Yoshiro Sakurai
Eri Fujieda

The Myth of Royal Authority and Shinbutsu-Shūgō (Kami-Buddha Amalgamation)

Résumé

Cet article étudie deux étapes historiques du développement du mythe de l'autorité impériale au Japon. La première se situe à l'époque où le bouddhisme fut adopté dans la structure mythologique japonaise. Dans le Japon ancien, l'autorité impériale gouvernait au moyen du système des codes (jp. ritsuryō). La mythologie et les cérémonies qui faisaient la démonstration de cette autorité mirent toutefois de côté l'impureté et l'exclurent du schéma mythologique général. L'ironie est qu'une telle exclusion rendit l'autorité impériale moins capable d'expliquer mythologiquement la création de l'univers par le truchement de la mythologie. De manière générale, les structures mythologiques nourrissent la violence. Celle-ci apparaît comme le premier élément dans les théories de la création de l'univers. Dans le cas du Japon, la force violente fut représentée par les esprits courroucés et vengeurs des morts (jp. onryō). Mais, cet aspect fut redouté et volontairement négligé dans la mythologie impériale. C'est dans ce contexte que le bouddhisme fut adopté pour apaiser les esprits des morts assoiffés de vengeance et ainsi redonner à cette autorité sa puissance mythique dans toute sa plénitude. Bien que les enseignements du bouddhisme ne continssent pas à l'origine les éléments nécessaires aux rituels pour calmer les esprits vengeurs, lorsqu'il fut intégré à la structure mythologique, il devait jouer un rôle crucial dans la mise au point de cérémonies pour la protection de l'État (jp. chingo kokka) - aspect indispensable de la structure mythologique d'ensemble de la royauté.

La seconde eut lieu lorsque divers changements sociaux firent passer le Japon à l'âge médiéval ; avec cette transition, la mythologie impériale, ses cérémonies et le rôle du bouddhisme furent aussi modifiés. Alors que le système des codes se détériorait, le système de répartition des terres cultivables (jp. handen-sei,) qui avait jusque-là prévalu, fut remplacé par le système dit des terres publiques (jp. kōryō) et des domaines privés (jp. shōen). Dans ce système, apparu ultérieurement, la distinction entre les terres appartenant à l'État et celles appartenant au privé cessa d'avoir la moindre fonction sociale. Les institutions de la société se modifièrent et leur soutien à l'État-nation gouverné par l'autorité impériale tendit à diminuer. Les paysans ne formaient plus un groupe homogène. Ils constituaient plutôt des groupes de statuts divers qui, de façon active et autonome, prenaient part à la production, à la distribution et à la consommation. Chaque groupe se spécialisa dans un « art » (jp. geinō au sens du latin artifex « métier »), que celui-ci fût d'ordre technique ou itinérant, et développa une histoire de ses origines fondée sur la mythologie impériale ; elle avait alors fusionné avec le bouddhisme (jp. shinbutsu shūgō) Cette nouvelle structure sociale contraignit la puissance impériale à refonder la mythologie ; un certain nombre d'essais en la matière virent le jour. L'exemple le plus évident est celui de Kitabatake Chikafusa dans son Jinnō shōtō ki (Histoire de la succession légitime des divins empereurs). Ceci dit, cette réinvention de la mythologie impériale fut incapable de fournir la démonstration complète de l'autorité de l'État-nation. Mais, paradoxalement, le mythe de l'autorité impériale se maintint dans les récits des origines développés au sein des divers groupes professionnels. Même si la structure de ces récits d'origine semble indiquer chez ces groupes une résistance à l'autorité impériale, ils manifestent également un désir de celle-ci.

THE MYTH OF ROYAL AUTHORITY AND *SHINBUTSU-SHŪGŌ* (KAMI-BUDDHA AMALGAMATION)

SAKURAI Yoshirō 桜井好朗

Translated by Eri FUJIEDA

Cet article étudie deux étapes historiques du développement du mythe de l'autorité impériale au Japon. La première se situe à l'époque où le bouddhisme fut adopté dans la structure mythologique japonaise. Dans le Japon ancien, l'autorité impériale gouvernait au moyen du système des codes (jp. ritsuryō*). La mythologie et les cérémonies qui faisaient la démonstration de cette autorité mirent toutefois de côté l'impureté et l'exclurent du schéma mythologique général. L'ironie est qu'une telle exclusion rendit l'autorité impériale moins capable d'expliquer mythologiquement la création de l'univers par le truchement de la mythologie. De manière générale, les structures mythologiques nourrissent la violence. Celle-ci apparaît comme le premier élément dans les théories de la création de l'univers. Dans le cas du Japon, la force violente fut représentée par les esprits courroucés et vengeurs des morts (jp.* onryō*). Mais, cet aspect fut redouté et volontairement négligé dans la mythologie impériale. C'est dans ce contexte que le bouddhisme fut adopté pour apaiser les esprit des morts assoiffés de vengeance et ainsi redonner à cette autorité sa puissance mythique dans toute sa plénitude. Bien que les enseignements du bouddhisme ne continssent pas à l'origine les éléments nécessaires aux rituels pour calmer les esprits vengeurs, lorsqu'il fut intégré à la structure mythologique, il devait jouer un rôle crucial dans la mise au point de cérémonies pour la protection de l'État (jp.* chingo kokka*) – aspect indispensable de la structure mythologique d'ensemble de la royauté.*

La seconde eut lieu lorsque divers changements sociaux firent passer le Japon à l'âge médiéval ; avec cette transition, la mythologie impériale, ses cérémonies et le rôle du bouddhisme furent aussi modifiés. Alors que le système des codes se détériorait, le système de répartition des terres cultivables (jp. handen-sei*) qui avait jusque-là prévalu, fut remplacé par le système dit des terres publiques (jp.* kōryō*) et des domaines privés (jp.* shōen*). Dans ce système, apparu ultérieurement, la distinction entre les terres appartenant à l'État et celles appartenant au privé cessa d'avoir la moindre fonction sociale. Les institutions de la société se modifièrent et leur soutien à l'État-nation gouverné par l'autorité impériale tendit à diminuer. Les paysans ne formaient plus un groupe homogène. Ils constituaient plutôt des groupes de statuts divers qui, de façon active et autonome, prenaient part à la production, à la distribution et à la consommation. Chaque groupe se spécialisa dans un « art » (jp.* geinō au sens du latin* artifex « *métier* »), que celui-ci fût d'ordre technique ou itinérant, et developpa une histoire de ses*

---

origines fondée sur la mythologie impériale ; elle avait alors fusionné avec le bouddhisme (jp. shinbutsu shūgō). *Cette nouvelle structure sociale contraignit la puissance impériale à refonder la mythologie ; un certain nombre d'essais en la matière virent le jour. L'exemple le plus évident est celui de Kitabatake Chikafusa dans son* Jinnō shōtō ki *(Histoire de la succession légitime des divins empereurs). Ceci dit, cette réinvention de la mythologie impériale fut incapable de fournir la démonstration complète de l'autorité de l'État-nation. Mais, paradoxalement, le mythe de l'autorité impériale se maintint dans les récits des origines développés au sein des divers groupes professionnels. Même si la structure de ces récits d'origine semble indiquer chez ces groupes une résistance à l'autorité impériale, ils manifestent également un désir de celle-ci.*

Introduction

The emergence of royal authority and the nation/state cannot be explained merely as the effect of a simple historical transition from a primitive society to a class society. As Claude Lévi-Strauss argues, the term "primitive society" itself reveals the inaccurate foundation of such a theory.[1] "Uncivilized people" are "primitive" only when the civilization is defined in a biased manner. The emergence of royal authority and nation/state can be regarded as a phenomenon that occurs only under certain complex conditions. In this paper, I will examine medieval Japanese society as a means to advance the theory of royal authority and the nation. This case investigates the possibility of reconsidering the notion that royal authority and the nation/state could maintain their legitimacy by means of mythological structures.[2]

Specifically, the following questions will shape the discussion. First of all, what is mythology? What is religion? How should we view the relationship between them? Second, what is the difference between royal authority and imperial authority? What kind of authority did ancient and medieval Japan's *tennō* respectively have? Third, in connection with the questions above, what role did Buddhism play after it was integrated with Japanese *kami* into the myth of royal authority?

---

[1] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Race et Histoire* (Éditions Gonthier, 1961). For the methodological and epistemological critique of Lévi-Strauss' works, see Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996). I was also informed on the concept of "natives" by Ray Chow, "Where have all the natives gone?," in *Writing Diaspora* (Indiana University Press, 1993).

[2] According to Pierre Clastres in *La société contre l'État* (Édition de Minuit, 1974), the natives living in the forest in Paraguay consider the homogenizing unity as evil elements to be eliminated. The nation/state may be a product of the tension of emergence and disappearance. Orikuchi Shinobu perceived the history of Japanese literature in a similar manner, as the continuous pattern of emergence and suppression. See Orikuchi Shinobu 折口信夫, *Kodai kenkyū, kokubungaku-hen* 古代研究：國文學篇 [A Study of Ancient Japan: Literature] (1929).

Mythology and Religion

Distinguishing between mythology and religion is not always easy. Nor is it helpful to examine the differences merely through applying definitions. Mythology can be defined as a set of stories about the origin. Centered on the idea of origin, mythology provides interpretations, explanations, and justifications for the emergence and the presence of things, events, and their relationships.[3] Furthermore, mythology explains the origin of the universe by referring to forces beyond human control. The origin is sanctified and symbolically represented as the realm of higher being(s). Even if the substantive aspects are different, these stories share common mythological structures.

Religion can be understood in relation to mythology. Like mythology, religion also embraces the idea of sacred origin. In such a case, the very notion of "origin" can connect mythology with religion to assure the existential foundation of the "self." "Self" emerges from the experiences of diverse social relations: as an individual, as a member of a family (including extended kinship network), as a member of community that shares customs, values, and/or beliefs, as a member of an organization that presumes specific goals to attain and stresses contract and trust (i.e., *Gesellschaft*), and as a member of a royal authority/nation that presumes its supremacy, centrality, and unity.[4] Embracing various social relations, although unsure about the universality or the quality of the reasoning, the "self" realizes its existence in the human body. An individual body experiences birth, life, and death. However, its inability to experience the previous life and the afterlife generates anxieties about the foundation of the "self." How the self begins and ends is fundamentally not explainable. This lack of fundamental explanation of the self is the essential source of anxiety. To be relieved from the anxiety requires one to see the previous life, birth, the present life, death, and the afterlife on the same horizon. When the mythological story of origins can provide the vision of the "self," mythology transforms into religion. The story becomes philosophy. Ascetic practices and ceremonies are reorganized into the elements of religion, and salvation and condemnation of the "self" emerge as ideas. Mythology and religion are, in this context, interdependent.

Buddhism seems to relate to mythology in a fundamentally different manner from other religions. Although the teaching of Gautama Buddha does not deny the chain of life events, it aims to liberate the "self" from the idea of sacred

---

[3] Countless myths are available in, for example, *Le Grand Parler* by Pierre Clastres (Paris: le Seuil, 1974).

[4] Lee Chong-Hwa argues in the discussion with Ukai Satoshi ("'Wanting together' as a place of politic: Tale of 'Kindai' and Now in East Asia," *Shisō* 思想, vol. 89, no. 5, 1999), that in the contemporary Korea, *kindai* or modernity is found as the effects of Japanese imperialism internalized in the Korean "self." Korean women (*harumoni*) who were forced to serve as "comfort women" embodied the modernity as an insult on their female bodies. Here, the "self" embodies the intense negative social relations between individual women and the imperial regime.

origins. Buddhism assumes an absolute existence behind phenomena, and, instead of telling a story about the creation of the universe, it teaches about the lack of transcendent reality. This aspect is called emptiness (*kū* 空 or *śūnyatā*). The Buddhist teaching proposes that salvation can be realized through an understanding of thusness (*tathatā*), which can be attained by liberation from the linear conception of "self" and departure from mythological thinking.

However, whether religion can embrace or reject mythology, all religions are directed to the salvation of the "self" and equipped with distinctive philosophies, ascetic practices, and rituals. Because of this orientation, even Buddhism is significantly related to mythology. In fact, its major figures are mythologized and its temples are sanctified—a point that is important for my discussion. As I will elaborate later, *shinbutsu shūgō* 神仏習合 (*kami*-buddha amalgamation) should not be construed as a specifically Japanese phenomenon that vulgarized Buddhism in connection with worship of local spirits. In fact, as it will be shown, the examination of *shinbutsu shūgō* can contribute to the theorization of the larger problem of the relationship between mythology and religion.

Royal Power and the Role of Mythology

The more divided a society becomes, the stronger the aspiration to centralize power. One of the functions associated with the nation/state is, at the same time, the provision of social solidarity. Even if the nation/state plays a role in maintaining class relations, inordinate advancement of class division itself can invite the intervention of the nation/state as a central authority.

The nation/state's higher authority over all the other social relations, however, does not emerge naturally. Rather, it has to be indicated by, for example, the creation myth as well as by the history fashioned from the myth. (Note that the idea of 'history' here is different from the modern view of history that presumes truth in the empirical facts and the relationships among them.) The state attempts to monopolize the production of myth as well as history, institutionalizing a mechanism to symbolically link the sacred and the profane.

Royal authority is an institution that legitimates the nation/state's superior authority. Although it has no ontological foundation, royal authority is expressed in a concrete form through the behavior of the ruler. The ruler is certainly an individual human being who leads his/her own course of life. Yet, he/she is expected not only to exercise authority over secular matters such as politics, law, diplomacy, and military, but also over sacred matters, whether willingly or by force.[5] The presence of such a ruler is a requirement even when the monarchy is

---

[5] In *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), Ernst Kantorowicz reveals the dual nature of kings' body in historical writings, and points out the influence of Christianity in the commonly made distinction between the natural and the political bodies. In the case of Japan's myth of royal authority, the *tennō* is considered as an *akitsu-kami*, or a deity who transcends his material body (*utsushi-mi* 現し身), and who embodies Taoist and/or Buddhist philosophies. For more details, see my

abolished and the modern state emerges. As long as the nation/state continues to be a social force, rulers are accompanied by non-monarchical leaders or organizations or institutions designated with holy power.

Royal mythology presumes solidarity as the requirement of the nation/state ruled by the king. Even if a nation/state has trade and diplomatic relations with others, royal authority must be able to claim its superior status in the story of the origin of the universe. Myth that legitimates royal authority or the state is thus selective and exclusive.

For example, in *Omoro-sōshi* おもろさうし, an anthology of songs compiled for the king of Ryūkyū in 1532-1623, royal mythology was exclusive of the state's external relations. The Ryūkyū Kingdom governed islands southwest of the Japanese archipelago (the area now called Okinawa), and maintained its economy through prosperous maritime trade with China, its suzerain state. However, external relations with China were excluded from the collected songs.[6] At the same time, the Ryūkyū Kingdom enjoyed peaceful relations with the surrounding countries.

In contrast, Chinese emperors did not attain the authority to unite the entire realm. However, as a result, this failure provided for an advantageous position vis-à-vis other rulers in East Asia.

King Zheng of the Qin Dynasty brought the country under a single authority, and adopted the title of emperor (*huangdi* 皇帝) to signify his achievement. The emperor was perceived as the manifestation of the absolute power of Heaven, the glorious divine authority that controls the universe. In the period of the Han Dynasty, under the influence of Confucianism, the emperor was regarded as the "son of Heaven," who had the authority to control the realm by the order of Heaven.[7]

The Taoist view of the emperor was established in the sixth century. The heavenly celestial world (*xian* 仙) was headed by the Great Emperor of Heaven (*Tianhuang* 天皇 or *Tianhuang Dadi* 天皇大帝). The emperor was served by high-rank bureaucrats (*zhenren* 真人) in the palace (*zigong* 紫宮). The mirror and the sword provided the spiritual power to attain the ultimate peace (*taihe* 太和). This philosophy had much influence on Japan's ancient royal authority.[8] In sum, the Chinese notion of the emperor was blended with political and cosmological ideas, and fluid even within the same historical period.

The ambiguous ontological foundation for his authority liberated the emperor from the exclusive and localized royal mythology. Seo Tatsuhiko

Saigi to chūshaku 祭儀と注釈 [Ceremonies and Interpretations] (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1993).

⁶ *Nihon shisō taikei* 日本思想大系 18 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1972). Also see *Omoro-sōshi* by Hokama Shuzen 外間守善 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1985), pp. 63-68, 91-93.

⁷ Nishijima Sadao 西島定生, "Kōtei shihai no seiritsu 公的支配の成立" [The Making of the Emperor], *Iwanami shoten kōza sekai rekishi* 岩波講座世界歴史 4 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1970).

⁸ Fukunaga Mitsuji 福永光司, *Dōkyō shisō-shi kenkyū* 道教思想史研究 [A Study of Taoist Thought] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1987).

argues that the large and complex political space in China necessitated royal ceremonies to present the abstract and universal authority, and to appreciate universal spirits rather than locally specific spirits. This is why the Heavenly Emperor (*Haotian Shangdi* 昊天上帝) exerted abstract authority even though he was referred to by various names, such as *Taiyishen*, *Tianhuang Dadi*, and *Yuhuang Dadi*.[9]

This constitution of royal authority in China was closely related to the social organization through which the nation/state emerged. Economic activities varied from area to area. Some areas were primarily agriculture-based, while others were based on hunting, pasturage, or trading. The types of economy influenced the organization of politics and religion. Furthermore, many ethnic groups lived in close contact to each other. The Chinese emperor was obliged to rule the territory, embracing all differences. Furthermore, he was responsible for keeping external enemies off the land and subjugating surrounding countries. These tasks demanded the diversity to be incorporated rather than excluded. In fact, for this purpose, the title of the emperor was once passed to the tribes in the North. In order to maintain authority over a larger realm, the emperor had to accept such difficult changes as reflecting the will of Heaven. Imperial politics, laws, ceremonies, and philosophy did not belong to a fixed mythology. On the contrary, the empire accommodated these institutions to a changing environment. This open, universalistic approach marks the strength of the Chinese emperor system. Of course, this program works well only when other countries accept it. If external powers reject this imperialistic universalism and demand another program, the empire faces a major challenge. It is, moreover, useful to see the distinction between them to understand Japanese *tennō*. Whether the latter should be treated as an emperor or a king matters to the analysis of the role Buddhism played in Japan, and of the meaning of *shinbutsu shūgō*.

Japan's Royal Mythology and the Tennō

According to Mary Douglas, chaos symbolizes not only destruction, but also origin and development.[10] In Japan, chaos was related to cosmos, and generated the mythological structure of chaos=desolation / cosmos=prosperity. This structure led Japanese ancestors to emphasize the primordial nature of deities such as Susano'o, Amaterasu, and Kitano Tenjin.

In the seventh century, the Yamato Dynasty established Ise Shrine and worshiped the Sun Goddess Amaterasu (Ōhirume) as the primary deity who unites local solar deities. These acts aimed to supersede the worship of local solar deities and to unify the generative myth. This project was generally successful, as most of the solar deities in Japan (except for some cases found in

---

[9]   Seo Tatsuhiko, "Teikoku no kosumorojī" [The Cosmology of the Empire], *Hikaku rekishigaku taikei* 比較歴史学大系 1 (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1998).

[10]   Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (Penguin Books, 1966).

Tsushima Islands located between Kyūshū and the Korean Peninsula) had been replaced by Amaterasu.[11] According to the royal mythology, Hononinigi, the grandson (*sumamima*) of Amaterasu, descended to earth, embodying the origin of royal authority. This myth of heavenly lineage, known as *tenson kōrin* 天皇降臨, symbolizes the power of fertility. The name "Hononinigi" refers to the matured rice plants, and it was implied that Hononinigi descended to the celebrated fertile land named Mizuho.

This myth of heavenly lineage is not exactly reflected in the accession ritual, but it is incorporated into the esoteric ceremony of succession (*daijōsai* 大嘗祭). In the former case, the new *tennō* ascends the royal throne (*takamikura* 高御座) in the court of high ceremony (*daigokuden* 大極殿), receives the royal order of accession, and completes the transmission of the regalia (*senso* 踐祚). In the esoteric ceremony of succession (*daijōsai* or *daijōe* 大嘗会, as it was later called under the influence of Buddhism), however, the myth of heavenly descent is incorporated. In this ceremony, the new *tennō*, who is at first a mere person with high status, turns into a heavenly deity (*amatsu-kami* 天つ神), who eats and drinks with other deities, particularly with Amaterasu, in Heaven (Ame, or, to be more specific, Takama no hara). Then, the divine child Hononinigi descends in a divine bed (*madoko-ofusuma* 真床覆衾). This ceremony takes place in the shrine of *yuki-suki* 悠紀・主基, which is built and attended by the designated administrative division (Kunibe) selected by divine will rather than by the *Moku-no-ryō* 木工寮, an office in charge of the entire palace. This shrine is eliminated in the early morning after the ceremony. By this arrangement, the shrine disappears from this world as soon as the sacred performance ends, and returns to where it belongs, i.e., Heaven.

The *tennō* plays the role of the heavenly *kami* who descended to the earth and became a manifest *kami* (*akitsukami* 現つ神).[12] Chaos and violence were, however, left out in the very ritual that links royal authority to the symbolic representation of the deity. As his name indicates, Hononinigi is the symbol of cosmos and prosperity, but not that of bloody wars or of holy marriage. Hononinigi's marital partner Kono-hana-no-sakuya-hime is beautiful but fragile, symbolizing the fragility of life, rather than sexuality and reproduction. In this mythological structure, generative violence is considered as impurity (*kegare* 穢れ) or mythological sin, and disregarded as a source of royal power. Unlike other cases, violence here, as the sacred act, does not provoke transformation toward a new order and prosperity.

René Girard discusses ritual sacrifice as a phenomenon prevalent in human societies, and argues that generative violence is not the act of an individual.

---

[11] The worships of local solar deities is never eradicated. For example, the sunrise (*goraikō* 御来光) is still an object of worship. However, such worship is yet unrelated to the worship of Ise Shrine.

[12] Orikuchi Shinobu, *Kodai kenkyū: minzoku-gaku-hen* 古代研究：民俗學篇 2 [A Study of Ancient Japan: Folklore 2] (Tokyo: Ōokayama shoten, 1930); Saigō Nobutsuna 西郷信綱, *Kojiki kenkyū* 古事記研究 [A Study of *Kojiki*] (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1973); Sakurai Yoshirō, *Saigi to chūshaku*.

Violence can function to eliminate generative violence itself from the community. This sacred act of violence defines the king as either good or evil.[13] Although one may not approve of violence, communities require a sacred force derived from violence. Violence functions as the sacred, as it eliminates itself and generate order from chaos. In Japan's creation myth, violence is also significant, for the violent acts of Susano'o made the Sun Goddess Amaterasu hide in a cave, leading the world to death. However, in the myth of heavenly lineage, violence is structurally excluded. Hononinigi descends to the land of Mizuho that has been already purified by the warrior deity Takemikazuchi, and neither Hononinigi nor the *tennō* have structural reason to use violence.[14]

The lack of violence in the generative myth of Japan's ancient royal authority is further conspicuous in the ceremony of great purification (*ōharae no girei* 大祓の儀礼). The *kami* invocation first proclaims the myth of divine descent as the origin of royal authority. Then, it cites the myths of heavenly sins (*ama-tsu-tsumi* 天つ罪) and the conception of blood (*chi* 血). Heavenly sins were caused by Susano'o who violently transgressed against the Plain of Heaven (*takama-no-hara* 高天原). The notion of blood is the basis of familial and kinship structure. In royal mythology, a transgression occurred when those who did not share the blood of the *tennō* family acquired symbolic power. Referring to the mythological idea, the *kami* invocation explains that transgression of royal authority (*kuni-tsu-tsumi* 国つ罪) was purified by prayers from the "land below Heaven" (*Ame-no-shita-yomo-no-kuni*).

The identity of the one who eliminated the earthly sins is unclear. The *tennō*, the manifest deity (*akitsu-kami*), does not participate in the ceremony held inside of the Suzaku Gate. He has little power to fight against impurity and eliminate it. Heavenly deities (*amatsu-kami*) and Earthly deities (*kunitsu-kami*) do not act against impurity either, they just receive the result of purification. The Nakatomi, bureaucrats of the Bureau of *Kami* Affairs, would not eliminate pollution. *Kami* such as Seoritsu-hime play a role in removing sinful impurities and eliminating them, but, like the bureaucrats at the Bureau of *Kami* Affairs, only for the purpose of performing the Great Purification (*ōharai*). Neither the origin of this purpose nor the agent who eliminates violence is obvious. In the ceremony, the origin of royal authority is also presented as a goal. In this respect, the ceremony of the Great Purification and *ōnamesai*-rite 大嘗祭 clearly share the same principles.[15]

---

[13] René Girard, *La Violence et le sacré* (Paris: Éditions Bernard Grasset, 1972).

[14] Sakurai Yoshirō, *Saigi to chūshaku*, pp. 63-67. The myth does not include the generative story of human beings, either. Instead, human beings are called *aokusa-bito* or plant-like beings naturally present on the earth. Unlike the creation mythology in Okinawa or in Fiji Islands, Japan's myth of royal authority does not include an explanation of the origin of human beings. For mythology in Fiji Islands, see Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

[15] Sakurai Yoshirō, *Saigi to chūshaku*. Okada Seishi argues that the *ōname-sai* in the Ritsuryō system was rooted in the *niiname=osukuni* ceremony that was held only once during a *tennō*'s reign, along with the subjugation ceremony (*fukuzoku girei* 服属儀礼).

During the reigns of Tenmu 天武 and Jitō 持統 in the second half of the seventh century, the title of the ruler, Great Lord (*ōkimi* 大君) was replaced by Heavenly Thearch (*sumera-no-mikoto*). This change was probably to follow the Chinese system. As noted earlier, Chinese emperors had a great impact on Japan's rulers. The evidence can be found, for example, in the title "True Person" (*mahito* 真人) adopted by Tenmu. Japan also developed the *ritsuryō* system which presumed the ruler to be the emperor rather than the king.

Unlike Chinese emperors, however, Japan's *tennō* reigned as an *akitsu-kami* named Hononinigi, a symbol of agricultural fertility. Hunting and pasturage were largely neglected in the myth of royal authority in Japan, only mentioned once in a passage about Yūryaku Tennō.[16] Furthermore, massacre and other blood-shedding acts, many of which must have been led by the ruler, were confined largely to the passage on Tenmu and described only in relation with Yamato-takeru, the tragic prince. Tenmu (or Ōama-no-mikoto 大海人皇子) was, in short, hardly afraid of violence, the source of impurity. In fact, in the Jinshin War (672), he killed Prince Ōtomo 大友皇子 (Ōtomo-no-miko) and held up the latter's head in front of the military camp. Obviously, military success led him to political power. When Tenmu established royal mythology and ceremonies as institutions to legitimate royal authority, however, he institutionalized violence as something missing in the royal mythology. The memory of the Jinshin War was told in relation to the story of Jinmu's aggression in Yamato.[17] Jinmu was characterized as an individual prone to violent acts, and also as the authority legitimatizing Tenmu's violent actions. In the meantime, Tenmu assumed the benevolent function of Hononinigi in agriculture, naturalizing the lack of violence in the mythological structure. During the Jinshin War, the deities Kotoshiro-no-nushi and Ikutama (Ikutama-no-yori-hime) said through an oracle that offerings of horses and weapons should be made to the grave of Jinmu. They also recognized Ōama-no-miko as *sumemima-no-mikoto*. Facing social chaos during and after the war, Tenmu promoted the myth of the descent of the divine grandson, and repeatedly indicated that he himself was the manifestation of Hononinigi (also referred to as *sumemima*). The construction of Ise Shrine and the establishment of the Ise Priesthood were part of his effort to propagate the myth.

During the reign of Tenmu, however, the *ōnie-sai* was held three times. The first was the *ōnie* ceremony held in 673 (Tenmu 2), soon after his enthronement. Then, *niina(m)e* ceremonies were held in 676 and 677, each of which should be considered also as *ōnie-sai*. See Okada Seishi, *Kodai ōken no saishi to shinwa* 古代王権の祭祀と神話 [Ceremonies and Myths of Ancient Kingship] (Tokyo: Hanawa shobō, 1970).

[16] Saigō Nobutsuna, *Shinwa to kokka* 神話と国家 [Myths and the State] (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1977), pp. 13-20; Sakurai Yoshirō, "Karerimi sureba – Nō ni tsuite no tanshō," 2 [In reflection—a short essay on Nō] in *Kokuritsu nōgaku-dō* 国立能楽堂 198 (2000), pp. 22-23.

[17] Sugano Masao, "Jinmu-ki no kōsō" [Structure of the Records of Jinmu], in Doi Kiyotami 土井清民 (ed.), *Kojiki – ōken to katari* 古事記－王権と語り [Kojiki – Royal Authority and Narrative] (*Nihon-bungaku kenkyū shiryō-shū* 1, Tokyo: Yūseidō, 1986), pp. 108-111.

To conclude, we now see that, although philosophically rooted in the Chinese emperor system, the Japanese *tennō* system evolved into an institution supported by a mythology with a closed structure.

Buddhism and Myth of Royal Authority

Generative violence is difficult to reconstruct through myth when it is lacking in mythological structure, and when the authority of the king or of the state is sustained. However, it can be captured as religion or philosophy in historical narratives, as a matter of ordered events, or causal relations. Thus, the mythology that legitimated Japan's royal authority was influenced by Buddhism.

In so far as violence was excluded from the mythological structure, Buddhism offered a necessary means to deal with the problem of vengeful spirits (*onryō* 怨霊). When powerful persons encountered a conflict within the power system, failed to sustain their position, and lost their life, their spirit would become revengeful and curse this world. Vengeful spirits is, in this case, the embodiment of historicized violence. In ancient Japan, the myth of royal authority, as well as the ceremonies that put this myth in practice, could not confront vengeful spirits and transform the violence represented by them into sacred acts. Violence was excluded from the mythological structure. It was in this context that Buddhism became an important force to placate vengeful spirits.

Although Buddhism was a religious philosophy of salvation, in ancient Japan it was expected to transform violence within the limits of royal mythology, and to protect the state. For example, in November of the fourth year of the Tenmu reign, someone cried out inauspicious words and killed himself in the east lounge of the palace. Those who happened to work at the palace on that night were all promoted by Tenmu, who wanted to erase the memory of the event. Tenmu feared the angry spirit of the previous *tennō*, Tenchi, as well as the revengeful spirit of Prince Ōtomo, the latter's son. After the event, Tenmu also organized frequent prayer ceremonies. In August of the following year, a ceremony of Great Purification (*ōharae*) and an assembly for liberating beings (*hōjōe* 放生会) were held in various locations. In September, the preparation of the *ōname-sai* began, and in November, the *Golden Light Sūtra* (*Konkōmyōkyō* 金光明經) and the *Benevolent Kings Sūtra* (*Ninnōkyō* 仁王經) were read all over the kingdom. Despite Tenmu's efforts, the state continued to decline. A new capital was planned, but never realized.

As Aoki Kigen points out, during the reign of Tenmu, rituals to worship *kami* were held at an amazing frequency. Yet, many more passages discuss Buddhism-related matters rather than *kami* worship. Does it mean that, as Aoki argues, Buddhism provided personal salvation to Tenmu?[18] I am skeptical of this explanation, because I see Buddhism as supplementing the myth of royal authority. Buddhism was employed to confront and placate calm the

---

[18] Aoki Kigen 青木紀元, *Norito ko-denshō no kenkyū* 祝詞古伝承の研究 [A Study of the Ancient Invocations and Legends of Kami] (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1985), p. 111.

vengeful spirits, ironically resulting in an increased mythological power of the royal authority.

In the second half of the eighth century, the monk Dōkyō 道鏡 was appointed as Dharma King (*hōō* 法王) by ShōtokuTennō 称徳天皇. Manipulating the power granted along with the position, Dōkyō planned to become the next Tennō. The *kami* of Usa Hachiman 宇佐八幡 Shrine once supported this plan in its oracle. However, when this plan failed due to the resistance of the Fujiwara and Wake clans, this *kami* changed its oracle, and commanded that Dōkyō be exiled to restore order.

The story of Dōkyō exemplifies not only the inclusion of vengeful spirits in historical narratives, but also the integration of transformed generative violence in the narration of history. This incident was not simply related to the political crisis caused by an ambitious priest. Dōkyō also contributed to the maintenance of royal mythology, almost as a trickster.[19]

Shinran, Mythology, and Violence

The accounts of Dōkyō provide insight into how Buddhism provided royal mythology with a means to accommodate violence. However, by the medieval period, some Buddhist critics actively promoted the incorporation of violence as well as the effort to confront social changes.

As social transitions led Japan into the medieval age, royal mythology, ceremonies for royal authority, and the role of Buddhism also changed. As the *ritsuryō* system deteriorated, the previous system for the distribution of farmland (*handen-sei* 班田制) was also replaced by the *kōryō* 公領-*shōen* 荘園 system. Under the latter system, the distinction between the principality (*kōryō*) and the manor (*shōen*) ceased to have any social function. Social institutions also shifted to provide decreasing support to the state ruled through royal authority. Peasants (*handen nōmin* 班田農民) were no longer one homogeneous group. Rather, they constituted various status groups that actively and autonomously engaged in production, distribution, and consumption. Each group specialized in some art (*geinō* 芸能), whether of the technical or itinerant kind, and developed a story about its origin based on a royal mythology that had blended with Buddhism (*shinbutsu shūgō*).[20]

---

[19] Among numerous studies on tricksters, one of the most stimulating is *Afurika no shinwa-teki sekai* アフリカの神話的世界 [The Mythological World of Africa] by Yamaguchi Masao 山口昌男 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1971).

[20] As Amino Yoshihiko points out, Japanese historians long focused on agricultural population, and neglected the population in other sectors. Although the land for rice production was politically and institutionally significant, the heavy reliance on the historical materials related to agriculture, specifically to rice-fields, generated a biased view of the historical development of Japanese society. Based on this criticism, Amino demonstrates, with ample evidence, the significance of the presence of craftsmen (*shokunin* 職人) in the maintenance of royal authority. Amino's view of royal authority in medieval Japan is slanted, however, by his exclusive attention to masses. The power of the sacred became too weak to regulate social relations in medieval Japan, and, according to Amino, medieval social relations were detached from the ancient myth of royal

In fact, in medieval Japan, certain forms of Buddhism made a special effort to appeal to an increasingly broad array of social groups. One example is the case of Shinran 親鸞 and his True Pure Land School. In this regard, the "New Buddhism" that developed in the Kamakura period has received positive evaluation among postwar historians. Particularly praised were the popular orientation and the progressive nature of the new Buddhist schools. This view of Kamakura Buddhism was, however, corrected by Kuroda Toshio. Kuroda argues that medieval Buddhism institutionalized the exoteric-esoteric structure, and used rules and esoteric rituals to protect the system of power (*kenmitsu taisei* 顯密体制) as the core of the medieval state. The institutionalized *kenmitsu* (exoteric-esoteric) Buddhism had to be acknowledged in order to understand the positive evaluation of the so-called "ancient Buddhism" in the Kamakura period.[21]

Kuroda's work is, yet, limited in developing an understanding of the medieval mythology. The tendency to pay attention to the ideological aspect of the myth of divine roots makes it difficult to articulate medieval mythology that deconstructs the totalizing State ideology—such as that propounded by Shinran.

Shinran himself had never considered himself the founder of a new school or monastery. However, the formation of a new school required the elevation of this nameless monk into a founder. A deviation from the thoughts and teaching of Shinran became necessary for the establishment of Jōdo Shinshū as a new school of Buddhism. Paradoxically, this deviation required the mythologization of Shinran as a charismatic leader.

The work *Tannishō* 歎異抄 was compiled in the thirteenth century by Yuien, a disciple of Shinran. It has been debated as to whether this text is the exact record of Shinran's predications (*hōgo* 法語) or the expression of Yuien's personal interpretation of his mentor's teaching. While a thorough review of this debate is not possible due to limitations of space, it is critical to recognize the text as an artifact that reflects early efforts to mythologize Shinran.[22] In fact, the text of *Tannishō* has a mythological structure. It teaches to rely upon Amitābha's Primal Vow. At the same time, it prohibits the monopolization of

---

authority. Amino finds, at the same time, a variety of manifestations of the sacred among non-agricultural groups in medieval society. It seems important to consider how mythology was reshaped in medieval society by the appearance of new actors of the sacred. For more discussion, see Amino Yoshihiko, *Nihon chūsei no minshūzō* 日本中世の民 衆像 [The Image of the Populace in Medieval Japan] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1980).

[21] Kuroda Toshio 黒田俊雄, *Nihon chūsei no kokka to shūkyō* 日本中世の国家と宗教 [State and Religion in Medieval Japan] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1975). For a critique of Kuroda's thesis, see Taira Masayuki 平雅行, *Nihon chūsei no shakai to bukkyō* 日本中世の社 会と仏教 [Society and Buddhism in Medieval Japan] (Tokyo: Hanawa shoten, 1992); Satō Hiroo 佐藤弘夫, *Kami, hotoke, ōken no chūsei* 神・仏・王権の中世 [Kami, Buddha, and Royal Authority in Medieval Japan] (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1998); Sueki Fumihiko 末木文美 士, *Kamakura bukkyō keisei-ron* 鎌倉仏教形成論 [A Study on the Formation of Kamakura Buddhism] (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1998).

[22] From this perspective, it is misleading to view Yuien as a kind of Judas. Yamaori Tetsuo 山折哲男, *Aku to ōjō* 悪の往生 [Evil and Death] (Tokyo: Chuō kōronsha, 2000).

the Vow by Shinran, the bearer of religious authority. Shinran is represented as a "king" embodying both benevolence and evil.[23]

According to *Tannishō* (Chapter 13), Shinran taught that people who make a living by casting nets or fishing in the rivers and the sea, those who sustain themselves by hunting in the moors and mountains, and people who live from trading and cultivating the fields were all alike. Under the influence of past karma (*gōen* 業縁), some might kill hundreds and thousands of people against their own will, while others might not be able to kill a single person even if it were to settle their rebirth in the Pure Land.

This passage can be read in many ways. First, it is obviously a part of the mythology that elevates Shinran to the rank of founder of the school. Second, it communicates the idea that we must entrust ourselves to the Other Power of Amitābha's Primal Vow. Third, and most importantly, this passage presents a perspective on the diversified social world, by including people who do not farm, but who make a living through the arts (*geinō*), practices considered evil in Buddhism.[24]

Medieval Japan in the World of *Shintō-shū*

Medieval Japan saw a wider range of "arts," from academics to blacksmith, from military arts to erotic arts, from shamanism to gambling. People who made a living by performing these arts developed stories to explain their occupational origins. Such stories often indicated the precedence of their arts to the state. At the same time, the origin of medieval royal authority was told under the influence of *kenmitsu* Buddhism. The tradition of the enthronement ritual was no longer dependent upon the ancient myth of royal authority. The legitimacy of medieval kingship was sought for in three ceremonial regalia. The genuine nature of these regalia was proved by three Buddhist virtues associated with them, i.e., honesty,

---

[23] Considering the sect as the secularized version of Shinran's teaching is also problematic, for it assumes the mythologized Shinran as the essence of the sect. In *Tan'nishō* it is claimed that "Since I am absolutely incapable of any religious practice, Hell is my only home. If Amitābha's Primal Vow is true, Śākyamuni's teaching cannot be false. If the Buddha's teaching is true, Shan-tao's commentaries cannot be false. If Shan-tao's commentaries are true, how can Hōnen's words be empty? If Hōnen's words are true, what I, Shinran, say cannot be meaningless. In essence, such is the true entrusting of this foolish one. Now, whether you accept the prayer (*nembutsu* 念佛), entrusting yourself to it, or reject it, that is your own decision". This passage reveals not only the Buddhist philosophy specifically for Jōdo Shinshū. It also shows the burden put on Japanese Buddhism. The text has a kind of mythological structure that links Hell and Amitābha's Primal Vow.

[24] The meaning of "geinō" is according to *Futsūshōdōshū* compiled in Tōdaiji. Murayama Shūichi 村山修一, *Kodai bukkyō no chūsei-teki tenkai* 古代仏教の中世的展開 [Medieval Development of the Ancient Buddhism] (Kyoto: Hozōkan, 1976); Kuroda Hideo 黒田日出男, *Kyōkai no chūsei, shōchō no chūsei* 境界の中世・象徴の中世 [Medieval Boundaries and Symbols] (Tokyo: Tōkyō University Press, 1986).

compassion, and wisdom. Ironically, as indicated in the *Legitimate Succession of Divine Reigns* by Kitabatake Chikafusa 北畠親房 as well as in his *Gengen-shū* 元元集, the integration of Buddhist values prevented royal authority from unifying the state. On the contrary, the mythological structure extended the power to living beings (*shujō*). Even if royal authority was ruling medieval society, its mythological force was disintegrated. This is why a variety of texts, rather than one single text, constitute the so-called medieval *Nihongi*.[25] During this period, the myth of royal authority underwent a test regarding its legitimacy.

The *Shintō-shū*, a collection of shintō stories (or, more correctly, stories of *kami*-buddha amalgamation) from the thirteenth century, was completed in the fourteenth century. These legends together articulate the origins of medieval Japan in relation to those of various arts, and thus allow various social classes of people to share these mythical origins. "The Story of Kumano Gongen" in the second volume provides, by means of the following three legends, a clear presentation of the medieval ethos.

<Legend 1> A hunter in Kumano shot a wild boar, but could not find its track. He followed a crow, the manifestation of a *kami*, and found the boar lying on the ground, three mirrors from the tree above the boar. The mirrors represented the three sites of the provisional deity (*gongen*) of Kumano. The hunter cut off a piece of meat from a deer and offered it to the *kami*. Later, he reported this incident to the imperial court (*chōtei*), and the shrines were constructed at the three divine sites.

<Legend 2> The King of Magadha in the central India had one thousand wives. One of them was a court lady in one of the palaces (Gosuiden). Because she was the king's favorite, the others envied her, and ordered her head to be cut off after she gave birth to a baby boy in the mountain. A tiger saw the boy sucking the breasts of this dead mother, felt sorry for him, and looked after him. An ascetic named Kiken Shōnin happened to learn about the boy, and brought him to the king. Later, the prince, the king, and the ascetic all flew to Japan,

---

[25] The concept of the "medieval *Nihongi*," first used by Itō Masayoshi and Abe Yasurō, has become the core of researches on medieval mythology. For a general discussion, see the special issue of *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō* 国文学解釈と鑑賞 [Interpretations and Appreciations of Japanese Literature] 64, 3 (1999). Some scholars of Japanese literature have studied medieval *Nihongi*, using the variety of materials to reconstruct the medieval form of *shinbutsu shūgō*. The reference to *Nihongi* is a problem, however, for it can lead us to confuse the medieval myth of royal authority with a more general mythological structure in medieval Japan. This approach has been used effectively by Yamamoto Hiroko 山本ひろ子 in *Henjōfu* 変成譜 (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1993), *Ishin* 異神 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1998), and *Chūsei shinwa* [Medieval Myths] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1998). The notion of the medieval *Nihongi* has also been deconstructed. See for example, Ogawa Toshio "Chūsei shinwa no mechie" [Professions in Medieval Mythology], in Mitani Kuniaki 三谷邦明 and Komine Kazuaki 小峯和明 (eds)., *Chūsei no chi to gaku* 中世の知と学 [Knowledge and Learning in Medieval Japan] (Tokyo: Shinwasha, 1997).

and, along with the court lady, came to be worshiped at Kumano.

<Legend 3> Suizei Tennō, the ruler who succeeded Jinmu Tennō, ate seven peoples for breakfast and dinner everyday. His concerned subordinates told him to hide from a rain of fire, and led him into a cave underneath of the pole of the imperial palace (Dairi), where they killed him. When Amaterasu hid herself in the heavenly cave, she left a reflection of herself in the imperial mirror. This mirror was originally placed in a room called Naishidokoro in the Palace, but later the *kami* of blacksmiths Daimyō-jin, took it to Jinmu. After that, Kumano Gongen became the primary protective deity for the room Naishidokoro.

Legend 1 can be interpreted as the story of origins for those engaged in hunting, as the *kami* emerges from killing and meat-eating. These acts were avoided as defiling in the ancient myth of royal authority, and prohibited as sinful acts in Buddhism. Legend 2 includes the ritual of sacrifice, and suggests the multiple origins of the provincial deity of Kumano. At the same time, this story preserves Buddhist elements. It is also structured so as to explain class or occupational divisions.

In Legend 3, Suizei Tennō embodies mythological violence, while the rain of fire symbolizes the power of the fire deity Kanayago. The deceptive warning about the rain of fire forces violence to withdraw. The violence is here transcended by an act of sacred nature. The deity also emerges to restore the order and to protect royal authority.[26]

This legend explains both the origins of the human community and those of the blacksmiths. The ancient myth of royal authority was revived in medieval Japan, but as a creation myth for the blacksmiths. The power of Amaterasu as well as Jinmu is, however, no longer granted. It must presume the creation myth of the blacksmiths.

---

[26] Sakurai Yoshirō, *Kamigami no henbō* 神々の変貌 [Changes in Kami Deities] (Tokyo: Tokyō daigaku shuppankai, 1976), pp. 18-195; Sakurai Yoshirō, *Chūsei Nihon no ōken, shūkyō, geinō* 中世日本の王権・宗教・芸能 [Royal Authority, Religion, and Arts in Medieval Japan] (Tokyo: Jinbun shoin, 1988), pp. 234-237. I appreciate Amino's references to the relationship between blacksmith and royal authority in *Nihon chūsei no hi-nōgyomin to tennō* 日本中世の非農業民と天皇 [Non-Agricultural People and Tennō in Medieval Japan] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1984). However, I disagree in his conception of *tennō*'s right to rule the earth and the sea. He considers it similar to the primitive right naturally granted to all the people. We should not overlook mythological aspects in modern history.