

A Preliminary Examination of the *Omamori* Phenomenon

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Omamori in Japanese Tradition

Among the phenomena of popular religious traditions in Japan are *omamori* or amulets and talismans, which have been enjoying an increasing popularity over the past decade. Seen essentially as conduits through which the sacred power of life flows to human beings, these *omamori* are both consistent with and expressive of several themes long present in Japanese culture.

In contrast to the Christian tradition, which characteristically lauds personal salvation and life beyond death, the accent of Japanese religious traditions, especially Shinto and folk, has always been on nurturing and enriching life here and now. Much religious energy has been expended on the ritual sustenance of the normal order: the health of the family, progeny, easy birth, bountiful harvests, protection from storms, prosperity in business and so forth. This order is normal in two senses: it is imbedded in norms which are prehistoric in origin and it is the usual and commonplace reality.

The Japanese have been willing to accept this world as absolute in the sense that it has been characteristic for them to perceive *kami* 神 as residing in all kinds of objects. If they have not rejected the notion of a transcendent presence existing over and above this realm, they certainly have given little importance to it. Any place or object could refract an otherwise unseen or unperceived dimension of existence.

... we become aware of the reality of a certain being in an extraordinary manner ... something in this world ... is not just received

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as if it originated in a deeper essence. It is not a supernatural being from a supernatural world, but a certain thing found in the natural world presenting itself as if on a supernatural plane. Yet it is actually a natural presence . . . it is not an eternal being from an eternal world, but something in the middle of the movement of time presenting itself as though on a timeless plane.¹

Thus there was and to a great extent still is a deep and sustaining preoccupation with the mysterious numina that create and enrich any form of life here and now.

Although an aggressive secularism is commonly found in intellectual circles in contemporary Japan, the attitude still persists among many Japanese that the causes of calamity in human life often lie in the numinal realm. Accident, storm damage, and sickness can be in part the work of offended numina. In other words, there is an "incomprehensible otherness" that has the power to destroy or sustain and which "shows through" impalpably at certain places and often at specific times. In the felicitous phrase of Carmen Blacker, "there shows through, as though through a thin place, an incomprehensible otherness which betokens power" (Blacker 1975: 34). This power is not transcendent but immanent, and it can be embodied in an amulet or a talisman, obtained from or near a shrine or temple and placed in one's house or automobile or carried in one's pocket or purse.²

Both the belief in the immanent presence of numinal powers and the notion that they can be invited and persuaded to infuse specific objects appear to be prehistoric in Japan. Scarves, mirrors, swords, rocks, dolls and pillars are among the many objects which through the centuries have served as temporary abodes of the numina. The early eighth century work *Kojiki* 古事記, for example, tells of a ritual inducement of the kami to take up residence in a *sakaki* 榊 tree decorated with strips of blue and white cloth, a mirror and strings of *magatama* 勾玉 beads (Philippi 1969: 83). These two themes continue to find expression in the nature and function of the omamori.

Another indigenous theme is the ability of the religious structures to respond adaptively to new needs and situations as they arise. Over the centuries people have sought special benefits from the exercise of numinal power. This has resulted in the emergence of the belief that certain numina have specific power to cure disease, protect travelers, bring rain, or assist in the achievement of intellectual distinction.

Types of *Omamori*

Today there are seven specific concerns commonly served by the

omamori. Listed in order of demand, they are traffic safety (*kōtsū anzen* 交通安全), avoidance of evil (*yaku yoke* 厄除), open luck (*kaiun* 開運), education and passing the examination (*gakugyō jōju* 学業成就), prosperity in business (*shōbai hanjō* 商売繁盛), acquisition of a mate and marriage (*en musubi* 縁結び), and healthy pregnancy and easy delivery (*anzan* 安産). Seldom are all seven needs met by a single shrine or temple. The Tenmangu Shrine in Dazaifu 太宰府天満宮 has nineteen different kinds of omamori serving seven different functions, while the temple Sensōji in Tokyo's Asakusa district 浅草の浅草寺, on the other hand, which claims to distribute more omamori than any other shrine or temple in Japan, has fifteen forms of omamori for six needs. Another popular omamori center, Kompira Shrine 金平神社 in Shikoku, offers seventy-seven different kinds of omamori for forty-five needs, including such special needs as succeeding in an election, producing a good tobacco crop, protecting a ship's engine and preventing water pollution.

The people pressure shrine and temples to issue omamori for specific purposes. The Grand Shrine at Ise 伊勢神宮 refused for most of its history to issue omamori because its leaders understood its function to be that of serving the needs of the nation rather than those of particular individuals. In the early 1950's, however, Ise began to issue a single omamori directed to no specific needs. People were not content with this practice, so now specifically directed omamori serve special needs.⁴ But Ise's resistance is an exception. Aso Shrine 阿蘇神社 in Kyushu each year surveys the parish to find out if there are needs for which the people wish to have omamori.⁵ Furthermore, anyone can go to certain shrines and temples and request the priest to make an omamori for any particular concern, such as a crying baby, bad dreams or whatever. One author records an instance of a man obtaining an omamori to protect himself from women (Yabe 1934: 6). If enough people request a specific kind of omamori, then it will likely be made regularly available, if not by the shrine or temple itself, then by the shop owners in the neighborhood.

Omamori in History

Change appears to have been a constant characteristic of religious phenomena throughout Japan's history. A preliminary examination indicates that the omamori demonstrates this characteristic. As Yanagita Kunio has observed:

Japanese have probably always believed in amulets of one type or another, but the modern printed charms now given out by shrines and temples first became popular in the Tokugawa period or later,

and the practice of wearing miniature charms on one's person is also new. The latter custom is particularly common in cities (Yanagita 1969: 314-315).

Changes are presently occurring in a variety of ways. The traffic safety omamori (*kōtsū anzen*) was seldom found twenty years ago, and in regions such as Kyushu it was not used even as recently as ten years ago.⁶ Today it is the most common omamori and is found throughout Japan.

The forms of the omamori are also changing. Omamori in the form of bumper decals, bicycle reflectors, and credit cards have made appearances. Shingon temples and one of the new religions, PL Kyōdan, have omamori in the form of finger rings. The names are also changing. For example, PL Kyōdan refers to its omamori as *amuretto* (アマレット).⁷

Before 1950 most omamori were made of paper or wood. A few were made of metal. Today plastic has become a common material for their construction.

Another change lies in the means of production of the omamori. Because of the increasing demand for the omamori many shrines and temples have found themselves unable to produce a sufficient number through their traditional sources, the lay women of the parish, especially since many of these in recent years have taken part time employment outside of the home. Consequently, factories to manufacture omamori have recently appeared in Tokyo and Osaka, and their sales representatives make the rounds of shrines and temples from Kyushu to Hokkaido.⁸ While a few shrines and temples such as the temple Kōganji 高岩寺 in Tokyo and the Grand Shrine at Ise refuse to purchase factory-made omamori, most, such as the temple Sensōji and Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine, have large standing orders with the salesmen, although the priests have complaints about the aesthetic quality of the factory-designed and produced omamori. With the shift in the source of production additional changes in the forms of the omamori are predictable.

Establishment of Powers

What determines whether a shrine or temple is sought for its omamori? Two factors are crucial in this regard. The temple or shrine must have a powerful *gohonzon* 御本尊 (Buddhist image) or *goshintai* 御神体 (Shinto deity), and an *engi* 縁起 or story (Fujii 1978: 20-27). The story is of some auspicious, powerful moment when a numinous event occurred. Often the event is said to have taken place at or near the present location of the shrine or temple, though this proximity is not always so, as is clear in the case of the Tenmangu. The *engi* are celebrated in an annual festival. While it is necessary for a shrine or tem-

ple to have an engi to become popular originally, it probably is not necessary for the engi to continue to receive credence from the people once the tradition of providing effective omamori has been established.

Perhaps a few examples will be helpful. According to its brochure, Sensōji in Tokyo originated with the discovery of a golden image of Kannon 観音 caught in the nets of poor fishermen in old Edo. This story is fortified by an even older story about a great golden dragon who came out of the bay to sun itself on the land where the temple now stands. Both stories, but especially the former, give ontic value to Konryūsan 金龍山, the formal name of the temple.

At Dazaifu Tenmangu the story is the well known tale of Sugawara Michizane 菅原道真, his mastery of learning and subsequent rise to the highest levels of Japanese society, his exile and the angry soul (onryō 怨靈) episode.

The engi of a less well known temple, Nariaizan 成相山, one of the thirty-three pilgrimage temples in the Kansai area, tells of its founder, Shino Shōnin, who was lost in deep snow and without food when Kannon, in her mercy, changed herself into a deer and gave him meat from her shoulder. Shino Shōnin was saved and out of gratitude built a temple. His ardent prayers brought about the rapid restoration of the deer's shoulder. Consequently, according to the temple's brochure, Nariaizan is thought to be especially auspicious for healing.

While every temple or shrine known for its effective omamori has a story which gives the temple or shrine its special power, sometimes a particular omamori has its own engi. For example, an *enmusubi* omamori from the Tsurugaoka Hachiman Shrine in Kamakura has a phrase from a song, "*shizu no odamaki*" しずのおだまき, written on its back in reference to an event said to have occurred at the shrine. Shizuka 静 was the faithful and beautiful mistress of Minamoto Yoshitsune 源義経 and was sought as a mistress by Yoshitsune's brother Yoritomo 頼朝 following Yoshitsune's exile. According to the engi, within the shrine compound Shizuka danced and sang of her faithfulness to Yoshitsune while rejecting Yoritomo's advances. Accordingly, the omamori is noted for its power to strengthen a relationship between a man and a woman.

A very old omamori from Yasaka Shrine 八坂神社 in Kyoto has an engi which gives the omamori the power to protect one's progeny. The story tells of an emperor who, traveling incognito, sought to stay the night in the home of a local resident. Turned away unpleasantly, the emperor spent the night in the home of the man's younger brother, who graciously hosted him. The next morning the emperor blessed the younger brother by assuring him that his descendants would be many

and live long, while those of the older brother would be cursed by diseases and epidemics. Around the upper edge of this omamori—which is carried annually in the Gion Matsuri 祇園祭—is a prayer for descendants.⁹

The *gohonzon* or *goshintai* is the central figure in the engi. The spirit of Sugawara Michizane (Tenjin 天神) is especially effective in assisting in educational endeavors. The deity Inari 稻荷 has a reputation for helping gain prosperity, whether agricultural or commercial. On the Buddhist side Fudō Myōō 不動明王 has an old reputation for protecting travelers and today is sought for the *kōtsū anzen* omamori. Benzaiten 弁財天, known for protecting money, is sought when fiscal concerns are high. Kishōten 吉祥天, originally the protector of actors and known for being able to change the impossible to the possible, is now sought for the *yaku yoke* omamori. If the *gohonzon* is Monju, then the temple has the power to issue effective omamori for *gakugyō jōju*. In each case, of course, an appropriate engi must also be present.

Occasionally, however, it appears that more important even than the engi and the central deity of the shrine or temple is the auspiciousness of the place where the shrine or temple is located. Such is clearly the case for Tsukuba Shrine 筑波神社 in Ibaraki Prefecture, which is located at the base of identically shaped mountain peaks in the center of a great plain. Tsukuba Shrine is thus noted for its *en musubi* omamori.¹⁰

If both an engi and an appropriate central deity are present, then the shrine or temple can become very important to people. The temple Kōganji in Tokyo has an appropriate engi, a miracle healing story, with Jizō as its *gohonzon*; this is the figure popularly known as Toge Nuki Jizō とげぬき地蔵 (Splinter pulling Jizō). The popular title indicates that this Jizō has the reputation for healing as well as for his usually recognized ability to watch over children. Unique to Kōganji is an *omikage* 御影 omamori, which consists of a small paper image of Jizō designed to be swallowed or stuck to the skin at the point of the affected area. Kōganji distributes “an astronomical number” of these, including mail orders to Los Angeles, San Francisco, Hawaii and elsewhere. In recent years Kōganji has sometimes found itself unable to keep up with the demand and occasionally has had to ask people to restrict to two the number of omamori they purchase at a single visit. When the supply is sufficient it is not uncommon for one person to purchase as many as ten thousand yen (about fifty dollars) worth of omamori at a time. Some individuals, prominent television personalities among them, swallow an *omikage* omamori at each meal. While other omamori are available at Kōganji, it is notable that those associated with health

and healing, and therefore most directly related to the *engi* and the *gohonzon* are, according to chief priest Bushi, in greatest demand.

Forms of *Omamori*

The talismanic variety. From my initial survey it appears that approximately one half of the *omamori* are of the talismanic variety; that is, the power of the shrine or temple is conveyed by words printed on the token, which is nearly always rectangular in shape. Printed on either paper, wood (usually pine), or silk (always red),¹¹ these words might be from a prayer or they might be a portion of a sutra, but more often they are simply the name of the shrine or temple.

The other *omamori* are divided about evenly between those which bear the image of the *gohonzon* or *goshintai* (the latter are not common) and those which are in the shape of a particular object such as a sword, arrow, jewel (*magatama*), frog, turtle, dog, horse, drum, mallet, book, coin, rake, doll, gourd, bell, and so forth. It is uncommon for the image type, or iconic *omamori*, to be accompanied by more than the name of the shrine or temple. There are numerous tales of images of Kannon, Fudōmyōō, Jizō, Kongō, Nichiren and others protecting individuals during crises.

An interesting story of iconic protection was told to Carmen Blacker by a contemporary female shaman. A priest confronted a fox, who was possessing a woman, by threatening it with a picture of the Emperor Meiji, "which reduced it [the fox] to an abject state of shame and terror" (Blacker 1975: 54).¹²

Morphic omamori—the hyōtan. *Omamori* in the imitative shape of an object (which will subsequently be referred to as morphic *omamori*) often have no writing on them at all. They may also represent the oldest basic type. Let us examine a few of them.

Although not now widely found, the bottle gourd (*hyōtan* 瓢箪) is one of the oldest types of morphic amulets and might be the predecessor to both the bell (*suzu* 鈴) and the mallet (*takara no kozuchi* 宝のこずち). A wide range of notions have been associated with the *hyōtan*. In *Kojiki* a *hyōtan* containing wood ashes hung at the top of the mast could assist a ship in avoiding dangers at sea (Philippi 1969: 261). It has also been popularly thought to keep children and the elderly from falling (Hildburgh 1919: 26). It can bring prosperity, and many tales exist about the *hyōtan*'s ability to confer wealth. In one story two small boys, who are born from a *hyōtan*, confer wealth on their foster parents (Ouweland 1964: 189). Hung in the house it can help quench the thirst of the problem drinker. In folk medicine it was thought that

one could transfer a disease to a hyōtan (Clement 1907: 28–29).

An amulet cut from mulberry or peach wood in the shape of a hyōtan was placed on a child's belt for protection against whooping cough and measles (Oto 1963: 51). Following the great earthquake in Edo in 1855 *namazu-e* 鯰絵 appeared as amulets to protect against further earthquakes. In the *namazu-e* the hyōtan was associated with ability to tame the great fish, the *namazu*, who caused the quakes (Ouweland 1964: 7).

The widespread belief in the protective value of the hyōtan probably indicates that its use as an amulet is even older than *Kojiki*. Its amuletic use is found in China and south into Malaya. Hildburgh (1919: 29) suggests that the reason for the hyōtan's widespread use as an amulet relates to its employment as a rattle in religious ritual. The dried seeds striking the shell of the gourd when it was shaken produced a sound thought to be efficacious in inviting the presence of the numen. It was probably a small step from the hyōtan's use in ceremony to its employment as an amulet.

The hyōtan's amuletic use was probably further strengthened by the ancient notion that the kami or invisible divine spirit lived in the hollow of big trees, earthenware vessels, boxes and other small closed spaces such as gourds. According to Blacker (1975: 98–99) Origuchi Shinobu has explained the notion that sacred power “gestates and grows” within secluded darkened space and then at some point “emerges into the world.” Blacker also notes that belief that the gourds, bamboo, and even stones and peach seeds were empty and yet full because they are occupied by numina is well illustrated in the folk narratives. In *Kojiki*, for example, the deity Sukunabikona is associated with a gourd; further, Momotarō is born from a peach and Kaguyahime from bamboo (Blacker 1975: 98).¹³

Morphic omamori—bells and mallets. Furthermore, the hyōtan might well have contributed to the development of two other common amuletic forms, the bell (*suzu*) and the mallet (*takara no kozuchi*). Hildburgh (1919: 29) notes the relationship of the *suzu* to the hyōtan's shape, for the *suzu*, found on approximately forty percent of all omamori, is not shaped like other bells, which are either designed to be struck from the outside by a beam or from the inside by a clapper. Rather the *suzu* consists of a thin shell of metal or clay almost completely closed and containing one or two balls which rattle when the *suzu* is shaken. Thus the *suzu* is actually as much a rattle as it is a bell and in fact might have developed from the gourd rattle. Certainly, like the rattle in religious rites, the *suzu* is also thought to have the ability to call forth the numina. The *suzu* has been found on the *haniwa* 埴輪 mirrors

which are among the oldest *goshintai* known and which were worn on the belts of the shaman (Blacker 1975: 106). Philippi (1969: 76) cites Matsumura Takeo as saying that the jingling was intended to evoke the latent spiritual forces and induce them into action.¹⁴

Preservative and protective roles have been universally associated with bells for centuries. In Europe in the Middle Ages church bells were thought to be efficacious against evil spirits, thunder and lightning. In some places in Europe church bells are still rung to protect the crops against hail (Thomas 1971: 31-32). The booming tone of the Buddhist temple bell at the New Year's arrival is said to subdue "the thirty-six celestial and the seventy-two terrestrial Evil Influences" (Casal 1967: 27). During epidemics the Japanese would throw straw puppets into a river accompanied by the ringing of bells (Clement 1907: 29). Tinkling a bell could assist in recovering a child who had been spirited off by a *tengu* (Oto 1963: 107-108). There are Japanese folk stories about bells that enable believers to prosper and that bring misfortune to doubters. There is at least one story about a bell which helps individuals to find their way back into this world from the region of the dead (Hearn 1969: 68). The notion of the protective ability of the *suzu* is still evident in such statements as "the *suzu* on the child's schoolbag will help keep him safe from traffic," which I heard in several interviews. Small clay *suzu* in the form of dogs are commonly available at shrines and temples for the protection of infants.

At Suitengu Shrine 水天宮 in Ningyōchō, Tokyo, an expectant mother can obtain a rectangular piece of white cloth called a *suzu no anzan* 鈴の安産 omamori, which is about four inches by five inches in size. She pins this to the rope attached to the shrine's large *suzu*. After a healthy rattle of the *suzu* she unpins the omamori and later fits it into her *obi*. According to the shrine's brochure and an interview with the woman attending the sale of the omamori, this will assist in the safe delivery of children.

Another morphic amulet, which like the *suzu* probably has its origins in the gourd rattle, is the treasure mallet (*takara no kozuchi*), also known as "the hammer from which, when beaten, springs luck" (*uchide no kozuchi* うちでのこずち). U. A. Casal (1967: 30) suggests that this amulet is, in fact, not a hammer or a mallet but a drum rattle. With its barrel-like head and its lobed handle it has been popularly associated with Daikoku, the deity of the crops. Because rattles were used to exorcise evil forces such as drought, and drums were employed for their thunder-like sounds to produce rain, the assertion that the *takara no kozuchi* is a drum rattle appears plausible.

In addition to Daikoku some *oni* 鬼 (demons) are also said to carry

the takara no kozuchi, which can grant any desire. For example, according to one story a one-inch dwarf, Issun bōshi 一寸法師, was transformed into a "man of noble stature" by a princess who found a takara no kozuchi dropped by an *oni* (Anesaki 1964: 286). While this story has no direct relationship to crops, it is a story of growth. It is clear that the primary association of the drum rattle has been with agriculture.

Morphic omamori—drums and dogs. If the takara no kozuchi is related to the gourd rattle, it is also related to the drum, which like the rattle, *magatama*, suzu, mirrors, arrows and swords was an important tool of the shamans of Japan and Northeast Asia (Eliade 1964: 464-465).

The drum was the shaman's most important instrument. It embodied in its shape and material a symbolic link to the numinal realm and thereby facilitated her ability to evoke the numinal presence. Said to have been made of the trunk of the world tree, the drum's sound was believed capable of resonating in the other world (Blacker 1975: 25; Eliade 1964: 169).

One can visit a shrine or temple and occasionally discover a small papier-mache or clay dog with a drum fastened to its back which rattles when shaken. Usually the attendant identifies it as an omamori to protect a sleeping child. When one recalls that not only do the drum and rattle have associations with the ancient mantic rites of the shaman, but also that the dog was often the helping spirit ready to act as the shaman's guide and messenger, the conclusion appears inescapable that this morphic amulet has a long history in Japanese culture and might well date from the prehistoric shamanic rites of Japan.

Therefore it is probably the case that several of the oldest morphic omamori—the gourd rattle, the suzu, the drum rattle, and drum and the dog—had their origins in the ancient shamanic rites where they were used to evoke the presence of the kami. From this role there is an alteration in function, viz., they or small replicas could be used to drive away evil spirits, to protect from destructive events and to bring beneficence. Examples of this evolution of function are common in the history of religion (Eliade 1964: 175-176).

Omamori and Magic

The fundamental notion that everyday events can be influenced by the numinal forces present in the omamori is not in itself magical in the sense that this word was given by the sixteenth century Protestant Reformers and subsequently by E. B. Tylor and Sir James Frazer. That is, the omamori is perceived neither to be automatically effective nor to

represent a mechanical means of manipulation. It is not coercive.

The omamori is better understood if it is thought of as a token of numinal presence and assistance which requires the complete and sincere effort of the person possessing it. It will not automatically guarantee success in examination or safety in driving or prosperity in business. Without intelligent energy and care, the individual cannot avoid failure or achieve success. Therefore, while homeopathic and sympathetic magic are often involved in events surrounding the derivation of the omamori, it in itself is not magical.¹⁵ There is no virtue in the mere possession of an omamori. Occasionally a card accompanying the omamori clearly states that its effectiveness partially depends upon the spiritual and moral condition of the recipient.

The notion that an amulet is beneficial to deserving individuals and ineffective to the undeserving is a common theme in Japanese folktales. For example, there are several accounts of an old woman who cares for a wounded sparrow. As a reward she is given hyōtan seeds which in time bear rice, gold and fresh water in inexhaustible quantities. Then a bad woman obtains the hyōtan only to receive snakes, bees, mud and salt water (Ouwehand 1964: 189; Seki 1963: 120–125).

Indeed, because of this emphasis on the individual's contribution to an omamori's effectiveness the Jōdo Shinshū tradition, with its emphasis on a person's total dependence on the grace of Amida (*tariki* 他力), has rejected the use of omamori. Consequently, in the region of the Noto Peninsula where the Jōdo Shinshū tradition is dominant, omamori are scarce.

Concluding Remarks

The omamori is a part of the mythopoetic perception of existence. The experience of death, accident, failure, and other forms of loss and destruction often overwhelm normal intellectual perception. Human intelligence alone cannot withstand these realities or cope with the "facts of the human condition." In their presence another dimension of the human personality becomes active—what Henri Bergson calls "the *fonction fabulatrice*."¹⁶ The *fonction fabulatrice* is a complex whole that includes both the creative imaginative powers and hope. It forms a counterweight to the intellect, produces the story which defends, neutralizes and compensates for the otherwise overwhelming, all-consuming empirical realities. L. M. Silko (1977: 2) portrayed this when he wrote:

I will tell you something about stories
(he said)

They aren't just entertainment.
 Don't be fooled.
 They are all we have, you see,
 all we have to fight off
 illness and death.

What the intellect must accept as inevitable, the story—together with its token, the omamori, and its drama, the festival—protects against. What rational intelligence deems inescapable is transposed by the *fonction fabulatrice* into hope. Fear changes into trust. Uncertainty is softened by promise. Thus the story and its token enrich and give meaning to the totality of life.

SUPPLEMENTARY REMARKS*

In the West it has been the custom of churchmen to label and stigmatize as superstition or magic those popular folk beliefs and practices they do not approve of. This has been particularly pronounced in Protestant culture in recent history. This chronic tension is due to the fact that while folk religious beliefs are immanent, God is characteristically monotheistic and rational.

Such assaults on folk religious practices from the churches, however, have not always been successful, because many of those "superstitious" practices have endured, often in new symbols or artifacts (see Pope 1965). For example, Elzey (1975) documents the proliferation of what he calls "popular Protestantism" in the United States today. The fact that popular Protestantism tends to make nearly everything sacred—for example, Jesus watches, key chains, religious comic books, bumper stickers, velvet pictures of Jesus, plaques proclaiming "God Bless Our Home," and the like—suggests that churches have, in fact, little control over folk religious practices. Furthermore, he suggests that sociologically at least these items perform some significant functions that help bridge the often wide gap between religious principles and everyday needs.

In Japan, official religion (Shintoism and Buddhism) has made no deliberate efforts to de-legitimatize omamori. Both Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples have shown their positive support for the dissemination of omamori as long as they have control over the ritual aspects of

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their production.

There are two major reasons for the relatively peaceful coexistence of the official religion and omamori. First, both the traditional religion (especially Shinto) and omamori are characteristically immanent and inclusive. Second, omamori—which operate beneath the official religion—supplement religious practices in terms of concrete day-to-day needs. This is not to deny the fact that there have been tensions among some Buddhist sects regarding the use of omamori.

Responding to our question, “Do you believe in the efficacy of omamori,” a prominent Buddhist monk, who is also a professor of ethnology, said, “I myself don’t believe in the efficacy of omamori, but we are happy to supply them to anybody as long as people have a desire for them.” This reply seems to represent the attitude of many religious professionals. While they deny a private need for omamori, they recognize that the public needs them.

New religious movements such as Sōkagakkai are said to exhibit a sectarian or exclusive character; what are their attitudes towards omamori? Comparative examinations of official positions and personal attitudes of members of several different religious groups (including traditional ones) yield many interesting results. The members of new religious groups continue to use omamori, but they do not expect to find much value in them. Omamori are chiefly situated in the “low” culture, but their structural and functional dependencies on the institutional religions should be carefully investigated.

Omamori persist in highly industrialized and secularized Japan for two probable reasons. First, omamori are apparently able to provide people with the religious assurance needed to withstand moral and psychological uncertainties and anxieties in everyday life. The official religions can offer eventual and total release from the world of suffering but give little comfort and guidance for the here and now. Omamori work because they focus on immediate, practical and, above all, personal problems. Most Japanese, if they are religious at all, are religious in a practical and personal sense. Although less rationalized, the omamori perform many of the same functions as traditional Shinto, perhaps for different people and in different ways. Those who carry omamori have no difficulty in seeing themselves as being engaged in the more personalized Shinto practices.

Second, the omamori help to order the world morally, and particularly help sustain the normative principles involved in kinship organization. To receive an omamori from his relatives will help remind a person of love, obligations and the solidarity of the family to which he belongs. This is the latent, and not the manifest, function of oma-

mori. I would suggest that the role of the omamori cannot be understood apart from the social structure of family and kinship. Social boundaries and contexts in which the omamori are exchanged should be examined. It appears that a person seldom buys an omamori for himself, but nearly always obtains it for others, such as a child, spouse, classmate, a brother who will be taking a trip and so forth. I believe that the giving of the omamori on special occasions reaffirms love and obligations within the family and the broader social context and provides a measure of assurance and confidence to family members who need support.

Another issue that needs examination is the question of how to account for the increased use of the omamori. I would suggest that this increase is likely to occur where uncertainty or risk taking social action has increased, examples being omamori for car safety or success in college entrance exams. This hypothesis can easily be proven empirically. I believe that omamori are hardly the source of social change, but that social change as it occurs is likely to express itself through omamori.

NOTES

1. See Nishitani 1967: 28. Given this perception, the terms "natural" and "supernatural" are not applicable.

2. Most omamori are obtained from temples and shrines, but there are also a large number of omamori available from shops. Some of these have been taken to the priests for special rites and prayers and others have not but are nonetheless identified as omamori by the shopkeepers and the people. The priests deny that they are. Some innkeepers give *kōtsū anzen* to their departing guests, but in at least one case the omamori had not received any special rites.

3. *Kaiun* refers to the opening of the doors of the inner sanctuary and the subsequent coming of the kami. It is best read to mean "to induce good luck."

4. Interview with Ogaki Toyotaka at Ise. During the Tokugawa period (1600–1868) more than three hundred shrines and temples arose in the region around Ise Shrine which did meet the demands of the people for omamori from Ise. Herbert notes that "it often happens" that people will uproot a small sakaki tree or take home a stone from the shrine, and Lafcadio Hearn records that Izumo Shrine had to wrap mats around trees to prevent people from taking pieces of bark for omamori.

5. Questionnaire completed by the chief priest at Aso Jinja.

6. Interview with chief priest Nishitakatsuji at Dazaifu.

7. Interview with PL Kyōdan officials.

8. Interviews at Ise, Dazaifu and Kōganji. In my initial field study I was unable to locate the companies which are manufacturing the omamori. This tendency will probably result in the standardization of omamori and the wide variety presently available will probably diminish in time. Already certain common "factory forms" are found throughout Japan.

9. Interview with Maeda Takashi, a sociologist at Kansai University. Accord-

ing to Maeda this omamori, called *nejiri*, evolved from the centerpost of the early Japanese houses and it was into this centerpost that *tama* (souls) were invited to protect the household.

10. There are many homophones in the Japanese language, and examples of homeopathic magic also abound. For example, *kaeru* means both "to return" and "frog," so one puts a frog in one's purse to guarantee its return if lost. People go to Hirota Shrine in Nishinomiya to "pick up happiness" (*hiro*=wide and *hirota* [*hirot-ta*] means "picked up."). A pregnant woman should visit the shrine on the day of the dog because dogs give birth easily. The basic notion running through all instances is that like influences like.

11. Colors, especially red and gold, have significance for omamori. Seldom does one find an omamori without the gold color. Both colors are associated with life, power, fecundity and the sacred.

12. Clement (1907: 25) observes that an antidote for smallpox was to keep on one's person a photograph of the Honorable Inouye Kakugoro, M.P. "The idea in this case seems to be that, as Mr. Inouye is such a noted orator, the very sight of his face would overwhelm the smallpox kami."

13. Perhaps because of the notion of *utsubo*, or the magical power of enclosed places, omamori have often been placed in dark closed places: the hem around the collar, inside a bamboo tube, and more recently inside a silk bag. If the bag is opened the omamori is said to lose its power. Omamori made of a ginko or a peach seed with a gold image of a deity inside also illustrate the *utsubo* principle.

14. Motoori Norinaga kept a large number of suzu in his home, which he rang in the morning and the evening to brighten and clear his mind. Today students journey to his home, which he named Suzunoya, to obtain suzu for assistance in their examinations. Iizawa and Yasude (1978: 17-19) note that suzu attached to *ema* 絵馬 enhance their effectiveness and suzu attached to war horses protected the horses and enabled their riders to conquer.

15. Interview with priest at Fushimi Inari Shrine. For a discussion of the word "magic" see Geertz 1975: 71-89 and Hammond 1970: 1349-1356.

16. Bergson 1954: 108 ff. The term *fonction fabulatrice* has been translated as "myth making power," which is too restrictive and misleading.

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