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## Dancing as if Possessed

### A Coming Out Party in Edo Spirit Society

The nineteenth-century nativist Hirata Atsutane's desire to discover information about his theorized supernatural Other World of kami and other spirits was fulfilled through his leading conversations with the so-called *tengu* apprentice Torakichi. This interaction is well-documented in his work *Senkyō ibun*, which should be understood as a pseudo-ethnography of that Other World. However, Torakichi's usefulness to Atsutane was not merely limited to insights gained from growing up in that Other World and having been trained by its inhabitants. Atsutane also exploited his *tengu* apprentice Torakichi's unique talents in religious ritual and ritualized ceremonial settings to support Atsutane's theory of the superiority of native Japanese practices over all foreign traditions. This article seeks to bring to light how Atsutane subverted dominant modes of discourse and supported his controversial nativist theories by staging performances in Edo salon society to provide ritual verification of a new powerful kami-loving spirit in Edo.

KEYWORDS: Hirata Atsutane—nativism—*tengu*—*Senkyō ibun*—spirit possession—ritual

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IN THIS article I introduce a ritual performed only once in Edo Japan. It has yet to be studied or even noticed, but has important general implications for the academic study of ritual as an instrument for social change, and is particularly important for the revelation of new elements of late-Edo-period religion. Ritual is often defined as some innate and primordial human way of acting upon the world that recreates, regenerates, or reinforces beliefs and practices of a reality accepted by the social group practicing that ritual. There are volumes of scholarly works replete with examples from various cultures from around the world throughout history that can support this understanding of ritual. However, this article illustrates and explains a less familiar function of ritual that creates and generates a reality previously unknown by the social group into which it is introduced. As Clifford GEERTZ (1973, 119) suggested, ritual does not always merely describe and maintain the social order but in certain instances reshapes it.

This one-time ritual was performed in Edo Japan to introduce a new spirit entity. In Japan in 1821 a birthday party of sorts was held for a *tengu/yamabushi*<sup>1</sup> known as Sugiyama Sanjin 杉山山人<sup>2</sup> that was meant to verify his legitimacy as an object of worship to members and friends of Hirata Atsutane's 平田篤胤 nativist

1. The most common image of the *tengu* today would be that of the long-nosed, red-faced supernatural trickster who is usually dressed like a *yamabushi*. Some versions might even be winged and have birdlike facial features. The Chinese characters literally mean dog from the heavens, and in the ancient Chinese *Shi ji* 史記 (Records of the historian, first century BCE), and the ancient Japanese *Nihon shoki* 日本書記 (Chronicles of Japan, 720 CE), the word appears to refer to a type of shooting star which was said to be a kind of dog when it landed on earth. By the Heian period, as evidenced by the word's usage in the *Genji monogatari* 源氏物語, it had come to mean a supernatural trickster living in the mountains. We can see by the early twelfth century *Konjaku monogatari* 今昔物語集 that the word had developed an association with deluded Buddhist priests who worshiped *tengu* and eventually turned into them. The Kamakura period saw a clear association of *tengu* with wicked Buddhist priests, even the most eminent monks, depicted as corrupt birdlike *tengu* in the well-known *Tengu zōshi* 天狗草紙 from 1296. From that time on *tengu* came to be more closely associated with *yamabushi* and their practices. The boy Torakichi's mountain master was most likely such a *yamabushi*, a practitioner of Shugendō (Japanese mountain religion).

2. The use of the two Chinese character compound for *sanjin* 山人 can be traced back to ancient Chinese texts, and better known citations come from Guan Zi 管子, seventh century BCE, and Xun Zi 荀子, third century BCE. In Japan, Atsutane himself places them in the eighth century poetry collection *Manyōshū* 万葉集, and they are also to be found in the *Kokinshū* 古今集 (903). Literati in China and Japan have used and on occasion continue to use *sanjin* as an honorific title; for example, Hiraga Gennai 平賀源内, the eighteenth century artist and inventor,

academy.<sup>3</sup> That party was inspired by stories of supernatural contact with spirits and the festivities were arranged by and performed in large part by a boy who claimed to have been an apprentice *tengu*. Atsutane opportunistically used the stories, the theatrical dance, and other various talents of this *tengu* apprentice by sponsoring this ritual for his patrons, colleagues, and followers hoping to enhance his own status among certain diverse and influential elements of Edo society.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Context of the Birthday Party*

From Atsutane's work, completed in 1822 and titled *Senkyō ibun* 仙境異聞 (Strange tales from the realm of immortals), we learn that in 1820 Atsutane

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is also known by the sobriquet *Fūrai Sanjin* 風来山人. However, prior to Atsutane's *sanjin*, the word was not a specifically religious classification. In *Senkyō ibun* 仙境異聞, Atsutane equated the term closely to *shinsen* 神仙 and *sennin* 仙人. His intent was to put the term and his newly found hero on a par with words usually used to describe Daoist Chinese immortals.

3. Atsutane's intellectual movement, *kokugaku* 国学, is also referred to in modern scholarship in English as nativism, ethnic nativism, Tokugawa nativism, or national learning. This nativist movement is usually seen as having started in the seventeenth century both as an outgrowth and as a response to historical developments. The choice of certain Ming and Qing dynasty scholars to return to the ancient texts in order to find their real original unmediated meanings, an attempt to bypass Zhu Xi 朱熹 by those dissatisfied with the domination of that school, became known in Japan and sparked similar activities. However, perhaps piqued by Chinese ethnocentric tendencies in historiography, and certainly owing in part to Japanese ethnocentric proclivities, the idea of going back to the first classics—the principle that the original form is the true form—inspired an interest in Japanese studies, or *kokugaku*. This new school would be a Japanese nativist response to the Ancient Learning School which focused on Chinese classics; that is, a type of Ancient Learning whose object was not China, but Japan. Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843) is best known as the fourth Great Man of *kokugaku*.

4. In case there are some who might be wondering why a single birthday party, a one-time ritual at best, should be treated as anything more than a blip on the radar screen of the history of Japanese religions I offer the following reasons. First, as readers will see, the opportunity to focus on the densely recorded details of the construction and performance of this one-time ritual will show how the inventor of the ritual appropriated and manipulated an eclectic variety of Japanese and foreign ritual structures while claiming the new ritual to be an exact reproduction of ancient and indigenous practices. Second, the ritual provides an opportunity for a case study that also seeks to expand the importance of Japanese historical and cultural production by testing the applicability and effectiveness of religious studies ritual theory on an example from Japanese religion. Finally, this article contains a never-before translated record of late-Edo period ritual that encapsulates and epitomizes a new methodological strategy employed by the nativist Hirata Atsutane. This strategy was intended to subvert the epistemological ascendance of philology in late Edo Japan, which Atsutane saw as favoring foreign (Chinese and Indian Buddhist) teachings, by promoting a phenomenological approach to religion that emphasized the affective power of viewed ritual performance along with the persuasive power of ethnographic interview of those claiming firsthand religious experience. For more explanation of this methodological move, except without any detailed coverage of the ritual explained herein, see HANSEN 2006 and 2008.

met a boy named Torakichi 寅吉 who claimed to have been raised in the Other World of spirits and supernatural beings.<sup>5</sup> This boy introduced Atsutane to a new Japanese supernatural super hero, the *sanjin*, or mountain man. Torakichi was a teenage homeless waif when Atsutane discovered him, but he had a knack for spinning a convincing yarn and he soon found himself in demand for his stories about life in the Other World. The information that interested Atsutane the most about this Other World was what Torakichi had to say about his master and trainer in the supernatural arts, a being known as Sugiyama Sanjin. Sugiyama Sanjin had first been introduced by Torakichi as the well-known Japanese goblin, the *tengu*; however, through much self-serving prodding and browbeating Atsutane started to pull out stories of a secret class of *tengu* who were not really *tengu* at all, but rather a previously unknown type of supernatural being now identified as *sanjin*.

Atsutane's desire to discover a kami-loving supernatural being in the Other World was fulfilled through his leading conversations with Torakichi, and this interaction is well-documented in *Senkyō ibun*, which should be seen as a pseudo-ethnography of the Other World of the *sanjin* using Torakichi as the half-human informant (HANSEN 2008, 74–102). While *Senkyō ibun* is the most important and complete source of information on Torakichi and his *sanjin* master Sugiyama, there are other sources containing detailed information that are both different and important.<sup>6</sup> Although *Senkyō ibun* was originally kept as a private document controlled by Atsutane alone, he did allow a student from his academy to write a short account of the student's own interactions with the boy using some of Atsutane's private notes from *Senkyō ibun*. This student was Takeuchi Magoichi Tatsuo 竹内孫市健雄 and his authorized mini-chronicle of Torakichi's special abilities was titled *Shindō hyōdan ryakki* 神童憑談略記 (A short chronicle of the child medium's possession tales; see HIRATA 1911b). This

5. For an early treatment of this text in English see BLACKER 1967. This is Carmen Blacker's provocative article wherein she translates small sections of the *Senkyō ibun* text and provides a folklore analysis. NAKAGAWA Kazuaki published a study of *Senkyō ibun* and *kokugaku* in 2008 and KAMATA Tōji produced an in-depth treatment of the relationship between Atsutane and Torakichi in Japanese in 2002. KOYASU Nobukuni was an earlier commentator on Atsutane and Torakichi in 2001. HAGA Noboru's fairly recent works (2002, 2003) have on occasion included important insights into this relationship. In fact, there is a long history of prewar Japanese scholarship on the *Senkyō ibun* text and the relationship between Atsutane and Torakichi, which includes commentary by Muraoka Tsunetsugu 村岡典嗣, Watanabe Kinzō 渡辺金造, and Oriuchi Shinobu 折口信夫. See HANSEN 2008, 6–9, for an overview of the secondary literature on this text.

6. These sources are *Senkyō ibun furoku* 仙境異聞付録 (A Supplement to the *Senkyō ibun*), and *Shichishōmai no ki* 七生舞の記 (A record of the dance of the seven lives), an Other Worldly ritual dance taught by Torakichi.

source is particularly interesting for its presentation of examples of Torakichi's episodes of spirit possession, which is not a major focus of *Senkyō ibun*.

*Shindō hyōdan ryakki*, which was written at approximately the same time that *Senkyō ibun* was being put together and so contains many similar passages, provides a prime example of the elaborate preparations, large expense, and pains taken by Atsutane and his followers to celebrate and valorize both Torakichi and his *sanjin* master. Toward the end of his record, Takeuchi claimed that while secretly following Torakichi one day he overheard him talking to an invisible interlocutor about his mountain man master and heard that Sugiyama Sanjin's birthday fell on the following day. Takeuchi took this startling revelation to Atsutane who determined it to be the perfect opportunity to throw a large party and worship ritual. Atsutane gave Takeuchi and Torakichi the go ahead to spare no effort and expense, and he himself promptly set out to make sure the guest list could be constructed for maximum social and political effect.

#### *Translation of the Birthday Ritual Process*

What follows is a translation (by the author) of a short selection from *Shindō hyōdan ryakki* which describes in detail the lead up to and the performance of the birthday party/worship ritual held by Atsutane for Sugiyama Sanjin.

On the twelfth of that same month the following event occurred. The boy Zennosuke 善之助 said to me that the child medium [Torakichi] had climbed up the fire tower and seemed to be talking to someone, but there was no one else in sight when Zennosuke went over there, and he urged me to see if something was going on. He added that he thought something quite strange was occurring, and I too suspected there was something unusual about this. So I quickly ran out and peered up where he [Torakichi] was at the top of the fire tower and saw his lips moving as if he were speaking with someone. But there was no one else visible although Torakichi seemed especially attentive as if there actually was someone there. I felt that this must be another case of kami visitation. I thought I should prostrate myself in reverence, but if I were to honor the kami in that way I thought it might become aware of my presence and immediately depart. So I thought to bow with my head up and avoid detection from even the child medium. After a while I stuck my head higher up to look and saw the child medium standing near the exit of the fire tower facing west just staring fixedly at the sky. I thought he must be in the midst of a conversation with his master. Suddenly the child medium went through the exit and climbed down from the fire tower and went directly to the outhouse.

I went to Master Hirata's home and when I told him about this he too thought it quite astonishing. Then the child medium arrived wanting to speak with Master Hirata. He said that tomorrow would be his venerable old master's birthday and he asked for permission to celebrate it as it would be cel-

ebred in the mountains. Master Hirata was delighted to hear this and happily determined that it was easily accomplished and would be conducted just as it would be done in the mountains. Therefore, we had to inquire about every single detail. In asking about our food offerings, Master Hirata was so delighted he was at his wit's end thinking of the greatest delicacies, promising to spare no expense. He had resolved to be overly generous in providing the food offerings.

However, since this was clearly an extraordinary situation, Master Hirata at first had to inquire further as to whether there might be some prevarication involved in the child's desire to make tomorrow into a day of celebration. He told Torakichi that he would have to explain his master's earlier visit further. Just then Master Hirata looked at me and I immediately added, being next to him, and before the boy could deny there was anything to talk about, that he certainly had to explain about whom he had been talking with when I saw him on the fire tower. Master Hirata asked him time and again if what he was saying was at all untrue, saying that now was the time to make an honest accounting of all the facts. He was stubbornly persistent in making sure these were true statements, and then asked Torakichi specifically to explain if he had been visited by his venerable master, to which the boy answered in the negative, saying that his master had sent a messenger. Hirata asked who that messenger had been, specifically asking if it was that Sajima 左次馬 person.<sup>7</sup> The boy answered in the affirmative. When asked where he had come from the boy pointed toward the sky in the direction of the yard adjacent to Master Hirata's study. He said Sajima had come to him from somewhere over in that direction and then they had talked after climbing to the second level of the fire tower. Then he added what Sajima had told him, which was that although the master would like to attend to enjoy tomorrow's festivities and offerings, the boy should be aware that he is extremely busy with the various activities in the mountains, and the master himself could not come but would send a representative. The boy said Sajima also said that anyone at all who had some wish should write it down and leave it on the kami altar.

Then the boy said to me that to do it the way that they do it in the mountains there were various articles he needed to obtain and set up as well as things he had to construct himself. He asked if I would please go along with him because he by himself couldn't find all those things, nor could he determine what the food he wanted would cost, and on top of that, the type of seasonings they needed. I agreed to help and immediately the child medium and I were running around here and there. We gathered up a variety of articles and then proceeded with the setup in the traditionally prescribed manner, but it was not until after the eighth hour of that evening that we were able to find the larger

7. From *Senkyō ibun* we learn that Sajima is an advanced disciple of Sugiyama Sanjin whom Torakichi met in the mountains and whose supernatural powers surpass Torakichi's but are certainly not on a par with Sugiyama Sanjin's.

articles of what we needed to start with. What yet remained to be done by the next morning of the thirteenth we started at about halfway through the ninth hour, and this did not yet include the food preparation.

First of all, the adornment of the kami couch had to be done in the ancient manner by preparing straw matting as the throne seat decorated with uprooted evergreen oak trees (these do not have to be evergreen oak trees, they could be any variety of sakaki trees, but they cannot be any tree that has leaves like pines or cedars) set up on both sides with a pliant white *nusa* hanging between them to act as the kami boundary rope.<sup>8</sup> Then the child medium personally cut the offering cloth to be included among the sanctified objects.

Among the other offerings there was first of all the green bean rice, the washed rice, the sacred saké, water, and the cold fish dishes of broad fin, narrow fin, and tail. (As for the offering of a live duckling given by Aoki Goro-masa 青木五郎治, when he asked the child medium whether this should be offered as a prepared dish or alive the boy excitedly said that it was best offered live. When the ceremonies were over, the child medium directed that this bird be released with a magic spell that would stop it from ever being captured by humans again. After giving the magical protection he requested a warrior from the Akimoto 秋元 clan, Kōno Daisuke 河野大助, to release it into the Shinobazu Benten 不忍弁天 pond).

The other offerings prepared by the child medium included a dish called *katsuobushi no denraku*.<sup>9</sup> This is dried bonito boiled until it is soft, cut into circles one-quarter inch in thickness, and lightly grilled. Adding salt and pepper (or even seeds and buds) he covered it all with bean paste. Among the side dishes of the offerings these were particularly excellent. In addition to that he prepared raw yam slivers about chopstick size that he seasoned with sugar and pepper (and even seeds and buds) all mixed together. He wrapped this in dried seaweed cut into two-and-one-half-inch squares and bound it up using dried gourd (or yam). This was then deep fried in oil. For another dish he added salt and sugar to the yams, boiled them in saké, then cut them into thin round slices, and he placed finely chopped sweet persimmons on top of each one. He then coated each one with boiled arrowroot starch and deep-fried them in oil. For another he did the same thing with water plantains. Also, he boiled the yams in the aforementioned saké before grilling them. For another, he stewed the plantains for a time before mashing them and putting them in the same saké and to this he added eggs. Then he added arrowroot starch, removed the water, and cooked it as you would eggs. The whole lot served as offerings.

8. Sakaki is a flowering evergreen tree or shrub used in Shinto rituals and *nusa* is a wand waved for ritual purification usually made of paper strips and hemp fibers.

9. *Katsuobushi no dengaku* 鰹節の田楽 is perhaps best likened to the currently popular grilled tofu specialty that goes by the same name. The main difference in Torakichi's recipe is the use of the prepared bonito replacing the tofu.

(These things were also served to the people when the offerings became the feast, and they felt that they were mostly without overwhelming flavors; this was due to the actual seasoning methods used in the spirit world).

After all these things were prepared, the child medium himself cut some cotton *nusa* strips for one large and one small pole. He purified all the offerings and then performed the offering to the kami. Later I asked him about this event because the manner in which he conducted the offering was completely unknown to me, and he replied that it was derived from sword fighting forms. When the offering was over he instructed everyone in attendance to pray, which they did. After that the child medium collected the written versions of their prayers and placed them next to the kami couch. The offerings prepared by the child medium were then taken down from the altar in the ancient fashion on their ceremonial trays and were distributed to those in attendance as the ceremonial feast.

There is nothing special to say about that first part of the ritual. But after that part was finished everything that the attendees were to experience was to be directed by the child medium.

Then, after the feast was over, the child medium performed *kagura* dances.<sup>10</sup> At first he danced holding a *nusa* wand and little bells. Next he danced using little bells and a fan. Then he danced with little bells and a sakaki branch. Then after that he did a dance using a bow. He said that this dance with the bow was performed precisely according to the *hikime* method practiced in the Other World.<sup>11</sup> After that he acted out the *sanbasō* dance.<sup>12</sup> His form was not at all ordinary. He seemed to be dancing while possessed by a spirit. (The reason I think he must have been dancing while possessed by a spirit is because on the evening of the following day, the fourteenth, after the sun had set, he said he would show us some dancing even better than he had performed yesterday evening. He warmed up and danced but it looked nothing at all like the dances he had performed on the previous evening, in fact, the strange thing was how remarkably inferior he was.) Dressed in a *hakama* he stamped out the cadence of the *sanbasō* dance. His rhythm was always precise and he never lost his perfect form. Everyone could not help but feel that here was someone who knew how to do it right. (Prior to this, from time to time Master Hirata had

10. For a short and precise explanation of the importance of *kagura* in Japanese religion, see AVERBUCH 1995, 73, where she writes, “The *kagura* provides religious and magical services to its sponsors, benefits that are expected and are why the performance is invited. It functions as worship and offering to the kami on their festivals, fulfilling the ancient shamanic role of inviting the kami down to celebrate with their worshipping community and to extend their blessings. It functions as a ritual of thanksgiving for the kami’s blessings and as prayers for their continued favors.”

11. *Hikime* is the name of a whistling arrow exorcism.

12. *Sanbasō* means “third oldest man” and is a dance performed by the “third oldest man” in the ensemble, often occurring in the prologue of some classical drama performances.



asked him if perhaps he knew if, as Master Hirata suspected, those in the spirit world practiced ancient *kagura* and acting forms. Torakichi had answered definitively that there was no such kind of activity; however, after dancing this way he admitted that there were a certain [blank in text] number of dances, of which during his stay, he had learned a certain [blank in text] number.) After that, the Gunsmith Kunitomo Yoshimasa 国友能当<sup>13</sup> and the Physician Asano Seikō 浅野世寛 joined him in acting performances.

Then when the *kagura* were over he performed the ritual for sending the kami home. The child medium took up the *nusa* wand and performed as in the offerings ceremony. Then he extinguished the lamp and said to open the rain shutters so that the kami could now return home. After people opened the rain shutters, he then announced that as the kami departed there would be a large gust of wind, and immediately there was. And with that, the sending off of the kami was over. The child medium then handed back everyone's written prayer requests. This festival had started, I think, approximately some time before the eighth hour and had continued on through the night until about halfway through the fifth hour of the next day. I would never have thought that this could have been conducted so perfectly from beginning to end by a mere youth.

The following people attended the entire festival: venerable master Yashiro 屋代,<sup>14</sup> the landlord of Master Hirata's house, Financial Officer Kojima Yūsuke 小島祐助 and his son Taijiro 泰次郎, Wakasa 若狭 Kamidono Sakai's 酒井 retainer Hanshu Goro 伴州五郎, Kamidono Akimoto's retainer Kōno Daisuke, Awa 阿波 Kamidono Itakura's 板倉 retainer Aoki Goromasa, master gunsmith Kunitomo Tōbei, physician Satō Shōan 佐藤松庵,<sup>15</sup> Asano Seikō, and the townsmen Tadayā Shinbei 多田屋新兵衛, Tsukudaya Denjirō 佃屋伝次郎, and Takahashi Yasuemon 高橋安右衛門. Also there was someone named Uesugi Rokuro 上杉六郎 who had come from Oseki 小関 village in Echigo 越後 to study at the academy, and then myself. To conclude, even though there are many other things I would like to add, I must leave off speaking for the time being with this summary as it is. Bunsei 文政 four (1821), the year of the snake, fourth month. (HIRATA 1911b, vol. 3, 19–23)

13. Kunitomo Tōbei (Yoshimasa) 国友藤兵衛 (1778–1840) was associated with the Hirata School, but was best known as a gunsmith and an inventor. He was from Kunitomo Village in Ōmi 近江 province, and for generations his family had worked for the *bakufu*. After seeing a Dutch model for an air-powered firearm, he designed something similar. He also built a reflecting telescope with which he was able to observe sunspots.

14. Yashiro Hirokata 屋代弘賢 (1758–1841) was a scholar of *wagaku*, Japanese studies, and a prolific writer. He was a coeditor of the *Gunsho ruijū* 群書類従 (Great collection of old documents), and was Atsutane's most influential friend within elite intellectual and political circles.

15. This is Satō Nobuhiro 佐藤信淵 (1769–1850), a member of Atsutane's academy who gained fame in the late Edo period as an expert in various fields including agriculture, economics, and Dutch studies.

*Ritual Modes and Their Varying Effects:  
The Birthday Party, Celebration, Magic, or Liturgy*

Coming-out celebrations and debutante balls in high society are clear examples of ritual's power in secular society to establish identity and create social reality. Even the common birthday party can be seen as a ritual that announces an advance in status. From that perspective the birthday party is not so much a ritual conducted for the subject of the party as it is a ritual meant to affect and impress those in attendance. While most birthday parties are academically unimportant and the accompanying ritual process is not in the least interesting to the scholar, certain birthday parties—such as Sugiyama Sanjin's in 1821—can give the scholar the opportunity to analyze and explain ritual's power to create social reality and establish an individual identity within that reality.

The ritual that was performed in Edo in Bunsei Four was not a typical birthday party then or now; that is, it was not at all a celebration marking one more year of existence. Despite the fact that this ritual does not quite qualify as a conventional birthday party with cake and candles, it ritually sought to verify the existence of an entity named Sugiyama Sanjin, and in that sense announced the birth of this entity, if not as a member of the human species, then as a real spiritual presence in Edo society. The ritual did not bring to mind the conception or the delivery of a material being; however, it called for recognition of a presence that required the respect and the attention of those in attendance. The main ritual actor, Torakichi, performed as if there were a spirit present, and the recorder of the ritual directly states or else implies that the audience in attendance also recognized a real presence.

Atsutane sponsored this ritual and Torakichi conducted it with more than just recognition of a spiritual entity in mind; in actuality, they worked to make this ritual impress upon their audience that a sacred religious event was occurring. Although it is often convenient for scholars of religious studies to follow Edith Turner's suggestion that the nature of ritual is "work done at the behest of and under instruction from spirits, gods, or powers, and it is work that has efficacy in its performance" (TURNER 2000, VII), it might behoove us in this instance to begin from a more general concept and define ritual in a more open manner to allow the perspective that the god or spirit does not necessarily have to be running or planning the ritual process at all times. Allowing for a more expansive understanding of the construction of ritual will enable us to see the motives and roles of the ritual performer Torakichi and the ritual sponsor Atsutane in shaping this ritual and in determining its intended meaning for an audience. However, harkening back to Turner's definition, we will also see a "spirit" credited with the "efficacy in its performance."

Ritual can be performed for a variety of reasons, and a classification based on those specific reasons can help us understand how and why this ritual was

crafted and performed as it was. To assist in this analysis and categorization of ritual by intent and meaning, I will borrow some of the ideas presented by Ronald L. GRIMES (1995) in particular, his thoughts on modes of ritual sensibility that explain the differing way ritual actually affects its audience and performers. In chapter 3 of *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* Grimes offers six simplified modes of ritual: 1. ritualization, 2. decorum, 3. ceremony, 4. magic, 5. liturgy, and 6. celebration. Certainly ritual does not require that only one mode be employed at any one time just as all modes do not necessarily have to be present and recognizable in any one ritual.

Ritualization “consists of a sequence of actions having no obvious adaptive or pragmatic functions”; decorum “occurs at the moment a society or group, reflecting on the ritualizations it cannot help, appropriates gestures and postures for the purpose of facilitating face-to-face interaction”; ceremony “invites the participant to surrender idiosyncrasies and independence to some larger cause, for which one is willing to fight, die, or pay homage”; magic “refers to any element of ritual understood as means to an end. If a rite not only has meaning but also works, it is magical”; liturgy “refers to any ritual action with an ultimate frame of reference and the doing of which is understood to be of cosmic necessity”; and celebration “is distinguished by its root in play and its seeming to be unmotivated and spontaneous” (GRIMES 1995, 40–57).

Sugiyama Sanjin’s birthday ritual was, of course, a celebration. It was held because of Torakichi’s request to honor and celebrate his mountain master’s birthday. However, based on what occurred in the performance, the ritual mode most prevalent was magic. First of all, preparations were made to bring forth the spirit and to honor and entertain it. The description of the ritual shows that the recorder and the audience experienced a spiritual presence and then were aware of its departure. Therefore ritual effort as a means to an end that was accomplished is evident here, thus it fulfills the requirement for the magical mode.

From Atsutane’s other writings it is my contention that Atsutane’s intention was that this performance of magic would crossover so that the audience in attendance would experience the ritual as liturgy. The liturgical mode, according to Grimes, requires an “ultimate frame of reference” and “cosmic necessity.” Atsutane spent years during this stage of his career looking for proof of the superiority of Japanese nativist religious practice through which to understand and participate in the “ultimate frame of reference” he felt appropriate to the Japanese. Sugiyama Sanjin appearing in this magic ritual was to be part of that proof. The idea of the Japanese *kami* supporting this magical visitation was to provide “cosmic necessity.” In other words, the magical invocation of a spirit was not meant as a cheap magician’s parlor trick, but a liturgical performance of the true and now revealed religion of the Japanese people, as described by Atsutane and enabled by Torakichi.

First of all, the ritual demonstrates a recognizable and typical Japanese ritual structure, albeit one originating in South Asia (more on this in the next section), making it fit into the Japanese audience's expectations for liturgy. Furthermore, for the ritual mode to be more liturgical than magical, the audience should not see Torakichi creating dance forms through his own knowledge, skills, experiences, or even magical abilities. The audience should be inclined to believe that throughout the performance Torakichi was tapping into the flow of the cosmos. Takeuchi's position supporting possession by spirits and his statements that Atsutane wants us to believe those spirits are experts in ancient native dance forms show that Takeuchi and Atsutane are asserting that they attended something Grimes would call "liturgical ritual" and not simply "magical ritual." In short, this was not just a birthday party, this was a visitation by a Japanese spirit of clear cosmic import.

*Ritual and Identity: The Aim of the Ritual Performance*

If this ritual is intended as liturgy, using Grimes' taxonomy of ritual modes, it then has the burden of introducing a new credible spirit to persuade those in attendance of the "cosmic necessity" of recognizing and honoring this spirit. However, fortunately for Torakichi a large portion of the work of persuasion had already been done for him by the culture of Japanese ritual practice which he shared with his audience. "Especially in ritual performance the individual actor appears more as a receptacle of cultural meaning by being subjected to the rules of ritual prescription" (KÖPPING, LEISTLE, and RUDOLPH 2006, 23). This quote has an even more precise meaning than the authors may have intended if we think that in this case it is important that the "actor" Torakichi is more believable if he is believed to be acting as a receptacle for the spirit of Sugiyama Sanjin, and so the cultural meaning displayed here is that the ritual prescription of Japanese esoteric ritual calls for possession.

The symbols, icons, archetypes, which come to life in ritual gesture, are not of the performers making; they are pre-scribed by convention and as such carry a cultural history which is appropriated in the performative act. The ritual performer is not free in his enactments, neither in form or content. But (s) he performs in the unique style which gives expression to his/her irreducible singularity as a person. This individuality may be subdued or emphasized depending on the respective cultural tradition and / or type of ritual. However we would assume that an individual dimension always makes itself felt in performance and that it belongs to the necessary contingencies of ritual action.

(KÖPPING, LEISTLE, and RUDOLPH 2006, 23)

In other words, although there are elements in the preparation and performance of the ritual that highlight Torakichi's idiosyncracies as a credible child medium,

what greatly aids him in becoming convincing is the fact that he is reproducing the cultural patterns in which he was raised and the religious conventions in which he received intensive training. In fact, Torakichi seems to have been trained by practitioners of Shinto, Buddhism, Shugendō, and Onmyōdō.<sup>16</sup> Although the chronicler, Atsutane's student Takeuchi, expresses his admiration and amazement that Torakichi was able to put together this grueling ritual complex lasting for hours all by himself, the structures and generative schemes used in this ritual are relatively simple and clearly have been engrained in Torakichi by years of practice. In fact, the audience also understands these ritual structures, which are evident in the ancient histories and practices of Shinto as well as in the texts and practices of esoteric Buddhism. In general, the ritual consists of one common ritual structure prescribed by convention in Japan and much of Asia. Therefore, this ritual, which ultimately seeks to embody the new spirit of Sugiyama Sanjin, works if the audience agrees it works, and then only because it embodies cultural norms in the performance.<sup>17</sup>

The embodied cultural norms that appear in Torakichi's birthday ritual originated outside of Japan. The basic ritual structure comes from South Asia, in other words, Torakichi's ritual practices owe a debt to Buddhist ritual. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce some basic facts concerning the function and structure of the Buddhist ritual so important to Torakichi's birthday ritual. Buddhism originated in South Asia, and as Vesna Wallace so clearly describes:

In the Buddhist traditions of South Asia, ritual performances are powerful devices by means of which a Buddhist community communicates and interacts with gods, spirits, and humans in order to control them and to regulate its own social and spiritual life. Through ritual performance, an individual or a group of individuals create and recreate relations with other individuals, with different religious, social, and ethnic groups, and with terrestrial and cosmic entities. (WALLACE 2007, 240)

For the sake of clarity and precision in classifying Torakichi's birthday ritual as Buddhist ritual I must point out that the structure is based on esoteric or tantric Buddhist models that originated in South Asia generated from Vedic models. Evidence of other connections to esoteric Buddhism will also be presented shortly; however, firstly further explanation from Wallace about esoteric possession rituals shows just how Torakichi's performance should be understood.

16. Torakichi's own story told in *Senkyō ibun* claims tutelage by Shinto and Buddhist masters of different sects. Furthermore, his stories clearly identify Sugiyama Sanjin as a Shugendō practitioner. It is Hirata Atsutane apologist Orikuchi Shinobu who suggested that Torakichi was trained by a yin-yang master. See ORIKUCHI 1976, vol. 20.

17. This might well be explained by the notion of habitus in BOURDIEU 1980, 80–97.

In the context of esoteric Buddhism in South Asia, certain ritual performances are not devised merely to express the performer's identity in relation to religious, social, spatial, and temporal domains and to determine his relationship to others on the basis of those identities, but also to facilitate their transcendence. Esoteric ritual performances primarily involve communication with alternative and transcendent modes of reality, generating alternative and transcendent states of awareness. They transform a ritual performer into a transcendent, divine being and locate the terrestrial and cosmic landscape, the mundane and supramundane deities, spirits, and humans within the body of the ritual performer to bring in spiritual entities within his body and mind that he may project them externally and exercise their power on the external environment. At the same time, it enables the ritual performer to utilize the powers of the internalized spiritual entities in order to bring about inner transformation and the creation of his new identity on physical, verbal, and mental planes through the ritual reconstruction of a transcendent body.

(WALLACE 2007, 242)

Recall the passage translated above wherein the author of *Shindō hyōdan ryakki*, Takeuchi, suggested that Torakichi himself had no ability to dance as well as he did during the ritual. Just as Wallace described, during the ritual Torakichi became one with Sugiyama Sanjin and as a result used that spirit's power to dance as he did. Torakichi's physical body then became the body of Sugiyama Sanjin so that the spirit could be recognized as being physically present during the ritual. In essence Sugiyama Sanjin gained verifiable identity in his birthday ritual by possessing Torakichi. Torakichi then became the representative Sugiyama Sanjin had promised to send to attend in his stead.

#### *Buddhist Foundations and Influences: Torakichi and Atsutane*

One of Torakichi's special abilities and the one thing which set him apart from other religiously devoted teenage boys was his talent for spirit possession; he would either intentionally cause spirits to possess him or his ritual assistants, or he would become spontaneously possessed. The exercise of these talents shows his debt to both the Daoist and Buddhist traditions; however, for the most part the possession rituals rely heavily on Buddhist images and practices.<sup>18</sup> In *Senkyō ibun*, Torakichi openly admitted to repeatedly performing Buddhist rituals for divination purposes at the request of laymen seeking spiritual assistance (HIRATA 1911a, vol. 3, 180–81). He insisted that they were spiritually effective. Of course, for Atsutane's benefit, he also claimed that both he and his master did

18. See Chapter 5, "The Daoist Ritual Master and Child-Mediums," in DAVIS 2001; see also HANSEN 2008, 140–68.

not believe in the reality of Buddhist deities, but actually hoped for visitations from kami when they performed those rituals.<sup>19</sup>

In 1821 Atsutane compiled a work on Esoteric Buddhism called *Mippō shuji buruikō* 密法修事部類考 (Categories of esoteric doctrines and rituals). Included in this collection were practices for the worship of kami. These rituals reveal a secret side of Atsutane's attitudes toward Buddhist practice. In particular, the final ritual in this collection was very important to him. In typical esoteric Buddhist fashion, this ritual calls for unification between the practitioner and the *honzon*, the central image or object of worship that represents the deity.

The name of this ritual was *Kuebiko saishiki* 久延毘古祭式 (Ritual for Kuebiko), and the explanation of the practice shows Atsutane's adherence to esoteric Buddhist ritual structure used in support of his nativist Ancient Way theology. Kuebiko no kami was explained by Atsutane in his *Tamadasuki* 玉襷 (The jeweled sash) as a universal kami who was the source of all souls. First in *Tama no mihashira* 靈能真柱 (The true pillar of the soul), and later in greater detail in *Yūkenben* 幽顯辨 (Explanation of the hidden and the revealed), Atsutane explained that at death the body returned to its natural components while the soul, as a divine gift from the kami, remained unchanged. Furthermore, he claimed that this individual divine soul was actually just a part of the universal divine soul. His theological debt on this point can be traced to a couple of different major religious traditions, neither originating in Japan; however, what he recommended as a form of religious practice was the reunification of the individual soul with the divine kami of creation by a method that can be traced to the esoteric Buddhist model from which this goal also seems to have been derived.

We can imagine that for Atsutane, as a nativist, Torakichi's knowledge and practice of Buddhist ritual must have been publicly problematic for him, as it is recorded so in *Senkyō ibun*; however in actuality, Torakichi's Buddhist and Shugendō experiences must also have proven quite valuable for Atsutane's own private research and ritual practice. Atsutane presented himself as a nativist who hated Buddhism, saying it was an inferior religion that came from an inferior country. Nonetheless, he has a record of spending a great deal of time and effort in the study of Buddhism, and also in the practice of rituals that show Buddhist inspiration and influence (HANSEN 2008, 151–54).

#### *Atsutane's Role and Motivation*

Elsewhere it has been argued that Atsutane as an ardent nativist had a political and social agenda for which he employed the services of Torakichi (HANSEN

19. Also, for information on the use of child mediums by tantric Buddhist ritual specialists see the chapter entitled "The Genealogy of Spirit Possession" in STRICKMANN 2002.



2006 and 2008). For Atsutane, this ritual affirming the existence of the powerful spirit Sugiyama Sanjin was not meant to merely reaffirm what the actors and audience in the ritual knew to be reality, rather it was a ritual intended to change an unsatisfactory status quo by constructing a new social reality. Although Takeuchi gives the lion's share of the credit for the production of the ritual to Torakichi, Atsutane had an important role, and an even more important stake in the outcome of the performance.

It is useful to focus attention on the differing stakes held by the two people most involved in the creation of this ritual, which would be Atsutane the producer or backer/publicist, and Torakichi the performer. Although their hopes for the success of the ritual were quite similar, their motivations were completely different. While as the main ritual performer Torakichi was intent upon gaining credibility for himself and recognition for his spiritual abilities, Atsutane as the "executive producer" of the ritual had grander social and political goals for the performance. In the introduction to their book, Köpping, Leistle, and Rudolph theorize about the connection between ritual and group identity formation and help to clarify this point.

Contrasting with constitutive processes [of ritual]... are the multifaceted strategies employed by social actors to actively influence the formation of collective identities. On this level, analysts typically find themselves dealing with actors aware of the intentions which prompt them to act, as well as of the means which are suitable to reach a prospected end. We believe actors of this type to figure less prominently in the domain of actual ritual performances, where—to put the matter simply—agency and reflexivity are transferred to the practice itself. They are more likely to be encountered in the realm of mundane action in the sociopolitical sphere. Ritual for them functions, so it seems, like a sort of warehouse where they find a storage of psychologically and socially efficacious symbols and themes, only waiting to be recombined in accordance with their agendas. The latter, in turn, are contingent on discourses involving wider sociopolitical settings, and dealing with topics of supra-local, often national implication. Actions dedicated to identity formation on this level we prefer to call identity construction, a term chosen to better express the intentional, strategic, and inventive thrust of these actions.

(KÖPPING, LEISTLE, and RUDOLPH 2006, 26)

The social actor described in the paragraph above is precisely the sponsor of this ritual, Atsutane. As the scholars predict he did figure more prominently in the "realm of mundane action in the sociopolitical sphere," but as my translation and his *Senkyō ibun* shows he also figured prominently in the creation of religious ritual. His discourse and his agenda did involve a "wider sociopolitical setting," and had "national implication." However, in sponsoring this birthday ritual he was acting on a smaller scale hoping for more limited impact. More-



over, the identity he attempted to construct through ritual was an individual spirit entity and not a collective entity. However, if he had been successful in this and other efforts to establish the identity of this particular spirit entity it would have had great impact on the collective Japanese identity, which was his ultimate goal. This ritual was just one tactic employed in a broad and multi-faceted strategy aimed at reconstructing Japanese national identity.

Even though *kagura* is supposed to be dance for the kami invited to the ritual, in this case Sugiyama Sanjin, Atsutane may have been more interested in how the dance affected and impressed his invited guests. In fact, since the dancer was seen to have been the spirit of Sugiyama Sanjin, the dance was actually performed for the audience of human guests Atsutane had carefully chosen. This ritual birthday party was in part a celebration for Sugiyama Sanjin, but it was also a showcase for the magical power of Torakichi, and on top of that, liturgy that involved Torakichi manipulating the spiritual forces of the cosmos. While one purpose of this ritual sponsored by Atsutane was to glorify Torakichi and his abilities, another equally important purpose was to introduce a nativist spirit, the *sanjin*, which Atsutane was attempting to introduce as proof of the superiority of native Japanese religion over all foreign religious competition.

#### *Conclusion: Ritual for Change*

There is an ancient Japanese technique of inducing possession of a human medium by a kami, who employ a ritual specialist called a *saniwa* 審神者 who acts as a second medium to interpret the speech of the possessed medium. For example, in the Emperor Chūai 仲哀天皇 chapter of the *Kojiki* 古事記, Empress Jingū 神功皇后 acts as the spirit medium, and the minister Takeuchi no sukune 武内宿禰 acts as the *saniwa* interpreter of the possessed Jingū's speech. In this ritual dynamic, the *saniwa* is the position with the power because it is he who determines the meaning of the words of the possessed medium, even though he does not produce them.

Historically, however, the *saniwa* role has been fraught with difficulties and not without its detractors. Atsutane also found this to be true in his case. In the example above, Emperor Chūai was not pleased with the results of the divination process; that is, the *saniwa*'s interpretation, and when he objected, he ended up dead. Atsutane's eventual failure in his ethnographic/ritual endeavor (no one today believes in his *sanjin*) also caused him some difficulty and disappointment. As Atsutane himself recorded in *Senkyō ibun*, his work as the promoter did not always go smoothly, and Torakichi as a medium was occasionally reported to be unconvincing. However, those passages that point to controversy or show public distrust of Torakichi are not simply evidence of the honesty of Atsutane the author; they also serve another function. They work to disguise

Atsutane's *saniwa*-like manipulation by suggesting that Atsutane's record has not been purposefully edited to correct Torakichi's errors.

Opposition to Torakichi also served to support Atsutane's assertions that detractors of the Ancient Way were constantly working to undermine him. Ultimately, Torakichi the medium stood—and still stands—as a buffer protecting Atsutane from the full force of public and scholarly criticism. Atsutane wanted the *sanjin* to be verified by any and all effective means, and ritual was just one of those means. Therefore, Atsutane was pleased at the opportunity presented him when Torakichi asked to perform a ritual for a new spirit. Torakichi's ritual allowed Atsutane to introduce objective material evidence in support of his new and radical nativist theories about the Japanese spirit world.

The ritual also created a “frame” through which all future viewings of performances by Torakichi would be seen. Gregory BATESON's work (1972, 179–89) describes how performances set up interpretive frameworks so that actions are understood as the actor intended. The birthday ritual in which Torakichi was possessed was meant to provide a magical frame through which new audiences were to view all future performances by Torakichi, ritual or otherwise. In other words, if Torakichi could be possessed in this ritual, then all of his future actions were potentially supernaturally informed or inspired.

As BOURDIEU argues (1977, 133), rituals are “strategic practices for transgressing and reshuffling cultural categories in order to meet the needs of real situations.” Ritual shows the way the ritualist thinks the world should be understood. Sugiyama Sanjin's birthday ritual made a statement announcing and demonstrating Atsutane's and Torakichi's revelation of a previously little known reality whereby native Japanese religion shows itself superior to all other contenders in Japan. They used ritual in an attempt to reverse the present hierarchy of religions in their world and reshuffle associations to make Atsutane's Ancient Way of true indigenous Japanese religion seem more potent and relevant than its current status could attest to. The ritual alone did not make this so, but it offered a new possible reality; the audience could then decide for themselves whether or not they would support it. When considering the fact that some members of this audience did decide to support this new religious creation, the spiritual *sanjin*, for a short while at least, much of the credit goes to Torakichi's ritual, which helped to trigger a chain reaction of spiritual verification leading to the aggrandizement of Atsutane's reputation and social standing in the 1820s in Edo.

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