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Onmyōdō in the Muromachi Period

This article argues that the significance of the Muromachi period within the history of Onmyōdō has been seriously undervalued and understudied, and demonstrates the importance of the period through a discussion of the careers of the leading *onmyōji* of the time. It discusses the policies of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu and his promotion of numerous *onmyōji* to high court ranks, and his performance of various Onmyōdō rituals, such as “the Great Esoteric Rite at Kitayama villa.” It then looks at the decline of *onmyōji* activities after the death of Yoshimitsu and during the administrations of Yoshimochi and Yoshinori. It concludes that the Muromachi period, especially during the reign of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, was the “golden age” of Onmyōdō, and speculates on why this has been overlooked by scholars.

KEYWORDS: Muromachi period—Ashikaga Yoshimitsu—Abe no Ariyo—court ranks—esoteric rites—Ashikaga Yoshimochi—Ashikaga Yoshinori

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HOW SHOULD we understand the Muromachi period within the history of Onmyōdō (yin-yang divination) as a whole? If we consult the largest dictionary of Japanese history, the *Kokushi daijiten*, we find that the entry on Onmyōdō begins with the period in the sixth and seventh centuries prior to the Taika reform and touches on the Medieval period, but devotes an overwhelming majority of space to Onmyōdō in the Heian period. For the Kamakura period, we find the shogunate's favoring of Onmyōdō set out extremely simply, and for the Muromachi period the entry merely touches on the Onmyōdō texts produced around that time. Turning to the entry on *onmyōji* (yin-yang diviners, Onmyōdō practitioners), we find an exposition on the subject from the Asuka period to the time of the Meiji Restoration, but it makes absolutely no mention of *onmyōji* in the Muromachi period. Even if the Muromachi period was a period of decline for Onmyōdō, there must surely be issues concerning the *onmyōji* of the time that need to be taken into consideration.

If we put preconceived ideas to one side and approach the historical materials with an open mind, a historical image of Onmyōdō comes into view that is radically different to the one described above. This article presents a discussion of the relationship between Onmyōdō and the Muromachi regime during the administrations of the shoguns Ashikaga Yoshimitsu 足利義満 (1358–1408), Ashikaga Yoshimochi 足利義持 (1386–1428), and Ashikaga Yoshinori 足利義教 (1394–1441). This is said to have been a relatively stable era even amid the repeated uprisings and upheavals of the Muromachi period as a whole.¹

* Note on the translation: this article was originally published in HAYASHI and KOIKE (2002), a work that aimed to provide an up-to-date introduction to Onmyōdō, including important yet often overlooked aspects, to the general reader. It was translated for the *JJRS* by Jon Morris. Some reference page numbers have been added for this English version of the article. Further discussions of the points raised in this article may be found in the author's other works on the subject, upon which this work is based (see footnote 1). The translator wishes to thank the author for providing answers, corrections, and assistance throughout the process of translation, especially concerning readings of personal names. It is not possible to confirm the readings of many of the personal names given in this article, and the readings given should therefore be regarded as best suggestions. The translator also gratefully acknowledges the valuable comments and advice provided by Hayashi Makoto, Orion Klautau, and Sebastian Maslow.

1. This article is based on earlier works by the author: see YANAGIHARA 1992; 1993a; 1993b; 1994; 1995; 1997. These works are not referenced fully in later parts of the article. Furthermore, presentation of historical materials in support of the arguments made in this article has been kept to a minimum.

The Period of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu's Administration

A large number of *onmyōji* appear in the historical materials of the Muromachi period. It is of great interest that the ranks held by the *onmyōji* of this period are unusually high. We even find some who have progressed to the Third Court Rank and higher, that is to say, to the highest aristocratic echelon, known as the court nobles (*kugyō* 公卿; see TABLE 1). There is no example of this prior to the Muromachi period. Court rank is a direct indication of the holder's position within the state. Thus we can say that the position of *onmyōji* within the state had become higher than had previously been the case. From what point in time, then, did *onmyōji* become able to rise to the Third Court Rank? Moreover, what was the historical background of this elevation?

ARIYO AND YOSHIMITSU

Abe no Ariyo 安倍有世 (1327–1405) was the first *onmyōji* to rise to the Third Court Rank (without Imperial Advisor status [*sangi* 參議]), a position he achieved in the first month of the fourth year of the Eitoku era (1384) (see the *Kugyō bunin* 公卿補任 official list of court appointments in SZKT). Ariyo was born in 1327, the second year of the Karyaku era. While still young he served as commissioner of ceremonies for the *kishimai* 吉士舞 ritual dance which was part of the *Daijōe* 大嘗会 (the banquet on the occasion of the *Daijōsai* 大嘗祭, enthronement rites in which the first of the rice harvest is ceremonially offered by a newly-enthroned emperor) in 1354, the third year of the Bunna [Bunwa] 文和 era (Northern Court datation). He was then appointed *on'yō no kami* 陰陽頭 (Chief Official of the *On'yōryō* 陰陽寮, the Yin-Yang Bureau) in 1355, the fourth year of the Bunna era. From that point on he was an *onmyōji* of the very highest standing in the service of the retired and current emperors and the *sekkanke* 摂関家 families from which regents and chancellors were chosen. Nevertheless, Ariyo's activities up to that point in time did not differ greatly from those that *onmyōji* had typically performed, and his rank was also entirely in line with precedent. It was his association with Ashikaga Yoshimitsu that was to change his life fundamentally.

The first contact between Ariyo and Yoshimitsu that we can confirm from the historical materials was on the twenty-third day of the fourth month of the fourth year of the Eiwa era (1378). This was the occasion of Yoshimitsu's wife Hino Nariko's 日野業子 *chakutai* 着帯 (putting on of a maternity sash, a ritual carried out in the fifth month of pregnancy), at which Ariyo performed prayer rites (see, for example, *Gukanki* 愚管記, in ZST). It is also possible that Ariyo served as officiant priest at the celebration of an Onmyōdō rite (the *Taizan Fukun sai* 泰山府君祭, which celebrates Taizan Fukun, a divine being with power over longevity) that is described by the *Kaei sandaiki* 花營三代記 (see GR, *zatsubu* 雑部) as having been held by the shogunate on the twenty-third day of the sixth

	PERIOD OF OFFICE AS AN ONMYŌJI	FINAL RANK HELD
Abe no Ariyo 安倍有世	(Eitoku 4–Ōei 12, 1381–1405)	Junior Second Rank
Abe no Yasunobu 安倍泰宣	(Meitoku 3–Ōei 8, 1393–1402)	Junior Third Rank
Kamo no Akihiro 賀茂在弘	(Ōei 13–Ōei 26, 1407–1420)	Junior Third Rank
Abe no Moritsune 安倍守経	(Ōei 22–Ōei 29, 1416–1423)	Senior Third Rank
Abe no Yasuie 安倍泰家	(Ōei 23–Ōei 24, 1417–1418)	Junior Third Rank
Kamo no Akikata 賀茂在方	(Ōei 29–Bunan 1, 1423–1444)	Senior Third Rank
Abe no Arimori 安倍有盛	(Ōei 31–Eikyō 5, 1425–1434; formerly known as Yasutsugu, written 泰嗣 or 泰継)	Junior Third Rank
Abe no Arishige 安倍有重	(Eikyō 11–Hōtoku 4, 1440–1453; later known as Arinaka 有仲)	Senior Third Rank
Abe no Aritomi 安倍有富	(Bunan 2–Bunan 5, 1445–1448)	Junior Third Rank
Kamo no Akisada 賀茂在貞 ^a	(Bunan 2–Bunmei 2, 1445–1470; a.k.a. Aritoyo/Arinari)	Junior Second Rank
Abe no Arikiyo 安倍有清	(Bunan 4–Kanshō 5, 1447–1465)	Junior Second Rank
Kamo no Akiyasu 賀茂在康 ^b	(Bunan 5–Kanshō 3, 1448–1463)	Senior Third Rank
Kamo no Akinaga 賀茂在長	(Kōshō 2–Bunmei 15, 1456–1480)	Senior Third Rank
Kamo no Akimori 賀茂在盛	(Kōshō 2–Bunmei 11, 1456–1476)	Junior Second Rank
Abe no Arisue 安倍有季	(Kōshō 2–Kanshō 6, 1456–1466)	Senior Third Rank
Abe no Arinobu 安倍有宣	(Bunmei 5–Eishō 11, 1474–1515)	Junior Second Rank
Abe no Yasukiyo 安倍泰清	(Bunmei 5–Eishō 8, 1474–1512)	Junior Second Rank
Kamo no Akimune 賀茂在宗	(Bunmei 10–Bunmei 15, 1479–1484)	Junior Third Rank
Kamo no Akimichi 賀茂在通	(Bunmei 11–Eishō 9, 1480–1513)	Junior Second Rank
Kamo no Akimoto 賀茂在基	(Eishō 11–Kyōroku 2, 1515–1530)	Senior Third Rank
Kamo no Akishige 賀茂在重	(Eishō 11–Eishō 14, 1515–1518)	Junior Third Rank
Kamo no Akitomi 賀茂在富	(Eiroku 4–Eiroku 8, 1562–1566)	Junior Second Rank
Kamo no Akiyasu 賀茂在康	(Tenbun (Tenmon) 5–Tenbun 6, 1537–1538)	Junior Third Rank
Abe no Ariharu 安倍有春 ^c	(Tenbun 11–Eiroku 12, 1543–1570)	Junior Second Rank
Abe no Arinobu 安倍有脩 ^d	Abe no Arinobu 安倍有脩	Junior Third Rank

- a. His activities as an *onmyōji* between 1449–1454 do not appear in the *Kugyō bunin*.
b. His activities as an *onmyōji* between 1459–1454 cannot be confirmed with reference to historical materials.
c. A large amount of this time was spent in his territories in Wakasa province.
d. From this point on there are no extant records until Abe no Arinobu in the seventh year of the Genna era (1622).

TABLE 1. *Onmyōji* who rose to the Third Court Rank and above.
The information in this table is based on the *Kugyō bunin*.

month of the second year of the Eiwa era (1376), following a *kanmon* 勘文 (official report) from the Abe family.

It would seem, then, that the relationship between Ariyo and Yoshimitsu began around the beginning of the Eiwa era. At this juncture, let us take a brief look at Yoshimitsu's connection with Onmyōdō before his coming into contact with Ariyo. First, though Abe no Munetoki 安倍宗時 and Kamo no Sadahide 賀茂定秀 were *onmyōji* associated with Yoshimitsu, their ranks were not particularly high, there being a disparity between their ranks and those of *onmyōji* in the service of the retired and current emperors and the *sekkanke*. Furthermore, the services that Munetoki and Sadahide provided to Yoshimitsu were mainly limited to preparing official reports concerning dates and times relating to political and administrative affairs, and as such were nothing outside the boundaries of the usual work of *onmyōji*. Their significance with regard to our investigation is that with their roles being an extension of those established under Ashikaga Takauji 足利尊氏 (1305–1358), Ashikaga Tadayoshi 足利直義 (1306–1352), and Ashikaga Yoshiakira 足利義詮 (1330–1367), we may conclude that no special status was attributed to Onmyōdō at that time.

However, after coming into contact with Ariyo, Yoshimitsu's mode of association with Onmyōdō took a dramatic new turn. First, it is important to recognize that Ariyo was the leading *onmyōji* of his generation. The discrimination against those *onmyōji* who were not in the service of the Retired Emperor, emperor, and high-ranking court nobles was to disappear. Next, it is significant that Yoshimitsu ceased to have *onmyōji* other than Ariyo perform prayers and draw up official reports. At the same time, Ariyo's connection with the Imperial household and the *sekkanke* weakened until his sole affiliation was to Yoshimitsu.

The course of Ariyo's exceptional rise in status was as follows. First, he was granted access to the Imperial Court at the end of the first year of the Kōryaku era (1379) following a *bukeshisō* 武家執奏 (a political request from the Ashikaga Shogunate to the Northern Court; in effect, Yoshimitsu's personal recommendation). This was the first time access to the court was granted to an *onmyōji*, according to an entry in the *Gukanki* of the fourth day of the first month, second year of Kōryaku (1380). Next, in the first month of the fourth year of Eitoku (1384), Ariyo was promoted to the Junior Third Rank mentioned above. There is, of course, no prior example of such an elevation. To borrow the words of Yoshimitsu himself, this was indeed "an unprecedented award" (*fuji no shō* 不次之賞).² This can only have been brought about as a result of Yoshimitsu's administration having secured control over the rights of state investiture. Yoshimitsu had raised the position of *onmyōji* within the state.

2. See *Yoshidake Hinamiki* 吉田家日次記, twenty-first day of the third month of the eighth year of the Ōei era (1402), DNS 7–4.

So why did Yoshimitsu change his attitude toward the *onmyōji*? It would be too superficial to simply assume that Yoshimitsu was influenced by Ariyo, or that Yoshimitsu himself had become preoccupied with Onmyōdō. It is necessary, rather, to explain Yoshimitsu's attitudinal shift in relation to the political issues facing him at that time. Yoshimitsu's political concerns were, briefly put, his desire to usurp a range of powers that had previously been in the hands of the court nobles and to render the nobles subservient to him (SATŌ 1990a, 136–56). More specifically, this involved the acquisition not only of worldly powers such as the rights to control the police, courts, and taxation in Kyoto, but also of more conceptual aspects of state life such as the rights to change era names, confer court ranks, award commissions, and perform prayer rites (IMATANI 1990, 34–108).

Yoshimitsu became shogun in the first year of the Ōan era (1368). However, as he was still only a boy of eleven years, the powers of the shogun were held in his stead by Hosokawa Yoriyuki 細川頼之 (1329–1392). It is thought that Yoshimitsu achieved his political independence and began to exercise power in his own right around the first year of the Eiwa era (1377). Hosokawa Yoriyuki fell from power in the first year of the Kōryaku era (1379), and Shiba Yoshiyuki 斯波義将 (1350–1410) took control (in the Kōryaku coup d'état). This was the point at which the seizure of the various rights and powers held by the court nobles began in earnest (MORI 1984, 361–492). Ariyo's rise to high appointments under Yoshimitsu took place more or less during the same period, and it is surely no coincidence that the period was also one in which Yoshimitsu's relationship with Onmyōdō changed dramatically. Ariyo and Onmyōdō were elements within Yoshimitsu's greater strategy. To what use, then, was Ariyo put by Yoshimitsu?

PRAYER RITES AT THE KITAYAMA VILLA

On the fifth day of the sixth month of the fifth year of the Meitoku era (of the reunified state, 1394), the esoteric Buddhist *Godanhō* 五壇法 rite was performed at the Muromachi Dai palace. On the same occasion, the Onmyōdō rite *Sanman-rokusenjinsai* 三万六千神祭 was carried out by Ariyo (These events are recorded in the *Kyōto gosho higashiyama gobunkokiroku* 京都御所東山御文庫記録, DNS 7–1). From that point onward, prayer rites consisting of esoteric Buddhist rituals performed alongside Onmyōdō rituals appear intermittently in the historical materials. In the sixth year of the Ōei era (1399) Yoshimitsu completed the Kitayama Villa (modern day Rokuonji 鹿苑寺). The prayer rites were carried out without fail on the seventh day of each month from his taking up residence there. Let us take a look at the specifics of those rituals.³

3. Regarding prayer rites under Yoshimitsu's regime, see TOMITA 1991, 96–104; IMATANI 1990. For historical materials in further detail, consult the *Kanenobu kōki*, 75–99.

First, the esoteric Buddhist prayer rite was performed by the *Dai Ajari* 大阿闍梨, the highest-ranking Buddhist clergyman. It was a large-scale prayer rite, complete with a money offering of two hundred *kanmon* 貫文. Those involved with its organization were all noblemen. The last day of the rite (*kechigan* 結願) was attended by the *kugyō* court nobles, who were, as a rule, direct retainers of the Imperial household. The prayers were offered under headings reflecting state or public votive concerns such as: “peace under heaven” (*tenka annei* 天下安寧); “universal tranquility” (*itten taihei* 一天泰平); and “peace without incident throughout the world” (*shikai buji* 四海無事). Onmyōdō rites conducted by Ariyo were carried out in tandem with these esoteric Buddhist ritual practices.

On the first day of the ceremonies Ariyo came to the Kitayama Villa bearing the *saimon* 祭文, the text of his prayerful address to the gods; this was duly signed by Yoshimitsu. Then a *migatame* 身固 prayer rite for the strengthening of the body was performed for Yoshimitsu. After a *nademono* 撫物 rite (in which [ritual] impurity [*kegare* 穢] is removed from the body by stroking actions) had been performed, Ariyo received the object into which the impurity had been transferred and returned to his residence, where he performed Onmyōdō rituals over seven nights. The days and times of the prayer rites were chosen based on Ariyo’s divinations.

In this article I will use the phrase “the Great Esoteric Rites at Kitayama Villa” (*Kitayamadai daihō* 北山第大法) to denote the esoteric Buddhist rites held at that place, and the event as a whole, including the Onmyōdō rites, I will call “the Prayer Rites at Kitayama Villa” (*Kitayamadai kitō* 北山第祈禱). Certainly, these did not account for all the prayer rites carried out under Yoshimitsu’s regime. There were also comparatively small scale rites, known as *megurikitō* 廻祈禱, carried out in the intervals between the performances of the Prayer Rites at Kitayama Villa. Thus official prayer rites under Yoshimitsu were structured in such a way that the Prayer Rites at Kitayama Villa constituted the zenith, and the *megurikitō* rites were distributed around it, in multiple layers.

No other statesman or potentate in Japanese history put on impressive and elaborate religious rituals to the extent to which this was done by Yoshimitsu. At the time, Yoshimitsu had resigned as shogun and prime minister (*dajōdaijin* 太政大臣) and “gone forth from home to homelessness” as a Buddhist ordinate. This, however, did not actually mean that he had renounced the world and gone into seclusion. It was a strategy designed to allow him to build a power base away from all restrictions, circumventing and superseding the influences of the samurai and nobles. In the eighth year of the Ōei era (1401), emissaries were dispatched to the Ming court in China. In a very well-known historical episode from the following year, an edict was brought from the Ming emperor designating Yoshimitsu “the king of Japan” (Ch. *Riben Guowang*; Jp. *Nihon kokuō* 日本国王). The Prayer Rites at Kitayama Villa were a ceremony which made a display, particularly for

the benefit of the court nobles, of the whereabouts of the prerogative power to perform state prayer rites, and also one which solemnified and ennobled Yoshimitsu's regime through religion; the Onmyōdō rites performed by Ariyo constituted an indispensable aspect of this.

Yoshimitsu's institution and structuring of this system of prayer rites was part of his ongoing and steady progress toward achieving complete political independence. The promotion of Ariyo, the highest-ranking *onmyōji* of the time, was a strategic move reflecting a recognition of the importance of Onmyōdō within that process of achieving complete political dominance. What was it, then, that Yoshimitsu was expecting Onmyōdō to provide for him? If it was to make a show of the whereabouts of the prerogative power to perform state prayer rites, overcoming the religious authority of the emperor would be a problem. The religious authority of the emperor consisted of Buddhist and kami worship (*jingi shinkō* 神祇信仰; the worship of the gods of heaven and earth) elements. As the kami worship elements were characterized by the ancestral cult of the imperial house, they were an area into which it would have been difficult indeed for Yoshimitsu to reach out his hand to interfere (IMATANI 1991).

YOSHIMITSU'S POLICIES REGARDING THE ORGANIZATION OF ONMYŌJI

From the tenth century onward, the higher *onmyōji* ranks were made accessible only to members of the Kamo and Abe families. The former were in charge of *rekidō* 曆道, the way (study) of the calendar, and the latter were in charge of *tenmondō* 天文道, astrology. Between the tenth century and the Muromachi period, the lineages of both families branched off and increased in number and complexity. We may understand that there was no decisive hierarchy in place among the intra-family lineages from the fact that in neither family was a single intra-family lineage fixed as the one to provide *on'yō no kami*. There was a significant change in this regard, however, in the period of Yoshimitsu's administration.

First, from the time of Abe no Arimochi 安倍有茂, *on'yō no kami* in the second year of the Kakei era (Northern Court datation, 1388), the lineages that might provide the Abe family *on'yō no kami* were limited to the descendants of Arimochi and Ariyo. Furthermore, as mentioned above, although *onmyōji* of the Third Court Rank and higher do appear after the time of Ariyo, these were limited to the two lineages of Arishege and Ariyo.⁴ These lineages had come to stand out from the others, and above them. However, if we compare the lineage of Ariyo (the lineage of eldest sons, *chakuryū* 嫡流, of the Tsuchimikado 土御門 house) to that of Akishige (the "illegitimate" family lineage, *shoryū* 庶流, of the

4. Though the details of this matter are unclear, the only exception to the rule was Abe no Moritsune 安倍守経.

Tsuchi-mikado house), it is clear that the superior position was held by the former, at least in the time of Yoshimitsu's regime.

From the eighth to the tenth year of the Ōei era, (1401–1403), Arimochi made repeated applications requesting access to the Imperial Court.⁵ At around the same time, Ariyo was not only enjoying access to the Imperial Court but had achieved the heights of Junior Second Rank. Moreover, Arimochi's father Yasunobu 泰宣 was of the Junior Third Rank. Despite the exceptional cases of Ariyo and Yasunobu, however, Yoshimitsu made no move to accept Arimochi's petitions. On the other hand, there was at that time an *onmyōji* who rather made a mockery of Arimochi's efforts by receiving access to the Imperial Court without any great difficulty. This was Ariyo's son Yasutsugu 泰嗣, who was permitted access to the court in the first month of the ninth year of the Ōei era (1402).⁶ Arimochi was permitted access to the court in the following year. The "legitimate" and "illegitimate" lineages of the Tsuchimikado house were clearly dealt with differently. Yoshimitsu treated the former of the two as the most legitimate, and the latter of the two in accordance with that judgment.

For the Kamo family, from the time of Kamo no Akikata, who is known to have been *on'yō no kami* in the third year of the Ōei era (1376), all *on'yō no kami* were appointed from the Kadenokōji 勘解由小路 house lineage. Kamo family *onmyōji* who rose to the Third Court Rank or higher were also all of that lineage. In this manner, the internal hierarchies of the Abe and Kamo families came to be completely determined during the Muromachi period, with the ranks held by the legitimate and illegitimate/secondary lineages of the Tsuchimikado house and the Kadenokōji house lineage having risen significantly. The causal background to these developments was surely Yoshimitsu's policy for the organization of *onmyōji*. From the Kamakura period onward the Abe family overwhelmed the Kamo family in terms of influence and held the predominant position. However, looking at appointments of (state) *on'yō no kami* and promotions to Third Court Rank and above we can see no definitive difference between the two families.

THE DEATH OF ARIYO

The following poem in the *Shinshoku kokin wakashū* 新続古今和歌集 (DNS 7–7) is extremely interesting:

祈りこし君が恵みに位山代々にも越えて昇りぬるかな
Inorikoshi kimi ga megumi ni Kuraiyama yoyo ni mo koete noborinuru kana

5. Regarding Arishige's petitions for access to the Imperial Court, see the *Yoshidake Hinamiki*, DNS 7–6.

6. *Yoshidake Hinamiki*, entry for the sixth day of the third month of the ninth year of the Ōei era (1402), DNS 7–5.

By the graces of my prayerful lord [have I scaled] Mount Kuraiyama,
 unclimbed though it was by generations past.

Ariyo, Junior Second Rank

The meaning of this poem is: “Thanks to my lord who has continuously offered prayers, I have risen in rank to a level far higher than that achieved by any *onmyōji* in the past” (“Kuraiyama” being an alliterative metaphor for rank, *kurai* 位). It goes without saying that the “lord” of this poem is Yoshimitsu. Few would argue if we were to find the sentiments a little too brazen for the poetic medium, but it is not difficult to imagine that these were the heartfelt and unfeigned feelings of Ariyo in his last years. According to the *Kugyō bunin*, Ariyo died on the twenty-ninth day of the first month of the twelfth year of the Ōei era (1405).

What, then, became of the Prayer Rites at Kitayama Villa after the death of Ariyo? In the first instance, it was accepted that Ariyo’s son Yasutsugu should succeed to the position of celebrant of the rites. This, however, was perhaps done only in deference to mourning for Ariyo. In fact, it was Kamo no Akihiro who was given the post (*Tōin Mainichi Zatsuzatsuki* 東院毎日雑々記, DNS 7-7). The court rank held by Akihiro deserves our attention as significant to his appointment. The *Kugyō bunin* tells us that he became the first of the Kamo family *onmyōji* to receive the Junior Third Rank on the sixth day of the first month of the thirteenth year of the Ōei era (1406). This rank was conferred on him immediately after he officiated at the Prayer Rites at Kitayama Villa. The link between an *onmyōji*’s service to Yoshimitsu and promotion in rank is clearly demonstrated here. Furthermore, Akihiro was a direct descendent of the Kadenokōji house mentioned in the previous section. The prospering fortunes of that house were doubtless another factor in Akihiro’s appointment.

The Administrations of Ashikaga Yoshimochi and Ashikaga Yoshinori

THE TRANSITION FROM YOSHIMITSU TO YOSHIMOCHI

Ashikaga Yoshimitsu died suddenly on the sixth day of the first month of the fifteenth year of the Ōei era (1408). An urgent meeting of the chief vassals of the shogunate was called, with Shiba Yoshiyuki the dominant personality, at which it was decided that Yoshimochi would succeed to the position of shogun. That is not to say, however, that the decision was accepted as obvious and natural by all the people of the time. Though Yoshimochi had indeed been confirmed as heir to the title of shogun in the first year of the Ōei era (1394), it was solely upon his younger brother Yoshitsugu 義嗣 (1394–1418) that Yoshimitsu poured his affections. Accordingly, there was some weight to the view that the succession might go to Yoshitsugu. Furthermore, in recent years, research has suggested that Yoshimochi had plans to take over the Imperial house, and that these plans were

at one stage making steady progress. It is indeed certain that there was a move among the court nobles to confer on the deceased Ashikaga Yoshimitsu the title of Retired Emperor, *Daijō Tennō* 太上天皇. However, as the meeting of the chief vassals of the shogunate decided to reject the conferral of that title, we must see the route to the Ashikaga house being merged with the Imperial house as having been abandoned.⁷ This is the political environment in which Yoshimochi inherited his power and authority. Was he also to inherit and continue the special policies toward *onmyōji* which were developed under Yoshimitsu?

YOSHIMOCHI'S ANTI-YOSHIMITSU POLICIES

First, let us consider the direction taken with the Prayer Rites at Kitayama Villa. Many esoteric Buddhist rites were also carried out during Yoshimochi's period in office. However, these were performed on the seventh of every month, and none appear that were carried out in conjunction with Onmyōdō rites. Thus the Prayer Rites at Kitayama Villa as they once were ceased to exist, and were replaced by a substitute system of rites and rituals.

Next, let us take a look at the relationship Yoshimochi held with the *onmyōji*. Yoshimochi was served in the time immediately following his inheritance of power by Ariyo's son Yasutsugu. Onmyōdō rites were performed for Yoshimochi's recovery from illness (*byōki heiyu* 病氣平癒) and the aversion of natural disasters (*tenpen kijō* 天変祈攘). The performance of these prayers may be considered to have been very much a matter of standard procedure at the time. However, historical materials showing the connection between Yoshimochi and Yasutsugu can no longer be seen from the last instance (as in the *Shosaimon kojitsusho* 諸祭文故実抄, DNS 7-12) on the tenth day of the ninth month of the sixteenth year of the Ōei era (1409). It is said that Yoshimochi's tendency to go against the measures enacted by Yoshimitsu (as demonstrated, for example, by his cutting off of diplomatic engagement with the Ming) became more marked from the time of Shiba Yoshiyuki's death during the fifth month of the seventeenth year of the Ōei era (1410). It would seem likely that Yasutsugu was kept at a distance as he was the son of Ariyo, who had been so closely associated with Yoshimitsu.

From this point on, Yoshimochi was served by Abe no Yasuie. The connection between the two appears in historical materials from the eleventh month of the eighteenth year (1411) of the Ōei era (in the entry in the *Kanenobu kōki* for the twenty-eighth day of the eleventh month of the same year). Yasuie became *on'yō no kami* in the nineteenth year of the Ōei era (1412) and received the Junior Third Rank in the first month of the twenty-third year (1416). Yasutsugu was appointed *on'yō no kami* in the twenty-third year of the Ōei era and received the

7. This account is based on IMATANI 1990.

Junior Third Rank in the first month of the thirty-first year (1424) of that period, and thus Yasuie's promotion was significantly earlier than Yasutsugu's. Of particular interest is that Yasuie was an *onmyōji* of the illegitimate/secondary lineage of the Tsuchimikado house (the son of Abe no Arimochi). This lineage, which had been resigned to a position subordinate to that of the primary/"legitimate" lineage under Yoshimitsu, experienced a reversal in their standing under Yoshimochi. Here, also, we may observe an "anti-Yoshimitsu policy" on the part of Yoshimochi.

After the death of Yasuie in the twenty-fourth year of the Ōei era (1417), Yoshimochi was served by Abe no Yasusada 安倍泰定 and then by Kamo no Akikata. Though it is difficult to accurately place Yasusada on the lineage chart, there is a possibility that he was one and the same person as Abe no Aritomi (the brother of Yasuie). Kamo no Akikata was the child of the Kamo no Akihiro who officiated at the Prayer Rites at Kitayama Villa after the death of Ariyo. The fact that Akihiro, who lived until the twenty-sixth year of the Ōei era (1419), did not receive the appointment may also reflect a policy of reversing the arrangements put in place by Yoshimitsu.

THE SHOGUN CHOSEN BY LOT

Ashikaga Yoshimochi died on the eighteenth day of the first month of the thirty-fifth year of the Ōei era (1428). As there was no designated successor, lots were cast and Yoshimochi's younger brother, Tendai *zasu* 座主 (chief abbot) Gien 義円 was chosen. Gien returned to secular life in the third month of the same year, taking the name Yoshinobu 義宣. He began to govern in the fourth month. Changing his name to Yoshinori 義教 in the third month of the following year (from this point on I will use "Yoshinori" to refer to him, including when referring to the time before he changed his name), the second of the Shōchō era, he was named shogun by the emperor. The successor to the title of shogun being chosen by lots, with the added complication of that successor having been of the Buddhist clergy, was an unorthodox and unusual situation. This could hardly discourage the emergence of would-be usurpers, and led to political instability.⁸ A peasant uprising that began in the eighth month of the first year of the Shōchō era (1428) heightened the sense of turmoil. To step back in time again for a moment, during the third month of the thirty-fifth year of the Ōei era, immediately after Yoshinori's succession was decided, *onmyōji* were consulted regarding the scheduling for the Buddhist rites performed in conjunction with Yoshinori's move into the Muromachi Villa (the *Hana no Gosho* 花の御所). The advice sought was provided in an official report by three men: Kamo no Akikata,

8. Regarding the political situation at the time of the accession of Ashikaga Yoshinori, see SATŌ 1990b.

Abe no Arimori, and Abe no Aritomi (according to the diary *Kennaiki*; see DK). Official reports and consultations continued to be carried out by those three individuals for a period of time after that event.

Akikata, Arimori, and Aritomi were, respectively, the heads of the Kadenokōji house, the Tsuchimikado primary lineage, and secondary lineage at that time. As I have stated above, appointment as *on'yō no kami* and promotion of *onmyōji* to the Third Court Rank and above was limited to members of those three houses under Yoshimitsu. At that time, and until that time, no more than one *onmyōji* at a time had served at the Muromachi Villa, producing official reports and surveys. It would seem that an attitude of implementing what we might call a general mobilization of the leading houses of Onmyōdō was taken by Yoshinori's administration in its early years. What, then, was the reason for this?

I would suggest that the reasons are very much related to the previously-mentioned weakness in the shogun's power base and the political instability that ensued. Command of the *onmyōji*'s ability to carry out official reports and surveys was indispensable to the potentate for the maintenance of order and stability. I will discuss this in greater detail below. Recognizing the value the *onmyōji* held for them, Yoshinori and his administration moved to strengthen and develop the state-focused organization of the *onmyōji* and their official reports and surveys. This tripartite reporting system can be observed until the third day of the first month of the third year of the Eikyō era (1430; see *Mansaijugō nikki in Zoku gunsho ruijū hoi*, HANAZONO 1966). Thenceforth, reports and surveys were carried out by Akikata and Arimori. After the death of Arimori in the eleventh month of the fifth year of the Eikyō era (1435), Akikata became solely responsible for the proceedings. After the sixth month of the tenth year of the Eikyō era (1438) official reports were carried out by Arimori's younger brother Abe no Arishige 有重 alone. The political crisis that accompanied Yoshinori's accession had largely abated by the third year of the Eikyō era (1431; see SATŌ 1990b). We might infer that the reduction in the numbers of *onmyōji* undertaking official reports and surveys came in conjunction with the stabilization of his power base. This Arimori, however, was one and the same person as Yasutsugu, son of Ariyo, who had been consigned to obscurity by Yoshimochi. Yoshinori, unlike Yoshimochi, had no antipathy toward Yoshimitsu and his administration. On the contrary, he returned Arimori/Yasutsugu to a position of power, surely as part of his efforts to enlist the help of all the leading *onmyōji* of the day.

ONMYŌJI AND PRAYERS IN RESPONSE TO UNUSUAL NATURAL PHENOMENA

In the Middle Ages, the occurrence of extraordinary natural phenomena of heaven and earth was seen as a warning from heaven brought about by a ruler's maladministration or immorality (this was the *tenjin sōkansetsu* 天人相関説,

rooted in the classical Chinese view that holds that there is a close relationship between human action or political affairs and natural phenomena). If such an event occurred, it was then inherent upon the ruler to practice moral and meritorious governance and perform prayer rites, thereby restoring the lost order.

According to research on prayer rites performed in response to extraordinary natural phenomena of heaven and earth (called *hen'i kitō* 変異祈禱), such rites were presided over exclusively by court nobles during the early part of the period of the Northern and Southern Courts. The first *hen'i kitō* rites presided over by samurai occurred in the Bunna era (1352–1355), and thenceforth the samurai gradually suppressed the nobles' prerogatives over the rites (TOMITA 1991, 100–4; MORI 1994). The right to preside over *hen'i kitō* was thus another area in which prerogatives held by court nobles passed to the samurai.

What role, then, did *onmyōji* have in the performance of *hen'i kitō*? It was, of course, an important function of the office of *onmyōji* to perform Onmyōdō rituals, which made up an aspect of the rites performed to prevent and expunge the occurrence and influence of these natural phenomena. Alongside the performance of such rites, the *onmyōji* would discover extraordinary natural phenomena through their regular observations of heaven and earth. They would attribute a meaning to it based on their accumulated knowledge, and indicate the appropriate measures to be taken in response. This was another important duty of the *onmyōji*. The role played by the *onmyōji* here might be compared to that of an observatory or “control tower.”

Official reports relating extraordinary natural phenomena discovered by *onmyōji* were called *tenmon missō* 天文密奏 (that is, “secret astronomical memoranda”). According to the *Kinpisho* 禁秘抄, an early Kamakura period record of the established ceremonial practices and duties of the Imperial Court and its officers (*yūshoku kojitsusho* 有職故実書; see GR), the form they took was as follows. The doctor of astrology (*tenmon hakase* 天文博士) and his assistant (*gon no hakase* 権博士) would write their memorials to the throne (*sōsho* 奏書) and carry these to the regent (*sesshō* 摂政) or senior regent (*kanpaku* 関白). The regent or senior regent would look over these reports then seal them and return them to the *tenmon hakase*. The seal would bear one character of the regent or senior regent's name. Then, the *tenmon hakase* would have the memorial taken to the Imperial Palace where, via the Chamberlain of the Imperial Archives (*kurōdo* 蔵人) and the Imperial Private Secretary (*naishi* 内侍), it would be delivered to the emperor.

It is well understood that *tenmon missō* were carried out under conditions of strict and systematic secrecy. The content of memorials to the throne was an important state secret. They are an important indicator of the authority of those to whom they were delivered. According to the entry for the seventh day of the tenth month of the second year of the Showa era in the *Hanazono tennō nikki* 花園天皇日記 (HANAZONO 1982), the seal of a memorial to the throne seen by

Emperor Hanazono at the time when Mars and Jupiter came into unusual proximity in the tenth month of the second year of the Showa era (1313) bears the single character “initial” of the senior regent. From this we can confirm that the system for the submission of *tenmon missō* described above was maintained into the late Kamakura period. Moving into the period of the Northern and Southern Courts, we can confirm that the system persisted until the first year of the Eitoku era (1381) in the form of the (*tenmon*) *missō* of the Abe family (via the entry in the *Gukanki* for the fifteenth day of the eleventh month of the same year). This was to be, however, the last example of *tenmon missō* to appear in the historical materials. How, then, were official reports on unusual astronomical phenomena carried out after that time?

In the second month of the eleventh year of the Eikyō era (1435) a comet appeared. Comets were seen as the most significant of all astronomical phenomena. Abe no Arishige, who was in charge of astronomy, alerted the “The Muromachi Palace” (*Muromachidono*),⁹ that is, Ashikaga Yoshinori, to the occurrence (according to the entry in the *Kennaiki* for the twenty-eighth day of the second month of the eleventh year of the Eikyō era). It has not been confirmed whether or not a report was sent to the emperor at that time (for further details, see TOMITA 1991, 94–96). We cannot state conclusively that official reports of unusual astronomical phenomena were not delivered to the emperor at that time, but it is certainly clear that the main place to which *onmyōji* delivered their official reports was the Muromachi Villa. We can only conclude that a very great change had taken place. Furthermore, understood in relation to the situation at the time at which *tenmon missō* cease to appear in historical records, we may surmise that the change that occurred was one that began in the time of Yoshimitsu. However, as discussed above, during the time of Yoshimochi, the Yoshimitsu period Prayer Rites at Kitayama Villa were cancelled and regular prayer rites for the most part cease to appear. This changed somewhat under Yoshinori, and it seems that prayer rites were held in the first, sixth, ninth, and twelfth months (according to the entry in the *Mansaijugō nikki* for the twenty-fifth day of the first month of the Eikyō era). That said, the frequency and scale of these rites cannot be compared to those of Yoshimitsu’s time in office. The numbers of Onmyōdō rites (presided over by samurai) dropped dramatically under Yoshimochi and Yoshinori.¹⁰

9. This was an appellation of the head of the Ashikaga house. As a general rule the term implied the shogun himself, but there were cases of heads of the Ashikaga house that held on to real power even after retiring as shogun.

10. To give the number of times Onmyōdō rituals were held under the auspices of the Muromachi Villa: there were thirty-five instances under Yoshimitsu, seven under Yoshimochi, and eleven under Yoshinori. Takauji and Yoshiakira held no Onmyōdō rituals whatsoever.

Based on the perspective outlined above, we can only infer that the activities of *onmyōji* fell off significantly during the administrations of Yoshimochi and Yoshinori in comparison with the period of Yoshimitsu's administration. However, it would be too hasty a judgment to conclude on that basis that Yoshimochi and Yoshinori placed little value in Onmyōdō as a matter of policy. The reason for this is that the highest ranks attained by *onmyōji* of the primary/legitimate and secondary/illegitimate lineages of the Tsuchimikado house and the Kadenokōji house lineage remained at the level of Third Court Rank and above into the period of Yoshimochi's administration and beyond. There was, in fact, an atmosphere of displeasure among the court nobles with regard to the raising of the status of the Onmyōdō houses. Also, there were those who declared even Yoshimitsu's promotion of Ariyo and the others to be an unprecedented and unusual step (according to the *Yoshidake Hinamiki* entry for the twenty-first day of the third month of the eighth year of the Ōei era, 1402; see DNS 7–4). Had they so desired, Yoshimochi and company would have had precious little difficulty in reducing the *onmyōji* houses to the ranks they had previously held. Nonetheless, this was not done. This is because the *onmyōji* had valuable services to offer Yoshimitsu's successors. In fact, it has been argued that the *hen'i kitō* discussed in this section had their heyday under Yoshimochi and Yoshinori (TOMITA 1991, 100–4). A shift in the relative importance of the extraordinary *hen'i kitō* rites performed in response to emergent phenomena, and regular prayer rites performed according to a planned schedule, took place during that period, in favor of the latter. Thus, we must understand the expectations directed toward *onmyōji* serving as a “control tower” to the *hen'i kitō* rites to have increased. It is here that we should look for the defining features of the perceived role of *onmyōji* under Yoshimochi and Yoshinori.

THE ORDEALS OF THE ONMYŌJI

Ashikaga Yoshinori's political stance was extremely autocratic. Accordingly, he made vigorous use of the coercive power of the state to the extent that he was judged “a terror to all men” (*bannin kyōfu* 万人恐怖). Many were touched by Yoshinori's wrath and suffered oppression. For example, in the second month of the sixth year of the Eikyō era (1434), Yoshinori's concubine Lady Uramatsu 裏松 gave birth to a child. According to the entry in the *Kanmon nikki* for the sixteenth day of the second month of the sixth year of the Eikyō era, when aristocrats went to offer messages of congratulation to Lady Uramatsu's elder brother Yoshisuke 義資, Yoshinori flew into a rage and at a single stroke around sixty individuals suffered censure (*totsubi* 突鼻)—official reprimand and/or disinheritance.¹¹ The

11. The *Kanmon nikki* is in the *Zoku gunsho ruijō, hoi, Kanmon gyōki* 統群書類従・補遺, 看聞御記. On this topic, see MOMOSE 2000, 207–13.

reason for this incident was that Yoshisuke was under disciplinary confinement at home having incurred Yoshinori's displeasure. The *on'yō no kami* Abe no Arikiyo was also censured at that time, and suffered the confiscation of territories in his possession. According to the *Kanmon nikki*, he was pardoned on the twenty-third day of the twelfth month of the tenth year of the Eikyō era (1438). As Abe no Arisue (son of Arimori) was pardoned on the same day, perhaps he too had paid a visit to the Uramatsu family residence.

Kamo no Arikata, an influential *onmyōji* in the service of Yoshinori, was also to suffer official censure. According to the entry in the *Kanmon nikki* for the fifteenth day of the tenth month of the eighth year of the Eikyō era (1436), the reason for this relates to his performance of a *nademono* during a session of prayer rites. This incident led to the commission for official reports and surveys to Yoshinori being given to Abe no Arishige. Considering the events described above, we might well see Yoshinori's period in office as one in which even *onmyōji* were unsparingly oppressed and harassed. Perhaps as retribution for his deeds, Yoshinori met with a miserable end. On the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month of the first year of the Kakitsu era (1441), Yoshinori was killed at the palace of Akamatsu Mitsusuke 赤松満祐 (1381–1441) during a *sarugaku* performance. Imperial Prince Fushiminomiya Sadafusa 伏見宮貞成 (1372–1456) wrote in his diary, *Kanmon nikki*: “We know of no precedent since time immemorial of the dog-like death of a shogun in so ignominious a manner” (*shogun kakunogotoku kenshi, korai sono rei wo shirazaru koto nari* 將軍かくのごとく犬死、古来その例を知らざる事なり). According to the *Kennaiki* entry for the twenty-ninth day of the sixth month of the first year of the Kakitsu era (1441), Kamo no Arikata was pardoned immediately after that incident.

Concluding Remarks

Let us return here to the questions posed at the beginning of this article. How should we understand the Muromachi Period within the history of Onmyōdō as a whole? The Muromachi period, the time of the administrations of the Ashikaga shoguns Yoshimitsu, Yoshimochi, and Yoshinori, was the period of Japanese history in which Onmyōdō was given the greatest weight within the state and politics. It was the period that saw the greatest prosperity of Onmyōdō. This was initially brought about by the policies of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, and, despite ongoing changes in its form and organization, the flourishing of Onmyōdō continued under Yoshimochi and Yoshinori. This is the kind of answer we can offer to our question. That said, there are many questions left unsolved or that are not touched on in this article. There is the question of the connection between *onmyōji* and the administrations that came after that of Yoshinori, and that of the patterns of activity of *onmyōji* in the provinces, among others. Thorough

investigations (SUEGARA 1996; MORI 1996) of these points are underway, and the results are promising for the future development of research in this field.

Why is it, then, that until recently the Muromachi period has been left a blank in the pages of Onmyōdō history? It is generally the case, for example, that an area for which few historical materials are available may be one in which it is difficult for research to make progress. This, however, does not apply to research on Onmyōdō in the Muromachi period. On the contrary, historical materials on the topic are abundant. One reason for the lack of research may be that as Onmyōdō was part of the world of the court nobles, it has come to be thought of as simply an aspect of their private lives and an aspect of strategy in their scheming and power plays within palace politics. This reflects a stereotypical view of the court nobles as corrupt, dissolute, and irrational in contrast to the samurai, seen as sincere, vigorous, and rational. It is a natural progression from this view to seeing the Heian period as the high point for an Onmyōdō that thereafter went into decline. Surely more fundamental, however, is the influence of certain preconceived notions relating to Onmyōdō—such as that it is the practice of weird and dubious sorceries, that it was no more than a tool used in political intrigues, or that for statesmen, associating themselves with Onmyōdō was a sign of political degeneracy. To state this explicitly, it has not been thought a proper subject for decent, honest, and upstanding historical research.

Today, certainly, Onmyōdō survives as little more than a form of superstition, and to attribute any grand meaning to it would be somewhat unwise. However, if we judge the Onmyōdō of the Middle Ages based solely on modern ideas, we would surely lose a great deal of the richness of its historical significance. To the people of the Middle Ages, Onmyōdō was the cutting edge of science and technology, and *onmyōji* were indispensable for the maintenance of order in space and time. Based on an understanding of these perspectives, research on Onmyōdō in the Muromachi period has the task of retrieving and rehabilitating an area which has fallen out of the received framework of modern historical studies.

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- DNS *Dai Nihon shiryō* 大日本史料. Ed. Tōkyō Daigaku Shiryō Hensanjo. Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku, 1968–present.
- GR *Gunsho ruijū* 群書類従. Ed. Hanawa Hokiichi 塙保己一. Tokyo: Zoku Gunsho Ruijū Kanseikai, 1959–1970.

SZKT *Shintei zōho kokushi taikei* 新訂増補国史大系. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1930.

ZST *Zoku shiryō taisei* 続史料大成. Vol. 22. Kyoto: Rinsen Shoten, 1967.

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