

The Symbolism of the *Shishi* Performance

as a Community Ritual

—The Okashira Shinji in Ise—

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The purpose of this article is to examine *shishi gyōji* 獅子行事 (“lion dance performance”), an example of a Japanese celebration of the coming of spring, and to discuss the symbolism of this ritual and its relation to the community as a folk event. My conclusion is that this ritual is a reconfirmation of community order and has the ritual function of transforming young men into full members of society. The significance of this event depends to a great extent on the role of the *shishi* as an extraordinary animal with a strange and unusual form. In the article, the community I am dealing with is a “village” (*mura*), not necessarily in the sense of an administrative entity, but as a common, local social unit which shares the same daily activities, culture, and traditions.

The event which I will examine is called *shishimai* 獅子舞 or *shishi kagura* 獅子神楽 (lion dance), a performance which has been studied as a form of folk art. The central point of research in the past has been the origins of this art, its dissemination throughout Japan, the classification of its types, and comparative studies of its place with regard to folk arts as a whole. Other studies have focused on classifying the different types of masks used in the performance, dance styles or the structure of the forms of dance, the music used during lion dance performance, and so forth. Past research has emphasized the historical examination or the classifications of the lion dance performance. There was the danger of concentrating too much on a one-sided examination of this multi-faceted folk event. My interest is in

the relationship between this folk event and the society in which it is performed. I seek to clarify the many aspects of this event as a whole, and to understand its meaning.

An Introduction to Shishimai

First, a few words about *shishimai* in general. Simply put, it is a dance performance in which people are dressed to look like lions. This kind of performance is not limited to Japan. It can be seen at New Year celebrations among the Chinese. Some scholars have attempted to trace the origins of *shishimai* in Japan to Tibet or Mongolia (Furuno 1968, p. 13). Kodera Yukichi explains the origin of Japanese *shishimai* in two categories, that of "imported" (輸入 *yunyū*) *shishi*, and that of indigenous (固有 *koyū*) *shishi* (1930, p. 233–242). By "imported" *shishi* Kodera is referring to the *shishimai* introduced from China at the beginning of the seventh century along with arts such as *gigaku* 伎楽.¹ At first a kind of masked performance or dance was performed at ancient temples along with religious rituals. These performances spread among the people and took the various forms which we find today. The so-called "indigenous" *shishi* refers to a type which is found mostly in eastern Japan, which appears to have originated in Japan some time in the unknown past and passed on to the present day. However, these two types of *shishimai* have mutually influenced each other, and it is now difficult to make clear distinctions between them.

The reason for classifying *shishimai* into these two categories is related to the meaning of the word *shishi*. Generally *shishi* is understood to refer to a lion, but in ancient Japanese or local dialects, *shishi* is a generic term for all wild animals, particularly deer (now known as *shika*) and boars (*inoshishi*). Lions never existed in Japan, and it was always an animal known only through the imagination. Therefore it is certain that the *shishi* as lion is an import from outside Japan. Actually, some of the masks used for *shishimai* have horns and other features related to deer. Yanagita Kunio points out that it has become impossible to differentiate between indigenous *shishi* and the *shishi* of foreign origin (1930, pp. 243–247). The performance studied in this article has, in terms of this dual classification, many features in common with the imported *shishi* type. However, the people involved do not identify the *shishi* as a lion. The *shishi* is seen as an extraordinary animal with a strange appearance.

¹ A type of silent theatre with masks, accompanied by music. It is said that this art was first brought to Japan in A.D. 612 by an immigrant from Koguryo who had studied this art in China.

Generally *shishimai* is strongly identified as a folk custom performed to celebrate the new spring, though there are places such as the Kantō region where it is performed in the summer. Groups of professional performers travel from place to place, carrying with them all the tools and equipment required for performing *shishimai*. The performance takes place wherever people gather: in open spaces, shrines, temples, or even at the entrance to individual homes, and is known as a ceremony for exorcising evil influences. Many people wait expectantly for the regular annual visit of the *shishi*, but it is also a fact that the number of professional performing groups has decreased considerably in modern times.

Some types of *shishimai* are different from that type which travels over a wide area to give performances. There are many cases of *shishi* performance with a very limited scope as a local village event. It is very difficult to get a grasp of this phenomena on a national level, since each locality possesses its own characteristics. In this article I will examine the *shishi* performance found in the middle part of Mie Prefecture called *okashira shinji*.

Shishi Performance in Mie Prefecture

I have examined over eighty cases in which *shishi* appear on a festival occasion in Mie Prefecture, either through direct observation myself or through documentation. Of these many cases some are still popular and flourish to this day, others maintain only a part of their former performance, and some have vanished completely. Ancient documents preserved in certain shrines and temples relate that these religious facilities possessed a *shishi gashira* 獅子頭 (lion's head), suggesting that at one time in the Mie area the *shishi* performance was very common. However, as far as we can determine today, we cannot say that all of these *shishi* performances had the same content, and they can be classified into a number of categories. Hotta Yoshio, a specialist in folk studies, has examined *shishimai* in Mie Prefecture for many years and concludes that there were three major types (1982, pp. 175–188; 1961, pp. 6–13):

1. Ise daikagura 伊勢太神楽
2. Shishi kagura 獅子神楽
3. Okashira shinji 御頭神事

Hotta investigates these *shishimai* as folk arts within the category of *kagura*.² This classification appears to be based on the role of the *shishimai*

² *Kagura* is a dance performed with music in front of the *kami*. One interpretation is that its purpose is to entertain or mollify the *kami*.

performing group. The defining characteristics of each type, based on their description by Hotta, are as follows. Ise daikagura is performed by a professional group of dancers who travel around to different areas over a long period of time. The group has its residence in Tayū-chō, Kuwana City in northern Mie. Shishi kagura, if one infers from the cases introduced by Hotta, is that it is an predecessor of Ise daikagura. Unlike that performed by the Kuwana group, the performers are not a professional group, the extent of their performances are limited in area, and their dancing style is more classical. Okashira shinji is a type of *shishimai* performed in and around the area of Ise City, being performed in each community. One drawback to this kind of classification, however, is that some forms of *shishi* performance have been overlooked. A more comprehensive survey is required to rectify this situation.

Okashira Shinji

I would like to look more carefully at the category of Okashira shinji, which Hotta defines under a classification with a single characteristic. The events which include *shishimai* in the thirty-odd communities of the Ise area are usually called Okashira shinji, or just *jinji*. The localities in which these events are performed today include the central district of Ise City itself, the lower reaches of the Miyagawa river which flows along the western part of the city, and the seashore area. Politically this includes both Ise City and Watarai County. Of this area, the ancient name for the urban area of Ise City was Yamada, an urban area which was excavated as the *monzenmachi* 門前町 (“town in front of the gates”) of Ise Shrine. The other locales are mostly agricultural areas, with the seashore area containing communities which are half agricultural and half fishing-oriented. However, even the agricultural communities include few people who are full-time farmers. Most of the economic support comes from employment at companies or factories.

The “Okashira” of Okashira shinji is an honorific form of the word *kashira* meaning “head.” It goes without saying that in this context this refers to the *shishi*’s head. “Shinji” refers to matters relating to the *kami*, generally referring to festivals, but also used sometimes for Shinto rites or ceremonies in general. In all areas this shinji is the most vigorous and important festival among the annual events of the communities. Hotta makes the following points concerning the characteristic features of the Okashira shinji, based on his classifications (1987, pp. 134–136).

These performances are sustained by the participation of young people,

and this serves as an “initiation” into the community. These performances also include a vigorous fire festival, magical activities related to birth, is related to the *tōya* ceremonies,³ and includes the theatrical performance of certain Japanese myths within the structure of *shishimai*.⁴ These features are not all seen in every occurrence of Okashira shinji, but they are useful in outlining the shinji for the sake of analysis. I would add additional features, i.e., that the members of the communities come in contact with an expression of the community *kami* through this performance, and that one can see in almost all of the performances that the Okashira visits all locales within the spatial borders of the community. I would like to report on some concrete examples and concentrate on three points: 1) the symbolism of the Okashira, 2) the central role played by young people, and 3) problems with the structure of the performances.

The Sacredness of the Okashira.

I have already mentioned the fact that “Okashira” is an honorific form. This reflects the attitude that people of the community have toward the Okashira. The people come in contact with the Okashira only once a year – during the time of the festival. The *shishi* head is perceived not to be viewed as an object of art; in fact it is sometimes referred to as “*kami*.” For this reason only members of the community are allowed to come in contact with it. Even those who perform the dance are not allowed to touch the face of the Okashira bare handed. They must also purify their bodies before performing the dance. These days most researchers are allowed to take pictures of the Okashira, but until a decade or so ago no one was allowed to use flash bulbs or to take pictures.

The Okashira is usually kept (though it is more proper to say “enshrined”) at the following places.

1. The main hall of a shrine.
2. A small shrine built for this purpose within shrine precincts.
3. The main hall of a temple.
4. A small shrine built for this purpose within temple precincts.

³ *Tōya* ceremonies are religious rites performed by people called *tōya*, who act as representatives of the community. This person, or people, changes every year. The *tōya* is a person chosen by the community to oversee religious activities. Sometimes the role of the *tōya* is filled by one person, and sometimes by a number of people.

⁴ The Japanese myth portrayed at this time is the story of the Yamata no Orochi, found in the first section of the *Kojiki*. A dangerous snake is killed by tricking it into getting drunk. The *shishimai* develops on the basis of the structure of this story.

5. A small shrine built for this purpose at an appropriate site within the community.
6. The community center, such as those called a *kaisho* 会所.

The fact that the Okashira is kept in both shrines and temples is not strange if one understands that these religious facilities are not clearly identified as belonging to different religions, i.e. Buddhism and Shinto. The shrines, temples, and community centers are all accepted as having a common religious function in society (see Harada 1975, pp. 134-137). After the Meiji Restoration of 1868 there was an attempt to separate the religious activities of the Japanese, which until then had been an amalgamation of various factors (神仏習合 *shinbutsu shūgō*), into Shinto and Buddhist elements. The Okashira, however, could not be clearly identified as one or the other. Nevertheless it is more common these days for it to be kept in a building with Shinto-like characteristics.

The Okashira, due to its unusual or extraordinary facial features, is feared as a devilish being, especially by small children. It has large eyes, and the lower jaw is movable, resulting in an even more frightful visage with its mouth open. It is made of wood, and often the entire body is painted with red and black lacquer. The top of the head is covered with fine white strips of paper for hair. Parents seek to have the Okashira bite their children's head. They believe that children thus bitten will not become sick for a year. For the same reason, people gather the "hair" which has fallen from the Okashira and place it in their home *kamidana* (神棚 "god-shelf"), or put it in a little bag (*omamori bukuro*) which the children carry as a charm. In Aritaki-chō of Ise City, a certain old woman told me that if one looked at the Okashira straight on face to face, "one's eyes would burst (and become blind)." Other people in the community avoid meeting the Okashira head on by quickly getting out of the way when it heads toward them.

Many people of the community refer to the Okashira as *mura no kami* ムラのカミ ("the community deity"), but this is just a way for the people to express its sacred nature. Usually there is only one Okashira per community. If there is more than one, it means that this society may be split into as many communities as there are Okashira. For example, in Miyako, Tamaki-chō, Watarai County, there are now two Okashira, each of which is enshrined in a small shrine on the precincts of two separate temples. Each of these societies is actually split into two smaller sub-societies. Similar cases can be found in Ise City itself. Ise City presently has a population of about 100,000 people. Before the changes brought about by the Meiji Restoration in 1868, there were seven Okashira in the central part of the city. These

were associated respectively with the seven sites of the guardian deities (*ubusunagami* 産土神) in Yamada (the old name for downtown Ise City). At shrines which continue to celebrate these events, the places which perform *shishimai* limit participation to people in its jurisdiction (*ujiko* 氏子). One can even get a very clear idea of the former borders of the town by tracing the places where the dance is performed. In Nishitoyohama-chō of Ise City the town is divided into three areas, each with its own Okashira. The Okashira became an important community *kami* to replace the tutelary deities (*ujigami* 氏神) which were lost through the compulsory shrine mergers carried out by the government in the early 1900s (see Sakurai 1987, pp. 62–76).

An Example of Okashira Shinji

I would like to concretely examine the Okashira shinji of Tanahashi in Watarai County, Mie Prefecture, as the basis for further discussions. Tanahashi has a town office, a business assembly center, an agricultural co-op, an Elementary and Jr. High school, and is thus the political, economical, and educational center for Watarai-chō. However, the economic life of this community is much the same as we find in agricultural villages across Japan. In short, though it is an agricultural area, very few are full-time farmers. Most of the people have some other employment while carrying on their farming. In daily life, however, the people's relationships are still very conservative. There are 243 families in Tanahashi, of which at least 70% have lived in this area for many generations. The remaining 30% consist of new residents who have moved into this area from the outside. The residents of Tanahashi divide their society into the "new area" and the "old area," and the residents with old roots here are very conscious of considering themselves the true residents of Tanahashi.

The Okashira shinji is performed by the traditional residents of Tanahashi. The "old area" is divided, for the sake of convenience, into six smaller districts. This is done so that the neighborhood associations can communicate easily and help each other out. An adult man is chosen from each of these districts as a representative to be responsible for the work of the shrine. These men serve for one year cleaning the shrine, lighting the candles, and helping with the shrine ceremonies. The shrines do not have a resident priest. These six representatives divide the work into two month periods each. The person chosen for the first and second month becomes directly responsible for the Okashira shinji, which is held in February. In other words, his house becomes the location for performing the shinji. This

house is then referred to as the *yado* 宿 (“lodging”).

The Okashira *shinji* was performed on the twelfth day of the second month of the lunar calendar, but since 1979 it has been performed on the Saturday closest to this date. This change was necessitated by the fact that the people responsible for the performance could not get time off except on weekends. There are four main roles for performing the *shinji*. The first is the *negi* 禰宜.⁵ The head of the household, the *yado*, for that year assumes this role. This man is responsible for seeing that the performance is carried out. Second, there are the *sanyaku* 三役 (“three roles”) carried out by three young people. Two of them dance the *shishimai*, and the remaining one wears a *tengu* mask. These three roles are filled by young, single men between the ages of nineteen and twenty-five, the eldest filling the role of the front part of the *shishi*, the second playing the back part, and the third playing the role of the *tengu*. Third is the *jūkudo*, filled by six nineteen year-olds. These nineteen year-olds are believed to be living at an unlucky age (*yakudoshi* 厄年),⁶ and they assist in many ways by performing *shishimai* and participating in the *shinji*. Fourth are the six *koyaku* 小役 (“minor roles”), filled by young people of fourteen or fifteen years of age. These boys perform various simple tasks or roles, such as playing the drums during the dance, thus gaining experience for participating in the *shinji* in the future. The *shinji* ends in one day. The entire process, including preparations, is outlined below.

1. The people involved in the *shinji*, i.e. the three who perform the *shishimai* and the head of the house where the ceremony will be performed, visit the sea side at Futami-chō, famous as a spot to perform *misogi* 禊 (a Shinto purification ceremony), in order to purify their bodies one week before the festival day (see Sakurai 1986, pp. 52-54).
2. A few days before the festival, rice cakes are made to be used for offerings to the Okashira and to distribute to the members of the community.
3. Ceremonies to consecrate the *yado* are performed the day before. A sacred rope (*shimenawa*) is hung at the entrance, and the national flag hoisted. Inside the house the *tatami* mats are removed from two rooms and replaced with new *mushiro* straw mats. The men are

⁵ *Negi* is another term for a Shinto priest, or one who is responsible for carrying out such activities.

⁶ Unlucky ages are those “certain ages during which it is believed that one is subject to many misfortunes.” See Ōtsuka Minzoku Gakkai 1972, p. 749.

- responsible for such activity. The women are responsible for preparing the meals.
4. On the night before, drums are played in front of the shrine where the Okashira is kept in order to “wake up the Okashira.”
 5. Early in the morning of the festival day, the three *shishimai* performers and the *jūkudo* young men purify their bodies in the river which flows by the community.
 6. At 9 A.M. the Okashira is transferred to the *yado* and placed in one of the rooms with new matting. The other room becomes the dance floor. From this time on, women are not allowed into these two rooms.
 7. Preparations begin for the *shishimai*. The Okashira is taken out of its box and placed in a cloth bag. The costume, which serves as the body of the *shishi*, is made of indigo-dyed hemp, with a white crane pattern. The tail is made of a sheaf of white paper with a small bell attached to the end. Every year new hair is added to the Okashira. There are actually two Okashira, an old one and a new one. The old one is said to have been made about three hundred years ago, and is not actually used for the performance but is kept on display in a corner of the room. The new Okashira is used for the dance performance. The box also contains a red *tengu* mask, another black mask called the “*negi* mask” which looks like the old man’s mask in Noh drama, various costumes, and old documents which record past performances.
 8. At noon the people involved in performing the *shinji* are offered lunch at the *yado*. The young people assigned to the role of *jūkudo*, in particular, are given meals on special trays. However, no meat or fish is served. The young people all wear formal attire (*kimono*).
 9. After the meal the dance begins along with the beating of drums. One of the dance performers holds the Okashira, the head, with both hands and becomes the front legs of the beast, hiding his body within the costume of the *shishi*. Another performer becomes the hind legs, but does not hide his body within the costume of the *shishi*. Other participants in the dance are, in order, the children, the *jūkudo*, and other men who participate spontaneously. When the dance begins the people of the community visit the *yado* bearing gifts of rice cakes, wine, or money, which is offered to the Okashira. They receive the already prepared rice cakes upon arriving at the *yado*. The members of the community watch the dance performance, and at times throw small change wrapped in white

- paper into the dance room from outside the house. The dance performance continues until it ends in the evening.
10. After a simple meal for all participants, a ceremony called the *uchimatsuri* 打ち祭 is performed at around 8 P.M. From this time, unlike during the day where only the dance was performed, various scenes begin to unfold. The surroundings are already dark, with only small bonfires and paper lanterns providing light. The members of the community began to gather at the *yado*. There are also an increasing number of women and children. The main difference between this time and daytime is that the activities are performed in the yard of the *yado* rather than inside, and that participation in the dance is limited to the *sanyaku*.
11. When preparations for the evening events are complete, the master of the *yado* dons the *negi* mask and the traditional ritual white robes, and stands at the entrance to the *yado*. He will stand here without moving until the events of the evening are finished. The *tengu* flies and runs around in the yard. Sometimes he links arms with children and deliberately bumps into the spectators. At other times he leads the children to run into the house with their shoes on.⁷ He also beats people on the head with his fan. While the *tengu* cavorts in this way, the Okashira waits patiently outside. The dance begins when the *tengu*'s antics are finished and he leads the Okashira to the center of the yard. The last part of the dance consists of having the *tengu* fan the Okashira with the open fan held in both hands. The Okashira strenuously moves its head and body in accordance with the movement of the fan. This continues for over two hours.
12. Around 11 P.M. the *uma* ウマ (horse) performance begins. A single straw *mushiro* mat is placed in the middle of the yard, and the Okashira lies stretched out on this mat. At this point the *shishi* is perceived as a horse. The *tengu* straddles the Okashira, and the spectators surround them in a circle. Then a puzzling dialogue is carried on between the spectators and the *tengu*. The spectators make all sorts of nasty remarks to the *tengu* about the horse. These nasty remarks consist of things like comments on the poor condition of the horse's hide, that the horse is missing some part of its body, that its tail is an unattractive shape, and so forth, sometimes stooping to sexual innuendo. The *tengu* must respond to these

⁷ In Japan it is customary to take off one's shoes before entering the house.

remarks with witty replies before the event comes to a close. The *tengu* also makes sexually suggestive movements while straddling the “horse.” This always elicits laughter from the spectators. When the spectators run out of questions the *tengu* chants a festive song. As soon as the song ends the Okashira rears up as if in anger, and all the spectators step back. Finally the Okashira performs one more dance, marking the end of this event.

13. Next, the Okashira, the *tengu*, and the *negi* visit the temples, shrines, and other religious places affiliated with the community, performing the dance once at each place. At this time a “magical” activity is performed. The *negi* rolls a round object made from a willow, called an *imo* 芋 (“potato”), along the ground. The nineteen year-olds compete to obtain it. Recently the number of nineteen year-olds have decreased and many children take part. It is believed that the one who ends up with the *imo* will be blessed with a bountiful harvest if he plants *satoimo* (taro) that year. This competition is performed three times at each location. There is also a performance, using a small branch shaped like a hoe, pretending that one is digging up the *imo* from the garden.
14. After all the sacred spots have been visited, the Okashira, *tengu*, and *negi* finally reach the community outskirts. Here there is a stone monument where the people place rice cakes (symbolizing the one year) from the twelve groups, the *imo*, and the small branch shaped like a hoe. The bamboo decorated with sacred rope (*shime-nawa*) used in the *shinji* is also offered, after which, as a final gesture, the Okashira opens its mouth widely and then shuts it. The *shishi*'s head is covered with its costume, and everyone runs at full speed back to the *yado*. It is said that people must not for any reason look back during this sprint back to the *yado*. Those who do not participate in the event are barred from witnessing the activities at this place.
15. Back at the *yado*, the Okashira is placed back in its box with its costumes, other masks, and so forth. The box is placed back into the small shrine on the temple precincts the next morning. The people who participated in the activities of the *yado* are given a final meal. Unlike the noon meal, fish is served at this time.

The Shinji and the Age Groups

This *shinji*, like many other Japanese folk events, is becoming increasingly

difficult to perform in the traditional manner due to severe social change. Some parts have been gradually reorganized. This article is based on observations made in 1978, but since then the number of nineteen year-old participants has decreased, and the roles which they are supposed to play are given less importance. Also, younger children are actively encouraged to participate, in order to assure the transmission of the event. It is also said that the older people no longer get after or try to correct the younger people for their mistakes during the progression of the event. It was explained that this is so because the young people will resist wanting to learn about the event if the older people are too attached to traditional ways. However, this *shinji* has been officially recognized by the Governor of Mie Prefecture and has the status of an "intangible cultural asset." Therefore there is also a strong feeling of obligation to transmit the *shinji* accurately and train successors for the dance.

As I have mentioned above, this *shinji* is a seasonal ritual which contains elements for celebrating the arrival of spring. The young people, especially, play an important role. In the rest of the article I will examine this *shinji* from the perspective of the role of young people.

The famous folklorist Seki Keigo has pointed out the profound relation between the *shishimai* and age groups in his work on age groups in Japan (1981, pp. 185-186). He includes "young people groups organized for *shishimai*" as one group in his classification of young people groups. Also, Hotta Yoshio, who has conducted many surveys of the Okashira *shinji*, suggests that this event is closely related to age stratification (1987, p. 152). The role of young people is very important to sustain the event. In communities where the number of young people has decreased drastically, the old people merely take the head of the *shishi* out of the shrine and place it on view, and in some areas the performance of *shinji* has disappeared completely. Even more important than the need for young people to be around, however, is that there be purpose and meaning for the young people to actively perform the *shinji*. As can be seen in Tanahashi and many other cases, a characteristic feature of many Okashira *shinji* is that the roles performed differ according to age group, and that especially among young people the roles of a specific age group are very important.

In the case of Tanahashi, two of the three *sanyaku* who perform the *shishimai* and all of the *jūkudo* are nineteen year-olds. There is some leeway as far as age goes for the *sanyaku*, but clearly nineteen year-old young people are irreplaceable. According to a community saying, "one is not a real man until he dances the Okashira." It is an unspoken assumption in the community that at least one of the nineteen year-olds will represent the

rest and “dance the Okashira.” It is clear that the age of nineteen represents a watershed which demarcates the social position of a man before and after that age. Currently the young people for the roles of *jūkudo* are chosen one month before the performance of the *shinji*, after which the chosen ones must prepare for the *shinji* and practice the *shishimai*.

Until a few decades ago the nineteen year-olds were given much more work. Nineteen year-olds who were eldest sons were required to play the part of *jūkudo*. After participating in an Okashira *shinji* and inheriting the role of their predecessors, they would be given the use of a parcel of paddy-land from the community’s common property. They would be responsible to grow rice in this paddy and were allowed to keep the harvest, except for the part which was needed to defray the cost of the *shinji*. They would also assist in helping with rites for the community tutelary deity, cleaning the shrine, and so forth, for one year. At the present time the cultivation of rice for the *shinji* is taken care of by the family which is chosen as *yado*. The service to the tutelary deity is performed by the person responsible for the *shinji*, when in the past the young people were trained for this task for one year. Agricultural labor was a fundamental economic responsibility. The rolling of the *imo* on the day of the Okashira *shinji*, where the young people compete to obtain the *imo*, is related to this past form. The use of community property is an opportunity to learn the importance of the communal nature of social life based on paddy-field cultivation. The contact with the tutelary deity involved learning the important rituals of the community. Through these steps the young people gradually learned the conditions for entering manhood. Finally, one would pass from being *jūkudo* to being a full adult member of the community one year later on the day of the Okashira *shinji*. Clearly this process has been greatly abbreviated.

At present, the young people make the major preparations for the event by following the instructions of their elders. They are expected to dance animatedly while carrying the heavy Okashira. Though not yet fully recognized as adults, they actively come in contact with the Okashira which symbolizes the community *kami*. It is here that one can perceive their acceptance as full members of the community. On the day of the *shinji* they are offered proper meals during the noon meal. This signifies that they are henceforth publicly accepted as adult members of the community.

It is important to remember that these nineteen year-olds are in an unlucky age. Usually the age of nineteen for women and the age of twenty-five for men are considered unlucky ages. In Tanahashi a nineteen year-old is considered an unlucky age. However, given the fact that the roles for dancing the Okashira and the *tengu* are for young people from

nineteen to twenty-five years of age, young people of this age can be considered as one age group. The nineteen year-olds stand at the entrance to this age group. They are at a borderline age. Their role in dressing up as a *shishi*, an imaginary beast, and dancing with enthusiasm, signifies that their extraordinary power is something which cannot be omitted from this *shinji*.

The Rivalry Between the Okashira and the Tengu

The relationship between the Okashira and the young people at an unlucky age is also symbolically expressed within the events of the *shinji*. This event changes its character drastically from the daytime to nighttime. During the day, when there is natural illumination, the events take place within the *yado*. In contrast, in the evening when darkness falls, the center of activity shifts to the yard of the *yado*. At this point both of the dancers of the *shishimai* are hidden under the costume. The *shishimai* dance itself is different. During the day the major movement is the enthusiastic gestures of the Okashira itself, the front half of the *shishi*, while in the evening the feet of the back half does most of the movement. One of the most interesting contrasts between day and night activity is the role of the *tengu*.⁸ If the Okashira is the center of attention during the day, then it is the *tengu* who plays the main role in the evening. The *tengu* hits the spectators on the head, pushes and knocks people over, jumps around inside the *yado*; the spectators allow and even encourage this rambunctious behavior. The *tengu* is playing the role of one who breaks social rules and customs. Another activity of the *tengu* which deserves consideration is that the *tengu* forces itself of the Okashira many times, while the Okashira is always in a passive role vis-à-vis the *tengu*. While the *tengu* is rampaging about in the yard, the Okashira waits quietly in a corner. Sometimes the *tengu* even hits the Okashira on the head. The *tengu* can even lead the Okashira out to the center of the yard to begin dancing.

This relationship between the *tengu* and the Okashira appears most evidently in the activity of the *uma*. During this time the Okashira lies on the ground without moving, as if dead, and the *tengu* straddles the Okashira, facing the opposite direction. In this horse-riding-like position, the *tengu* periodically fans the Okashira. Upon being fanned, the Okashira moves its

⁸ The most conspicuous characteristic of the *tengu* mask is the long, protruding nose. *Tengu* are creatures which are believed to live deep in the mountains, with red faces and long noses, and with the power to fly through the air. However, they cannot be seen by human eyes, and usually move about during the night.

body slightly. This activity appears as a desecration of the immobile weak by the strong. At this point the relationship between the Okashira, the *tengu*, and the spectators is that the *tengu* is the mediator, or in a mediating position, between the Okashira and the spectators. To the spectators, the *tengu* is a being of strength who can face the Okashira. To the spectators, i.e. the members of the community, the Okashira is a fearful, sacred being. It possesses a power which cannot be resisted. Through the medium of the *tengu*, however, they can fruitfully respond to the authority and power of the Okashira. This is also revealed in the insulting words the spectators address to the Okashira in this situation. The *tengu* responds to their nasty comments in defense of the Okashira. The atmosphere is very tense during this give and take. The tension is broken by laughter in response to the *tengu*'s humorous antics and his witty answers. The final ice-breaker is the short festive song chanted by the *tengu*.⁹ The *uma* ends and the Okashira jumps up, dancing as in a fit, and all the people once again back away. The Okashira has regained its authority, and is also symbolic of the seasonal theme of death and rebirth. In any case, the *tengu* is a liminal being, and plays an important role as one who brings forth the activity of the Okashira. Its character is similar to that of the young people who are at an unlucky age.

The Closing Rituals for the Shinji

The avoidance of disaster (*josai* 除災) is a function common to all *shishimai*, including the Okashira *shinji*. When a professional group visits each home, the people have a *shishi* dance performed in order to protect the household from disasters and keep the family members from becoming sick. There is no doubt that the *shishi* in the Okashira *shinji* plays the same role. However, community rituals are not limited to protecting individuals, but emphasizes keeping away disasters from the community as a whole. In Tanahashi the people bring money to the *yado* wrapped in paper. This serves, like an offering to the *kami*, as a way of having the *shishi* take upon itself the misfortunes of a household. In the past the Okashira visited every house. The Okashira, as the bearer of all these potential misfortunes, visits the periphery of the community. At this border point, the Okashira does not go through any specific motions of getting rid of the misfortunes, but the objects used to perform the *shinji* are left behind here, and can be inter-

⁹ This festive song is very short, consisting of the single line: *medeta medeta, kotoshi wa ** toshi yo* (Congratulations! Congratulations! This is the year of * *), with * * standing for the year of the sexagenary cycle, e.g. year of the monkey, year of the snake, and so forth.

preted as fulfilling this purpose. The *imo* in particular, among the objects left behind, is a symbol of abundant harvest which people competed to obtain. However, once it is left behind at the border, the people of the community will not pick it up any more. These sorts of rituals at the community border can be seen in the Okashira shinji of almost all localities (Sakurai 1981, pp. 1-6; 1982, pp. 5-10). At Aritaki-chō, Ise City, and Takabuku, Misono-mura, Watarai County, there is a sacred *shimenawa* strung at the community borders which is cut by the Okashira with a sword, after which all the participants dash away from that area without looking back. At Toyohama-chō, Ise City, a long bamboo stick used in the *shinji* is cut and thrown in the river at the community border.

These actions are all reconfirmations of the common space of the community, while also serving to remove potential misfortune from within the community. It conceptualizes the community as an orderly realm. Potential elements of misfortune are attached to a sacred object, and, with the participation of young people at an unlucky age and of *tengu* (beings which exist at the periphery of our world), the authority and power of the *kami* are reconfirmed. This is the structure of the Okashira shinji. And this is the reason that the appearance of the *kami* must be that with an unrealistic visage and a strange and extraordinary form.

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