

## “My Own Inari”

### Personalization of the Deity in Inari Worship

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*There is a great deal of personalization of the kami in the worship of Inari. On Inari Mountain in Fushimi, for example, Inari is worshipped under tens of thousands of names, a phenomenon seen in contemporary Buddhist forms of Inari worship as well. This article describes various aspects of this personalization, sketches its historical background, and gives examples of how devotees understand their “own” Inari. It also explores the relation between cultural understandings of the fox in Japan and expressions of individuality within Inari worship, suggesting that the fox is, among other things, a powerful metaphor for the distinct, yet private, individuality that balances social personae in Japan.*

THE MOST STRIKING FEATURE of Inari worship (*Inari shinkō* 稲荷信仰) is the high degree of diversification and even personalization of this kami. Devotees do not simply worship “Inari,” but a separate form of Inari with its own name. Various Inari shrines and temples worship entirely different kami *as* Inari; traditions and symbols have a multiplicity of meanings.

With the exception of ancestor worship, where individualization is to be expected, such personalization is more developed in Inari worship than in any other form of Japanese religiosity (see SMITH 1974).<sup>1</sup> The present paper focuses on this phenomenon, an aspect of Japanese religious practice that has not been fully described and that is probably more widespread than studies based on normative texts and

<sup>1</sup> Such figures as Jizō 地藏, Kannon 観音, and Kōbō Daishi 弘法大師 may also be highly individualized and are frequently related to a specific place, though not to the extent that Inari is. READER describes the highly personal narratives that develop in connection with pilgrimage, especially relating to Kōbō Daishi (1993), and notes the locospecific nature of certain deities (e.g., Nakayama Kannon). He does not, however, find the same degree of renaming that I have shown for Inari (personal communication).

practices indicate.<sup>2</sup> This paper focuses on the astonishing degree to which Inari is personalized in both name and function, and how these functions relate more to private and personal religious concerns than to more social or group issues. I suggest that the fox, as the main symbol of Inari, reflects this emphasis on the personal, which may function as a balance to other group or communal forms of religion in Japan.

### *Regional Variations in Inari*

It is generally agreed that there are three main centers of Inari worship, known as the “Three Great Inari Shrines of Japan” (*Nihon no sandai Inari* 日本の三大稲荷). Yet, despite the suggestion of a nationwide tradition, the identity of these three centers shows the same sort of variation seen in Inari worship itself.<sup>3</sup> All *sandai Inari* lists include Fushimi Inari Taisha 伏見稲荷大社 at the foot of Inari Mountain just south of Kyoto, and most also name Toyokawa 豊川 Inari (the Sōtō Zen temple Myōgon-ji 妙嚴寺, Toyokawa-shi, Aichi). The identity of the third site varies depending on the speaker, however, and is usually the largest Inari shrine in that person’s region. Thus Kyūshū people tend to include Yūtoku 祐徳 Inari in Saga, whereas those in the north prefer Takegoma 竹駒 Inari in Miyagi. Kantō people may include Kasama 笠間 Inari in Ibaragi, while Kansai tradition names Saijō 最上 Inari in Okayama. A Shinto priest who lives near Toyokawa Inari was careful to leave this Buddhist temple out of his listings of the various traditions of *sandai Inari* but, curiously, included Saijō Inari, which he may not have known was the Nichiren temple Myōkyō-ji 妙教寺. His lists of the *sandai Inari* for the various regions were: Kasama, Takegoma, and Fushimi for eastern Japan; Taikodani 太鼓谷 (Shimane), Saijō, and Fushimi for central Japan; and Yūtoku, Saijō, and Fushimi for Kyūshū. A shaman on Inari Mountain in Kyoto named Fushimi, Takegoma, and Kasama for the eastern tradition and Fushimi, Saijō, and Toyokawa for the western tradition. Even the regional variability is variable.

This tradition of the top three Inari shrines (or the top five, known as the *godai Inari* 五大稲荷) is a popular one, but one that may or may not be condoned by the clergy. Some priests at Fushimi thought the

<sup>2</sup> See NELSON 1993 for a description of the multiple interpretations of the Kamigamo Shrine and its rituals by different constituencies. See also Nelson’s article in this issue, pp. 117–53.

<sup>3</sup> Other “big threes” of Japan seem to be constant across the nation, such as the *Nihon sankei* (Three Most Scenic Spots): Miyajima, Matsushima, and Amanohashidate.

notion was ridiculous: one commented that if anyone asked him the names of the *sandai Inari* he would not answer.<sup>4</sup> Less well known Inari shrines, however, sometimes claim a place in the *sandai* or *godai Inari* to increase their own stature.<sup>5</sup>

*Variation in the Three/Five Kami Worshipped as Inari*

Inari was first worshipped in the form of three deities (perhaps because there are three peaks on Inari Mountain in Fushimi) and later, from the time of the Kamakura period, as five deities. There has been great variation in the priestly assignment of kami as the three main deities of Inari Mountain; the current tradition of enshrinement, standardized during the Meiji period, is as follows:

|               |                   |                                 |
|---------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| Lower Shrine  | Sannomine<br>三ノ峰  | Uganomitama no ōkami<br>宇迦之御魂大神 |
| Middle Shrine | Ninomine<br>二ノ峰   | Sadahiko no ōkami<br>佐田彦大神      |
| Upper Shrine  | Ichinomine<br>一ノ峰 | Ōmiyanome no ōkami<br>大宮能売大神    |

The practice of enshrining three kami (*Inari sanza* 三座) or five kami (*Inari goza* 五座) is found at many Inari shrines besides Fushimi, but here, too, the sets of deities are not constant.<sup>6</sup> For example, the “Inaris of Five Happinesses” (*Inari gokō dai-myōjin* 稻荷五幸大明神) at Tamatsukuri 玉造 Inari in Osaka include Uganomitama no ōkami (the food kami most often worshipped as Inari today), but also another four that are different from the Fushimi lineage: Shitateru hime no mikoto 下照姫禰 (daughter of Ōkuninushi 大国主神), Wakaterume no mikoto 稚日女禰 (said to be the younger sister of the Sun Goddess),

<sup>4</sup> The priests who do not like the notion of multiple “great” Inaris also tend not to approve of the high degree of personalization of the Inari deity itself.

<sup>5</sup> Taikodani Inari includes itself among the *godai Inari* along with Fushimi, Kasama, Yūtoku, and Takegoma. This tradition excludes the two large Buddhist Inaris, one of which is located fairly close by. So in addition to regional variation, there is sometimes concern with sectarian consistency.

<sup>6</sup> Even at Fushimi Inari Shrine itself the identity of the kami has varied enormously over time. See SMYERS 1993 for a list of the dozen or so kami worshipped as Inari mentioned in shrine records, and ten additional ones listed in other sources. Honji-butsumo 本地仏 traditions also varied over time.

Not all Inari shrines enshrine three or five kami, although that is the dominant pattern. Taikodani Inari enshrines only two kami, Uganomitama no ōkami and Izanami no mikoto 伊弉册妃, even though it has direct connections to Fushimi. Some shrines have a generic Inari Ōkami, others feature one of the chief food kami, and still others enshrine Inari along with other deities added according to the contingencies of local history.

Tsukiyomi no mikoto 月読權 (the moon kami), and Kagutsuchi no mikoto 筆遇突智權 (the fire kami) (SUZUKI 1988, pp. 33-34).

The variety is endless. The three deities enshrined at Takegoma Inari are Ukanomitama no kami 薄稻魂神, Ukemochi no kami 保食神 (two food kami), and Wakumusubi no kami 稚産靈神 (TAKEGOMA INARI JINJA, n.d.). Ochobo お千弼保 Inari in Gifu enshrines an Inari Ōkami 稻荷大神 and two ancestral kami, Daiso Ōkami 大蠅大神 and Soshin 蠅神 (MORI, n.d.). Hanazono Jinja 花園神社 in Shinjuku has the expected food deities Ukanomitama no kami and Ukemochi no kami 受持神, but the third deity is the legendary hero Yamato Takeru no mikoto 日本武妃 (HANAZONO JINJA SHAMUSHO 1971, p. 1). A private shrine on Inari Mountain in Kyoto called Araki Ōkami 荒搬大神 worships three forms of the Inari deity that are not found in any shrine tradition: Araki Ōkami itself (Rough Tree Great Deity), Aratama 荒玉 Ōkami (Rough Jewel Great Deity), and Shirasuna 白砂 Ōkami (White Sand Great Deity). These are all personal forms of Inari in the *otsuka* お塚 tradition (see below), and have no connection to the official Shinto mythology in the classics. So again, though the practice of enshrining three or five kami together as Inari is fairly widespread, the identities of the respective kami vary considerably from shrine to shrine.

### *The Notion of “My Inari”*

The concept of a “personal Inari” is one mentioned by many believers, and is thus a “native term”: *watashi no O-Inari sama* 私のお稲荷謬. This aspect of Inari worship was described by priests at both the Shinto and Buddhist centers where I did my fieldwork, with varying opinions about the legitimacy of this form of religious expression.<sup>7</sup> Even the ones who disapproved, however, did not deny its key position in Inari worship.

One Shinto priest argued that the impulse to worship “my own Inari” arose during the late Edo period and accounted for the great spread of Inari shrines at that time. He could think of no other Shinto kami to whom people felt such an intimate connection, and who could be personalized to this degree.<sup>8</sup> Another priest at Fushimi said, “If there are a hundred believers, they will have a hundred different

<sup>7</sup> Some were troubled by the danger of extremes of personal interpretation, others of losing the center and the historical veracity in Inari. See SMYERS 1993, especially chapter 6, for a discussion of this issue.

<sup>8</sup> Although people act familiarly with the kami Ebisu 恵比須, praying at the back of his shrines and ringing the bell there loud and long, this is usually done not out of a sense of intimacy but because the deity’s hearing is thought to be poor. Nor does Ebisu take on personalized forms like Inari.

ideas about Inari.” A Catholic woman at a lay believers’ Inari ritual in a rural area of Japan asked the priest who had come from Fushimi Inari Shrine to describe Inari in a sentence. He replied, “Inari gives blessings to each person in an appropriate and personalized way.” Still another Fushimi Inari priest expressed much the same idea when he said, “Inari is a different kami to each believer, shaped by what each person brings of his own character and understanding of the world.” I found much the same sentiment expressed by the Zen priests at Toyokawa Inari, where people often worship the Buddhist deity Dakiniten 吒闍尼天<sup>9</sup> as a form of Inari with a unique name. A priest at the branch temple in Tokyo commented, “Like the Six Jizō (*roku jizō* 六地藏), different Inari listen to different people’s prayers.”

Inari has been divided and reenshrined with far greater ease and frequency than other Shinto kami, and this may in part account for its great diversity.<sup>10</sup> In this division the original kami remains in place in his shrine, but a portion of his spirit (*wakemitama*, *bunrei* 分靈) is ritually separated and enshrined in a new location. The technical term for this reenshrinement is *kanjō* 勧請.<sup>11</sup> Priests explain it as something akin to lighting a new candle from a burning one: the light of the first is in no way diminished as it becomes two.<sup>12</sup>

The first recorded example of an Inari *kanjō* is from the early Heian period, when the official Ono no Takamura 小番飯 (802–853) had an Inari *wakemitama* placed in his scepter of office (*shaku* 澁), then carried the deity to Mutsu no Kuni 陸奥の票 (Tōhoku), where he served as governor for some years. When he returned to Kyoto the people of Mutsu asked him to leave Inari there, and the shrine later became Takegoma Inari (FUSHIMI 1969, p. 30). Another *wakemitama* was enshrined in 1057 in Iwate when Minamoto Yoriyoshi 源敏義 (988–1075) defeated Abe no Yoritoki 安部敏時 (?–1057); this later became Shiwa 志和 Inari (FUSHIMI 1969, p. 30).

In 1194 Emperor Go-Toba 御鳥羽 (r. 1183–98), during his imperial

<sup>9</sup> Dakiniten is written in at least four different ways. Toyokawa Inari uses 吒闍尼天, while Saijō Inari prefers 嘶吉尼天, 嘶闍尼天 and 吒抵尼天 are variants found in other texts.

<sup>10</sup> Inari is given as the prime example of a much-reenshrined kami in the *Dictionary of Shinto*’s definition of *kanjō* (ANZU and UMEDA 1968, p. 281).

<sup>11</sup> *Kanjō* was originally a Buddhist term, meaning to request a sermon of the Buddha with a sincere heart, and later, to urge a buddha or bodhisattva to remain in the world to spread the teachings and save sentient beings. *Kanjō* later came to mean calling buddhas or bodhisattvas to descend to the altar in a Buddhist service; it could also indicate the actual words of supplication. In Japan the term gradually took on the broad sense of enshrining a buddha or kami in a building for the first time (FURUTA 1988, p. 161).

<sup>12</sup> In contrast to an *ofuda* お札, a talisman with the name of the shrine or kami written on it that must be renewed every year, the *wakemitama* is a portion of the kami itself, and so is permanently “alive” in its new location.

pilgrimage to the Fushimi Inari Taisha, decreed that only this shrine could perform the ritual of division and reenshrinement, and that only it had the right to transfer Inari with its top imperial rank of *shō-ichii* 正一位. Yet this right was abused, so that the Fushimi Shrine started providing certificates of authenticity with the *wakemitama* issued by them (FUSHIMI 1969, p. 32; 1977, p. 50).

The practice of “unofficial reenshrinement” remained so widespread, however, that in the Edo period the government sent a letter to Fushimi Shrine asking for its policy on the matter. The matter had been brought to their attention by a case in which a farmer had found a fox hole in a thicket and had enshrined there an Inari named Shōichii Toyokatsu Inari Daimyōjin 正一位豊勝稲荷大明神.<sup>13</sup> The reenshrinement ritual was performed by a religious practitioner named Imamura 今彼 from the Tsuchimikado 土御範 sect of Shinto.<sup>14</sup> The priests at Fushimi Shrine informed the shogunate that according to Emperor Go-Toba’s edict of 1194 they had the sole rights to such *kanjō*, that the different priestly lineages associated with the Fushimi Shrine had secret rituals for the transfers passed down from master to disciple, and that unauthorized *kanjō* were a great annoyance to the shrine (FUSHIMI 1977, p. 50). It is not mentioned how this particular case was resolved, but it is unlikely that the unauthorized reenshrinements were slowed.

The practice of *kanjō* continued even after Fushimi Inari was nationalized in the Meiji period, the difference now being that where earlier certificates of authenticity listed the name of the particular priestly lineage that had done the ritual,<sup>15</sup> they now listed the central shrine itself with its high government-assigned rank of Kampei Taisha 管幣大社 (major imperial shrine). When the government stopped the practice of *kanjō* at all shrines in Japan the priests at Fushimi petitioned, arguing that shrine income depended heavily on the practice, that the custom had existed “from long ago” (accounting for Inari’s wide dispersion throughout the country), and that devotees were clamoring for the return of the practice. The government finally relented, but forced the shrine to change its terminology so it would not appear that only Fushimi Inari Taisha was being allowed to continue

<sup>13</sup> The chronology (*nenpyō* 年表) has this as Toyokatsu 豊勝 (FUSHIMI 1962, p. 250), while the history pamphlet has this as Toyowa 豊浦 (FUSHIMI 1977, p. 50). In either case, a particular name was given to this Inari: “Abundant Success” or “Abundant Bay.”

<sup>14</sup> This was a form of Shinto that included yin-yang magic and native Shinto ideas; it was also known as Abe 安部, Anke 安家, or Tenjin 天神 Shinto.

<sup>15</sup> By the Edo period there were fourteen shrine lineages (*shake* 社家) that had separate establishments at the foot of Inari Mountain, including a Shingon Buddhist one in Aizen-ji 愛染寺, the temple within the shrine precincts.

*kanjō* (which was, in fact, the case). Now, instead of *wakemitama*, the divided spirit was called a *shinpu* 神札, “sacred talisman.”<sup>16</sup>

When the Inari deity was reenshrined a new name was often assigned to it, in addition to the appellation “Inari.” In the Edo-period example above, the new name, Toyokatsu Inari Daimyōjin, was probably chosen by the Tsuchimikado priest. In some cases the new name was revealed by the deity herself<sup>17</sup> in a divine dream or shamanic oracle. In many cases people do not know how “their” Inari got its name, but examples of both methods continue. An Osaka family, for instance, worships three manifestations of Inari whose names were revealed by a shamaness many years ago to the mother of the present household head; the names are Shiratama 白玉 (White Jewel), Ishimiya 石宮 (Stone Shrine), and Umematsu 梅松 (Plum Pine).<sup>18</sup> A ninety-two-year old Shinto priest explained to me that he sometimes assigned names to the Inari divided spirits he reenshrined, selecting auspicious and appropriate appellations based on the function of the new deity. Thus for the Inari of a prosperous Osaka company he chose Toyomitsu 豊光 (Abundant Light). The “toyo” he took from one name of the Inari deity, Toyouke no kami 豊受神. He thought that this name would be conducive to business prosperity.

Today most large Inari shrines and temples will provide believers with divided spirits of the Inari enshrined there. Fushimi continues to do so as well, and has even developed a yearly festival, the Motomiya Sai 本宮祭, in which everyone who has received a divided spirit in recent years is invited to the shrine on 22 and 23 July. In 1990 the priests mailed out 80,000 invitations to this festival. Paradoxically, the divided spirits, available to anyone without regard to status or income, are themselves categorized into nine separate ranks, housed in brocade-covered boxes from six to fourteen inches high, and priced at between \$120 and \$4,000.<sup>19</sup>

Smaller Inari shrines may also perform the *kanjō* ritual. At the single-priest Tamatsukuri Inari Jinja in Osaka, where the ceremony is done about twenty times per year, there are no ranks and the price is left to the discretion of the devotees (who tend to pay from \$400 to \$800).

<sup>16</sup> Conversation with a priest, 27 January 1991. I have never seen this incident described in print, although it can be gleaned from the *nenpyō* (FUSHIMI 1962) around the year 1875.

<sup>17</sup> I use both masculine and feminine pronouns to refer to Inari, who takes both forms in names, iconography, and believers’ narratives.

<sup>18</sup> The shamaness who presently performs monthly services at this household also mentions Sanbōkōjin 三宝荒神, Fudō Myōō 不動明王, Kōbō Daishi, and the household ancestors in her ritual.

<sup>19</sup> Prices calculated at the exchange rate in 1990 of \$1=¥125. This system existed in the Edo period also, when the *wakemitama* were divided into seven ranks that varied in price.

At the Sōtō-sect Toyokawa Inari devotees may receive a kind of “divided spirit” of Dakiniten called a *goshintai* 御真避 (true body)<sup>20</sup> or *gobunrei* 御分霊 (“divided spirit”). Believers buy a small carved statue of Dakiniten and then participate in a ceremony to animate it (*kaigen* 開眼; *shō o ireru* 生を入れる). There is no rank as at Fushimi, but the believer can buy statues of different quality ranging from \$600 to \$1000. The delicately carved image sits in a three- to four-inch-high, double-doored miniature shrine, which fits into a wooden box with a jewel-shaped hole cut into the front. Regular believers carry these statues with them when they go to the temple for monthly or yearly services; the image is placed on the altar during the owner’s ceremony. Divided spirits are also available at the Nichiren-sect Saijō Inari, but here one cannot add a personal name to the deity (at least officially).<sup>21</sup>

When people reenshrine a form of the Inari deity under a separate name it may be intended for a specific function. Thus the personalizations of the kami widened Inari’s appeal, for the new functions were often added to the specialties of the original deity.<sup>22</sup> ASTON describes some of the functions current around the turn of the century.

Naturally Inari is much prayed to for agricultural prosperity. But, as so often happens, the functions of this God have been enlarged so as to make him a sort of general providence who watches over all human concerns. In a recent Japanese novel he is supplicated by a wife to make her husband faithful; by a mother to cause her son to divorce an obnoxious daughter-in-law; by a wrestler for victory in his contests; by a geisha for a wealthy protector who will give her plenty of money and rich clothes, and, getting tired of her within a month, will dismiss her with a handsome present. He is also appealed to for the restoration of stolen property, to avert pestilence, to cure colds, to give wealth and prosperity, and to unite friends. The Kiōto Inari is the special patron of swordsmiths and of *jōrōs* [prostitutes]. Another Inari is celebrated for his protection of children from small-pox and measles. (1905, pp. 162–63)

These various functions change over time as society changes, industries become obsolete, and illnesses are eliminated. The function of

<sup>20</sup> This contrasts with the Shinto homonym *goshintai* 御神避, which means “deity body” and refers to the repository of a kami.

<sup>21</sup> I saw an old statue at this shrine that did have a personal name written on the box; this may have been an earlier practice, or may have been done without the priests’ knowledge.

<sup>22</sup> In this way, Inari functions somewhat like the Virgin Mary in the Catholic church. Whereas other saints share a “division of labor” in their specialties, Mary may be turned to for any kind of need. See TURNER 1978, p. 162.

protecting silkworms and mulberries, although still cited by certain shrines<sup>23</sup> as one of Inari's specialties, has almost totally dropped out, whereas the promotion of business prosperity (*shōbai hanjō* 商売繁盛) continues to increase in importance. There are cases in which Inari was reenshrined in a home or business for some specific reason, great success ensued, and the new function was thereby added to the repertoire of Inari's specialties. An example of this is fishing, an occupation that was certainly not originally associated with Inari on the landlocked Inari Mountain in Kyoto. Inari has nevertheless become the patron deity of the fishing industry in certain areas, and back in Fushimi one can now find "success in fishing" listed as an official "virtue" (*shintoku* 神徳) of Inari; amulets (*ofuda*) for "fishing satisfaction" (*tairyō manzoku* 大漁陪煩) and "safety at sea" (*kaijō anzen* 海上安背) now comprise one of the four basic types of *ofuda* available at the shrine. On the other hand, certain Inari have functions too specific to enter the larger picture, such as the toothache-curing Genkurō 源九郎 Inari on Genshōjizaka 源聖寺坂<sup>24</sup> in Osaka, and the famous O-Seki おせき Inari on Inari Mountain that cures coughs.<sup>25</sup>

#### Otsuka shinkō お塚信仰: *Rock Altars to Personalized Inari*

Another form of personalizing Inari occurred in the mid-nineteenth century, just before the start of the Meiji period, namely, the setting up on Inari Mountain of rock altars (*otsuka* お塚) to personalized forms of Inari. The custom grew slowly at first, and was strongly opposed by the priests. Around the "seven sacred spaces" (*nana shinseki*

<sup>23</sup> Such as Sankō 三光 Inari in Inuyama, Aichi Prefecture.

<sup>24</sup> A folk tradition has it that a local badger (*tanuki*) named Konnyaku no Hachibei こんにやくの八兵衛 was responsible for the frequent disappearance of *konnyaku* from housewives' shopping bags. The housewives were forgiving of this mischief, though, for they knew that when they had a toothache the *tanuki* would cure it for them. It is not clear when this phenomenon became associated with Inari, or how the *tanuki* tradition became a fox tradition.

<sup>25</sup> The origins of this Inari's name are unknown. Priests suggested four possibilities: 1) Oseki Ōkami おせき大神 was merely another name for Inari, such as Suehiro 蝶広; 2) "Oseki" was the name of a shamaness whose spirit was worshipped at this altar; 3) "Oseki" refers to the old barrier gate (*sekisho* 関所) between Kyoto and Yamashina that was located nearby; 4) "Oseki" was the name of a coughing deity. If one of the first three, then the cough-curing function of this Inari evolved through a play on words, for *seki* can also mean "cough" in Japanese. Other healing and medicinal forms of Inari are found in the same part of the sacred mountain, however, so curing coughs may indeed have been this deity's original function. In the Edo period there was throughout Japan a folk belief in "Old Cough Woman," Seki no obāsan 咳のおばあさん, as well as in various cough-curing rocks (see JOYA 1963, p. 463). Finally, I cannot resist mentioning that the Japanese onomatopoeia for coughing is "konkon," which is also the sound of the fox's bark.



Pair of guardian fox statues in front of a cluster of rock altars (*otsuka*) containing personalized names of the Inari kami. Inari Mountain, Fushimi-ku, Kyoto.

七神蹟)<sup>26</sup> on Inari Mountain, believers set up rocks with what the priests termed “strange names” carved into them. The priests issued their first prohibition in 1869 (Meiji 2), erecting three signboards firmly forbidding the custom. In 1876 they issued another prohibition, but believers continued to haul the stones up in the dead of night. The practice did not abate, and in resignation, in the second month of 1877 the shrine applied to the government for permission to set up the stones, which was granted in the fourth month. Now the custom was seen as a legitimate form of worship by the priests, who began to regulate the custom. By the year 1897 (Meiji 30) the notion of “my own Inari” was firmly entrenched at Inari Mountain (TORIIMINAMI 1988, pp. 147–48).

According to one line of thought, the *otsuka* phenomenon was causally related to the separation of Buddhism and Shinto in the early Meiji years and the resulting suppression of syncretism in the shrine proper, a suppression that caused syncretism to spring up again on the dark mountain paths (UEDA & TSUBOHARA 1984, p. 27). The priest

<sup>26</sup> The seven spaces where Inari was originally worshipped were simply small earthen mounds surrounded by sacred fences, except for the one at the Chōja sha 長者社, which had an *iwasaka* 磐境 (rock altar) (TORIIMINAMI 1988, p. 147). Folk religion abhors a vacuum, and it tends to express with concrete symbols what purists prefer to leave abstract.

Toriiminami Masatoshi, however, argues forcefully that the *otsuka* would have appeared even if Buddhism had not been suppressed.<sup>27</sup> He feels that the roots of individualism in Inari practice were already deep during the Edo period, and that the *otsuka* formed the logical development of this. In either case, people prevailed in their desire to have highly personalized, syncretic forms of religious expression that fit their particular needs, overcoming nearly a decade of priestly resistance.

At present there are about 10,000 rock altars on Inariyama, both within and outside the shrine's property.<sup>28</sup> The rocks have from one to three names, and sometimes more than ten, carved into them, so that the number of names under which Inari is worshipped on the mountain is several tens of thousands. Unlike the reenshrined Inari spirits of Inari during the Edo period, these names do not include the name "Inari" itself, but the chosen name, followed by the title Ōkami 大神 (Great Deity) or the more syncretic Daimyōjin 大明神 (Great Bright Deity). Some of the more popular names can be found on a number of stones; others occur only once. The following is a sampling of these private appellations:

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Aotama Ōkami 青玉大神          | Blue Jewel Great Deity                     |
| Akagitsune Ōkami 赤狐大神      | Red Fox Great Deity <sup>29</sup>          |
| Kyōō Daibosatsu 経王大菩薩      | Sutra King Great Bodhisattva <sup>30</sup> |
| Shiratama Hime Ōkami 白玉姫大神 | White Jewel Princess Great Deity           |
| Toyotaki Myōjin 豊媛明神       | Abundant Waterfall Bright Deity            |
| Haruaki Ōkami 春秋大神         | Spring and Fall Great Deity                |
| Katsuyoshi Ōkami 勝吉大神      | Winning Luck Great Deity                   |
| Ōsugi Ōkami 大杉大神           | Great Cedar Great Deity                    |
| Kurotatsu Ōkami 黒竜大神       | Black Dragon Great Deity                   |
| Shirahige Ōkami 白髭大神       | White Beard Great Deity                    |

(FUSHIMI 1965, 1966)

In addition to these personalized versions of Inari, the names of other Shinto kami, Buddhist deities, and Kōbō Daishi<sup>31</sup> can also be found

<sup>27</sup> Personal communication.

<sup>28</sup> Contrary to what most devotees assume, Inariyama is only partially owned by the shrine; much of the land is actually private property.

<sup>29</sup> Despite Inari's association with the fox, *otsuka* with the word "fox" as part of the deity's name are surprisingly few. Many altars do feature a pair of fox statues, however.

<sup>30</sup> This is the form of Inari worshipped at the Nichiren temple Saijō Inari. Forms of this and other Buddhist versions of Inari are also represented in the *otsuka* names.

<sup>31</sup> Inari beliefs have deep historical ties with Shingon Buddhism; Kūkai 空海 is credited with the Inari-Tōji 東寺 cooperation through which the shrine received increased patronage and the temple got lumber from the mountain for its pagoda in the early part of the ninth century (HIGO 1983).

on the stones. First-timers on the sacred mountain often express amazement at the myriads of deities worshipped there, but those aware of it are comfortable with the concept and even joke about it. A woman with whom I did the mountain pilgrimage called the mountain “the department store of shrines” because any of Japan’s hundreds of kami can be found in this one location. The head priest of Fushimi Inari Shrine quipped that, although the old name for October is “Month without gods” (*kannazuki* 神縛月) because the kami are all said to gather at Izumo Shrine, the “eight-hundred myriads” of kami (*yaoyorozu no kami* 八百売の神) of Japan are in residence at Inari Mountain all year around (UEDA & TSUBOHARA 1984, p. 27).

There are two ways to acquire one’s own rock altar dedicated to a personalized Inari. The first method is to set up a new *otsuka*. This is becoming increasingly difficult, not only because costs are prohibitive but also because the available space is so limited. Fushimi Shrine does not permit any more *otsuka* to be erected within the shrine precincts,<sup>32</sup> although there is plenty of land available.<sup>33</sup> One may, however, take over an old altar that is no longer being cared for. The use of private materials is not permitted in such renovations; the work must be contracted through the shrine, and the average cost is said to be about \$16,000. It is still possible in theory to set up altars on the sacred mountain’s private land, which are undistinguishable from the “official” ones on shrine ground, but such property too is in very short supply.

The other method is to utilize one of the existing *otsuka* as one’s own. In the largest lay believers’ group (*kō* 講) associated with Fushimi Inari, the leader consults with the deity in assigning a particular altar and kami to each member (or family) in her group.<sup>34</sup> That person then requests an official divided spirit of Inari from the shrine and worships it, both at home and on the mountain, under the name written on the altar.

Saijō Inari also has *otsuka*-like stones, called *hōtō* 宝塔, literally “treasure

<sup>32</sup> Although this is the official policy, exceptions seem to be made for loyal and long-time devotees.

<sup>33</sup> An area called Miyukibe 御幸辺 was made available in the 1970s, but is now full. It is not clear exactly why the shrine will not permit new altars to be built, but the priests seem to feel the current balance between wooded areas and altar areas should be maintained. Too many new altars, one priest explained, would cause the mountain to become “rock-cluttered” (*ishi darake*).

<sup>34</sup> The choice may be made through divine dreams as well. In one case a man dreamed the two Inari names Kanriki 間力 and Yaoki 八起. He went to Inari Mountain and searched thousands of altars, until finally an old woman told him to look on the far side of the mountain, to the east. He found the *otsuka* with both names (and six others), and subsequently founded on the mountain a small religious establishment devoted to Kanriki Inari.

sure tower.” They are the same shape as the *otsuka*, with the seven characters 南縛妙法蓮華經 (*namu myōhō renga kyō*; Praise to the Wondrous Lotus Sūtra) at the top center and the names of the particular deities underneath. At Saijō the name of the deity is followed not by Ōkami (great deity) but by Tennō 天王 (heavenly king). According to a priest, *tennō* refers not to Inari (as Saijōi Kyōō Daibosatsu 最上位経王大菩薩) but to one of her seventy-seven assistants (*shichijūshichi massha* 七十七媒社). People’s behavior suggests, though, that they do not make this distinction when they make the rounds of the numerous shrines and stones, praying for their different needs at the different locations.<sup>35</sup> Some of the

individualized versions of this Inari are Arakuma 荒熊 (Rough Bear) Tennō; Higuruma 日車 (Sun Wheel) Tennō; Enbiki 縁引 (Pulling Karma) Tennō; Daisōjō 大白正 (Big Priest of Truth) Tennō; and Chisui 地水 (Earth and Water) Tennō.

These forms are known for their special functions. Arakuma is an ancestral deity linked to business prosperity and success in examinations, Higuruma to literature, Enbiki to romantic concerns, Daisōjō to protection from fires, and Chisui to preservation from senility.

Toyokawa Inari does not have the practice of setting up such altars (although there is at least one *otsuka*-like stone at the branch temple in Tokyo). It is for this reason that worship at Toyokawa Inari has a dif-



*Hôtō*, Nichiren version of *otsuka*, at Saijō Inari, Okayama. Tennō are the 77 assistants to the central deity, Saijōi Kyōō Daibosatsu, at this temple of Lotus Sūtra and Inari devotion.

<sup>35</sup> This practice is almost certainly modeled on the Fushimi *otsuka* tradition. The terminology was probably modified to impart a Buddhist “flavor” during the forced separation of Shinto and Buddhism after 1868.

ferent quality than that at most other large Inari sacred centers, which allow for personalized worship in the form of rock altars, donating *torii* 鳥居, and the like. At Toyokawa people can dedicate only prayer flags, which are taken down and burned every three months. Personalized forms of worship, either as expressions of particular beliefs or as teachings relating to practice, are not prevalent at Toyokawa Inari. The institution has far more control over the symbols than is the case at Inari sites at which personal and popular forms are dominant.<sup>36</sup>

### *Intimacy and Retribution*

A sense of intimacy (*shitashisa*) with Inari is the sentiment that unifies the various narratives of people who feel a personal connection to the deity. This is expressed by worshipping at the back of an Inari shrine as well as the front, in a kind of back-door familiarity.<sup>37</sup> An early poem that now appears on the twenty-fourth Sacred Oracle (*omikujī* お神籤) shows the rude lengths to which this feeling could go:

I pound on the three sacred fences of Inari Mountain  
Beseeking the kami to answer my prayer.

The sense of familiarity starts with the three main deities of Inari, the aforementioned Uganomitama no ōkami, Sadahiko no ōkami, and Ōmiyanome no ōkami worshipped, respectively, on the Sannomine, Ninomine, and Ichinomine (see above, p. 87). For most worshippers these official designations are far less important than the “nicknames” by which these kami have come to be known. Uganomitama no ōkami is familiarly known as Suehiro-sama 媒広謬 (Mr/s. Prosperity), Sadahiko no ōkami as Aoki-sama 青搬謬 (Mr/s. Green Tree), and Ōmiyanome no ōkami as Shiragiku-sama 白菊謬 (Mr/s. White Chrysanthemum). Multiple banners with these nicknames decorate the altars of the three peaks, and it is by these names that the deity is affectionately addressed and referred to. It is doubtful that many nonpriestly worshippers know the “official” names of the kami enshrined.

<sup>36</sup> In recent years the temple has established a Spirit Fox Mound (*Reikozuka* 霊狐塚), at which people can dedicate fox statues. This is a type of more personalized worship, with each fox being a little different and with the donors' names carved prominently into the base. Lay believers' groups that wish to donate objects to the temple generally give utilitarian items (dishes, tables, curtains, ashtrays) marked with the name of the *kō*, not personalized objects of worship.

<sup>37</sup> This was formerly called *oido mairi* 御居処詣り (*oedo mairi* in Kyoto dialect). *Oido* is a women's term for buttocks.

A woman who fervently worships at Toyokawa Inari temple in Tokyo says, “I have worshipped Dakiniten [Inari] for ten years. When I pray to my ancestors, I feel that I must not ask for anything, but only give thanks to them. But in front of Inari I feel I can speak frankly; I feel very close and can discuss anything. Once when I had to hire a new employee, Inari helped me to know which applicant was the best. I have a very comfortable relationship with Inari.” A Toyokawa priest explains the closeness in terms of the Buddhist hierarchy. “Inari is the deity closest to human beings—it is like your own mother, it grants your wishes. In times of illness when even a doctor cannot cure you, you have no alternative but to ask Inari. Buddhas have various ranks; Dakiniten is at the *ten* 天 (deva) level, the level closest to that of humans. So Inari has very close relations with people.”

An article on the *genze niyaku* (this-worldly benefits) aspect of Inari worship by Koike Nagayuki provides hints about the psychological role that intimacy with Inari may play in a culture where keeping up appearances is exceedingly important. The author suggests that even those who seem very fortunate—politicians, entertainers, company presidents—have problems and needs that they can confide only to Inari (KOIKE 1976, p. 60). Japan is a society where reciprocity and the repayment of debts is taken very seriously (BENEDICT 1946), sometimes to the extent that help is not sought because of the resulting debt. With Inari, however, no matter how big the request there is no worry that one will later have to repay someone in kind (KOIKE 1976, p. 64). Inari seems to have struck a fortuitous balance: famous and powerful enough to make people feel confident that he can help them, but lacking the sort of clear historical narrative that would prevent his personalization to fit particular needs.

The other side of the feeling of familiarity for Inari is terror of the deity’s retribution. For although approachable, Inari is not to be taken lightly or trifled with. Her retribution (*tatari* 祟) is renowned for its power, and even people who do not consider themselves religious or superstitious are reluctant to destroy, desecrate, or even slight an Inari shrine. A proverb expresses the sentiment: If you slight Inari, retribution will strike (*O-Inari san o somatsu ni shitara, bachi ga ataru* お稲荷さんを矧媒にしたらバチが当たる; HIRAIWA 1989, p. 2). The belief is particularly strong with regard to moving, or abandoning, an Inari shrine (MIYATA 1988). One of the priests at Fushimi told me the story of a rich doctor who added his own stone to a rock altar on which three stones were already standing, thereby rudely blocking the other three. Shortly thereafter the doctor and his entire family perished when their house burned down. People interpreted the tragedy as

Inari's anger at being treated improperly. Inari's retribution was in fact the reason it received court rank in the ninth century. Emperor Junna 淳和 (r. 823-833) was stricken with a malady believed to have been caused by Inari, angry that trees had been cut on the sacred mountain.

### Examples of "My Inari"

A well-known personalized form of Inari on Fushimi's mountain is Ōmatsu Ōkami 大松大神 (Great Pine Great Deity), enshrined at a rock altar shaped like a guitar-shaped gourd (*hyōtan* 瓢箪). The altar, the only one on the mountain with this form, is flanked by two rocks shaped like the markers used in the chess-like game of *shōgi* 将棋. Ōmatsu Ōkami has been of critical importance for an alcoholic man in a lay believers' group who was able to become and remain sober with this deity's help.

Because alcohol consumption is an expected part of many employment situations in Japan, Oda-san<sup>38</sup> drank a great deal with his colleagues after work. His drinking got out of control, however, and he started imbibing in the morning and missing work. His wife and mother, extremely worried, consulted the shamanic leader of their Inari worship group. They persuaded Oda-san to participate in a monthly pilgrimage, with Ōmatsu Ōkami as his "personal Inari." The leader, who assigned him this form of Inari, explained that since gourds are the traditional container for saké and since *shōgi* can be used as a form of gambling, Ōmatsu Ōmikami is particularly effective in dealing with these types of addictions.<sup>39</sup> When I first did the pilgrimage with this particular group Oda-san had been sober for four months; by the time I left Kyoto, he had had his one-year anniversary and had grown substantially healthier looking. The wife and mother often wept tears of gratitude as they prayed at "their" rock altar, which embodied Oda-san's problem in such concrete form.

The following example is the most extreme case of Inari personalization that I have encountered. An ex-geisha named Chizuko is herself a living deity (*ikigami* 生神) named Chizuko Hime Daimyōjin 千寿子姫大明神 (Princess Chizuko Great Bright Deity). I first heard about this woman when I asked the Fushimi priests if they knew of anyone who worshipped at both Fushimi and Toyokawa Inari. Chizuko was the only one they could think of. Though not actually a

<sup>38</sup> I have used pseudonyms in the devotee's narratives to protect my informants' privacy.

<sup>39</sup> It is not clear if this was the original purpose for creating the rock altar in these forms, or if this was a later interpretation.



**Ōmatsu Ōkami, unique *otsuka* in the shape of a gourd and *shōgi* tiles. This form of Inari is worshipped by devotees to overcome drinking and gambling addictions. Inari Mountain, Kyoto.**

form of Inari, she was commanded by Dakiniten to worship Chizuko Hime Daimyōjin at the two main Inari centers, Fushimi Inari and Toyokawa Inari, and also at the center of the New Religion named Konkōkyō 金光教. Although she does not claim to be Inari, she and her group of believers worship herself *as* deity at two main centers of Inari.<sup>40</sup>

Chizuko is a radiant, beautiful, self-assured woman. The day I met her she was wearing a white linen suit with beaded panels down the front. Her black hair was pulled back and held in a jeweled barrette. With large pearl earrings and some impressively large diamond rings on her

fingers, she was one of the most elegant worshippers I had ever seen. She had trained as a geisha and had made her living by helping her mother, also a geisha, to manage thirteen other geisha, a profession that was emotionally exhausting and financially unstable. Chizuko was starting to have health problems when suddenly, about fifteen years ago, she was possessed and told that she was Chizuko Hime. She was directed to stop managing other geisha, and to worship at the three sacred centers mentioned above. After this revelation her heart prob-

<sup>40</sup> Although the incarnation of a deity in a living person's body is a common pattern in the New Religions, it is quite unusual in Inari worship. Other than Chizuko I know of only one person who is thought of as a living kami (a shamaness). Additionally, one priest felt that he *became* Inari during a ritual dance. A number of shamans and shamanesses felt they had a special conduit to the kami, but most of my informants made a distinction between themselves and the deity.



Shamaness and her followers conducting worship at their own *otsuka* altar on Inari Mountain. The service involves no Shinto priests, although the group may request a formal *gokitō* prayer service by the priests at the shrine before they climb the mountain.

lems disappeared, and she and her mother shifted their business to property management.

In their home altar, Chizuko, her mother, and her daughter (a three-generation female household—none of them has married) enshrine Chizuko Hime, Dakiniten, and the central deity of Konkōkyō. Each of the three women claims special spiritual powers. The grandmother, a fervent devotee of Konkōkyō, believes that her faith helped to bring this incarnation to pass. Chizuko, as the kami, utters oracles, and her daughter has profound dreams about divine snakes and Inari rock altars.<sup>41</sup>

Chizuko makes pilgrimages to Fushimi and Toyokawa five or six times a year alone or with her family, and visits the sites again with groups of believers in the spring and fall. At Fushimi she has set up a stone altar to Chizuko Hime Daimyōjin, and at Toyokawa has donated a stone fox and flower holder at the Spirit

<sup>41</sup> The snake and its related form the dragon were prevalent symbols in my informants' spiritual narratives. The snake occurred at least as often as the fox, although it is only rarely depicted in the iconography. A Jungian analyst's comments about the relation between snakes and empowered women are interesting in this context, since most narratives of this type were from women, and women tend to be excluded from most priestly sources of power in Inari worship (SMYERS 1993). BOLEN notes that "whenever women begin to claim their own authority, or make decisions, or become aware of having a new sense of their own political or psychic or personal power, snake dreams are common. The snake seems to represent this new strength" (1985, p. 284). See also OBEYSEKERE 1981 for a Freudian interpretation of the snake and female ascetics in Sri Lanka.

Fox Mound and two large Dakiniten banners inside the inner temple (*okunoin* 奥の院), all inscribed with the living deity's name. When her group worships at these two sites they recite a brief Shinto prayer, then a unique prayer that Chizuko dictated while possessed by the deity. She also has a monthly ritual at her home altar (*tsukinamisai* 月次祭) to which a variety of people come. The women are very proud of the sectarian diversity of their group, which includes high-ranking priests unable to discuss their problems with others at work. The women say their worshippers include people formally associated with Zen and Nichiren Buddhism, Shinto, various New Religions, and even Christianity. All, they say, are sure to be helped by this kami—even a Fushimi Inari priest who suffered from leg problems for three years following an accident was fully healed only a month after praying with them.

These examples illustrate only a few among the many ways people define, reshape, and personalize Inari. Although Chizuko's case is a little different, devotion still centers on two Inari institutions where Chizuko has set up an *otsuka* and dedicated a fox statue. It is thus impossible to tell through external behavior alone that hers is such a radically personalized kind of belief.

#### *The Fox Symbol as Metaphor for Individuality in Inari*

Inari worship is the form of religion in Japan that seems to contain the most personalization, and the symbol most often equated with Inari is the fox. It is interesting to note that foxes in the wild are solitary animals, and the cultural associations to foxes in Japan involve experiences that are individual, not communal. Fox possession, being tricked by a fox, being seduced by a fox, and receiving healing or a gift from a fox never happen to groups, but to individuals. Real foxes are liminal creatures, living on the boundaries, and in Japan, where surface conformity is stressed to such a high degree, obviously individual behaviors are also liminal. These may occur in the sacred space of Inari's mountains during the special time of pilgrimage, or they may "break in" to regular time and space through fox possession or being tricked by a fox, where one's outrageous behavior is tolerated because it is not the person, but the "fox" who is in control. In this sense attitudes toward fox possession resemble those toward drunkenness, drinking being an activity in Japan that temporarily suspends the usual norms of behavior and allows people to act willfully. The drinker is indulged and even encouraged in his outrageous behavior, for "it is not him, it is the saké that is acting." And interestingly, when

people are “tricked by a fox” it often happens after they have been drinking.

In an unusual survey conducted in 1990 the National Personnel Authority asked new members of the government ministries to “compare government workers to animals” (*Japan Times*, 30 October 1990). The animal most frequently named by the recruits was the dog, with its associations of loyalty and reliability (interestingly, the dog is a domesticated canine, a pack animal, and an enemy of the fox). Next was the ant, named because civil servants must “work hard and in groups.” The other animals in the top ten were the elephant, cow, horse, turtle, mouse, monkey, bee, and bear. The final paragraph of the *Japan Times* article explains that the elephant was chosen because of its slowness and size, and the monkey “because the recruits cannot disobey their bosses.”

How different from these animals is the cunning, unpredictable, and independent Japanese fox. These qualities are reflected in the wide variety of stone fox images found—sometimes in great profusion—at Inari shrines. Lafcadio Hearn tells us of the images he saw around the turn of the century:

They are of many moods, —whimsical, apathetic, inquisitive, saturnine, jocose, ironical; they watch and snooze and squint and wink and sneer; they wait with lurking smiles; they listen with cocked ears most stealthily, keeping their mouths open or closed. There is an amusing individuality about them all, and an air of knowing mockery about most of them, even those whose noses have been broken off.

(HEARN 1894, p. 311)

I have often seen people inspecting the fox statues at some Inari shrine or temple, marveling about how very different they all were in spite of their basic stylized form.

Two other symbols found with Inari’s foxes help to reinforce these cultural associations of individuality. Inari has come to be identified with the bright red color that distinguishes most Inari shrines and *torii*, and bright red bibs are often tied around the necks of fox statues. It is interesting that red is traditionally worn by small children, who are not yet members of society, and by old people, who have completed their obligations to society. Only these two age groups are permitted to act willfully and selfishly without reprisal (EMBREE 1939, p. 214). Strangers (known as *aka no tanin* 赤の扉人, literally, “red other people”) are also exempt from the tight social rules that bind social groups, and do not have to be dealt with according to the ordinary



**“Kuchi-ire Inari” statues of foxes in traditional Japanese clothing. The statues were prayed to for an addition to the household of a worker or a bride. Edo-period wood-block prints also depict foxes dressed and acting as Japanese people, perhaps suggesting the diversity that constitutes any group.**

rules of social politeness.<sup>42</sup> The other symbol of Inari is the “wish-fulfilling jewel” (*nyoi hōju* 如意宝珠), which grants not generic wishes but specific personal desires. The word for jewel, *tama* 玉, also signifies soul (*tamashii* 魂), and this is not a group, but an individual spirit.

The fox symbolizes not just the “selfish” side of individuality but also the psychological separation from the protection of the group necessary in the development of independence and adulthood. In the first scene of Kurosawa Akira’s film *Dreams* (*Yume* 爆) the little boy’s mother warns him not to go into the woods during a “fox’s wedding” (*kitsune no yomeiri* 狐の嫁入り), said to occur when rain falls from a sunny sky. Disobeying her, the boy sees the forbidden sight of foxes processing through the trees. As a result he finds when he returns home that he is no longer permitted within the walled compound of his mother’s home. His mother hands him a sword from the fox as she shuts the gate, telling him he must either kill himself or find the fox and beg forgiveness. No longer able to hide behind strong walls of maternal protection, he clutches the sword and makes his way into

<sup>42</sup> Still observable any day at rush hour on the Tokyo subway system.

the world alone, toward the rainbow, looking for the fox. Only if he finds and successfully negotiates with the fox will he live—otherwise he must die by his own hand. Seeing the foxes forces him to take his first step away from the family group; seeking the foxes forces him to begin his personal quest.<sup>43</sup>

Behaviors that were traditionally diagnosed as “fox possession” (*kitsune tsuki* 狐付き), included not only wanton sexuality, unusual eating behavior, and the inappropriate use of language, but also newfound literary abilities. NAOE (1950) describes claims that fox-possessed people could speak classical Chinese; NOZAKI (1961, p. 216) gives an illustration of the name of Inari written on a tablet by an illiterate man in the mid-eighteenth century while possessed by a fox. It is important to note that fox possession did not always express itself through obnoxious behavior that transgressed social norms, but sometimes empowered people to step out of their structural limitations through spontaneous skills in reading, writing, and speaking foreign languages.

Today, odd behaviors are increasingly dealt with in a psychological, medical idiom rather than a religious one. A young girl was brought to Fushimi Inari for a prayer service because she refused to go to school, and neighbors suggested to her family that this might be fox possession. But refusal to attend school (*tōkō kyōhi* 登校拒否) is commonly seen as a phobia and treated accordingly.

It seems to have always been the case that women have been possessed by foxes more often than men. Women tend to be more easily possessed, BUCHANAN was told a half-century ago, because they “are more subject to hysteria than men,” have less willpower and more vivid imaginations, and are more suggestible (1935, p. 52). I heard much the same explanations during my fieldwork, offered by women as well as men; I never heard the suggestion that perhaps women have less personal freedom than men and that they might be reacting against structural discriminations in society, or, as BLACKER suggests, acknowledging a suppressed part of their psyche (1975, p. 313).

### *Shape-Shifting as a Cultural Fantasy*

Although changes are occurring, Japanese people are bound by familial, social, and employment obligations that require them to associate with the same basic group of people for a very long time. In most

<sup>43</sup> This seems to be Kurosawa’s idiosyncratic interpretation of the fox wedding, for I have found no similar examples in discussions of fox folklore. Nevertheless, I find it an insightful extension of Japanese cultural notions concerning the fox.

cases, they do not have the option of picking up and moving to a new location and job when some situation becomes difficult. One result of this is a fantasy called the “desire for metamorphosis” (*henshin ganbō* 変身願望) that is one of the basic elements in a number of popular television shows (WILSON, 1990). There are several samurai period pieces (*jidai geki*), for example, that involve an “average” drifter, traveler, or crowd member, who is really the magistrate, judge, shōgun in disguise. In mingling with the common folk he always uncovers some evil plot and brings the perpetrators to justice by the end of the show. The actor Takahashi Hideki, who played Toyama no Kinsan in the original series (there is a new series as well), agrees that this “desire to change” accounts for the popularity of this kind of show. He says,

I think the “pattern” that Japanese people like the best...is one in which someone is an important person, but doesn’t reveal it openly. Instead they (*sic*) go into town looking just the same as the townspeople, and then when the villain appears, the hero discloses who he really is—but not until the end. So the man who goes into town and seems a bit of a bungler and not so bright, but is in fact clever, and a great and righteous man—this is exactly the kind of theme Japanese people like. Japanese people want to be able to turn into someone else like that.

(WILSON 1990)

Comments from another shape-shifter emphasized this desire in her new role as professional clown. A school opened in Tokyo in 1990 to train clowns, and received four times as many applications as the twenty-five spaces it had available. Part of the appeal of this job was expressed by a twenty-three-year-old woman who said, “Once I put on the clown makeup, I can become different from what I usually am.” Another woman explained, “The me, who lived as an office lady, was not the real me” (*Mainichi Daily News*, 5 May 1990).

But there is ambivalence here, for the word for monster is *obake* お化け, “changed thing.” It is both desirable and monstrous to become something different. The meanings and moral lessons of “changed things” are various: beings may change shape to do good or evil, to become something they are not or to escape a bad situation. Although the literal meaning of *henshin* 変身 is “to change the body,” the samurai heroes are really only changing clothes and manners, and this is merely an exaggeration of a tendency already quite prevalent in Japanese society: the continual changing of costume and even persona to fit the social context (BACHNIK 1986). Perhaps the cultural message here is that to “change shape” skillfully within limits is to be a well-adapted human being, but to go too far is to become a monster.

*Ambivalence toward the Individual*

At least one reason that the fox is both deified and demonized in Japanese culture may be its associations with behaviors considered “individual” rather than cooperative by Japanese culture; such behaviors are often attributed to the influence of a fox: breaking social sexuality, solitariness, or unusual eccentricity. I argue that the fox, as one of its many cultural meanings in Japan, symbolizes the positive and negative sides of the individual behaviors that are not part of the dominant ideology in Japan about how human beings should behave. The articulated norms of group conformity, harmony, and homogeneity do not make much provision for individual behaviors, which are seen on the one hand as desirable, fascinating, and liberating, but on the other as scary, unpredictable, and selfish.

If it is the case that the images of large numbers of fox statues may obliquely suggest individual expression to people, then this may account for the fact that fox possession often takes place either at an Inari shrine or after a visit to one. But by the same token, a possessed person was often taken to an Inari shrine to be cured. The fox images, the wish-fulfilling jewel, and even the color red may powerfully affect people, but the symbols have two sides. The goal is not to be a mere cog in the machine, but neither is it to behave selfishly, for the highest kind of maturity in Japan involves learning to fulfill one’s personhood within the bounds of society (PLATH 1980, ROHLEN 1976).

I witnessed a very illustrative example of strengthening an individual to fit into the group. Although it did not involve fox possession, it did involve austerities on Inari Mountain amid hundreds of fox images. Tatematsu-san, a shamaness, was consulted about the behavior of a thirteen-year-old girl in junior high school who was in a great deal of trouble. Yuriko was tall, pretty, and very bright, but had gotten involved with a “bad” group of kids at school. Nor was her association passive—she had become a kind of leader, extorting money, shoplifting, stealing bikes, skipping school, coloring her hair, and never studying.

Tatematsu-san said that since Yuriko was not attending school anyway, the two of them would live on Inari’s mountain and conduct austerities until the problem was solved. They lived in the rustic house by the Seimei 清明 waterfall for well over two weeks,<sup>44</sup> following a rigorous course of waterfall austerity (*takigyō* 媛行) twice a day, circumambulation of the mountain (*oyama o suru* お山をする), prayer (*norito* 祝詞), study, cooking, and cleaning for themselves. There was no tele-

<sup>44</sup> This is a quite a long time in Japan, where people rarely take vacations of even a week, and make five-day trips to America.

vision or radio, and the lifestyle was fairly rough. It was late November, and chilly at night on the mountain. On the two Sundays Yuriko's relatives came and performed the pilgrimage and waterfall austerity with her, as both moral support and a kind of pressure. Before I realized what was happening I was part of the "cure" as well, held up as an example of someone who was really working hard (*gambatte iru*), and I was encouraged to come up the mountain daily to assist Yuriko with her study of English.

The shamaness told Yuriko that they would stay there for as long as it took to purify her of all her negative habits and develop the desire to return to school in a positive way. She added (at some length) that she was worried about her son, for he had to cook for himself while she was here on this job—again, support and pressure applied simultaneously. One morning the shamaness was possessed by the kami, who praised them both for the austerities they were doing. He said he thought the time had not been sufficient to convince Yuriko to return to school, and that if she were not ready in three days they should stay for an additional week of extremely strict and severe austerities. They ended up leaving after two more days, and later reports indicated that Yuriko was doing well at school in spite of the time she had spent away.

What had happened was rather complex. Yuriko was the center of not just the shamaness's attention for over two weeks, but that of her family and everyone else who the shamaness encountered on the sacred mountain. The austerities were hard, but they were for her benefit, and she learned the prayers and the various routines quickly and well. The irony of the situation was that she was being strengthened as an individual so that she would go back to school, avoid the "bad kids," and conform to the school's expectations of behavior.<sup>45</sup> If we think of the much quoted proverb, "The nail that sticks out gets hammered in" (*deru kugi wa utareru*), this treatment was a kind of compassionate tempering of the nail before hammering it in.

This example shows that the personalization of the Inari deity and her rituals does not promote wanton individualism, but is in fact a way to acknowledge personal or individual concerns, deal with them, and thereby learn to function in a society that does not give them much formal attention. Yuriko's grandmother, who also participated in the waterfall austerity, said a very important thing to Yuriko before they began. "Doing austerities will not change other people at all. You cannot make your parents and friends behave the way you want them to.

<sup>45</sup> I encountered this with other shamanesses from time to time as well: although they themselves live lives very different from that of the typical woman in Japan, they spend a fair amount of time "mainstreaming" other women who come to them for help.

Your parents will be the same as they always were. But *you* will change, and that will make a great difference in everything.”

This is the key, I think, to understanding the fanciful pictures that depict foxes in groups, either family groups or work groups. I have argued that the fox is a solitary animal and is identified with certain kinds of individual behaviors in Japan. But in Edo-period wood-block prints we find fox families, fox weddings, fox parties, foxes in daimyō processions. The pictures show foxes standing on two legs, dressed in Japanese clothing, engaged in Japanese social and cultural activities. But that they are *foxes* dressed like Japanese suggests the association of some qualities of the fox with these groups of people. The fox images in these pictures that mirror Japanese society reflect, I believe, a realization of the great diversity of people who constitute Japanese social groups. Like the clusters of stone foxes at Inari shrines, all of which are different; like the thousands of altars to Inari, all of which have different names; like the groups of people, all of whom cooperate but also have private and personal parts to their lives—these depictions of Japanese people in fox shape make the point that it is separate people who constitute any group, no matter how homogeneous its outward behavior.

#### *Diversity in Japan*

For all the talk of homogeneity in Japan, there is actually a great deal of diversity. But it is a diversity of a different sort than that in nations defined by ethnic and cultural variation. In Japan, there is far less diversity of an obvious sort, but there are many differences in local customs, dialects, and household styles.<sup>46</sup> The following comparison of the United States and Japan is illustrative.

The first impression a foreigner receives in Japan is of homogeneity. After a while, though, he may be reminded of something like the tradition of the English sonnet, in which long history has set up expectations which so completely govern one's reading that small variations make large difference. So it is in Japan: one soon feels great diversity, in small ways. In the United States, very wide differences exist in kinds of people and modes of behavior, but they have been only recently foregathered, and so little ordered by insight and art that they

<sup>46</sup> Different ethnic and status groups in Japan are in some ways invisible because differences cannot be visually discerned. This helps the argument that the Japanese are basically “one race, one blood,” and the plights of Asian ethnic minorities and “special status people” (OHNUKI-TIERNEY 1987) are denied or ignored. See also DEVOS AND WAGATSUMA 1966.



**Fox wedding (*kitsune no yomeiri*).** This modern example of the traditional theme depicts foxes in a procession dressed in formal Japanese costume. This and other prints depicting foxes dressed and acting as Japanese people may perhaps suggest the diversity that constitutes any group.

seem analogous to random music rather than variations on a theme. Paradox again: on the one hand we speak, as Tocqueville did, of tepid similarity which admits of little distinctiveness in America; on the other, of unassimilated differences. The Japanese, diverse in local ways of being and behaving, have long been one people so that local differences have mostly been respected and even cherished.

(CLEAVER 1976, pp. 239–40).

Local planners realized with dismay that in their rush to erect modern buildings in the provincial cities and towns they had begun to erase the local differences for which the places had been known, and they then had to remedy this by designing “individual” styles for these *furusato*. Even though tatami mats are standardized, and the number of mats immediately tells you the size of the room, it turns out that the “standard” size varies somewhat across Japan. Dialects too, although being slowly eroded through the influence of television, were in some districts so different as to be unintelligible to someone from a different area.<sup>47</sup> And differences were not just regional, but within local

<sup>47</sup> There is, however, a developing interest in preserving dialects, and local television and radio stations have begun to offer programs that focus on the local forms of speech (Ian Reader, personal communication).

areas too, for each house had a particular style of doing things (*kafū* 家風), as did each temple (*monpū* 範風, *sanpū* 山風).

In the same way, Japanese people have private opinions, eccentricities, and hobbies, even though they may not choose to emphasize or even reveal this part of themselves in public situations. A number of Japanese people whom I met wanted to impress upon me how different they were from the other priests, housewives, shamanesses, businessmen, scholars, or believers, with whom they were associated. Priests told me they were more international, authentic, or diligent than their colleagues—but insisted I not mention their comments to anyone else. A professor eloquently described the ways in which he outshone everyone in his department, but then explained that he keeps an almost obsessively low profile there. Shamans were proud of their individual revelations, and sometimes commented on others whose claims they thought to be fraudulent. Members of worship groups often told me of the special privileges they had at the Inari shrine or temple, because their group was so important, devout, or unique. I heard this kind of comment over and over, and see it as a fairly common pattern: treasuring one's own personal differences, but not allowing them to define one's personality at work or in public situations, where playing the social role properly is more important than those qualities that make one different.

If we look at Japan from the Durkheimian position that religious and other collective forms are a projected image of the structures of society, then we can see that the Inari universe symbolizes the diversity hidden behind collective forms. For in Inari there is a shared form that has personal variations and interpretations: one kami with almost infinite manifestations, functions, names. Other religious forms in Japan express the more collective aspects of Japanese society, especially the *ujigami* 氏神 that protected family groups and now residential areas. Worship of these *ujigami* takes place primarily during the New Year's holiday, when most people make the first shrine visit of the year to the kami who protects their local area, and during the yearly festival in which the kami travels through his "parish" (*ujiko* 氏子), carried by the youth of that area. It is interesting that, although Fushimi Inari Shrine is the *ujigami* for a large area in the southern part of Kyoto and does have a large yearly festival in which the five Inari kami travel around their territory on palanquins, this festival is ignored by other devotees who are more interested in their "own" Inari and the sacred mountain. Although the Inari Matsuri is a fairly large and impressive festival, it has not captured the kind of attention that the great festivals of Kyoto have (at least since the fifteenth century)—this is not the

primary role that the Inari kami seems to have for people.

Other Japanese kami are specific deities with recorded myths, fixed genders and personalities, and somewhat set functions. They mirror the elaborated portions of Japanese culture. Inari has no central myth, but a number of local and personal variations; its gender likewise varies. Like its sacred fox messenger, Inari's personality and functions are fluid and changing. Inari worship is one arena in which the personal understandings that underlie the shared concepts in Japanese culture can come into play.

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