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Kami and Buddhism in the Nō Miwa: Rethinking the Study of the Amalgamation of Kami and Buddhas (*shinbutsu shūgō*)

Much research has been carried out on the religious phenomenon and system of thought called *shinbutsu shūgō* (the amalgamation of kami gods and buddhas), in which kami cults (*jingi* 神祇) and Buddhism are intimately intertwined. In the past, *shinbutsu shūgō* was regarded as a religious phenomenon unique to Japan, but it is obvious that the fusion of Buddhism and cults to local gods is widely seen in the entire Buddhist cultural sphere. As in the case of Bonten 梵天 and Taishakuten 帝釈天, who derive from the Indian gods Brahmā and Indra, respectively, Buddhism adopted gods from many locales as its own protector deities. Taking such a Buddhist perspective, we can consider *shinbutsu shūgō* in Japan as simply one form of that attitude.

However, more research is necessary to clarify what kind of commonalities *shinbutsu shūgō* in Japan has when compared to other areas and also what characteristics are unique to it. Buddhism spread in Asia as a religion endowed with universal aspects, but local gods and various cults existed in all regions of the Buddhist cultural sphere. If there is indeed a more general phenomenon we can call “amalgamation of deities and buddhas” (*shinbutsu shūgō*), the exploration of the interactions between these two broad formations must necessarily be based, as a preliminary condition, on an in-depth understanding of both—Buddhism on the one hand and local gods and their cults on the other.

It is doubtful, however, that previous research has been deeply aware of such a preliminary condition. Historian of Japanese Buddhism Tsuji Zennosuke 辻善之助, in a text entitled “Honji suijaku no kigen ni tsuite” 本地垂迹の起源について, first published in 1907 (now in Tsuji 1983), a pioneering work on *shinbutsu shūgō* which had a great influence on subsequent research, outlined the stages of development of *shinbutsu shūgō* as follows:

The gods (*shinmei* 神明) rejoice upon receiving the Buddha Dharma... *shinmei* defend the Buddha Dharma... *shinmei* are delivered from suffering thanks to the Buddha Dharma (*shinmei* are one among sentient beings) ... *shinmei* attain enlightenment

through the Buddha Dharma... *shinmei* become identical with bodhisattvas... in a further development, kami even become buddhas... kami are manifestations of buddhas (Tsuji 1983, 1: 152).

Understanding the development of *shinbutsu shūgō* with such a simple logic has already been criticized.¹ What I would like to problematize here, additionally, is that although the subjects of the previous passage are *shinmei* and kami, Tsuji's explanations of various phenomena related to *shinbutsu shūgō* such as "good gods who protect the dharma" (*gohō zenshin* 護法善神) and "original form, manifested traces" (*honji suijaku* 本地垂迹) are all described in terms of a logic in which Buddhism incorporates the kami—that is, through a description from a Buddhist point of view. Many scholars today are still under the influence of this Buddhist approach to *shinbutsu shūgō*.

There is no doubting the fact that Buddhism, with its universal logic, did incorporate "simple" kami belief. It is thus unlikely that the study of *shinbutsu shūgō* only from the viewpoint of kami cults would yield a systematic understanding. Nevertheless, it is also indispensable to study in depth the actual conditions of kami cults even as they appear to have been incorporated by a Buddhist logic. In particular, it is necessary to study the characteristics of the various divinities in order to understand the differences in processes of amalgamating gods and buddhas in India, China, Japan, and other regions.

In this article, I would like to argue for the obvious point that in order to study *shinbutsu shūgō*, a balanced analysis of both Buddhism and kami cults (*jingi*) is necessary. Given the current situation of the field, we must emphasize the need for such a self-evident approach.

An Outline of the Nō Drama Miwa

The specific subject of analysis in this article is the *Nō Miwa*, in which the *shite* シテ (protagonist) is the god of Ōmiwa Shrine 大神神社 (Sakurai City, Nara Prefecture).² This *Nō* drama, which describes in detail the relations between the kami and Buddhism in medieval Japan, is a rich source of suggestions for thinking generally about *shinbutsu shūgō*. Its author is unknown, but there is a record that *Miwa* was performed when the Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa 足利義政 visited Emperor Go-Hanazono 後花園 in 1464 (Koyama and Satō, eds., 1997, p. 511). Although there may be some differences from how it is performed today, we can safely assume that *Miwa* existed in the mid-fifteenth century.

1. In English, see for instance, the Teeuwen and Rambelli 2003. (Editor's Note)

2. On *Miwa* shrine and its god, see Andreeva 2017. (Editor's Note)

Nō was performed in front of a medieval audience, and while it took for granted the religious assumptions of the time, it also played the role of fostering new perceptions. It thus reveals, to a certain extent, the shared religious consciousness of the medieval Japanese. A brief outline of the *Nō Miwa* is as follows.³

There was a woman (*shite*) who brought Japanese star anise (*shikimi* 柾) and water offerings (*aka* 關伽) every day to the monk Genpin 玄賓 (*waki supporting role*) at his hermitage at the foot of Mt. Miwa.⁴ One day, she asked to be given a piece of the monk's robe. Genpin gave her the robe and asked where she lived, to which she replied "near 'the gate where the cedar stand'" and disappeared. Hearing from a villager that his robe is hanging on the sacred tree of Miwa Myōjin 三輪明神 (the main deity of Ōmiwa Shrine), Genpin decided to go on a pilgrimage to the shrine. When he arrived, Genpin saw a poem written on the hem of the robe, and eventually Miwa Myōjin (*ato-shite*) appears and tells him the legend of the divine marriage associated with the deity. Then, the deity dances a *kagura* 神樂 that reproduces the events at the Heavenly Rock Cave (Ama no Iwato 天岩戸),⁵ and finally explains that Miwa Myōjin and Tenshō Daijin 天照大神 of Ise 伊勢 are alternative forms of the same substance (*ittai bunshin* 一体分身); at that point, Genpin awakes from his dream.⁶

Miwa Myōjin, who appeared in the form of a village woman in the first part of the Nō, reveals itself as a kami in the second part;⁷ it engages in conversation with Genpin and performs a dance. However, all this turns out to be just Genpin's dream—this is the typical form of the Fantasy Nō (*mugen nō*) genre.

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3. For an English translation of this Nō, see Bethe, trans. 1988. (Editor's Note)
 4. Genpin (734–818) was a Hossō monk from Kōfukuji in Nara. He performed healing rituals for Emperors Kanmu (805) and Saga (809). He seems to have resided at a retreat by Mt. Miwa. (Editor's Note)
 5. This is the myth in which the sun goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami (always referred in the *Nō Miwa*, following the medieval usage, as Tenshō Daijin), offended by the unruly behavior of her little brother, the god Susanoo, secluded herself in a cave, thus taking away the light from the world. For a detailed analysis of this myth and various interpretations throughout history, see Breen and Teeuwen 2010, especially chapter 4 (pp. 129–167). (Editor's Note)
 6. Based on the version included in Koyama and Satō, eds., 1997, pp. 511–522.
 7. Given the gender uncertainty of the Miwa deity in this Nō, and to facilitate reading, throughout the article the deity is referred to with the neutral pronoun "it" (Editor's Note).

A Kami Burdened with Sin and Seeking Salvation

Miwa, whose theme is the interaction between a kami and a monk, contains in condensed forms all the main characteristics of the medieval kami/buddha relations. In particular, the fundamental theme running through the entire drama is that Miwa Myōjin, who appears in the form of a woman, is burdened by sin and asks a monk to be delivered from it. In the scene in Act One, a woman from the village (*shite*, manifestation of Miwa Myōjin) meets with Genpin (*waki*), while the chorus (*jiuta* 地謡) sings (Koyama and Satō, eds., 1997, p. 513):

pushing open the rustic brushwood door 柴の編戸を押し開き
I visit like this with branches of the *shikimi* tree かくしも尋ね切り樍
please save me from my sins 罪を助けて賜ひ給へ

The woman carrying water offering (*aka*) and anise branches holds her hands out to Genpin and enters his hermitage. Indeed, Miwa Myōjin is asking Genpin for deliverance.

In this plea for salvation, which occurs several times in *Miwa*, the following two questions emerge: why is the kami burdened with sins and therefore must ask a monk for help, and why is Miwa Myōjin (*Ōmononushi no kami* 大物主神), who is originally a male, appearing in the form of a woman? Various interpretations have already been proposed in regard to the latter question, but many problems still remain. These two questions are closely related and are rooted in medieval Japanese people's views of women and understanding of kami and buddhas; I believe that they point to the essence of medieval Japanese culture.

"For the Salvation of Sentient Beings in the Final Age of Dharma"

Here, I would like to offer a systematic attempt to understand the logic behind the Nō drama *Miwa* through analysis of the plot.

In the first part, a woman enters the hermitage, hands joined in prayer, and implores Genpin, "Please save me from my sins" and adds, "because the nights become cold in autumn, would you offer me one of your robes?" The woman receives Genpin's robe and when asked about her residence, she leaves saying, "at the gate where the cedar stands as a sign" (杉立てる門をしるしにて) and disappears (Koyama and Satō, eds., 1997, p. 514). When in the Interlude Genpin tells this to a villager (*ai*), the villager believes that the woman is the kami of *Miwa*, and says:

I think that because your reverend [Genpin] is so venerable, and for the salvation of sentient beings in the final age of Dharma, [the kami] provisionally appeared as a lowly woman and every day visited you carrying as offerings water and anise branches. Besides, it is said that kami also undergo the suffering of the five

degenerations and three torments (*gosui sannetsu* 五衰三熱), and wishing to escape from it, the woman may have wanted your robe (Koyama and Satō, eds., 1997, p. 516).

Here, the villager says the kami of Miwa temporarily transformed into a lowly woman and carried offerings to Genpin every day in order to rescue sentient beings of the age of degeneration of the Dharma. Furthermore, even the kami experience the suffering of the five degenerations and three torments,⁸ and thus it wanted Genpin's robe to escape it.

In the world of Buddhism, Japanese kami are positioned in the divine realm (*tenbu*); they are the protectors of Buddhism, the same as the Indian gods Brahmā and Indra. The five degenerations and three torments are originally suffering to which these heavenly gods are subjected, and I think that this aspect was further amplified by the kami's connection with the salvation of sentient beings in the final age of the Dharma.

The Interactions between Miwa Myōjin and Genpin

In Act Two of the drama, the kami of Miwa (*shite*) appears and has a conversation with Genpin (*waki*) (Koyama and Satō, eds., 1997, pp. 517–518):

Shite: Because even awe-inspiring kami also have the desire [to be saved], I am happy to meet with this person [Genpin]

ちはやぶる、神も願ひのある故に、人の値遇に逢ふぞうれしき。

Waki: How strange! From the shadow of this cedar tree I hear a mysterious voice. Please, show yourself for the sake of the sentient beings of the final age. Tears of deep gratitude wet my black robe.

不思議やなこれなる杉の木蔭より、妙なる御声聞えさせ給ふぞや。願はくは末世の衆生の願ひをかなへ、御姿をまみえおはしませと、念願深き感涙に、墨の衣を濡らすぞや。

Shite: Even though I am ashamed of my look, I will appear in front of you, oh holy man. Please save me from my sins.

恥づかしながらわが姿、上人にまみえ申すべし、罪を助けて賜ひ給へ。

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8. The five degenerations are five signs that the heavenly gods are about to die. These signs are: (i) their robes are dirty; (ii) the crown of flowers on their head withers; (iii) their bodies release a foul odor; (iv) their armpits are sweaty; and (v) they are no longer enjoying their position. The three torments, to which dragons and snakes are subjected, are: (i) they are burned by hot wind and hot sand; (ii) their dwellings and their clothes are destroyed by strong winds; and (iii) they are devoured by Garuda (Jp. Konjichō or Garura), the mythological Indian bird. In this connection, one should note that in medieval Japan, kami were often identified with reptilian forms (either dragons or snakes). (Editor's note)

Waki: No, sin and guilt exist in human beings. You are a wondrous god.

いや罪科は人間にあり、これは妙なる神道の、

Shite: As a skillful means [of the kami] to save sentient beings

衆生済度の方便なるを、

Waki: Lost in delusion for some time⁹

しばし迷ひの、

Shite: The human mind.

人心や。

Replying to the Miwa kami, who says “Because even awe-inspiring kami also have wishes, I am happy to meet with this person,” Genpin asks, “Please show yourself for the sake of the sentient beings of the final age.” Then the kami of Miwa, showing its appearance, pleads: “save me from my sins.” Genpin states that “sin and guilt exist in human beings,” not in kami, but the Miwa kami responds that as a skillful means for saving sentient beings, kami can take the form of humans and assume for a while the deluded mind of a human being.

Just before the deity reveals its form, the chorus recites (Koyama and Satō, eds., 1997, p. 518):

The kami of Miwa in female form, the kami of Miwa in female form, dressed not [in the garb of a priestess] in a sleeveless festive cloak (*chihaya*) and an *obi* belt but attired as a priest with hunting cloak (*kariginu*) and lacquer hat (*eboshi*) draped over skirts (*mosuso*). Most gratifying, this vision of the god.

女姿と三輪の神、女姿と三輪の神、ちはや掛帯引き替へて、ただ祝子が着すなる、烏帽子・狩衣、裳裾の上に掛け、御影あらたに見え給ふ、かたじけなの御事や、

In this way, the chorus emphasizes that the kami of Miwa in female form is indeed a woman, even though it manifests herself wearing the clothing and the hat of a male shrine priest.

On the stage, the cover of the kami seat is removed, and Miwa Myōjin shows its form. The chorus recites (Koyama and Satō, eds., 1997, p. 519): “the ancient stories from the age of the kami are for the beings of the final age, like all tales they are, in different forms, skillful means for the salvation of all people” (それ神代の昔物語は末代の衆生のため、済度方便のことわざ、品々以て世のためなり). In other words, telling the old stories of the age of the kami is an aid for the sentient beings of the final age, a skillful means to save them from their suffering; it is something that exists for all people.

In response to that, Miwa Myōjin (*shite*) states, “Especially in Japan (*shikishima* 敷島), the power of the kami increases because of people’s veneration” (なかにもこの敷島は、人敬つて神力増す) (Ibid.). The idea that kami increase their power

9. This line should perhaps be understood as the words of the *shite* (Author’s note).

precisely because humans worship them is a typical medieval conception of the kami (see below); because of the worship they receive, kami will save sentient beings by “mingling with the dust of the five impurities” 五濁の塵に交はり (Ibid.).

The Myth of Miwa Myōjin’s Divine Marriage

Next, the chorus intones the lines “A long time ago there was a couple who lived in the land of Yamato, mingled with the dust of the five impurities and their mind was burdened for a while” (五濁の塵に交はり、しばし心はあしびきの、大和の国に年久しき夫婦の者あり) (Ibid.), and begins to narrate the kami of Miwa’s myth of divine marriage.

They had been a couple for a very long time, but the husband always arrived in the night and never in the daytime, and the wife, thinking this was suspicious, asked about it and said she wanted to live forever together. The husband, ashamed of his look and afraid that in the daytime it would be known to all, said “From now on, I will no longer visit you, and our marriage ends tonight” (Ibid.).

Naturally sad at the separation, the wife, wanting to know where the husband went, sewed a thread of columbine to the hem of his robe and followed its trail. It stopped at the lower branches of a cedar tree in a sacred hedge at the foot of Mt. Miwa. Then, she knew the real nature of the person she had been married to. This old story ends with the song “How embarrassed to tell this old story of the [cedar as the] sign of Miwa” (Koyama and Satō, eds., 1997, p. 520).

At this point, the chorus intones, “This divine appearance is truly gratifying, listening to this tale, one feels like relying even more in the way of the Dharma” (げにありがたき御好相、聞くにつけても法の道、なほしも頼む心かな), which is followed by Miwa Myōjin (*shite*) reciting “I will now tell in detail another story of the age of the kami for the solace of this holy man” (とても神代の物語、詳しくいざやはらはし、かの上人を慰めん) (Ibid.). To bring solace to Genpin, we have now another tale of the age of the kami, namely, the myth of the Heavenly Rock Cave (Ama no Iwato), and Miwa Myōjin dances *kagura*. Miwa then ends with the chorus intoning (Koyama and Satō, eds., 1997, pp. 521–522):

Marvelous story of the beginnings. Thinking about it, the kami of Ise and Miwa... [they are] alternative forms of the same substance; now at last, the entrance of this rock cave opens, and so does the night, and I wake from such wonderful revelatory dream. How regretful to have to wake up...

妙なる初めの、物語。思へば伊勢と三輪の神、思へば伊勢と三輪の神、一体分身の御事、いまさら何と磐座や、その関の戸の夜も明け、かくありがたき夢の告、覚むるや名残なるらん、覚むるや名残なるらん。

What Exactly are the Sins of the Kami?

Miwa Myōjin, after repeatedly pleading “save me from my sins,” in the end dances *kagura* to comfort Genpin. Even though this can be seen as a simple sign of gratitude, we should rather interpret this as an indication that the deity has been saved by Genpin (Buddhism). By telling Genpin the myth of her divine marriage herself, the kami of Miwa attained salvation. Furthermore, as the Nō says, “the ancient stories from the age of the kami are for the beings of the final age, like all tales they are, in different forms, skillful means for the salvation of all people.” In short, telling ancient stories also meant saving sentient beings of the final age.

Now, what is the sin burdening Miwa Myōjin? As the Nō says deities can take the form of humans and assume for a while the deeply deluded mind of a human being as a skillful means for saving sentient beings, it is clear that the god’s sin refers to human sinfulness. Among human beings’ many sins, Miwa Myōjin, appearing provisionally as a lowly woman for the salvation of sentient beings of the final age, must be carrying the sins of women. Accordingly, in the first part the Myōjin appears as a woman, and in the second part the fact that it is a woman is emphasized with the words “the kami of Miwa in female form.”

The myth of her divine marriage is the key to fully understand Miwa Myōjin’s sin. As the beginning of tale indicates (“mingling with the dust of the five impurities”), the myth of Miwa Myōjin is a tale of a kami rescuing sentient beings by mingling with the human world, which is defiled by the five impurities.

This old tale ends with the song “How embarrassed to tell this old story of the [cedar as the] sign of Miwa,” and I think that this expression refers to the actions taken by the woman who married a kami. In other words, thinking it was suspicious that the husband never showed during the day, asking him about that, and sewing a thread to his hem when he said goodbye, and eventually finding out his whereabouts—these actions can be judged as “embarrassing,” if not even “shameful” (*hazukashii*). We can say that this womanly sentiment of attachment is cast as representative of the five impurities of the human world.

The Significance of Miwa Myōjin’s Taking a Woman’s Form

One could say that the story itself of Miwa Myōjin visiting a woman—a situation in which a kami encounters the deeply sinful form of a woman—refers to the salvation of sentient beings. The deity then carried upon itself all the sins of that woman, and itself underwent suffering by assuming the form of a woman, and then asked Genpin to be saved. Thus, by the deity itself telling that old tale to Genpin, and through the power of Buddhism, the sins carried by the Myōjin were sublimated and the deity was saved along with the woman.

Here, a wife appears—a woman as a symbol of the deeply sinful and deluded sentient beings—and Miwa Myōjin, originally a male, after taking upon himself her sins, became that very woman, and manifested himself provisionally in this world in a female form. We can certainly call this gender transformation a “skillful means for the salvation of sentient beings.”

However, when telling her own myth, Miwa Myōjin returns to being a man, the kami’s original state; as the chorus recites, “The kami of Miwa in female form... dressed not [in the garb of a priestess] ... belt but attired as a priest with hunting cloak (*kariginu*) and lacquer hat (*eboshi*) draped over skirts (*mosuso*).” As we can see, the plot of the *Nō Miwa* is constructed in a carefully calculated way. Miwa Myōjin, originally a man, becomes a woman. This is by no means a gender reversal or confusion of sexual roles, but a skillful means for saving sentient beings.

*Double Salvation by the Kami and the Monk:
The Kami “Soften their Radiance and Become Like Dust”
(wakō dōjin 和光同塵)*

Miwa Myōjin took a human form (a woman) to rescue sentient beings of this world, but then it suffered the burden of humans’ sinfulness. After the end of Miwa’s myth, the chorus chants, “This divine appearance is truly gratifying, listening to this tale, one feels like relying even more in the way of the Dharma,” indicating that the Myōjin was saved by Buddhism. The point I want to emphasize, from what the *Nō Miwa* seems to want to stress, is that the Myōjin could not do anything for his own suffering, and it is Buddhism (Genpin) that saved the kami. Naturally, Buddhism saves not only the kami but also humans (whom kami should have also saved), and the double structure of salvation in *Miwa* eventually converges toward Buddhism.

The expression “this divine appearance is truly gratifying” (*geni arigataki mikōsō*) definitely refers to the figure of the Myōjin to whom one must be grateful for saving sentient beings, but “divine appearance” (*gokōsō* 御好相) seems to be a variant of a Buddhist term that signifies the appearance of the perfect body of the Buddha (*sōgō* 相好). In other words, it is possible to understand the use of this expression in this context to mean that Miwa Myōjin displays a Buddhist appearance, and its original form is a buddha. If so, it is easy to understand that the double structure of salvation converges toward Buddhism. The kami, who suffers by mingling with the dust of the five impurities to save the humans in this world, is in reality a buddha, and the conduct of the Myōjin is none other than that of a buddha saving people.

The notion of *wakō dōjin* (“soften the [divine] radiance and become like the dust [of the defiled world]”) originally refers to buddhas and bodhisattvas softening their majestic light and appearing in this profane world in provisional forms to save sentient beings. Also, in medieval Japan, *honji suijaku* thought—the idea that the original forms of kami were in fact buddhas—was widely accepted. By connecting

the two ideas (*wakō dōjin* and *honji suijaku*), the understanding spread that kami were manifestations of buddhas and bodhisattvas deeply enmeshed with the defilements of this world in order to save sentient beings. Indeed, we can say that the Nō *Miwa* depicts the circumstances of kami as *wakō dōjin*.

The Kami Get Close to the People

Emerging with this understanding of kami as *wakō dōjin* (in other words, kami deeply affected by this defiled world to save people), there is a medieval conception of the kami that differs from the one circulating in ancient times. It is symbolized in the phrase “especially in Japan (*shikishima* 敷島), the power of the kami increases because of people’s veneration” uttered by Miwa Myōjin (*shite*) in the scene in which she tells the myth of its divine marriage—the notion that in Japan the authority of the kami increases by people worshipping them. As the reverence of people is necessary for increasing the power of the kami, kami become close to people’s hearts.

These words of Miwa Myōjin are related to the opening statement of the *Goseibai shikimoku* 御成敗式目 (Formulary of Adjudications), according to which “the kami increase their majesty through the respect by humans, and humans meet with fortune thanks to the virtue of the kami” (神は人の敬うによりて威を増し、人は神の徳によりて運を添う). The *Goseibai shikimoku* is the legal code of the Kamakura shogunate enacted by Hōjō Yasutoki 北条泰時 in 1232 (first year of Jōei 貞永). The first and second articles, respectively, discuss how to carry out kami and Buddhist rituals. The prosperity of kami and buddhas is the most important political idea of medieval Japan, and in order to explain how to deal with the kami, it is first necessary to introduce the medieval Japanese view of kami.

The phrase “The kami increase their power through respect by humans, and humans meet with fortune thanks to the virtue of the kami” indicates that kami and humans are in an equal relationship. The power of the kami exists because of human reverence, and humans gain good fortune by revering the kami. The medieval kami stood on the same footing as humans, in sharp contrast with the gods of ancient times who instead tended to curse humans for no apparent reason.

Kami reduced their original aspect as cursing spirits and got closer to human beings—that is what medieval kami are. The concept of *wakō dōjin* as a representation of kami was also born on such a premise. The Nō *Miwa* in particular describes these typical aspects of medieval kami.

Co-Substantiality with Tenshō Daijin

In the last scene of *Miwa*, Miwa Myōjin shows her gratitude to Genpin for saving her, and then performs the dance that reenacts the ancient event of the Heavenly Rock Cave (*Ama no Iwato*). This, too, displays characteristics of medieval kami. In

that episode from the ancient myths, Tenshō Daijin withdrew inside the Heavenly Rock Cave, casting the world into darkness. The *shite*, while reciting “the eight myriad kami, lamenting this in front of the rock cave entrance, performed and danced *kagura*,” sets aside the *sakaki* 榊 branch held in his hand, takes a fan and dances, and, covering his face with the fan, sits at the kami seat on the stage. Then, while the chorus sings, “When Tenshō Daijin opened the entrance to the rock cave a little, the clouds of darkness cleared up, the sun and moonlight shown bright, and she saw the faces of people being all white,” the *shite* stands up and moves away from the kami seat, looks out at the surroundings, and recites, “How amusing, these voices of the kami.”¹⁰

Let us now observe the conduct of the *shite*. The *shite* sits down at the kami seat, covers his face with a fan, then leaves the kami seat while reciting “when Tenshō Daijin opened the entrance to the rock cave a little”; at that moment, he is none other than Tenshō Daijin. Miwa Myōjin, who is the *shite*, was one of the eight million kami in front of the Heavenly Rock Cave, but when he (the *shite*) sat down at the kami seat with fan in hand he becomes Tenshō Daijin. Then she opens up the entrance to the rock cave and goes out, reciting “how amusing.” The *shite*, who is Miwa Myōjin, transforms into Tenshō Daijin—this is the highlight of this scene, and the chorus tells us: “Marvelous story of the beginnings. Thinking about it, the kami of Ise and Miwa... [are] alternative forms of the same substance; now at last, the entrance of this rock cave opens.”

As stated in the verse “the kami of Ise and Miwa... [are] alternative forms of the same substance,” on stage the *shite* becomes Tenshō Daijin, showing the unity of Miwa Myōjin and the main kami of Ise. In the world of medieval kami, the fact that Tenshō Daijin stood at the summit of the kami, surpassing all the others, was widely agreed upon; at the same time, the kami who enhanced their divine power thanks to people’s reverence were regarded as essentially identical with Tenshō Daijin, the supreme kami. From the late Heian period onward, several kami asserted that they were identical with Tenshō Daijin, but they never attempted to surpass her; respecting the hierarchy with Tenshō Daijin at the apex, they only tried to be equal with her.

In the Muromachi period, we can observe fluctuations in the hierarchy of the gods, as in the case of kami claiming to be descendants of Indian kings, but in the early middle ages (late Heian and Kamakura periods), Tenshō Daijin had a special position. What *Miwa* conveys is the conceptualization of early medieval kami who, by increasing their divine power, vied to be recognized as identical with Tenshō Daijin.

10. The dance and the story of the Heavenly Rock Cave is in Koyama and Satō, eds., 1997, p. 521.

The Kami as Protagonist (shite)

Up to this point, I have systematically analyzed the plot of the *Nō Miwa* arguing that *Miwa* is a story in which Miwa Myōjin, who suffers because he saves sentient beings, is in turn saved by Buddhism (the monk Genpin). In this way, *Miwa's* plot is developed around a Buddhist logic, but on stage, Miwa Myōjin is set up as the *shite* (protagonist) and Genpin as the *waki*. In fact, seeing *Miwa* on stage, the highlight is the kami dancing—the dance of Miwa Myōjin who first tells its own myth of divine marriage and then becomes Tenshō Daijin. In both cases, being able to see with one's eyes the majestic and awe-inspiring kami is profoundly impressive.

According to the plot, the Myōjin dances in order to attain salvation and to express gratitude for having been saved, but on the actual stage the kami appears in an exquisitely majestic semblance. The kami, regarded as the transformation body of a buddha and incorporated into the logic of Buddhism, on stage behaves as the protagonist. This fact is important, and constitutes another key to understand kami/buddha relations in medieval Japan.

Setting aside the plot momentarily, a new world emerges when one considers the viewpoint of the audience, as would have been the case for many people in the middle ages. Medieval audiences would have known that the “lowly woman” of the first part was the provisional appearance of Miwa Myōjin manifesting itself to save sentient beings, and the viewers likely would have perceived the kami as close to them. When Miwa Myōjin itself appeared on the stage, and further by showing its fundamental identity with Tenshō Daijin, the audience would have understood that the kami they felt so close to were in fact great, awe-inspiring deities, and their sense of reverence for the gods would likely increase even more. At Genpin's words “Please, show yourself for the sake of the sentient beings of the final age. Tears of deep gratitude wet my black robe,” expressing his wish for Miwa Myōjin to appear in front of him, one can imagine the deeply moving impression that apparition of the kami would have had on viewers.

The stage performance of *Miwa* is structured so that the viewer could feel a close affinity with the kami, while at the same time promoting a deeper sense of reverence toward it, as in the words of Miwa Myōjin, “Especially in Japan, the power of the kami increases because of people's veneration.” Precisely because it is this kind of kami, it “softens its radiance and mingles with the dust” (*wakō dōjin*)—that is, it can actually come face-to-face with people and save them. This role is not easily fulfilled by buddhas, who are regarded as the original ground (*honji*) of the kami. We must not miss the fact that in the scenes involving people there is a function that can only be performed by the kami revered by them.

It is precisely because there is such a role buddhas cannot fulfill that Buddhism had to incorporate kami using a logic like *honji suijaku*. Buddhism, with its logical outlook, subsumed kami in its own worldview as deities among the realm of devas. Nevertheless, the kami did not behave as mere members of the retinues of the buddhas, but as the protagonists in situations in which they had to come face-to-face with people. And those who saw the manifestations of kami experienced an emotional empathy and increased their sentiment of reverence. In the plot of the Nō *Miwa*, Buddhist logic is given priority, but on the stage the protagonist is unquestionably the kami, who leaves a deep impression on those who see its form.

Conclusion

Thus far, I have discussed the relationship between kami and buddhas in medieval Japan and their features, using the Nō *Miwa* as source material. This Nō emphasizes a number of elements—kami getting close to humans, suffering because of their sins, and seeking salvation through Buddhism; “softening their radiance and mingling with the dust” (*wakō dōjin*), “original forms and traces” (*honji suijaku*), and Miwa Myōjin’s essential identity with Tenshō Daijin; as such, it condenses the characteristics of medieval kami and buddhas, which are different from those of the ancient period. *Miwa* was composed in the Muromachi period, but I think the world of kami and buddhas depicted in it reflects the religious situation in the late Heian- and Kamakura-periods. In fact, the myth of Miwa Myōjin’s divine marriage as told in this Nō differs from descriptions in the *Kojiki* 古事記 and *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀, but a similar account appears in *Toshiyori zuinō* 俊頼髓脳, a book of poetry from the late Heian period by Minamoto Toshiyori 源俊頼, completed around 1115 (Eikyū 永久 3). In that book, a poem Miwa Myōjin offers to Sumiyoshi Myōjin says, “If you long for me, come to my place where the cedars stand at the foot the awe-inspiring mountain of Miwa” (恋しくばとぶらひ来ませ千早振三輪の山もと杉たてるかど); it is likely that this poem is the source of verse “at the gate where the cedar stands as a sign” recited by the woman in the first part of *Miwa*.

In *Miwa*, Buddhism and the kami coexist in their respective roles in a relationship we can call mutually complementary. This is precisely the characteristic of *shinbutsu shūgō* in Japan. By discussing *shinbutsu shūgō* based solely on the logic of Buddhism, one can never draw out the whole picture. The same can be said about descriptions involving emotional representations of kami. How to represent the relationship between buddhas and kami, each endowed with different characteristics? That is the biggest challenge when discussing *shinbutsu shūgō*.

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