

Supernatural Abductions in Japanese Folklore

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Part 1. THE THEME

The belief that children may in an unguarded moment be kidnapped by a subtle and malignant enemy of supernatural description is a fairly widespread one throughout the world. In western Europe fairies and korrigans were widely credited with powers of abducting babies, leaving in their place a hideous changeling with a huge appetite and misshapen head. In Japan a rather similar belief in supernatural kidnapping survived in many districts until modern times. A boy or young man who unaccountably disappeared from his home was assumed to be not lost but *stolen*, to be the victim of *kamigakushi* or abduction by a god. If all reasonable search for him proved fruitless it was concluded that some god or goblin had carried him off to its own realm. In such emergencies the whole village considered it a duty to turn out at sunset with lanterns, and to march round in procession, banging loudly on bells and drums and shouting, "Bring him back, bring him back!"

If these measures failed to bring the child back within a fixed period of time, the relatives could as a last resort request a *miko* or white witch to recite appropriate spells. If these in their turn did not prove efficacious within seven days the child was given up as hopelessly lost.

Not infrequently however, as a number of stories both oral and literary attest, the measures were fully justified by success. Suddenly and without warning, the tales run, the child reappears, deathly pale, in some oddly inaccessible place such as the eaves of the local temple or the space between the ceiling and the roof of his own house. For several days he lies in a dazed

stupor. Then he recovers and tells as best he can what has befallen him. Sometimes he is a halfwit when he recovers and is able to recount nothing of his adventures. But more often he relates that a tall stranger appeared while he was playing and carried him off. They had gone on a long journey over mountains and seas, sometimes into underground passages and caves, sometimes as far as the Great Wall of China, sometimes as far as the sun and moon. At length he had begun to feel lonely and homesick, whereupon in a trice he had found himself deposited in the odd spot where he was eventually discovered by his relations.

Such stories have not only been handed down in oral form in many villages, but can also be found in strange profusion in the written collections of tales in which Japanese literature has been so rich since medieval times.

Let us look first at three examples recorded from oral sources.

On the evening of September 30th 1907 a child in a village in Aichi prefecture disappeared just as everyone was busy preparing the white rice cakes to be offered to the god at a festival the next day. When the celebrations were over and the child still found to be missing, a frantic search was made throughout the village. For some hours all efforts proved fruitless. Then suddenly a loud thump was heard on the ceiling of the child's own house. They climbed up to see what had caused the noise, and found the child stretched out unconscious, his mouth covered with white rice cake. When at length he recovered his senses he told them that he had been standing under the big cedar tree in the shrine precincts when a stranger had appeared and taken him away. They had walked over treetops and gone into many people's houses, where always there was a delicious feast of white rice cakes to eat. Eventually he had felt himself thrust into a narrow place, which turned out to be the ceiling of his own house. The child afterwards became an idiot.¹

A similar episode occurred near Kanazawa in 1877. A young man of about twenty suddenly disappeared, leaving his wooden sandals under a persimmon tree. All efforts to find him proved fruitless, until again there was a loud thump on the ceiling and there, in the same cramped space, lay the young man with his

1. Yanagita Kunio, "Yama no Jinsei", *Teihon Yanagita Kunio Shû*, IV, p. 77. The story was related to Yanagita by Hayakawa Kôtarô.

mouth all green as though he had been eating leaves. He too, on recovering consciousness, told a tale of an old man who had carried him off and taken him to many distant places.²

Another story from the Kumano district relates how on the night of the 19th of the fifth month of the year 1808 a boy went out to the lavatory and did not return. They searched everywhere in vain until in the small hours of the morning he was discovered standing on the eaves of the go-down, his top hair cut off and his clothes covered with cob-webs and ears of susuki grass. For three days he slept soundly. Then he woke up and told how a mountain ascetic had appeared, taken him by the hand and flown up into the sky. They had flown a great distance at an incredible speed, alighting now and then on various holy mountains which he described accurately. He was enjoying himself very much and would have liked to see more places, but was worried about his family at home and begged to go back. From Kurama they had come home in one leap, and he had found himself standing on the eaves of the go-down with the lanterns of the search party flashing below.³

If the child does not come back within the required time in response to the spells and the noise on the bells and drums, his relations must look for signs which will indicate that he has indeed been stolen by a god, and not simply been lost or drowned. In Shinshû province a sure sign that he has been stolen is to find his shoes neatly placed together under a tree. In nearly all districts a further proof of supernatural kidnapping is that he should be seen again briefly and mysteriously once.

A child of five in a village in Bungo province cried so persistently and exasperatingly one one night that his parents turned him out of doors as a punishment. They heard his cries growing fainter and fainter in the direction of the mountain, until in alarm they rushed out to bring him back, only to find that he had completely disappeared. Spells, drums and bells were all of no avail. Nothing more was seen or heard of him for ten years. Then a man called Shôichi happened to be walking in the mountains not far from the village. Suddenly he saw

2. Ibid., p. 78. This story was told to Yanagita by a man who was a neighbour of the kidnapped youth, and whose own son had discovered him under the roof.

3. *Minzokugaku*, II, 9, p. 558.

a frightful figure, seven or eight feet high and covered all over with fur. Too terrified to move he watched it draw nearer and nearer, until unexpectedly it enquired in a human voice where he came from. Shôichi told it the name of his village. "That is my old home", it said. "Do you remember hearing of a child lost many years ago. I was that child". It gave Shôichi a cake made of chestnuts and climbed up the sheer face of the rock as lightly and nimbly as a bird. It was never seen again.⁴

Women as well as boys are apt to fall victims of *kamigakushi*. They too may reappear mysteriously once.

A girl from a well-to-do family in Iwate prefecture was riding to her bridegroom's house on her wedding day. She seemed to be taking a long time to cover the short distance, so they went out to see whether she had met with an accident. They found only a riderless horse. The girl had completely vanished. Some months later on a winter's evening some villagers were chatting in a shop, when suddenly a girl came in and asked for some *saké*. To their astonishment they recognised the missing bride, but before they could speak to her she had paid for the *saké* and gone. They rushed out, but she was nowhere to be seen.

Of the fate of this girl we are left to guess. But of another stolen girl, who lived as late as the mid 19th century, there came strange and unexpected tidings. She had gone up the mountainside to gather chestnuts and had not returned. Her parents, concluding her to be dead, had her funeral obsequies performed. But a couple of years later a hunter suddenly met her on the slopes of a mountain called Goyôzan. She told him that she had been carried off by a terrifying creature, and had been living with him as his wife ever since. She was never given a chance to escape, and indeed any minute now he might come back. He was not unlike an ordinary man in appearance, except that his eyes were a terrible colour and he was immensely tall. She had had several children by him, but always he had declared that because they did not resemble him they could not be his. In a rage he had taken them all away and presumably killed them. The hunter took her by the hand and began to hurry down the mountainside. They were just approaching the village when suddenly a fearfully tall man bounded after them through the woods, seized the girl and carried her off. She was never seen

4. Yanagita, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

again.⁵

Who then are these mysterious kidnappers? They are clearly of several kinds, some much more dangerous than others. The old men in the first examples we quoted were undoubtedly manifestations of the local Shinto deity, who had temporarily 'borrowed' the boys as mediums for receiving the offerings of rice cakes laid out for them at the festival. The tall, hairy creatures, on the other hand, from whose clutches it seems difficult if not impossible to escape, were *yamaotoko* or 'mountain men'. These mysterious, semi human denizens of mountains, the belief in whom some Japanese folklorists think may have originated in an ancient and unfamiliar race of mountain people, are described fairly uniformly by woodcutters of various districts. They are very tall, with glittering eyes and long hair straggling down to their shoulders. Sometimes they are covered with leaves or tree bark instead of fur. These creatures, it will be noted, never take the child on entertaining journeys to strange lands and mountains. They carry it straight back to their lair in the mountains, there keeping it in strict durance as a servant or catamite. Women, it will also be noted, are kidnapped only by *yamaotoko* and for the sole purpose of becoming the wives of the creatures. They are never taken on the magic journey.⁶

The most subtle and fearful of all the supernatural kidnappers, however, is exemplified by the mountain ascetic in our

5. Ibid, pp. 102, 109. Another version of this story, in which the hunter retreats in terror without attempting to rescue the girl, is in *Tôno Monogatari*, story no. 7. These stories were taken down verbatim by Yanagita Kunio in 1909 from an old man in the mountain village of Tôno. Three more stories of women victims of *kamigakushi* can be found in this work, Sôgensha edition pp. 119, 129, 131. In the first story the woman was captured by a 'mountain man', and was seen years later by a grass cutter on the mountain dressed in leaves. She sent messages to her family, who at once came in search for her. But she was never seen again. In the second story a beautiful girl was captured by the 'master of the mountain' and became his wife. Three years later she suddenly reappeared in her home, announcing that she was so homesick that her husband had given her permission to visit her family for a short time. She soon mysteriously disappeared into the mountains again, but her family afterwards became very rich.

6. Other noted kidnappers are foxes, the goblin known as *kakure-zatô* and the alarming spook called *yadôkai*. Some districts assign a general name *kakushigami*, kidnapping gods, or *kakushibaba*, kidnapping hags, to all these beings. See Yanagita, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-6.

third story. This figure was clearly a disguised *tengu*. These creatures, with the wings and beak of a kite, tiger's claws and oddly glittering eyes, were believed to haunt most of the high mountains of Japan. In medieval literature they appear prominently as one of the most sinister enemies of Buddhism. They sow seeds of pride in the hearts of those treading the path towards Buddhist illumination. They cause mysterious conflagrations in Buddhist temples. They carry off priests engaged in pious exercises and tie them to the tops of trees. They also carry off children in the manner we have described. Yanagita Kunio recalled how the boys in the mountain village in which he spent his childhood never tired of discussing the terrifying possibility of being stolen by a *tengu*. The favorite disguise of the goblin was the distinctive garb of the sect of mountain ascetics known as *yamabushi*.⁷

Let us now look at the *kamigakushi* stories to be found in literature. They appear in the collections of tales known as *setsuwa-bungaku*, and also in the *reigenki* or records of miracles which many shrines treasure among their archives. These literary examples will be found to contain certain features lacking in the simpler, orally transmitted tales. Almost invariably the kidnapper is a *tengu*, appearing usually in the disguise of a *yamabushi*. For no apparent purpose they carry off the boy or young man to distant mountains, but are compelled eventually to restore him to his home by a mysterious and benign figure of an old man.

Here is an example from the *Shasekishu*, a 14th century collection of stories compiled by a priest called Mujû. A boy disappeared from a monastery in the mountains.

"After a couple of days they found him on the temple roof in a state of stupefaction. When they recited a dharani over him he recovered his senses and told them he had been lured away by some *yamabushi*, who had taken him to a temple in the mountains called Anrakuji. A venerable priest of over eighty, who seemed to be the chief of the company, called the child over and said, "These fellows are a worthless lot. Just stay here and watch what happens to them". **The child watched them as they**

7. The *tengu* are given full and learned treatment in M.W. de Visser's "The Tengu", *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, Vol. 36, Part I, 1908. Also by Inoue Enryô in his *Yôkaigaku Kôgi*, Vol. 4, p. 245.

danced, when something like a net descended from the sky and seemed to draw itself round the dancers. The *yamabushi* in great distress did their best to escape, but in vain. From the meshes of the net shot forth flames which grew gradually fiercer until the *yamabushi* were all burnt to ashes. After a while they appeared again as *yamabushi* just as before and started to dance. The old priest said to one of them, "Why did you bring this child here? Take him back to his temple at once". Whereupon the *yamabushi*, looking very much afraid, took the boy back".⁸

A similar story, possibly a variant, is to be found in the 18th century collection *Kaidan Tôshiotoko*.

A little peasant boy set out on an errand from his mother's house in Sanuki province. Soon he was seen to leave the path and run through the fields of standing wheat. "What are you doing", they shouted angrily at him, "trampling down our wheat like that?" But the boy simply went on running and eventually disappeared. When he did not come back they began to be alarmed and told his mother what they had seen. The poor woman was beside herself with anxiety, and to comfort her the whole village turned out every night banging on drums and bells and calling "Come back, come back!" But when after several days there was still no sign of the boy the villagers grew tired and gave up.

Then suddenly he was discovered standing on the altar of the Kannon hall of the Kokubunji temple nearby. In great excitement they lifted him down and took him home, and for four or five days he lay speechless and unconscious.

When he came to himself everyone asked what he had been doing when he was seen running through the wheat. Two *yamabushi* had come, he said, seized him by the hand and run with him until he was out of breath. They had taken him to many places until at last they had come to rest on the top of Mt. Yakurigatake. There they had stayed until three more *yamabushi* arrived. One sang, another played on the *samisen*, while the third tossed him about in the air as though he were a ball. Just then an old priest in a grey robe appeared and said, "Don't do that. Let me have the child". At first the *yamabushi* took no notice, but eventually, as the old man continued to ask for the boy, they gave him up. After that the boy remembered

8. *Shasekishû*, maki 8, no. 11.

nothing until he woke up to see the villagers gathered round him. All this happened quite recently, the story ends, and all the people concerned are still alive, so it must be true.⁹

One last example will suffice to show the prevalence of the motif in literature. Hirata Atsutane, the Shinto scholar, recorded the following story in his *Kokon Yômikô* (1821), a rich mine for the collector of tales.

In the year 1740 some repairs were being carried out to the western tower of the Hall of Shaka on Mt. Hiei, with two officials in charge of the work. Among the retainers of these officers was a man of about thirty by the name of Kiuchi Heizaemon. In the early evening of the seventh day of the third month this man suddenly disappeared without trace.

Searching for him high and low they found, scattered in odd places in the temple garden, his wooden sandals, his short sword bent like a pothook with its scabbard smashed, and his undersash cut into three pieces.

Realising that it must be the work of *tengu*, they continued their search, ordering prayers and spells to be recited in all the temples and haunted spots on the mountain. That night at about 2 a.m. there was a sound like the blast of a mighty wind, and a voice was heard calling, "*Tanomô, tanomô.*" Rain was falling heavily and the mountain was still deep in snow, so that little could be seen outside. But a man called Suzuki Shichirô, following the voice, ventured out into the garden and saw standing on the roof of the temple a strange winged figure.

"Help! Help me down!" it cried.

"Are you not Heizaemon?" Shichirô asked.

"Yes", replied the figure.

Shichirô then saw that what had seemed to be wings attached to the figure was in fact the broken frame of an open umbrella.

A crowd began to gather, and at last a workman called Shirôbei climbed up on the roof to help the man down. Heizaemon at once fainted, so that Shirôbei had to strap him to his back with a sash, and crawl down on his stomach.

For three days Heizaemon lay unconscious. When at last he came to his senses he told them that at about three o'clock in the morning he had heard a voice calling his name. He had gone outside to look, and there at the entrance of the temple

9. *Kaidan Tôshiotoko*, by Zansetsusha Sokyû. *Tokugawa Bungei Ruijû*, Vol. 4, p. 489.

was a small priest wearing wide trousers and a black robe tucked up short. As Heizaemon approached he was joined by another man with a red face and wild black hair, wearing ceremonial dress. "Come up on the roof!" they ordered him. Heizaemon laid his hand on his sword, but at once the two strange figures seized him, and in the ensuing struggle his sword was bent like a pothook and its scabbard smashed.¹⁰

"Take off your sash!" they then cried, and when Heizaemon refused they tore it off him and cut it into three pieces. Then they dragged him up on the roof and were beating him hard with a big stick when a tall priest in a red robe appeared and shouted angrily, "Stop!". They whispered something together and then the first two strangers said "You must come with us".

Thinking that it would be the worse for him if he refused, Heizaemon did as he was told, and stepped on to a thing like a round dish. The small priest pressed down on his shoulders with both hands, and he felt himself rise up in the air.

"We flew on and on over the sea", Heizaemon continued. "I was very frightened, but the tall priest appeared to me and said, 'If you say 'Water cannot drown me', you need have no fear'. I shut my eyes, but even so I could see the sea below. At last we arrived at the top of what seemed to be Mt. Akiba. In the valley far below a great fire was raging. I was terrified lest I should be thrown down the mountainside and burnt, but the tall priest appeared again and said, 'Say 'Fire cannot burn me', and you need have no fear.'"¹¹

I shut my eyes and we flew on again, past Myôgisan and Hikosan and many other mountains. I thought that about ten days must have passed and begged them to take me back.¹²

10. At intervals during the narrative Hirata interpolates comments of a critical and explanatory kind. Here (p. 26) he remarks that in violating Heizaemon's sword the *tengu's* conduct was doubly disgraceful. The sword while on official duty was not a private object, but the property of the Emperor. The *tengu* world may have been the 'other world' (*yûkai*) but it was still part of the Emperor's domain.

11. Hirata comments: 'Fire cannot burn me' etc. are phrases from the Lotus Sutra. The round dish is one of the well known ways in which *tengu* on Mt. Hiei carry off mortals.

12. Hirata comments: Usually when one is carried off to the Other World one is not aware of the passage of time, and months and years seem like only a moment or two. It was most unusual for Heizaemon to think that ten days had passed when in fact it was no more than one day.

A white haired old man came forward and said, "In that case we must give you some money". And he produced many gold coins, telling me that however many were spent the store would never be exhausted. But before I could take them the tall priest said to me, "If you accept this money two of your aunts will have their lives shortened by one year each". So I replied, "Thank you, but I cannot accept these coins as it would be a pity to shorten my aunts' lives".

The strangers said, "What a queer fellow you are. In that case we will give you a prescription and a discipline which will enable you to live the rest of your life in peace. One of the herbs for the prescription grows only on this mountain. When you want to make it up, just climb the mountain and we will give it to you". With these words they gave me a slip of paper with a formula written on it.

"You must never tell anyone of this", they continued. "For three years you must purify your mind and body with a strict discipline, taking particular care to avoid the contamination of women. After three years you can lie with your wife without ill effect, but when you wish to make up the medicine you must observe the discipline strictly. We are sending you back now". In the small hours of the morning I felt myself coming down on what seemed to be a mountain top, then landing on the roof of the temple. The strangers had disappeared, but I heard the voice of the tall priest echoing among the mountain streams. I asked him who he was, and he replied, "I have lived on this mountain for nine hundred years". Then just as the workman Shirôbei climbed up to rescue me, the priest disappeared and I lost consciousness".

Hirata concludes the story with the remark that it must certainly be true because it was recorded by someone who had seen it all with his own eyes.¹³

Prominent though the *kamigakushi* motif undoubtedly is in Japanese folk literature it is not considered by Japanese folklorists to be a legitimate *kata* or folktale type. Though it appears

13. *Kokon Yômikô*, in *Hirata Atsutane Zenshû*, Vol. III, pp. 25-28. Other literary examples of the *kamigakushi* motif can be found in the 13th century collection of tales *Kokonchomonjû*, maki 17, *Nihon Bungaku Taikêi* Vol. 10, p. 731. Also in the 15th century work *Aki no yo no Nagamonogatari*, *Nihon Bungaku Taikêi*, Vol. 19, pp. 703-710. Also the 18th century collection of weird tales *Sanshû Kidan*, in *Kinsei Kidan Zenshû*, *Zoku Teikoku Bunko*, Vol. 47, p. 726.

more than once in Stith Thomsen's *Motif Index of Folk Literature*, it finds no place in any of the great anthologies or type indexes of Japanese folktales. Seki Keigo ignores it in his extensive collection and type index *Nihon Mukashibanashi Shūsei*. Nor does it appear in the great regional anthology of Japanese folktales *Zenkoku Mukashibanashi Kiroku*, edited in thirteen volumes by Yanagita Kunio.¹⁴

The reason for this apparent neglect of an interesting and persistent motif may well be that the stories in which it appears are not strictly speaking folk *tales*, but rather folk legends. A point which strikes us at once about the stories is that they all purport to be factually true. In both the oral and the literary versions the incidents are recounted in a firm context of exact time and place. The boy was stolen, for example, "on the evening of September 30th 1907, from Mr. Kasaijima's house in the village of Damine in Aichi prefecture", the teller frequently assuring us that the story is certainly true because he knew the whole family intimately. In the traditional folk tale or *mukashibanashi*, on the other hand, the fox wives, the small heroes, the monkey bridegrooms are not thought to have existed in historical time at all. The events took place 'once upon a time', in *illo tempore*, and their exact historical truth is a matter of little concern.

The *kamigakushi* stories should therefore more properly be treated as folk legends; as stories of a persistently recurring type believed by the teller to be historically true, comparable with the circumstantial tales current during the last few years in England of flying saucers and their passengers from outer space, or of mass migrations of man-eating rats.

Our next task therefore is to ask, as can be justifiably asked of every folk legend, what objective circumstances could have given rise to the story? Why should a legend of this particular type be so widely and obstinately believed to be factually true? Are there any substantive grounds which might support such a phantasy?

14. Stith Thomsen's *Motif Index* gives F320, Fairies carry people away to Fairyland, and F460.4.4.1. Mountain men abduct persons. The last volume of Seki Keigo's work provides a type index, *Nihon Mukashibanashi no Kata*, but again no mention is made of *kamigakushi*. The nearest seems to be his type 3 A and B, pp. 834-5, wherein women are stolen by *oni* and make good their escape by devious means. In English see the same author's "Types of Japanese Folktale", *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol. XXV, 1966, p. 47.

A clue may be found, I suggest, in the curiously dream-like, inconsequential quality of so many of the tales. May not these mantic journeys be examples of the visionary experience of "magical flight", so common on the mainland of Asia as to be recognised as an important *rêve initiatique* of the shaman?

Abundant evidence exists of shamanic practices in the early Shinto cult in Japan, but it points largely towards the variety of the cult which involves divine possession. The god or ghost is enticed by spells to leave his own world and to visit the human, there to make his will known through the mouth of a possessed medium. On the Asian continent, on the other hand, a contrary form of the cult is practised, in which it is the shaman, not the god, who leaves his own world to visit the other. His soul is believed to leave his body and to make a mantic voyage to the upper world of spirits and the underworld of the dead, whence he returns to his own community armed with useful supernatural knowledge. This journey to other worlds is held in many Siberian tribes to be an initiatory vision of deep significance, the experience without which a man cannot leave his ordinary human state to assume the extra powers of the shaman. It has given rise, among the Mongol and Turkish speaking peoples of north and central Asia, to a great epic literature, wherein are recounted the journeys of the seer to other worlds.¹⁵

We know that in the ethnic admixture which in prehistoric times went to make up the Japanese race there was a strong Altaic strain. A powerful invasion of Altaic people is thought to have occurred about the 3rd or 4th century A.D. Is it possible that in the visions of the boys who fall victims to *kami-gakushi* we see a subterranean survival of an Altaic strain of culture? Had the boys been born in north or central Asia their experiences might have been recognised as a valid initiation into the status of shaman. In Japan, however, where this form of shamanism never formed part of the established cult, their visions survive only peripherally as a folk legend. The boys were certainly recognised to be 'different'. Indeed, as Yanagita Kunio remarks, they were usually odd, neurotic children who easily slipped over the threshold into trance. They were the kind of boys who in the old days were purposely selected to act as *yori-*

15. Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism*, especially chapters 4 and 6. N.K. Chadwick, *Poetry and Prophecy*, pp. 90-5. I must gratefully acknowledge too the kind help on this point from Professor Hori Ichirô.

warawa, boy mediums through whose mouths deities were induced to make prophetic utterances.¹⁶ But their vision of the magic journey was not acknowledged by their community as conferring upon them any religious charisma.

Among the descriptions given by shamans of their journeys to other worlds there is much similarity according to tribe and community. Is there any such agreement among the accounts of the Japanese boys of what they saw and heard in the Other World?

Many of them, as we have seen, were halfwits when they recovered consciousness and were able to relate nothing of their adventures. Others tell no more than incoherent tales of a tall man with glittering eyes who took them off to the tops of mountains and showed them lands and seas stretching below.

Very occasionally, however, a boy appears who gives an immensely detailed account of his adventures, with a clear and vivid picture of the Other World. During the Bakumatsu period a young priest called Kôan from a temple in Wakayama was carried off by a white haired old man to Mt. Akayama, where he met many Immortals, and later to China and Siberia. He wrote a long description of his journey. Seventeen years later a young medical student climbed the magic mountain Akibasan and acquired supernatural powers. His story won him many disciples.¹⁷ But the most notable example is the boy Torakichi, who in the year 1820 provided the Shinto scholar Hirata Atsutane and his learned circle of friends with a wealth of material for their studies of supernatural worlds. The story of this boy, as set out at length in the writings of Hirata and one of his disciples, is undoubtedly the longest and most circumstantial account extant in Japanese literature of a supernatural abduction to the Other World.

16. Yanagita, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-2.

17. These stories have been collected into a book to which I have not had access, *Yûmeikai Kenkyû Shiryô*, published in 1921 and quoted in Yanagita, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-5.

Part 2.

HIRATA ATSUTANE AND THE "STRANGE TIDINGS
FROM THE REALM OF IMMORTALS"

The boy Torakichi was born into a merchant family in Edo at the end of the year 1808. He was said to be a sickly, difficult child, addicted to nocturnal bedwetting, but from the age of five astonished his family by his correct prognostications of fires, robberies and accidents.

One day when he was seven years old he noticed an old man with long white hair and beard selling pills in a bowl near the gate of a shrine. Presently he stepped, one foot at a time, into the bowl, which at once rose up into the air and flew off. Torakichi, though naturally surprised, said nothing to his family of what he had seen, but the next day he came back to the same spot, to find the old man selling pills there just as before. When evening came he again flew off in the bowl. For several days the same thing happened. Eventually the old man noticed Torakichi and invited him to come away with him in the bowl. "I can show you lots of interesting places", he said.

Torakichi was at first too frightened to come, but at last the old man persuaded him with cakes and promises to step into the bowl. At once it rose into the air and flew rapidly as far as the top of a high mountain in the province of Hitachi which was said to be the haunt of *tengu*. When night came Torakichi cried so much that the old man took him back home. Thereafter every day the old man took him off to the mountain, and every evening brought him back again. Later they moved to another mountain called Iwamayama, where after a preliminary initiation involving a hundred days' fast the boy became the old man's formal pupil. For four years, until he was eleven, Torakichi was taught by his Master martial arts, calligraphy and magic, and how to make medicines and weapons.

Until the year 1820 the boy seemed to have spent his time partly in a Buddhist temple of the Nichiren sect and partly with his strange master, who took him off on long journeys all over Japan, to China and to even more distant lands. He was warned never to speak lightly of what he had seen and heard on the Other World mountain, and never to reveal his Master's real name. "Just say that my name is Sugiyama Sôjô, and that I

am one of the thirteen *tengu* living on Mt. Iwama", he was told. In the spring of 1820 he was set down at the gate of the Kannon temple in Asakusa. After a short spell at home he was taken in as a boarder to the house of a pharmacist in Edo who was also a noted antiquarian and Shinto scholar.¹⁸

Such was the boy's story as it reached the ears of Hirata Atsutane in the year 1820. Hirata in the course of his antiquarian researches into the golden 'age of the gods' before the beginning of history, had naturally become interested in the various realms where supernatural beings were said to dwell. For years he had been particularly exercised by the nature of the afterworld. In 1812 he had propounded in his long work *Tama no Mihashira* the new and comforting theory that the souls of the dead went not, as stated in the Shinto classics, to the gloomy and polluted realm of Yomi, but to a far pleasanter place called Yûmeikai. Yûmeikai seems to have been a kind of replica of the world of the living, in which the dead souls enjoyed clothes, houses and food in the same dimensions of space and time as the living, although imperceptible to human sense organs. It seems also to have been the abode of other supernatural beings besides the souls of the dead, so that tidings from any 'Other World', whether of gods, demons or immortals, were of immediate concern to Hirata. When he heard, therefore, that there was a boy in Edo who claimed to have spent several years in the Other World his interest and curiosity were immediately aroused. Though warned by his friends that the tales of boys who had been inveigled away by a god were incoherent and unreliable, he lost no time in calling at the pharmacist's house, in company with another notable scholar of the Shinto revival, Ban Nobutomo.

He described the boy as looking fairly ordinary except for a pair of strangely glittering eyes, of the type known to physiognomists as 'lower third white'. He took his pulse and felt his stomach, and found the pulse to be thready and feeble but the stomach strong. He also took the opportunity to ask

18. This account is to be found in the first fascicle of *Senkyô Ibun*, in *Hirata Atsutane Zenshû*, Vol. III. Also in the work *Katsuma Mondô*, an unpublished record of Torakichi's answers to questions compiled by Hirata's pupil Matsumura Heisaku which is very similar to Hirata's account. My manuscript copy of this work I owe to the kindness of Professor Donald Keene. A usefully condensed version of the story is given in Watanabe Kinzô, *Hirata Atsutane Kenkyû*, 1942, pp. 173-8.

the boy a number of questions about his life in the Other World with his strange master.

Hirata had some difficulty in seeing the boy again, as his guardians seemed jealous of the interest he was taking in their ward. But several meetings were eventually arranged in Hirata's own house, where he prepared tempting dishes of cakes and fish, and invited a number of learned Shinto friends to hear the boy's story.

On October 16th Torakichi appeared at Hirata's house dressed for a journey, announcing that he was off to the Other World mountain again and had come to say good-bye. Hirata persuaded him to stay the night, and when he set off the next day gave him a letter to take to his Master. It is a remarkable document, couched in the politest of language and testifying to Hirata's implicit faith in the truth of the boy's story.

Though he had striven for many years to learn about the Other World, he wrote, there were yet many matters which still perplexed a mere mortal like himself. "I would ask you", he continued, "to grant me the favour of your instruction on these puzzling points, sending the answers to my questions with the boy when he returns from your mountain. . . Please be so good also as to glance at a work I published some time ago called *Tama no Mihashira*. In this book I did my best to set down the truth about heaven and earth and the Other World, but I fear that you with your lightning eye will detect many errors. If you would have the goodness to correct these mistakes I should be infinitely obliged. . . ."

The letter ended with the most profuse expressions of humble reverence of which the Japanese epistolary style was capable, and with some complimentary poems, the first of which ran as follows:

*Torakichi ga yama ni shi ireba kakuriyo no
Shirienu michi wo tare ni ka towamu?*

When Torakichi goes into the mountains, whom shall I ask about the unknowable ways of the Other World?

Torakichi left Edo on October 19th. Three weeks later he was back, knocking on Hirata's gate in the early hours of the morning. His Master had gone off on a tour of the mountains in Sanuki province, he declared, and he had been given a holiday during the period of cold weather austerities. "Did you give

him my letter?" Hirata asked. The boy replied rather briefly that his Master had simply nodded on reading it, saying "Good, good".¹⁹

From the end of November Torakichi seems to have come to live in Hirata's house as an apprentice. Hirata was naturally criticised and even ridiculed for accepting so credulously all that the boy had told him. But his credulity is less odd when we remember that during the past couple of centuries several Confucian scholars of the highest repute had written serious treatises on the subject of *tengu*. Hayashi Razan, the official Confucian advisor to the first Tokugawa Shogun, gave the *tengu* solemn treatment in his *Honchô Jinjakô*. The noted 17th century historian and Confucianist Arai Hakuseki wrote a special treatise on *tengu*. So also did Ogyû Sorai, the Confucianist of the Ancient Learning school renowned for his penetrating criticism of the orthodox school of Neo-Confucianism. None of these scholars had any doubts as to the objective existence of *tengu*.

Neither had Hirata and his circle of friends, all deeply learned in the doctrines of the Shinto Revival. Until the end of the year 1820 they plied Torakichi with innumerable questions about every aspect of his life on the Other World mountain. These questions and Torakichi's answers Hirata carefully recorded in a lengthy work of some 180 pages called *Senkyô Ibun*, 'Strange Tidings from the Realm of Immortals', which was published in 1822. He also published a shorter version of the tale entitled *Shindô Hyôdan Ryakki*, 'Short Account of the Inspired Sayings of the Divine Boy'.²⁰

The questions in their total lack of order are rather reminiscent of those put to the Dutch embassy during the 17th century on the occasions of their annual journey to Edo to bring presents to the Shogun. The Dutch merchants were asked where negroes came from, how mummies were made, whether there was smallpox in Holland, whether they had never seen dragons, who was the commander in chief in their country and if they wore false teeth.²¹

Torakichi was likewise respectfully questioned by the learned group of scholars on the recipes his master had cooked, on the

19. *Senkyô Ibun*, maki 1. Watanabe, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-9.

20. Both these works are in HAZ III.

21. See *Oranda Mondô*, *passim*, in *Kaihyô Sôsho*, Vol. 2. Also Donald Keene, *The Japanese Discovery of Europe*, p. 23.

games they had played. Did your Master wear a nightgown when he was asleep? Do you know a good spell to cure a swollen tongue, or to dislodge a thorn stuck in the throat? Is there a good cure for colds, consumption, leprosy, colic, bites by mad dogs? They asked questions about the correct manner of performing various rites, and of worshipping certain deities, about the strange lands he had visited, about the truth of certain folk beliefs and tales.

All these questions Torakichi seems to have answered with a glibness and fluency which would have done credit to an accomplished professional story teller. We have no means of knowing how accurate was Hirata's reporting of the boy's answers, and how much he added himself from his own wide knowledge of folklore and popular antiquities. But even allowing for some 'help' from Hirata, the boy must still have been remarkable for his years. He shows a detailed knowledge of Shinto ritual, of the ingredients of the Chinese *materia medica*, of cooking and folklore, and an easy confidence as a teller of tales.

In the course of his travels, for example, Torakichi claimed to have visited many strange lands. Among these was the Island of Women. Hirata asked him where it lay and what it was like. Torakichi answered,

"About 400 leagues to the east of Japan. They don't build houses there, but instead they dig holes in the mountainside and hollow them out, keeping the rain off by fixing a few sticks across the entrance thatched over with seaweed. The women there look very like Japanese women. They do their hair up in a bun, and wear jackets with tight sleeves. They go into the sea with all their clothes on to catch fish and collect seaweed to eat. When they come out they give themselves a good shake, and at once all the water runs out of their clothes. It is said that they cannot be harmed by fire. The seaweed there has a stalk as thick as a man's thigh. If you take out the moist part inside and roast it you can eat it like a fern-seed cake. Naturally the women are always craving for a man, and if ever one should be shipwrecked on their island they all gather round and devour him. If they want to conceive a child, two women each take a bundle of *sasa* leaves in their hands, bow towards the west and then embrace each other like husband and wife. But I believe there are proper times and rules for conceiving in this way. I was hiding in this

country for about ten days altogether".²²

Hirata asked if he had seen any other strange lands.

"I went to lots of countries whose names I never knew", Torakichi replied, "to carry out orders of my master—uninhabited mountains and seas and rivers. But generally I was too busy to notice what they were like, and now they seem just like places in a dream. But there was one country which struck me as particularly queer, and I remember something about it as I was there for about ten days. The men and women looked fairly ordinary, but their language sounded just like the barking of dogs. Every family kept lots of dogs and used them for food. For their clothes they rip up the stomach of a live dog and flay off all the skin in one piece. Then they put their arms and legs into the places for the dog's four legs and sew up the split in the stomach. They would dry the skins as they wore them. Everyone in the country wore this garb, so that they all looked just like dogs walking about on two legs. They kept various kinds of dog, white and red, and the rich people wore several skins at once. The tribute they pay to

22. *Senkyô Ibun*, p. 56. The similarities between this description and traditional Chinese accounts of the Island of Women are curious and inexplicable. The 5th century Buddhist priest Hui-chin recounts that a thousand leagues east of the land of Fusang lies the Land of Women, Niu-kuo. The women there live on seaweed and become pregnant by plunging into the sea in the third month. See G. Schlegel, "Problèmes Géographiques: Niu Kouo". *T'oung Pao*, Vol. 3, 1892, pp. 495-510. M. Schlegel believed that what Hui-chin had taken for women were in fact seals, whose habits could be reconciled with this description on every point. The legend of the Island of Women is a widespread one, (F112 in Stith Thomsen's *Motif Index*) found also in Melanesia and Polynesia, and among the Ainu and the North American Indians. The Ainu legend adds the horrifying detail that the women inhabiting the island have the *vagina dentata*, teeth inside their female organs with which they will kill a man. See Ishida Eiichirô, "Mother-Son Deities", *History of Religions*, Vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 41-5. Marco Polo speaks of Two Islands in the Indian Ocean called Male and Female, where for nine months of the year men and women lived entirely isolated from each other. See Colonel Sir Henry Yule, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, Vol. 2, pp. 404-6. Jason and his argonauts encountered such an island in their search for the Golden Fleece, and we meet it also in the Arthurian romances. See Heinrich Zimmer, *The King and the Corpse*, p. 81.

their king is also made in dogs, and the king wears dog skins too. These people seemed like a kind of sea creature, because they were never drowned if they fell into the sea. Of all the countries I visited this one was certainly the most disgusting, but I never knew its name or in what direction it lay".²³

Hirata later asked if Torakichi had visited countries where they worship pictures of a man hanging on a cross, and of a woman holding a baby. We may suspect that he added a little colouring of his own to Torakichi's reply.

"I once went for a short time to a very cold place where the people wore clothes with tight sleeves, and there they had images such as you describe. Every time my Master saw one of those things he would spit on it. I asked why he did this, and he replied that they were images worshipped by a wicked heresy called Kirishitan which was strictly prohibited in Japan".²⁴

Hirata asked if the boy had ever found himself lost in a strange place.

"Yes, often. Once I was wandering about quite lost somewhere deep in the mountains where there were hardly any houses, and where they ate no rice, only potatoes. I found a fairly sizeable house and asked to stay the night there. It seemed to belong to quite a well-to-do family, with about fourteen or fifteen people inside. They put me to sleep in a room next to the one where the master of the house slept with his family. In the middle of the night I happened to see half a dozen frightful looking men with drawn swords creep into the garden and light a fire. With a pair of long iron fire tongs

23. Ibid., p. 57. This odd description is vaguely reminiscent of the Tartar land of dogs, Nochoy Kadzar, described in the *Historia Tartarorum* of the Franciscan friar de Bridia in 1247. The males are all dogs and the women human. The dog warriors put the Tartars to flight by dint of covering themselves with an armour of ice and frozen sand. See R.A. Skelton et al, *The Vinland Map and the Tartar Relation*, p. 70. Dog bridegrooms are a motif in Japanese literature as well as in folktales, cf. the lengthy and celebrated novel *Hakkenden*, by the 19th century writer Bakin.

24. Ibid., pp. 72-3.

they held four or five cups over the flames until they were glowing red. Then they whispered together and were obviously about to creep into the house. Everyone inside was still sound asleep, so I got up softly, crept over to where the master of the house was lying, put my mouth to his ear and said urgently, "Get up! There are thieves in the house". The man jumped up, spied the thieves and roused the household. The whole family woke in alarm, and the thieves, seeing that they were outnumbered, made good their escape. The master of the house praised me warmly and gave me lots of nice things to eat. When we went outside, we found that in about five places there was a heap of filth and excrement, with a straw sandal on top of it. I asked my Master about this afterwards, and he said that it was an evil spell to enable the thieves to get in without waking anyone up. They intended that the disgusting smell should get inside the house and drive away the gods who would usually protect it so that they could carry out their robbery with impunity".²⁵

"When your Master took you on these journeys", they asked, "did you always fly through the air, or did you travel overland?"

"Sometimes we used to go by land, but for any long distance we always flew".

"When you were flying in this way", they persisted, "did you *walk*, or did you progress as an arrow does? Or did you ride on the clouds, as one sees in pictures? What did it feel like?"

"When one rises into the sky", Torakichi replied, "one feels rather as though one is treading on soft cotton—it may be clouds for all I know. But as one is rushing along as though blown by the wind faster than an arrow, the only sensation one has is of a ringing sound in one's ears. Some prefer flying high in the sky, others low, rather as some fish swim near the surface of the water, others down in the depths".

"Do you take off from a mountain peak, or the top of a tall tree?"

"Not necessarily. You can take off from anywhere you like".

"Is it cold or hot up in the sky?"

25. Ibid., p. 86.

"When you first leave the ground it gets gradually colder, but once you are past the cold pole it gets extremely hot. When you are just passing *between* the cold and hot regions you feel cold from your waist downwards as though you are standing in water, and burning hot above. When you get up still higher, entirely into the hot region, your hair begins to go into tight curls like those on a Buddha image. And when you get up really high you find very calm weather, with no rain or wind".²⁶

"What did this country look like from up in the sky?"

"As you fly upwards, you see the seas and rivers and plains and mountains and even roads all stretching out enormously wide on all sides. But as you fly higher they gradually get smaller and smaller until by the time you are as high as the stars this country hardly looks any larger than the moon".

"If you got up as high as the stars, then you must have seen what the moon looked like?"

"The nearer you get to the moon the larger it looks. It is piercingly cold, and you think you will never be able to get the whole way, but when with a tremendous effort you come within a couple of hundred yards of it, you find it is unexpectedly warm. The places on the moon which are brilliantly shining are like great seas mixed with mud. And the place which people call the hare pounding rice cakes is in fact two or three open holes. But I can't tell you very accurately what it looked like as I never got really close to it".

To this Hirata, for whom the moon held an important place in his theology, rejoined, "I can easily believe that the shining parts of the moon are like seas, as the western people have already put forward such a theory. But I can't at all understand about these holes. Are you sure they were not hills?"

Torakichi laughed and said, "What you say is wrong because you have simply read it in books. I don't know anything about books. I only tell you what I saw when I got near the moon. You may say that they are hills, but from close up I could see that there were two or three holes going right through the moon so that the stars were visible on the other side. There is no doubt at all that they are holes".²⁷

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 140-1.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

"Could you see what kind of substance the sun was made of?"

"The sun is much too hot to get very near, but when you fly high to take a good look at it you see lightning flashing among the flames. You can't see what the 'substance' of the sun is, but it looks more like fire than a solid thing".²⁸

For the landmarks of Buddhist geography, on the other hand, Torakichi showed a contempt no doubt highly gratifying to Hirata. When asked if he had ever seen Mt. Sumeru, the vast mountain which Buddhist cosmology declared to be the axis of the universe, he replied:

"Mt. Sumeru may have been written about in books, but the fact remains that it simply does not exist. Those who believe in it should just think for a moment that if it is really 80,000 miles high, its roots underground would have to be twice or three times as deep if it is to stand up at all. So even if one cannot see the summit of the mountain one ought to be able to find its foothills somewhere. But although my Master took me right up into the sky where all the stars could be seen, nowhere at all could we see Mt. Sumeru. The fact that my Master could not see it proves that it does not exist. Indeed, I am rather inclined to think that the world must be round. The reason is that if you go a long way to the west, you find that you are coming back from the east...."²⁹

Some of the most interesting passages in *Senkyô Ibun* are those in which Hirata and his friends tell various strange stories which have come to their notice and ask Torakichi if he can in any way explain them. One day Mr. Kurahashi, one of the circle, told the following sinister tale, which contains at the beginning a hint of our theme of supernatural kidnapping.

"Not long ago a young samurai was lured away by a strange priest, who took him to many places, far and near. When he got back he related that in the course of his travels the following incident had taken place. He and the priest had been looking round the shrine of Atagosan at Shiba in Edo,

28. Ibid., p. 173.

29. Ibid., p. 166.

when they encountered a strange looking warrior with half a dozen retainers attending him, who greeted the priest like a long lost friend. When their salutations were over the warrior said, "You remember that long standing grudge of mine? You can congratulate me now, for the time has at last come when I can avenge myself". The priest asked what had occurred to make his revenge possible, and the warrior answered,

"The family I hated have always until now employed a guardian priest in a certain temple to recite prayers and spells to ward off my curses. But now the temple has entrusted this task to a crippled priest whose prayers have no efficacy. So here is my opportunity for revenge".

The priest answered, "Your resentment is perfectly justified, but after all the offence against your family took place many years ago, so why not forget your sinful anger and let things rest in peace".

The warrior turned pale and said, "Not for a single instant can I forget my hatred against those who destroyed my house. How could I live without avenging myself?"

The priest remonstrated with him many times, but he refused to listen and they parted with angry looks.

"Who is that warrior?" asked the young samurai.

"His name is Ryûzôji Takakage", replied the priest. "This matter is of great concern to a particular family, and we must see to it at once". They thereupon made their way to a certain temple, and said to the monk who answered the door,

"It is disgraceful and scandalous that you should have appointed a crippled priest to recite the protective prayers for such-and-such a family. Tell them to have him changed at once". They were turning to leave when the monk asked in astonishment who the distinguished visitor might be. "Do what I say and never mind my name", the priest replied as he walked away.

"Now what I can't understand", Mr. Kurahashi concluded, "is how these ancient people can still be alive. Could this story be true?"

Mr. Kurahashi's doubts about the truth of the story might well be justified, since the destruction of the house of Ryûzôji had taken place in the mid 16th century, some 250 years previously. Torakichi answered,

“Oh yes, there are any number of such ancient people still alive in the Other World. I didn’t know who they all were, but my Master told me that the ancestor of the Shogun, for example, Tokugawa Ieyasu, was still alive just as before, and so were lots of others such as Yoshitsune and Tametomo”.³⁰

Among the tales recounted to Torakichi for his comments and criticism were a number of apparently authentic cases of *kamigakushi*. The following example contains many motifs already familiar to us.

“On December 27th 1814,” Mr. Kurahashi began, “a boy of fourteen who was serving in the Shôkeiji temple at Ikenohata went out to a nearby shop to buy some starch. There he met a stranger, who several times before had been seen with him. The man said to him, “Don’t work any longer in that temple. Go back and tell them you are leaving”.

“But I ought to buy the starch and leave it at the temple before I go”, the boy said.

“Just leave the money in the shop and tell them to deliver it. Come away with me at once”, the stranger replied.

The boy obeyed him and they flew up into the sky. In a trice they had arrived at the Hakozaki Hachiman shrine in Tsukushi, and picked up some of the beans which were being ritually scattered there. Then they flew on and on, the boy knew not how many leagues, until they came down on what looked like a stone wall. “This is the famous Great Wall of China”, the stranger said. “We have come rather a long way but I thought I would like to show it to you”.

They flew on again until they arrived at another region where it was very cold, where the sun could be seen all the time and where there was a beautiful and majestic castle. The boy saw that the people of this country looked just like Japanese, and had rows of shops just as in Japan. The money they used was also the same as Japanese coins. The stranger took him into a palace, where five lords were seated behind a hanging screen. Some were old and some young, but all were Japanese and wearing Court dress.

“Do you intend to stay here?” they asked. “Or do you want to go home?” The boy replied that he would like to go

30. Ibid., p. 73.

home, but the stranger who had brought him said, "Don't say that. You must stay here".

The lords replied, "It is no use making him stay here if he does not want to. We will send him home in about four or five days".

They gave him some cakes to eat which tasted just like the cakes in Japan. They then told him, "There are eight lords altogether here, but three happen to be away in Japan. We live here for a special reason".

The boy was then taken to a kind of communal room where there were many people who seemed also to have been recently brought to the place. During the four or five days that he was there he noticed that these people would every day press round lumps of red hot iron against their bodies, murmuring spells the while, without seeming ever to be burnt. Then they would boil water in a great cauldron, again murmuring spells, and put several of their number into the boiling water, clamping the lid down. But again no one ever seemed to feel the heat. This happened every day.

On New Year's Day someone came to the boy and told him that he was to be sent back home. About noon he was summoned before the five lords who said to him, "Today we are sending you back to Japan". They called half a dozen strangers and ordered them to take the boy home, carrying out various commissions on the way. They gave them an instrument which looked like a large ball of gold or brass with a revolving needle attached to it like a magnet which was apparently to show them the right direction. Then they all rose up into the sky. I was told that this was an instrument for helping those who are inexperienced in flying. Having accomplished various commissions on the way in a north easterly direction, they finally came to the sky over Japan.

The strangers then deposited him on the roof of the Kompira temple in the Inari shrine at Itadachô, saying, "An uncle of yours lives quite near here, so he'll soon be along to fetch you". They then took their departure.

When the people living in the street saw the boy on the roof of the Kompira temple, they lifted him down and informed his uncle. For two or three days the boy lay unconscious. When at length he awoke and they asked what had happened to him, he told them this story.

"Did your Master ever take you to a place like this one?"

concluded Mr. Kurahashi, adding that in his opinion it must have lain somewhere far beyond the Great Wall of China, probably in the far depths of Tartary or Siberia.

Torakichi replied, "I know all about this story as I stayed in the Shôkeiji temple myself for some time. No, I have never been to a place of that description, though I do remember once looking down from the sky on somewhere with a very high bank which may well have been the Great Wall of China".³¹

On another occasion, Hirata records, he and his friends were discussing the question of polluted fire, and how the Shinto gods abhorred such fire. They especially hate 'birth fire' and consequently food cooked in a house where there has recently been a birth is unclean. Torakichi who happened to be listening to this conversation asked if they had ever seen a thing called a *mametsuma*. "No", they replied. "What is it?"

"It is an unclean thing which appears at the time of a birth", Torakichi replied. "It is made from placenta, and will bewitch a man all his life. It is particularly harmful to small children. It takes the shape of a tiny man, about four or five inches high, wearing a helmet and armour and girt with a sword. It holds a spear and halberd and rides a tiny horse. Sometimes a whole crowd of them appear and fight with each other and it is great fun to hear the sounds of their swords clashing and to see their helmets and armour flashing and glinting just like those of real men. They have various tricks like this by which they tease and torment children, and if you try to drive them away they will vanish, leaving blood on the floor of the room. I used to see them quite often, so I asked my Master what sort of creature they were. He told me they were called *mametsuma* and were made of placenta and other unclean birth things. He warned me that if you store away these polluted things you must always put in with them some polished rice, which will make them powerless".

Hirata was much impressed with this information and commented:

"This story of the *mametsuma* struck me as very strange

31 Ibid., p. 167-9.

indeed, and reminded me of something I had read in one of those old books of tales. In the *Konjaku Monogatari* there is a story of a man who went to stay a night in an empty house in order to avoid an unlucky direction (*katatagae*), taking with him his small baby. The empty house, unbeknown to him, was haunted. At about midnight when the wet nurse got up to feed the child, she saw the rattan door open a crack. What should come in but eighteen tiny men about five inches high, wearing court dress and riding on horses. They were just approaching the child's bed, when the nurse in terror seized a handful of rice and flung it at them. At once they vanished. Afterwards they discovered that each grain of rice was covered with blood. So always one should keep some rice at hand if one has a child in the house. So runs the old story".

Hirata adds that although he had understood the efficacy of scattering rice from ancient books such as the *Engishiki*, it was from Torakichi that he first understood the meaning of the tiny figures in the story.³²

"Have you ever seen a dragon?" they asked the boy.

"I have never actually seen a large live dragon, but I have often seen trailing black clouds with flames bursting from them like a great thick tail. I have never seen a dragon soaring up into a cloudless sky, as they say one can. But talking of dragons, I remember a strange adventure I once had when I was in the Other World. I was collecting pebbles on a river bank, when suddenly a little snake, smaller than an adder with a red tummy, came out from somewhere and started to lick my finger. I watched it for a minute or two thinking how funny it was, when I noticed that it seemed to be swallowing

32. Ibid., pp. 96-8. The story Hirata quotes from the *Konjaku Monogatari* is the third in maki 17. *Katatagae* was a device adopted by those who wished to travel in a direction which, owing to the complicated directional taboos of the day was temporarily 'closed'. If, for example one wished to travel south, and the south was temporarily 'closed', one could travel to a point south-east or south-west, stay the night there, and the next day proceed to one's destination in a south-west or south-easterly direction. A full account is given by Bernard Frank, *Kataimi et Katatagae. Étude sur les Interdits de direction à l'époque Heian*. Bulletin de la Maison Franco-Japonaise, Tokyo 1958.

my finger and trying to pull me into the river. Rather frightened and disgusted I seized its head, tore open its jaws and threw it into the river. At once great waves got up, the river swirled into a waterspout and rain started to pelt down. It was all very frightening and I rushed back to tell people what had happened. They all said it must have been a dragon”.

“Do you know anything about the thunder-beast, which flies through the clouds when it thunders and then falls down from the sky with the lightning?”

“Yes, it lives in various mountains, Tsukubayama and others, and looks rather like a tapir, with fur striped like a tiger's. Some are black and a few are white. It is very fierce and strong, and for some reason loves clouds in hot weather, riding on top of them when it thunders and falling down with the lightning. If you fly up really high, right above the clouds and the thunder, it is a wonderful sight to see the thunder crashing about, and the thunder-beast flying along below you. In places where a white thunder-beast has fallen, you sometimes find some stuff called thunder dung, but I am not sure exactly what this is”.³³

The character and habits of Torakichi's *tengu* Master was of course a matter for serious investigation, and the scholars asked many questions about him. Like other *tengu*, he seemed to have been gifted with superior skills in swordsmanship, strategy and magic, and with supernatural knowledge of herbs, of the nature of the gods and the correct manner of worshipping them. But unlike most other *tengu*, he seems to have been a benevolent being, concerned with the welfare of humanity and the prosperity of correct Shinto doctrines. He was hostile to Buddhism, declaring that popular Bodhisattvas such as Kannon and Jizō did not exist. He made use nevertheless of some of the magical practices of esoteric Buddhism which had been absorbed into the folk religion of Japan.

“Did your Master ever practice Zen meditation?” they asked Torakichi. “Or recite spells and perform mudras?”

“He never practised Zen meditation as such”, Torakichi replied, “But when he had a problem on his mind he would often sit muttering a spell with his legs crossed and his eyes shut and his hands in the *nai* mudra”.³⁴

33. Ibid., p. 175.

34. Ibid., p. 61.

He could make himself invisible at will to all save animals and birds. He was also, Torakichi related, in the habit of giving lectures on astronomy and military science, and recitations of long allegorical tales. "These lectures usually went on from ten in the morning until midnight, when they lit torches. About sixty or seventy people used to come from various mountains to listen to him, sometimes as many as a hundred and fifty...He never used a book or a reading stand. He simply recited by heart with a desk in front of him. I am not sure what the particular clothes he wore were called. They were wide trousers and sleeves so huge that he had to tie them behind him, white with a pattern of lattice stripes in red and blue. He was a wonderfully elegant and majestic figure, with the strings of his cap dangling down in front and a small baton in his hand with which he would beat time on the desk in front of him as he talked".³⁵

Before he formally accepted Torakichi as his pupil he required the boy to undergo a severe initiatory ordeal of a hundred days' complete fast.

"This discipline was very difficult. I got so terribly hungry after four or five days that I secretly ate a riceball that someone gave me. But for this I was severely punished. I was kicked down to the bottom of the mountain seven times, and then made to start the discipline all over again tied up to a tree. Many days passed thus without my knowing the difference between night and day. Often I was desperately hungry, and if I saw a chestnut fall in front of me drops of sweat would break out on my forehead. But tied to the tree I was helpless. After some time in this state I felt as though I were dead, and when I came to myself again I found that the hundred days were up. I didn't really feel as though I had fasted for more than a week, and even now I don't understand how a hundred days could have gone by so quickly. What is even more strange is that my Master had pulled out the nail of my little finger before I started the discipline as a pledge that I would do my best. I remember clearly how excruciatingly painful it was. But when I regained consciousness at the end of the hundred days, there was my nail back again just as before...."

"You must have been very tired by the time you finished your hundred days fast", they said sympathetically. "How did

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 95, 100-102.

you feel?"

"My whole body was completely drained of moisture. I was skin and bone, and so weak that I could scarcely move. I tried to walk, but I couldn't even stand up. I couldn't hold anything in my hands, and when I tried to speak my tongue wouldn't move. I was quite deaf too. It may have been a dream, but during the time that I was asleep for so many days I seem to remember someone coming from time to time and putting something into my mouth for me to eat. When I woke up after this long time asleep I remembered nothing about the real world. It was just as though I had begun a new life with another mind. When I am here in this world I can remember everything that has happened to me here in the past. But when I am there, I forget what happened *here* just as though it were a dream. And when I come back here, everything *there* seems like a dream".³⁶

Tengu are usually credited with extraordinary skills of various kinds, notably swordsmanship. Torakichi's Master was no exception. The boy acknowledged having received lessons in swordsmanship, stone throwing and the use of the stick on a special training ground on Mt. Kaba. "What were these lessons like?" he was eagerly asked.

"In the swordsmanship lessons we first had to take a mouthful of beans, spit them out one by one and cut them down with the sword in mid air. When we had done this with a thousand beans we had to spit them out two by two, and cut *them* down with the sword. Then we had to spit them out three by three and four by four, and cut them down with both swords. When we had got thoroughly skilled in this we went on to contests with real swords, wearing helmet and armour".³⁷

Magical powers were also traditionally attributed to the *tengu*, so that spells were another subject of great interest. The scholars eagerly asked Torakichi if he knew a spell for bringing out the moon on dark nights, for conceiving a child, for keeping off demons and wild beasts while travelling in the depths of the mountains.

One evening when a number of people had gathered in Hirata's house, someone said he had heard that there was magic power in old poems, and that they could be used as spells. Torakichi remarked,

36. Ibid., p. 148.

37. Ibid., pp. 142-3.

“The Hitomaro poem in the *Hyakunin Isshu* is often used as a spell by the *Yamabushi*. I tried it once myself. I got someone to tie my hands together and then recited

*Honobono to makoto Akashi no kami naraba
Ima koso yurume Hitomaru no uta.*

And at once my hands became untied. Then to stop a fire you can recite,

*Honobono to makoto Akashi no kami naraba
Ima koso yameyo Hitomaru no uta.*

This stops both fires and burns.”³⁸

They were also interested in the efficacy of various spells still commonly practised in Japan as part of the folk religion. “What do you think of the feats of the *Kuchiyose-ichiko*, the women who call down departed spirits?” they asked him.

“Their rites are evil black ones of the dog spirit *inugami*. Once when I was living on the mountain and wandering round with a couple of friends, we went into a house where they had invited an *ichiko*. About forty or fifty people were gathered there, asking her questions and weeping as they listened to her replies. From the spot nearby where we were watching I noticed that she had beside her a box on which she seemed to set great store. I asked to look at it, but at once she grew very angry. A quarrel developed, and in the midst of the noise the box got stepped on and broken. Out rolled the skull of a dog with its lower jaw missing. After the quarrel had quietened down, the master of the house noticed the skull, exclaimed at finding such a disgusting thing in his house and kicked it outside. The *ichiko* wept and cried, the old men and women who had wept so much at the *ichiko's* recital, left the house in terror, while the younger people, who had also been in tears, now seized the skull and smashed it to bits. It was all very amusing.

Well, afterwards I asked why the *ichiko* should have had a dog's skull, and was told that she must have practised the *inugami* rite. For this you take a large white dog, as strong as possible, dig a hole and bury it so that only its head is above the

38. *Ibid.*, p. 80. This poem by Hitomaro in fact does not appear in the *Hyakunin Isshu*, but in the *Kokinshû*.

ground. Then about three feet away from its nose you put some fish and rice, so that the dog smells the food, makes frantic efforts to eat it but in vain. After a few days all the vitality and energy in the dog's body go to its head, and you will see blood gushing from its eyes and nose. Then you tell it that if it will serve you well and obey all your behests you will worship it as a god and give it food every day. Then you cut off its head and without telling anyone you bury it at a crossroads. Let people walk over it for a hundred days, then dig it up and seal it into a box. The *ichiko* worship it every day and when they come to deliver their so-called messages from dead people what really happens is that the dog's spirit goes into people's houses, smells out the situation there and reports on it. So that when the *ichiko* gabbles out her message supposed to come from dead spirits everyone is moved to tears".³⁹

Remedies and cures for various bodily complaints of a herbal or magical kind formed a substantial proportion of the scholars' questions. Torakichi was asked if he knew a good cure for consumption, colic, eye disease, epilepsy, dog bites and thorns stuck in the throat. Apparently unhesitatingly he offered a detailed prescription, usually in terms of the traditional Chinese *materia medica*—herbs, snakes and shellfish roasted black, ground to powder and swallowed.

"A young man I know who had syphilis rather badly has now

39. Ibid., pp. 177-8. The cruel rites of dog sorcery are described with minor variations in so many places that it is clear that Torakichi's account was common knowledge at the time. Hirata's own master, the great Shinto scholar Motoori Norinaga, described the rite as follows: A hungry dog is tied up in sight of food he is not allowed to eat. When his desire is keenest, his head is cut off and at once flies to seize the food. The head is put into a vessel and worshipped. A serpent or weasel will do as well". Quoted by Aston in his *Shinto*, p. 332.

De Visser in chapter 4 of his "Dog and Cat in Japanese Superstition" *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, Vol. 37, 1909, gives numerous references to dog sorcery. It seems to be connected with the *ku* magic of China, which de Groot in his *Religious System of China*, Vol. 5, Chapter 3, p. 826, describes as "Sorcery by means of small reptiles and insects", which were left in a pot to devour each other, "the last surviving creature, after having swallowed all the others and thus appropriated their venomous qualities, then being employed as an instrument of evil". The reptiles may apparently (p. 846) do their work in the shape of another animal, for example a dog. There was once a man who kept 'dog *ku*', out of whose house would rush seven large yellow dogs, barking at unwelcome visitors, most of whom subsequently died.

pretty well got over it except that he still has a bad cough. Various doctors have prescribed for him, but nothing seems to do him any good. Can you suggest a remedy?"

"Chop up some green pine needles and roast them till they are black. Then cook them with mustard seed and bean curd. This is very good for all coughs".⁴⁰

"Someone told me the other day that a woman in a mountain village had a snake crawl up her private parts while she was asleep. It would not come out, and in the end she died".

"When that happens", the boy replied, "all you need to do is take half a pint of dark soy sauce, add five tablespoonfulls of rice wine, bring to the boil and drink. The snake will come out at once".⁴¹

"I am rather bothered by the hairs of my nose growing so long that they protrude outside my nostrils. I notice that some people pull them out with tweezers. Ought one to do this?"

"My Master always used to say that long nose hairs are a sign of longevity, and never ought on any account to be pulled out. His own nose hairs were so long that they got mixed up with his beard, and he always took the greatest care of them".⁴²

There were also questions about the correct way of performing various religious rites, all of which the boy seems to have answered with remarkable fluency.

"When performing the *hikime* dance, what costume should one wear, and how are the bow and arrow used?"

"A sleeveless jacket of coarse light yellowish green linen, and trousers of a crab-eye pattern tucked up. The bow should be of mulberry wood, and the arrows of lespedesa feathered with three pheasant feathers. In the course of the dance one should face the four corners in turn and shoot the arrows, shouting loudly "Eiya eiya".⁴³

Everyday life in the Other World, the food, clothing and houses of Torakichi's Master and the other supernatural beings with whom he associated, were naturally of great interest. "Did

40. Ibid., p.

41. Ibid., p. 68.

42. Ibid., p. 65.

43. Ibid., p. 67. The arrow called *hikime* was a blunt headed one with several holes drilled in it so as to make a loud whistling sound as it flew through the air. The noise was thought to be frightening to demons, and the arrow was hence used in various demon quelling rites. Cf. *Heike Monogatari*, maki 5, "Mokke".

your Master wear a nightgown when he was asleep?" they asked.

"Yes, he had a nightgown and quilts and a pillow. Sometimes he would sleep for ten or twenty days on end, snoring loudly".⁴⁴

"Are there any women in the land of *tengu*?"

"I don't know about other mountains, but certainly there were none on Iwamayama and Tsukubayama, as those mountains were closed to women. If anyone tried to climb them who had been contaminated by women, he would be sure to be badly hurt or even thrown back down the mountainside".

"Did your Master punish such people himself, or was it left to people like you?"

"Sometimes my Master would do it with his own hands, but usually he would order his subordinates to kick or push the climbers down".

"Was there any male homosexuality in the Other World?"

"I don't know about other mountains, but certainly there was none on ours".⁴⁵

"It is said that *tengu* often eat pine needles and various leaves such as the bamboo. Also that they sometimes catch fish and baby monkeys and cook and eat them. The 'tengu fires' which one sees in the mountains are in fact their cooking fires, made from burning sasa grass. Do *tengu* really eat such things?"

"Yes, they eat pine needles and leaves of various kinds, well steeped in salt and soy sauce, but not every day. They also eat fish and birds, but never monkeys. Not only, of course, because the gods are disgusted by those who eat four-legged animals, but also because the mountains belong to such animals and it is not right to eat them while living there".⁴⁶

Hirata was especially interested in the kind of food cooked and eaten by supernatural beings, and asked many questions on the subject.

"What kind of dishes used your Master to cook?"

"He would take some wild potato and grate it up with horse-radish, add seaweed, a little salt and a pinch of pepper. Then add dried gourd shavings to taste, and wrap in seaweed into little bundles. These he would fry in oil and serve. Then he would steep some leaves of the beefsteak plant overnight in salt, wrap them round the fruit of the same plant, also well salted,

44. Ibid., pp. 59, 157.

45. Ibid., p. 158.

46. Ibid., p. 63.

and fry in oil".⁴⁷

The conversations recorded in *Senkyô Ibun* take us to the end of the year 1820. Thereafter, for the eight more years that he kept the boy in his house, Hirata's references to Torakichi are few and brief. In his diary for the year 1821 he noted that Torakichi had amazed everyone by demonstrating the techniques of the sword, spear, bow and gun which he had learnt from his *tengu* master. Another entry in the same year noted that Torakichi had embarked on a hundred days' austerity of a mysterious kind, and that he had accompanied two of Hirata's disciples on a climb of Mt. Asama.

The laconic references continue until 1828 when they cease abruptly. It seems that in that year, much to Hirata's mortification, Torakichi became a Buddhist priest. Thereafter, like many 'miraculous boys', he disappeared into complete obscurity.⁴⁸

We shall never know how much of his story was deliberate fabrication, how much genuine vision, how much subsequently added by Hirata. *Senkyô Ibun* certainly differs in several ways from the other examples of the *kamigakushi* theme which we noted earlier. Torakichi's *tengu* Master is not the evil, harpy-like creature of the earlier stories, but an amiable and erudite figure who entertained and instructed the boy. Torakichi moreover, was not an unwilling slave or catamite to his Master, but a willing apprentice and initiated pupil. His journey to the Other World mountain could scarcely be described as a forcible abduction. It was a voluntary translation, from which he could return home any time he pleased. In the earlier literary stories we noted two contrasting figures—the evil kidnapper and the benign spirit guide. Torakichi's *tengu* Master seems to pertain more to the latter than to the former.

Torakichi's tale is thus not an entirely representative example of our theme. It lacks also something of the visionary, fantastical quality of the earlier tales. There is something curiously matter of fact about Torakichi's detailed description of the Other World on Mt. Iwama which will disappoint those accustomed to the enchantments of Celtic fairylands. There is no fairy food with its nameless terrors, no supernatural lapse of time, no perils of the passage. Iwamayama was not a misty mountain, visible only to saints and heroes, nor a hollow hill

47. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

48. Watanabe, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-200.

which rose up on pillars on certain indeterminate nights of the year. It was a well known landmark on the map of Hitachi province, visible and accessible to any traveller.

For this disenchantment we should perhaps in some measure blame Hirata, for whom the story in all its matter of factness was undoubtedly deeply satisfying. The very quality of familiarity, of closeness to the human, was welcome to him as confirming his theory that the afterworld was not fraught with dark and fearful terrors, but a pleasant replica of our own. We should not forget, however, that had it not been for his association with the celebrated scholar Torakichi's story would have passed into oblivion as completely as has the rest of his life. As it is, he has left us not only one of the curiosities of literature, but also the most remarkable and circumstantial of any of the accounts, so curiously frequent throughout the centuries, of supernatural abductions to the Other World.