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A Female Shaman's Mind and Body, and Possession

Abstract:

In this paper two types of initiation processes for female shamans (*fujo* 巫女) are introduced and analyzed. The first is one for a blind woman. After training under a master she has to undergo a ritual called *kamitsuke* 神憑け. During this ritual she becomes possessed by a divine spirit. It means that she encounters her possessing spirit by means of a traditional and culturally established device. By this process she not only becomes the bride of a male spirit, she also becomes a “woman” and is established as a full member of society. For her, therefore, this ritual has the double significance of an initiation both as a shaman and as an adult woman. The other process is that of a woman with normal eyesight. Such a woman does not have to undergo a set ritual. On her way to becoming a shaman she experiences psychosomatic disturbances and states of spiritual exaltation due to being possessed by various spirits. In the process she establishes the spiritual authority of her possessing spirit. By this authority she grows out of the household and local society she married into and, while not completely relinquishing her role as housewife, she builds her religious authority and religious world in the midst of her everyday world.

Keywords: medium (*miko*)—spirit possession—possession career—shamanism—altered states of consciousness

YANAGITA KUNIO can possibly be considered the first Japanese scholar to try his hand at the study of female shamans.* In *Fujokō* 巫女考, a work he wrote from 1913 to 1914 (1990) he identified two kinds of female shamans: “shrine shamans” (*jinja miiko* 神社巫女) who dress in a white kimono and red hakama, dance while holding round bells, and take part in the *yudate* 湯立て ritual; and “*kuchiyose* shamans” 口寄せ巫女 who call the spirits of the dead as well as of living people and allow them to speak. With the exception of his allocating shamans to these two categories, both of which date back to the same origins, Yanagita’s theory on female shamans was not well acclaimed. His theoretical points, however, were taken up by later scholars, the first being Nakayama Tarō (1930) who studied the history of female shamans by using a large amount of historical material.

YANAGITA KUNIO’S THEORY ON FEMALE SHAMANS

In his work “The Sister’s Power” (*Imo no chikara* 妹の力), written in 1925, YANAGITA (1990) dropped the category of shrine shamans and began to distinguish now between the “professional shamans” (being the same as the *kuchiyose* shamans mentioned earlier) and a new category which he calls *kami uba* 神姥. As for the characteristics that distinguish the two from one another he mentions “ascetic training and tradition” for the former and “some kind of omen,” “spiritual power,” or “divine possession” for the latter. “The bearers of our people’s characteristic religious beliefs” have diverged into these two categories of female shamans, each category developing in a different way. Yanagita paid special attention to the second category, that of the *kami uba*, because he believed that important religious activities, such as cult worship and invocations, fell under the authority of an “outstanding woman” who had been chosen as the “most sagacious” from among the women of the household.

Furthermore, he mentions the founder of Tenrikyō, Nakayama Miki, and the founder of Ōmotokyō, Deguchi Nao, who both in their time met with surprising success, as coming from the tradition of *kami uba*. He writes

that the “inclination [*shūsei* 習性] of women to become possessed by spirits” continues unbroken since ancient times, that belief in a “woman’s power,” that is, a woman’s spiritual power, was widespread, and that innumerable tales about women communicating with deities, as in the case of the two founders, were transmitted as if they were factual. He finally writes that “the roots of this mystery are several thousand years old” (YANAGITA 1990, 26).

In this way Yanagita in fact differentiated female shamans into three types: shrine shamans, *kuchiyose* shamans, and *kami uba*. Or it might alternatively be said that he established two types of *kuchiyose* shaman because he lumped together those who call the spirits of dead or living persons with those who call divine spirits *kami uba*. When we consider this in relation to the female shamans of northern Japan, then the blind women shamans who are called *itako*, *ogamisama*, or *waka* constitute the first of these types and the female shamans with normal eyesight who are called *kamisama* the second. Both types roughly correspond to the characteristics Yanagita mentions of the “professional female shaman” and the “*kami uba*.” However, the first type may also perform a “*kami oroshi*” 神降ろし or a “spring invocation,” which means that she calls forth a deity or engages in divination. Or it may be expected that a deity descends upon the shaman and manifests through her the “power of the spirits.” At any rate, although it can be said that Yanagita’s classification has been largely forgotten, it is without doubt still of great significance.

With modesty and a degree of self-ridicule, Yanagita says that “the important folklore hardly amounts to a single red bean in a dish of red glutinous rice (*sekihan*)” because he did not do fieldwork relating to female shamans (YANAGITA 1990, 12), but rather worked through a mass of written historical sources to develop a theory of female shamans, and engaged himself in historical folklore research about them. However, in his theory he postulated that women’s “propensity to be easily moved,” and their “disposition to be possessed by spirits demonstrate from early on unusual psychological activities and an ability to talk of mysteries,” and that a woman’s general physiological or emotional disposition and character were the reasons for her becoming a shaman. But when he noted “that a woman’s power was to be avoided and feared,” he drew this conclusion without first discussing the question of why a woman herself or pollution by her blood were to be avoided. He ends up going around in circles, expressing the character of women in terms of a “woman’s power” or the “sister’s power” (YANAGITA 1990, 25).

Yanagita relied on historical material of a broad scope in order to develop his theory of female shamans, but the basis of this theory is pervaded by a premodern psychological point of view and the assumption that the psy-

chological characteristics peculiar to women continued to exist unconditionally and without change from antiquity to modern times. As a result, he failed to consider what he himself calls the “origin of divine possession” in relation to women’s social and cultural context.

Yanagita has certainly brought to light the process of historical changes in the religious and cultural position of female shamans from antiquity to premodern and modern times. He was further of the opinion that the founders of new religions, such as Nakayama Miki and Deguchi Nao, continued the line of the female shamans of antiquity. Finally, in the introduction to his *Imo no chikara*, published in 1940—the year following the outbreak of the second World War—he explains that the time for women to revive the “power of the sister,” a figure imbued with sagaciousness (*sakashisa*) and noble-mindedness (*kedakasa*), has arrived, and that “our ‘sister’s power’ is again being invoked” (YANAGITA 1990, 13). However, he does not investigate what sort of conditions female shamans and women in general have experienced nor what their actual historical situation has been. In his discourse Yanagita extols by means of a history of the female shamans the “power of the woman” that was hidden in women from the earliest times. By doing so, he obscures the historical reality of the women and praises them solely as those who through their “woman’s power” would dedicate themselves to their men, their households, and the state.

INTERPRETATION OF “DIVINE POSSESSION” (*KAMITSUKI*)

In *Imo no chikara* Yanagita introduces two cases as examples of the process whereby divine possession occurs. One is an account he heard in Fukushima Prefecture from a person knowledgeable about the old ways who presented the story as “recent information.” According to this story, once every thirty or forty years a “strange person” (*ijin* 異人) would appear whose magic and prophecy would never fail. This strange person, “after some weak preliminary portents, suddenly exhibits signs of being possessed and jumps onto the rooftop. Sitting on the end of the ridge like one who straddles a horse, the person grasps the beam, grips and shakes it with such force that even a large storehouse trembles wildly” (YANAGITA 1990, 30). This is one standard way for someone to become recognized as a “strange person.”

Another way is introduced in the case of the *kami uba* mentioned above. A woman who is about to manifest spiritual power begins to eat less, her eyes become more penetrating, she may be inclined to lock herself up in the *nando* 納戸,¹ and begins to utter strange things. Such a woman, who tends to shut herself out of ordinary life, demonstrates an inclination to think intensely in trying to get to the bottom of matters or when she accomplishes some miraculous feat. Something that may happen at the time before or

after childbirth when her body undergoes significant changes, and then she is acknowledged as being a *kami uba*. Her family, especially men like her husband or elder brother, do not consider her to be in an abnormal state of mind nor to have fallen into neurosis as medical theory might suggest. Rather, they attribute a “mysterious significance” to the changes she has experienced and become her “first true believers” as YANAGITA puts it (1990, 31).

Yanagita heard of the first case from local people. Although he may have somewhat dramatized the account, it still reflects the locals’ image of a “divinely possessed” person. Such a person suddenly displays the looks of somebody overcome by a *kami*, exhibits behavior that astonishes other people, and manifests spiritual powers. From facial expressions and behavior, aspects that can be observed with one’s eyes, the manifestation of spiritual power is inferred and the individual acknowledged as a “strange person.” According to common opinion, in order to become real the phenomenon of spiritual power has to manifest itself concretely in a form that is visible to the eyes.

For the second case Yanagita relies on reports he had heard about *kami uba* while traveling in Iwate Prefecture in the Tōhoku region. Here, it can be said, Yanagita reveals his own theoretical point of view concerning female shamans. First, although it may be going too far to call it abnormal, such a person’s behavior deviates from the norm. This is a case of “weak portent” as mentioned above. Then, speech behavior grows increasingly strange until spiritual power finally reveals itself. Up to this point behavior is about the same as in the first case. As reasons for this case he adduces personal character and physical indisposition.

When Yanagita points out the women’s “propensity to be easily impressed” and their “propensity to become possessed by spirits” as a “function of their abnormal psychology” (YANAGITA 1990, 25), he ends up claiming the women’s supposedly inborn special psychological character and disposition as the basis for the revelation of spiritual power. Without noticing it he assumes the position of premodern psychologism which reduces phenomena that cannot be understood to phenomena of depth-psychology.

Yanagita tends to unduly single out pregnancy and childbirth as examples of “women’s special physiology” and fixate women as “childbearing women.” He often completely disregards the historical development of a religious concept, as for example when he says that women are considered to be polluted (*kegare*) by the blood of childbirth and menstruation, because “the power of an invisible spirit adheres to a woman.” After all, women were not the only ones to become shamans. As the dual expression *miko/kannagi* suggests, there have also existed a significant number of male *miko* since

antiquity. Yet Yanagita's drawing attention to the fact that "divine possession" occurs at a time of "change in a person's physical condition" is important, no matter whether such a change occurs before or after giving birth, or at any other time. It is now important to clarify in detail what effect all this has on a person's mind and body and to what behavior it may lead.

That Yanagita considered spiritual power to be acknowledged when it is accepted as such by the people is not the only important point he made. When he claimed that spiritual power is established and a *kami uba* is born when believers attribute to them a "mysterious meaning," he does not make the a priori and circular argument that a woman is a *kami uba* because she possesses spiritual power. It can rather be said that he offers a hermeneutics of possession phenomena because he says that spiritual power is established by means of the appraisal that has its origin within the relationship between a *kami uba* and her believers. With this he offers a theoretical point of view that also makes sense today.

If a woman proclaimed herself to be a *kami uba* and to possess spiritual power but there were no people who acknowledged her as such, she would be considered nothing other than a person "possessed by a *mono*," or an abnormal person, which means that in medical terms she would be just a mental patient (a "crazy person" in the eyes of the people). If the *mono* were judged to be an evil spirit bringing misfortune, rites would be applied to expel that evil spirit. However, if the "mystical meaning" of being a miracle-working *kami* were attributed to the *mono*, its bearer would be revered as a *kami uba*. There are several levels of interpretation and appraisal for what is meant by "*tsuki*" (to possess), that is, by possession.

However, to say that it was the elder brother or husband, the "menfolk of a family," who attributed such a "mystical meaning" indicates that Yanagita is overly taken by his own idea that since great antiquity there has been a "religious bond between brothers and sisters" in the sense that (younger) sisters by their spiritual power protect their (elder) brothers and their households. If somebody shows unusual behavior, be it a man or a woman, the members of the family do not give it a "mystical meaning," but often see it as a case of "craziness" or mental illness. In ancient times, too, there were such terms as "*tabure*" or "*mono gurui*," 物狂い and possession by a *mono* (*mono tsuki* 物憑き), which was not acknowledged as possession by a *kami* (*kami tsuki*), and carried no "mystical meaning."

Yanagita ventured several highly suggestive opinions concerning the occurrence of "*kami tsuki*," but they suffer from certain insufficiencies. He had summoned an *itako*, a "professional female shaman who depends on training and oral transmission," to come to Tokyo where he met her and witnessed a *kuchiyose*, but it is assumed that he never met with a "*kami uba*."

This may be one of the reasons for his opinions. In any case, it is most important to clarify what “*kami tsuki*” or “*mono tsuki*” really are. It is also necessary to investigate the process whereby a “*kami tsuki*” occurs and a woman comes to be considered a “*kami uba*” within her social and cultural context, and not simply attribute such tendencies to a “special physiology of women” or a “propensity to become possessed by spirits.” For that purpose it is necessary to meet with a *kami uba* and listen to what she has to say.

THE PROCESS OF BECOMING A FEMALE SHAMAN

Possession and types of female shamans (fujo)

What is it that determines the special character of religious practitioners such as *fujo*, mediums, spiritualists (*reinōsha* 靈能者), shamans, or of those that are generally called *kūōshi* 祈祷師 [religious curer], *sensei* 先生 [teacher], or *ogamiya* 拝み屋 [a person who specializes in invocations]? As students of shamanism like S. M. SHIROKOGOROFF (1982), I. M. LEWIS (1989), and E. BOURGUIGNON (1976) have pointed out, the distinctive characteristic of possession is to be spontaneous, autonomous, and intentional.

Is it possible for researchers to observe a state of possession and gain some sense of what it entails? Or is possession something only the experiencing subject can truly comprehend? Some researchers maintain that during possession the ordinary state of one’s mind and body changes into a new state, one of altered consciousness or trance. However, among the religious practitioners that are referred to as *fujo*, there are some who do not exhibit a conspicuous psychosomatic change when they perform such religious rituals as invocations or exorcisms. If that is the case, can these people truly be considered *fujo*, spirit mediums, or shamans?

First, the belief of the subject has to be probed, followed by the belief of and appraisal by the clients and the public. Is it not possible that a person can be considered a *fujo* no matter whether a noticeable change in the person’s state of mind and body occurs, provided there is a belief that some deity or divine spirit, some buddha or bodhisattva, or the spirit of a deceased person—here I will call all of these supernatural beings *kami*—may spontaneously possess or intentionally be made to possess a person, and that religious rituals are performed by the spiritual authority and power of these *kami*? I contend that the concept of possession is based on a belief that is socially constructed through the interaction between the religious practitioners themselves and their clients, as well as people around them.

On a national level, religious specialists who perform rituals while being possessed by some *kami* are numerous, although they may be called by various names depending on the locality. These people are not only women,

there are also men among them. Even so, I employ the term *fujo* (female shaman) here because I focus on examples of female religious practitioners.

In the Tōhoku region two types of *fujo* can be distinguished according to the process whereby they become *fujo*, and especially according to the standards by which they are socially acknowledged. One type consists of the *fujo* that are called *itaḱo* in Aomori Prefecture, *ogamisama* in Miyagi Prefecture, *onakama* in Yamagata Prefecture, and *waka* in Fukushima Prefecture. The other type encompasses the *fujo* that are called *ḱamisama* throughout the whole region of Tōhoku.

As a rule, the first type is a blind *fujo*, that is, a *hotoḱe oroshi* (one who can summon the spirit of a dead person), who performs *ḱuchiyose* and invocations, while the latter type is a *fujo* with normal eyesight who performs invocations and exorcisms. To express this distinction in the terms used in Miyagi Prefecture, in most areas it is often said that the matters of a *hotoḱe* (*hotoḱegoto*) are handled by an *ogamisama*, and those of a *kami* (*ḱamigoto*) by a *ḱamisama*. But the reality is often quite different. An *ogamisama*, too, may take care of *ḱamigoto*, and as a phenomenon of recent years a *ḱamisama* may perform a *hotoḱe oroshi*, although in a form that differs from that of the *ogamisama*.

Furthermore, none of the *fujo* having normal eyesight are called *ogamisama*, while some among the blind *fujo* are called *ḱamisama*. The specialty of this kind of *ḱamisama* is divination and invocations; they do not perform *hotoḱe oroshi*. After they lost their eyesight when they were already beyond their twenties they learned how to perform divination and incantations from their teachers.

It is possible to distinguish two types of *fujo* depending on whether they are blind or sighted. Yet a more relevant index is provided by the name used locally in referring to the *fujo*, by the kind of process they have to go through to become a *fujo*, by what distinctive *merḱmal*, and for what reason a *fujo* is acknowledged by the people and by other *fujo* (KAWAMURA 1991). In what follows I will provide a brief look at the initiation process through which the *fujo* of Miyagi Prefecture, that is *ogamisama* and *ḱamisama*, become shamans.

The initiation process of an ogamisama

All *ogamisama* are blind. No matter whether their blindness is total or only partial they suffer from physical discrimination mainly because they cannot be fully counted upon as members of the work force, and are socially categorized by the (derogatory) term *meḱura* (literally “dark eyes”). This social blindness is an indispensable prerequisite if one is to become an *ogamisama*. Not only the local society, but even the *ogamisama* themselves call their pro-

fession a “mekura’s business.” The practice of attributing the social position of *ogamisama* to a blind woman and accepting her in this way has become an institutionalized custom of local society.

The parents of a blind girl, either acting on their own initiative or heeding the counsel of their relatives or neighbors, arrange for her to become the apprentice of a master *ogamisama* so that in the future, when the parents are no longer around, their daughter will have a profession and can live as an *ichininmae*, a full member of society. Apprenticeship usually begins at the age of about ten, but the time varies depending on when the girl loses her eyesight. Virtually no one begins an apprenticeship after the age of twenty. *Ogamisama* say among themselves that the optimal time for beginning apprenticeship is “before one becomes a woman,” meaning before the first menstruation. Formerly, in prewar society, a girl was considered a “woman” after she had experienced her first menstruation. From that time on she was expected to leave her home for domestic service elsewhere or to participate in agricultural labor, and was regarded as having reached marriageable age.

That it is “best before one becomes a woman” to begin an apprenticeship means in the words of the *ogamisama* that an apprentice of that age “easily memorizes” the words of sutras and other ritual texts which she is asked to learn as part of her training. While she is still young her power to memorize and to recite from memory is good, and she is assumed to be better able to endure the ascetic exercises in the cold of winter and the chores she has to perform in the household of her master, all of this being part of her training. Another reason is that at this age she is said to “become easily possessed by a kami” during the initiation ritual called “*kamitsuke*” 神憑け (attaching of a kami), where she is reborn as a shaman (*fujo*) and which is held after her training has reached a preliminary conclusion.

In order to become an *ogamisama* this ritual of *kamitsuke* is of the greatest importance. If she does not undergo this ritual, she will never become an *ogamisama*. The ritual is generally performed four to five years after she begins her apprenticeship. It consists of a series of ascetic exercises and rites, namely exercises of prayer and fasting, the rite of *kamitsuke* itself, a feast, and certain exercises to thank her master (*reigyō* 礼行).

The person who is to undergo the ritual of *kamitsuke* is called *gyōja* 行者 (ascetic). She is obliged to perform prayer exercises for a period of one hundred days. During that time she has to repeat the words of sutras and rituals over and over again. Then she has to continue by undergoing one after another a series of fasting exercises, such as giving up the use of salt (*shiodachi* 塩断ち), the use of fire (*hidachi* 火断ち), and the use of cereals (*kokudachi* 穀断ち). Each of these exercises lasts for seven days. At the same time she has to undergo cold water ablutions (*mizugori* 水垢離) every morning, noon,

and evening. For this period a small hut (*gyōya* 行屋) for performing these exercises is built for her beside a well or a small creek that flows in front of the house. The *gyōja* who is to undergo the *kamitsuke* ritual is confined to the hut, has to avoid being seen or exposed to the sun, and has to strive to avoid any kind of pollution. The *gyōja* is isolated from the world of ordinary life and gradually raises the level of her purity by water ablution exercises and seclusion.

These fasting exercises conclude with the *kamitsuke* ritual on the last day, after the *gyōja* has performed close to a hundred water ablution exercises outdoors. People invited to the ritual include the line of disciples descending from the master to whom the *gyōja*'s own master once was apprenticed, the current master's relatives working in the same profession, and the *gyōja*'s own sister apprentices and aunt apprentices. In addition, the man married to the *ogamisama*, who is called *bosama* (he is a *mōsō* 盲僧, a blind Buddhist priest) is invited to perform the ritual. The *gyōja*'s parents and close relatives, too, gather, and with them come a number of close neighbors as onlookers. The *kamitsuke* ritual as such is performed as a secret rite assisted only by the companion *fujō* and *mōsō*, but part of the ritual is public and open to the local society.

Before proceeding with the ritual, the *gyōja* dons a white garment (called *oizuri* 笈摺), white coverings for the back of the hand (*tekko* 手甲), white leggings (*kyahan* 脚絆), and white *tabi*, so that she is all clad in white attire (*shiroshōzoku* 白装束). Sometimes she wraps her head with a white cloth and puts the cover of a straw bag for rice over it. It is said that this is the attire of a corpse. The *gyōja* then enters the room in the house of the master where the *kamitsuke* ceremony is to be held and kneels before the altar, approximately in the center of the room. The room itself is called *dōjō*. Kneeling in front of the *gyōja* is the *maegenja* who leads the ceremony. Behind her is the *ushirogenja*, and on either side the two *wakigenja*—the *higashigenja* 東驗者 to the east and the *nishigenja* 西驗者 to the west. Her master customarily acts as the *ushirogenja*. The *gyōja* sits on the lap of her master, who embraces her. In some cases the *gyōja* is supported on her back and two sides by straw bags of rice. Kneeling in a circle around the *gyōja* are her master's "sister" and "aunt" disciples, as well as the *mōsō*. Being clad in a corpse's attire and embraced by her master, the *gyōja* can be understood as undergoing a symbolic transition from a dead person to an embryo and being reborn.

During the *kamitsuke* a series of rites are performed, such as the playing of a bow string, the purification of the *dōjō* by exorcism with a wand of white paper streamers (*heisoku* 幣束), the singing of invocations to the deity, and

the pronouncing of an invitation to all deities of the whole nation to come and participate. Accompanied by the jangling sounds of ringed staffs (*shaku-jō*), bows (*yumi*), cymbals (*kane*), bells (*suzu*), and drums (*taiko*) the *fujo* and *mōsō* who had surrounded the *gyōja* now proceed to circumambulate the *dōjō*, repeatedly reciting together the Heart and Kannon Sutras in loud voices. This sometimes lasts more than two or three hours. Eventually in the midst of this commotion a *kami* comes to possess the *gyōja*. The *gyōja* announces by word of mouth the name of the *kami*, who from now on will be her *tsukigamisama* (possessing spirit). After it has been ascertained that the *tsukigamisama* has possessed her, the *gyōja* frees herself from the embrace of her master, faints, and loses consciousness.

After the *gyōja* has regained consciousness a series of rites follows. Among them is the rite called “spreading wisdom” (*chiehirome*) or “handing over the name of wisdom” (*chiena watashi*), whereby the “name of wisdom” (*chiena*) is bestowed upon the *ogamisama*. “Spreading wisdom,” therefore, refers to the act of conferring a new name on the person who is reborn as an *ogamisama*. There is also a rite to hand over the rosary (*juzu*) and the *oshirasama*, the latter referring to the bamboo staffs of the paper wands the *gyōja* holds in her hands during the *kamitsuke* ceremony, their upper parts being covered with pieces of cloth. The master manufactures the *oshirasama* and donates them to her disciple as instruments to be used when she performs invocations. They both release divine power during invocations and protect the “business” of the *ogamisama*. The ritual concludes with a test, called the “opening of the bow” (*yumibiraki*), which is held in order to ascertain whether the incumbent is able to perform a *hotoke oroshi* and call forth the spirit of a dead person. When the test has been passed successfully, the rite of the *kamitsuke* comes to an end.

On the day following the *kamitsuke* ritual there is a festive celebration (*goshūgi*) for the newborn *fujo*. First she is dressed like a bride, her hair done in *shimada* style wearing a *tome sode* kimono. She then proceeds to the celebration room (*zashiki*) of her “wedding feast” (*goshūgi*), where she takes her seat as the bride of her possessing *kami*, the *tsukigamisama*. Returning to the opinion that it is good to enter apprenticeship “before becoming a woman,” we can now suggest that this derives from the requirement that the bride of a *kami* be “pure” in body. Furthermore, if we assume that the *kamitsuke* represents a wedding with a *kami*, that is, a divine marriage, then the celebration (*goshūgi*) is both the announcement of a new *fujo* and the banquet of the divine wedding. In contrast to the strict ritualism of the *kamitsuke* rite the celebration afterwards (*goshūgi*) is of a highly festive character. A festive meal is served and the occasion is enlivened with drinks and songs. On the next day the *gyōja* begins her service of one hundred days to thank the mas-

ter. After that she further studies the manner of invocations and divination until after two or three years of service to thank her master she establishes herself (*miagari*), leaves the fold of her master, becomes independent, and begins her “business”—her own work as a *fujō*, in other words.

The process of becoming an *ogamisama* is the same for all candidates even if their age at the time they begin their apprenticeship varies according to the time when they lost their eyesight. This means that they all follow an established process: beginning their apprenticeship—training—*kamitsuke* rite [prayer exercise, fasting exercise, and the rite itself, followed by celebration (*goshūgi*) and the hundred-day exercise in return of favors received from her master]—service to thank the master—becoming independent. This is the period of the apprentice’s service in preparation for her becoming independent. To this purpose she studies the technique of the rites to be performed by a *fujō* in order to follow the “way” of a professional *ogamisama*. However, when we look at the elaborate symbolism of the *kamitsuke* ritual, it can hardly be said that this alone is the whole story.

In local society, a young girl who loses her eyesight is relegated to the derogatory category of “*mekura*.” As such she is not counted upon as a full wage earner or even as a “person” in the ordinary realm of social interaction. However, in the course of the *kamitsuke* ritual, she is married to a *kami*, grows into “a woman” and “an adult,” and in addition acquires the spiritual authority of a *kami*. In other words, by the rite of the *kamitsuke* she is transformed from a person labeled with the derogatory term “*mekura*” into one who carries spiritual authority and is called by the honorable title of *ogamisama*. In the process of becoming a *fujō* with the title *ogamisama*, the most important rite of the *kamitsuke* is doubly constituted as a rite of initiation, namely as a rite to become both a shaman (*fujō*) and a woman. It can, therefore, be said that this rite includes a mechanism of socialization for a blind woman in the sense that she becomes (socially) accepted by folk religionists as well as by the people.

The initiation process of a kamisama

It is no exaggeration to say that the initiation process of a *kamisama* is completely different from that of an *ogamisama*. Above all, there is no ritual of installment as an institutionalized *fujō* comparable to the *kamitsuke* ritual of the *ogamisama*. Neither is blindness a necessary precondition for becoming a *fujō*. The processes of becoming a *kamisama* are quite diverse, and each one is rich in originality. Here I am going to introduce several cases of *kamisama* but discuss them in a very generalized manner.

Among those who became a *kamisama* there is not a single one who

made the decision while she was still a child. All of them had been over twenty years old and married, and most were already in their thirties or older when they began the process. The *kamisama* themselves often recall that it was a kami who first led them to their profession. They all have in common an experience of some crisis situation before becoming a *kamisama*. The crisis is mainly a psychosomatic indisposition or illness. Discord or trouble with their husbands or mothers-in-law, problems with child rearing, poverty, excessive labor, illness of husband or children. Often some of these problems combine to provoke the occasion for becoming a *kamisama*. This happens to women who are married, have children, and are housewives, typically during their mid-thirties or forties. They are not merely full-time housewives but are engaged in agriculture, a family owned business, or some type of wage-earning employment.

In order to maintain their family lives they have to overcome the crisis situation that hits them suddenly. I will describe in approximate terms what kind of route these women have to follow when their psychosomatic disturbance is considered to be a kind of illness. Initially they often take refuge in medicines they customarily keep in their houses or with commercial medicines, and often rely on so-called folk medical practices for treatment. If this does not effect a recovery they consult a physician practicing Western medicine or seek treatment from a folk religious practitioner such as a *fujō* or a faith healer (*kitōshi*). There are some cases in which a woman approaches a folk religious practitioner right from the outset, but here too she often consults a physician as well.

When we speak of medical treatment, images of physicians in hospitals employing sophisticated equipment—in other words, modern scientific medicine—come to mind. In Japan, however, medical treatment may also include the trinity of acupuncture, moxibustion, and massage, together with Chinese medicine and bone setting. Even so, institutionalized medical treatment under government control and patronage occupies a dominant position that far surpasses all other forms and is thereby endowed with great authority. Among the population, too, this kind of treatment in hospitals commands a high degree of confidence and is definitely preferred over other forms of treatment. It goes without saying that people acknowledge the authoritative position of physicians and faithfully comply with their medical advice and prescriptions. Other forms of treatment are taken to be complimentary.

Although the choice of treatment depends on the degree to which an illness is considered physical as opposed to spirit-related, it must be kept in mind that a considerable number of illnesses receive simple care according to folk methods and medicines administered by the patient herself, by her

parents, or by other family members. In other words, she is treated using folk medical methods. Although nowadays such cases may have become rather rare, to implore a kami or buddha to grant recovery from illness can also be counted among the various forms of folk medical treatment. In this way various folk medical treatments are used in parallel with one another. Under the overwhelming influence of modern medical treatment, however, such folk methods have increasingly been dismissed as unreliable—considered as meaningful only in emergencies.

When someone relies on modern medical practice, frequents a hospital for outpatient treatment, or is hospitalized yet does not recover satisfactorily, it often happens that such a person stops visiting the hospital or leaves the hospital, thus abrogating the physician's control. It also happens frequently that a patient continues to complain about being ill even though the physician can find nothing wrong and can diagnose no illness. Cases are not rare in which the physician diagnoses the psychosomatic disorder of a patient as physical illness and gives it a definite name, but this does not coincide with the patient's own diagnosis or with that of family members or other closely related people. People are reluctant to challenge a physician's authority and usually accept his diagnosis. In some cases, however, they remain unconvinced and subsequently consult another physician or turn to some other kind of healer. A hospital's waiting room or the rooms of hospitalized patients are places where all sorts of information concerning medical treatment are exchanged. These venues constitute a passageway to other healers and other methods of treatment—especially that of folk religious practice.

In the case of a person who becomes a *kamisama*, though it may depend on the kind of illness she has contracted, it often happens that she stops relying on modern medical treatment and the physician, or parallel to this begins to visit a folk religious practitioner. Folk religious practitioners do not reject the medical treatment of physicians indiscriminately. In keeping with the popular understanding they interpret a client's illness according to somatic or mental causes, and they may suggest the direction in which to find a hospital or drugstore suitable for treatment. Furthermore, as I mentioned earlier, they attribute the causes of an illness to the influence exercised by the presence and workings of such supernatural beings as evil spirits or evil kami, or to their intrusion. They administer treatment by eliminating these causes through invocations, exorcism, and memorial services (*kuyō*) and by encouraging faith in the kami and buddhas. Should an illness be cured already at this level, then the relationship with the folk religious practitioner ends, and the patient no longer pursues the path to becoming a *kamisama* but rather returns to ordinary life.

However, it sometimes happens that, in spite of treatment either by

modern medicine or by *fujō* and religious healers, an illness is not cured. In such a case religious feelings towards the kami and buddhas intensify, and the person begins to “cling” (*osugari*) wholeheartedly to them. She begins to neglect her role as a housewife caring for her children or preparing the meals, or as a worker engaged in the family business and supporting the livelihood of her family. Instead she drifts from the world of ordinary life into a world of belief.

In Miyagi Prefecture one finds the expressions “*dōbone hikizuri*” and “*kabane yami*.” Both “*dōbone*” and “*kabane*” mean “body.” The expressions, therefore, mean respectively “to drag the body” and “suffering in the body,” both denoting a weak constitution. But this is not their entire meaning; they also signify a lazy person who, in spite of having an able constitution for work, does not work satisfactorily. On balance, the two expressions “*dōbone hikizuri*” and “*kabane yami*” are often used to indicate a lazy person. If a person does not work but prowls around aimlessly, visits temples and shrines for reasons of belief, and pays visits to *fujō*, such a person is secretly talked about using these expressions or is perhaps openly despised.

When the “clinging” to kami and buddhas takes over, and visits to *fujō* continue with increasing frequency, it is likely that people in the neighborhood will refer to this condition as “devotion dizziness” (*shinjin nobose*). As long as a person fulfills her role in everyday life and maintains order in the family she is said to have deep faith. But if she dedicates herself so completely to single hearted devotion that she neglects or relinquishes her role in the family, or disturbs the order of the family to such a degree as to become a hindrance to them, she will be seen as strange in the eyes of her family and neighbors and will be considered to be afflicted by “devotion dizziness.” As relations with her husband and mother-in-law continue to deteriorate, the person becomes isolated in the family, and nobody in the area wants to have any dealings with her. In the beginning she implores the kami and buddhas in order to have her own or her children’s and husband’s illness cured or frequents *fujō* for that purpose, but eventually she ends up imagining that the misfortune which has struck her and is now affecting her children and husband is a calamity afflicting her whole household, or she may perhaps be so taught by a *fujō* or a religious healer. Often she may come to nurture the idea that nobody understands her, although she implores the kami and buddhas not only for herself but also for her household and her whole family, and so she applies herself even more wholeheartedly to her devotions.

Many of those who became *kamisama* have been vilified by such derogatory terms as “*dōbone hikizuri*,” “*kabane yami*,” or “devotion dizziness.” A negative label has been put on them, and they are seen by the public as social-

ly withdrawn and deviant persons. Thinking that nobody understands them, they become isolated from the rest of society and increasingly absorbed in their own world of belief and intense devotion. In the course of such a process, the “*kamitsuki*,” that is, possession by a kami, may suddenly occur. In the case of a person who frequents a *fujō*, a religious healer, or a teacher or leader of a religious group, the deepening of her devotion may be acknowledged in her relation to such folk religious personalities, while at the same time she is alienated from her family and the people of her community. These folk religious practitioners may encourage her to become a *kamisama* by saying “Take up a white kimono,” or “Proceed along the way of the kami.” While she dedicates herself to devotion and exercises under their guidance, the *kamitsuki* may occur and she may be possessed by a kami.

At her first possession she utters words of the kami such as: “Because the world is filled with unfortunate people, save them, because the kami will bring up the body of the *mikotobito*,” or “Stay in this world and save the suffering people.” This event is called the “opening of the mouth” (*kuchibiraki*). She accepts it as her mission received from the kami to help people. After the first possession by the kami, she intermittently experiences states of possession and utters oracles and prophecies. She enters these states involuntarily as the kami suddenly takes over. She may assert that possession is by a spiritually powerful kami and that oracles and prophecies are legitimate, but the folk religious practitioners and the people around her may not believe her and say that hers are strange and eccentric utterings. This is to say that the possessing kami is considered to be not a good kami or spirit, but an evil one, and therefore must be the object of exorcism.

In Miyagi Prefecture there is the expression “*shinke takari*.” “*Shinke*” means “nerve” and “*takari*” means that something is assembled in great quantity or intensity. The expression, therefore, means that the nerves are in an agitated state, and by extension refers to a person who has lost control of her mind—a mad person (*kichigai*). When a person excessively worries about bad relations with her husband and mother-in-law or being secretly talked about as “*dōbone hikizuri*” and “*kabane yami*” because she cannot work due to illness, she loses balance in her mind, utters strange words, and exhibits odd behavior. She is then said to be “*shinke takari*” and is isolated from her surroundings. Furthermore, if she becomes possessed by a kami, or shows unusual speech behavior by shouting oracles in a loud voice and uttering prophecies, she is contemptuously referred to as “*shinke takari*.” Intermittently repeated states of possession that occur after the first occurrence are also considered to be “*shinke takari*,” and even the recipient person herself may say that her state at the time was one of “*shinke takari*.”

There are people who achieve recovery through their devotion and

ascetic exercises even while their psychosomatic disturbance and mental unbalance continue and while they at times fall into a state of possession. In such a case they stop entrusting themselves to kami and buddhas, and terminate their reliance on a folk religious practitioner, but then they may again fall into a state of psychosomatic disturbance and mental imbalance. If that happens, such a state is taken to be a “warning on the part of the kami.” The interpretation is that the person has been punished because she gave up helping people as the kami had directed, and therefore she is forced against her will to march along the “way of the kami.”

After the first possession, haunted by psychosomatic disturbance and mental imbalance, disdained as “*shinke takari*,” unacknowledged by folk religious practitioners, and isolated from her family and others around her, she may offer proof of the spiritual power of her kami at some unexpected occasion by curing an illness, indicating the place where a lost item can be found, or correctly foretelling an event. As news of such phenomena spreads through the neighborhood by word of mouth, she gradually gets acknowledged by the local society as a person who proceeds along the “way of the kami” and excels in the “business of the kami” (*kami shōbai* 神商売), until she is finally called *kamisama*. One of the fundamental differences between a blind *fujō ogamisama* and a *kamisama* is that the initiation ritual *kamitsuke* to become a *fujō* is held for the former but not for the latter. A *kamisama* is obliged, therefore, to demonstrate proof of the spiritual power of her kami, and needs to be acknowledged by the people around her.

FUJŌ AND THE SPECIAL CHARACTER OF THE KAMI

The kami of a fujō

Both *ogamisama* and *kamisama* have their kami whom we may call protective deity or tutelary *honzon* (buddha). In the following I will consider the special characteristics of such a kami and the relationship it has with a *fujō*.

For an *ogamisama* the occasion on which she became a *fujō* may not be distinct for her because of her youthfulness at the time that it happened, but in the minds of her parents it marks the acquisition of a profession as a blind *fujō*. The condition for aspiring to become a *fujō* is blindness. The work of such a *fujō*, her “business” (*shōbai*), officially starts after her “independent installation” (*miagari*), but she actually begins practicing shortly after her initiation ritual, the *kamitsuke*, with her service to thank her master. Accordingly, to undergo the *kamitsuke* ritual is the most important *merkmal* of her recognition as a *fujō* by society; it is the condition for her becoming a *fujō*. This ritual is the charismatic formation through which she receives her

charisma, her spiritual power. It can be regarded as a form of initiation (the rite of passage) through which she acquires her institutionalized charisma.

In the case of a *ķamisama*, the occasion to become a *fujō* can be seen in the sudden possession that occurs while she intensifies her devotions and exercises, and receives from her kami the mission to help people. However, there are also *ķamisama* who do not have this sense of mission. There are those who maintain that they have been made a *fujō* by their kami against their will, that they were destined to become a *fujō* from the moment of their birth. In describing this situation they use terms such as “*fujō* descent line” (*fujō no suji*) or “kami descent line” (*ķami no suji*). In the case of a *ķamisama* there are indeed various occasions for becoming a *fujō*, but there is no indispensable condition for doing so. Consequently it is possible to say that virtually anyone can become a *ķamisama*. For a *ķamisama* there is no institutionalized initiation ritual by which she acquires her charisma, or spiritual power, comparable to the *ķamitsuķe* ritual for the *ogamisama*. She has, therefore, first to prove that she possesses the necessary charisma, then she has to be acknowledged by society.

An *ogamisama* is acknowledged as *fujō* through her being possessed by a kami during her initiation ritual, the *ķamitsuķe*. This initial possession is both proof of her having acquired her charisma and acknowledgment of her status as *fujō*. However, the acknowledgment of her charisma remains restricted to her fellow *ogamisama* and the group of *mōsō* colleagues until, after her service of thanksgiving and her independent installation (*miagari*), the charisma is demonstrated before and acknowledged by the local society through her “business” performance.

In contrast to this, even if a *ķamisama* asserts her charisma in her first possession, it is safe to say that there is no case where she is immediately acknowledged. If her charisma is demonstrated she might become acknowledged as *fujō*, yet even if she utters oracles or prophecies at her first possession, she is practically never believed but rather is given the derogatory term “*shinķe takari*,” and her possession is regarded as a bad one because she is assumed to be possessed by an evil kami. However, even if the kami that possessed her is disavowed by the local religious practitioners and the people around her, she herself believes that hers is a spiritually powerful kami, and eventually she will demonstrate proof of her charisma while being possessed, thereby winning acknowledgment. If she does not succeed to change the negative appraisal of her possession to a positive one, and does not achieve a change in the evaluation of the kami that possessed her from an evil kami or spirit to that of a good kami or spirit, she will not be acknowledged by society as a charismatic *fujō*.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE KAMI

The first possession by a kami is registered as a most important event by both types of *fujō*, the *ogamisama* as well as the *kamisama*. During interviews, they typically describe this first possession as a climax, an event that leaves a deeper impression on them than any other in their life history as a *fujō*. It is the most important event among all those that announce their mission and fate as a *fujō*—the “ultimate source” (*genten* 原点), so to speak, of their being—and as such tells much about their actual standing in the fate allotted to them. However, between the two kinds of *fujō* there is not only a difference in the nature of the circumstances surrounding their first possession; there is also a great difference in the character of the kami that possess them, and in their relationship with the kami.

For an *ogamisama* the initial possession occurs during her *kamitsuke* ritual. As I mentioned earlier, the person who is to undergo this ritual has to fast for twenty-one days and to endure numerous cold water ablutions. By the time the ritual is finally performed, she is in a state of extreme psychosomatic exhaustion. During the ritual itself, the candidate as well as the attending *fujō* and *mōsō* repeat chanting incantations and sutras, and the air is filled with the sounds of bowstrings, drums, ringed staffs, bells, cymbals, and rosaries. This all contributes to an atmosphere of great excitement. In the *kamitsuke* ritual free use is made of traditional techniques to produce an altered state of consciousness.

Among the kami who possess an *ogamisama* we find kami and buddhas of national fame, for example Narita Fudō, Shimizu Kannon, and Sumiyoshi Myōjin, but also the kami and buddhas of famous local shrines and temples such as Takekoma Inari (city of Iwanuma, Miyagi Prefecture), Kokūzō of Yanaizu (town of Tsuyama, Motoyoshi District), the mountain deity (*yama no kami*) of Kogota (town of Kogota, Tōda District), and the eleven-headed Kannon of Nonodake (town of Wakuya, Tōda District).

It is probably correct to say that these are kami and buddhas the candidate learned about during her training or had seen and heard of in her early childhood. Whatever the case may be, it is a specific kami who possesses the *fujō* in order to bestow upon that person her mission. Judging from the name of the *kamitsuke* ritual one is inclined to think that possession has no relation to the candidate, but is suffered passively, involuntarily, and unintentionally. However, among the *ogamisama* themselves it is thought that the kami descends upon the candidate and possesses her in consequence of her active, voluntary, and intentional prayers. In physiological terms, she may perhaps be experiencing nothing more than an artificially provoked change in consciousness, but from an insider's perspective, it is believed that possession by

the kami is the result of the candidate's devotion and that the kami thereby invests her with her mission.

In contrast with the *ogamisama*, there is a great difference with the *kamisama* in terms of what kami possesses her and how it is appraised. The first possession occurs suddenly in the midst of her deepening devotion, her visiting of shrines and temples in order to pray for a cure from illness, and of intensifying her ascetic exercises. The kami who possesses her may be one of a variety of types: one of the kami or buddhas she has encountered during her devotions, or one that has some relation to her life history since childhood. It may be a Yakushi-sama that her forbears have venerated for generations, the Ise Myōjin enshrined in her main household, a Kannon dug up in a field, Amaterasu Ōmikami whose name she saw as a child inscribed on a hanging scroll of the Ise sanctuaries displayed in her parental home, or the spirit of an ancestor who had been a *rokubu* 六部 pilgrim² engaged in ascetic exercises on the three mountains of Dewa.

Whoever the kami may be, its tendency is to have a very intense relationship with the possessed person. It is not a kami or buddha of the house she married into, but one of either her parent's natal home or main household, or of her own natal home. The kami who possesses her is a specific kami or buddha such as the deity of the premises (*yashiki gami*) or the spirit of an ancestor, although I know of only one example of the latter. Perhaps it is possible to imagine the character of a kami as reflecting the human relationships the *fujō* experiences in the world of her everyday life. In that case it could be said that in this character the woman disavows the house she has married into and which is constituted by her husband and mother-in-law who are the object of conflict and strife, while she longs for the mental and religious authority (*ken'i*) connected with her parental home before her marriage and with the world of her parents (KAWAMURA 1997).

THE RITUALS AND KAMI OF THE FUJO

The representative rituals of an *ogamisama*, those that are referred to as her "business", are *hotoke oroshi* (the summoning of the spirit of a dead person, also called *kuchiyose*) and *haru gitō* 春祈祷 (also called *toshigami oroshi* 歳神降ろし or *kami oroshi*). Among the *hotoke oroshi* there is the *kuchiyose* where the spirit of a recently deceased person (a *nibotoke* 新仏) is called (the name of this rite is *shinkuchi* 新口), and a *kuchiyose* which is held at the time of the spring *higan* (the week centering around the spring equinox) and where the spirit of an ancestor is called forth (this rite is called *higan kuchi* 彼岸口 or *furukuchi* 古口). In these rites the spirit of a dead person or of an ancestor, in other words, a *hotoke*, is called forth, and its words are narrated. At this occasion the *ogamisama* invites the *hotoke* to possess her. Her clients,

therefore, are not hearing the words of the *fujō* but rather those of the *hotoke*, whom they in turn address. At a *hotoke oroshi* the *tsukigamisama* who possessed the *fujō* at her *kamitsuke* ritual does not possess her and does not have any function. At the spring invocation (*haru gitō*) held on a certain day during the New Year season, she calls forth the kami of the year (*toshigami*) and the local *ujigami* (tutelary deity 氏神), asks them for oracles about good and bad events of the coming year, and prays for the well-being of the client family and for their physical health. For important invocations and exorcisms the *oshirasama* are used and expected to bring their spiritual power into play. In none of these cases is the *tsukigamisama* of the *fujō* involved in the action.

It is interesting to note that in the shamanic rites of the *ogamisama* the kami who possessed her at the *kamitsuke* ritual does not possess her during these rites. Yet, this does not mean that this kami is dismissed as being useless. This kami receives daily devotions because it is the guardian spirit that watches over the *ogamisama*'s "business" and functions as her principal protective spirit. On the altar of the *ogamisama* there is also a god shelf together with the amulets of various shrines and temples, and there are some *ogamisama* who have enshrined a statue of Fudō or the bodhisattva Kannon, their *tsukigamisama*.

The "business" of a *kamisama* is invocations, exorcisms, oracles, and the like, but she does not perform *hotoke oroshi* or *haru gitō* like the *ogamisama*. Yet, in recent years, in the trail of proliferating memorials for aborted fetuses (*mizuko kuyō*), *kamisama* have come forth who perform *kuchiyose* for *mizuko*. During a shamanic rite the *kamisama* invites one of the kami mentioned earlier to possess her and activate its divine, spiritual power. Most of the *kamisama* have the kami who possessed them initially possess them again during these rites, but there are also some, who in the course of continuing to perform rites as *fujō*, have invited other new kami to possess them. Finally, there are those *kamisama* who perform shamanic rites for the spirits of dead persons who suffer and cannot reach buddhahood because they had committed some sin (*zaishō* 罪障), in order to deliver them from their suffering and help them to reach buddhahood. In such a case the *kamisama* induces not only her kami to possess her, but also the spirit of the dead person, and to release their spiritual power. In all of these cases the *kamisama* maintains an intimate relationship with the kami that possesses her.

THE TECHNIQUE OF POSSESSION—THE PSYCHOSOMATIC SENSATION OF KAMI AND HOTOKE

Possession by kami and hotoke

At the *hotoke oroshi*, the *ogamisama*, ties some floss to the one-string zither

she plays with a bamboo stick in order to summon the *hotoke*. The floss is said to be the spider web's thread to which the *hotoke* clings. When a *nibotoke* is called down, rice is specially heaped into a bowl as an offering to the *hotoke*. Two branches, one from a willow tree and the other from a peach tree, are stuck into the center of the heap. This is said to form a "leaf for the *hotoke* to cling to" (*hotoke no sugariha*), and it is believed that the *hotoke* descends along it. Ancestor spirits and *nibotoke* are invoked through the recitation of ritual texts, and by the sound of the one-stringed zither. The *hotoke* follows the spider's thread that is the piece of floss or the twigs of willow and peach, the "leaf for the *hotoke* to cling to," and comes to possess the *ogamisama*. At a *haru gitō*, she recites ritual texts to call the kami of the year and the local tutelary kami and to invite them to possess her.

Because people in general, or at least the clients, believe that the *ogamisama* spontaneously and actively calls forth the *hotoke* or kami and compels them to enter her body, these shamanic rituals are possible. According to the *ogamisama*, she does not actually know what the *hotoke* or kami had said when she is asked about it afterwards, but while she is possessed by a *hotoke* or kami she does not experience a particularly noticeable psychosomatic sensation or state.

The *kamisama* differs from the *ogamisama*. One *kamisama* says:

Thanks to the kami (referring here to the possessing deity) my body has become strong. When the kami comes over me it is like being in a dream. The heart feels light. A sick person makes my own body sick, that is true; the sickness appears in my body. In the case where a *hotoke* comes, I feel terribly sleepy. A kami is easier, you see. Because it (possession) is basically the way of the kami and not that of the *hotoke*, it is easier with the kami.

Another *kamisama* says:

When a kami possesses me, the sense of gender vanishes. Because a *hotoke* appears in the form of a sickness or a sick person, I feel the ailing part of the sick person in my own body, you see. I take away the trouble of that *hotoke*, its fate (*in'nen*), you know. I heal the *hotoke's* figure and cleanse it. I take away its suffering, make it pure, and let it climb the three mountains of Dewa. Since I am now experienced I do not feel it anymore. It is because my degree of satori (enlightenment) has deepened.

A *kamisama* allows the kami to possess her when she performs a shamanic rite such as an invocation or an exorcism, and responds to her

client through the kami's spiritual power. This kami is almost always the one of her initial possession. When a client is plagued by a mishap such as sickness or other misfortune, the *kamisama* applies the spiritual power of her kami to cope with the evil spirit or wandering spirit (*muenbotoke* 無縁仏), the *hotoke* that did not reach buddhahood or the ancestral spirit who is causing the misfortune. If one asks a *kamisama* how her body feels when she performs a shamanic rite, one often receives the answer that she experiences quite a unique psychosomatic sensation and state. This means that during possession by a kami she experiences a psychosomatic sensation and state of lightness, a clear feeling of being refreshed. Her posture is not bent, but straight.

In contrast to this, when she has to confront an evil spirit, or a spirit or *hotoke* that has not yet attained buddhahood because it has caused some misfortune, and when such a spirit possesses the *kamisama*, her body feels heavy and weary. In addition, the suffering of the evil spirits or *hotoke* who attach themselves to the client is transferred to her own body so that she feels pain and displeasure. Her posture is bent forwards, she falls on her face, or she yawns repeatedly. The *kamisama* further explains that she also takes upon her own body the ailing parts, the sins and the fate (*in'nen, zaishō*) of the evil spirits, of the *hotoke* who cannot reach buddhahood, and of the wandering spirits and ancestral spirits who attach themselves to the person who suffers from such misfortune as an illness. But there are also *kamisama* who say that "because the degree of my enlightenment has deepened" or "because I am more experienced" they have become better able to exorcise the affliction, sins, and fate of a *hotoke*, when they are visited by a client stricken by one, and they do not have to take these sufferings upon their own bodies anymore.

Quite surprisingly there are *fujō* also in other areas who develop the same kind of extraordinary psychosomatic sensations and states during their shamanic rituals. When asked about their sensations, *kamisama* of the Tsugaru region in Aomori reported the same kind of experience. There are also reports that the *hōnin* in the Gotō Islands of Nagasaki Prefecture and the *yuta* of Okinawa experience similar states (SASAKI 1984; ŌHASHI 1998).

The control of psychosomatic sensations and states

The psychosomatic sensations and states that the *ogamisama* and *kamisama* experience in their rituals differ considerably from one another. When I first started listening to the accounts of the *fujō* I did not pay attention to this. However, especially while listening to the reports of the *kamisama* about how much they were tormented, even before they became *fujō*, by the evil spirits and kami who possessed them, or how they behaved when a kami had

descended upon them and how this behavior evolved until they finally became *fujō*, I began to think that there must be a relationship between possession and the psychosomatic sensations and states experienced in the process of becoming a *fujō*.

The question is where the difference between the psychosomatic sensations and states of the two kinds of *fujō* lies. If we are to surmise from the narratives of *fujō* about their life history, I think that two points can be made. First, there is the question of how the technique of possession is mastered during the process of becoming a *fujō*, and parallel to this, how psychosomatic sensations and states are controlled; this is to say that the difference in method for mastering the technique of possession and for psychosomatic control is what concerns us here. Second, there is the difference between the *kami* and *hotoke* who possess a *fujō* during her rituals, particularly in relation to the way the *hotoke* are conceived. Roughly speaking, it is possible to think that an *ogamisama* performs her shamanic rites while being possessed by a standardized *kami* or *hotoke*, but that in the case of a *kamisama* the possession by *kami* and *hotoke* undergoes a change during the process of her performing shamanic rites. In the following I will relate where, in my present thinking, I feel the reason for this difference may be found.

The greater part of an *ogamisama*'s initiation process is taken up by memorizing ritual texts and sutras that are transmitted by the master, and by mastering the technique of invocations. No technique of possession is learned. Through training according to traditionally set methods, the *ogamisama* acquires the techniques of shamanic ritual. After she has become a *fujō*, she chants the ritual texts and sutras while performing her rituals. Possession by a *kami*, as it occurred in her *kamitsuke* ritual, is not repeated in her own shamanic rituals.

Support for the rites of the *ogamisama* is provided by the beliefs held by the local population. These are beliefs in possession according to which the *ogamisama* is capable of calling forth *kami* or *hotoke* and relating their words, and beliefs that the ritual texts and sutras are endowed with spiritual or even magical power. Consequently, no matter whether possession occurs by a *kami* or a *hotoke* in her rites, because she relies on this kind of possession belief and on the spiritual power of her ritual texts and sutras, the *ogamisama* is able to perform her rites in a psychosomatic sensation and state that is no different from the ordinary. Yet, at the *kuchiyose* for a *nibotoke*, which lasts many hours, her voice gets dry and she becomes greatly exhausted. But even this is interpreted by the clients as being a sign that it is a "well told" (that is, successful) *kuchiyose*, once the *ogamisama* has become skillful.

Compared with the *ogamisama*, the *kamisama* seems to undergo a very complicated process in order to acquire her possession technique. For the

kamisama, the process of becoming a *fujō* begins with the pre-existing psychosomatic or mental disturbance which eventually led her to answer the “call.” It then proceeds with a cure (of this disturbance) and culminates with the assertion of control over psychosomatic sensations and states with the help of the cultural and religious concept of possession. If we are to borrow I. M. Lewis’ expression we might say that this process parallels his “possession career” (LEWIS 1986, 91).

Making use of the concept “possession career” I propose to conceive of this process as one of four stages through which the specific psychosomatic sensations and states that occur during possession change and are formed:

1. the period lasting from the first outbreak of a psychosomatic disturbance to the first possession by a kami;
2. the period during which possession recurs intermittently, but spiritual power begins to manifest itself in such help for people as the curing of illness;
3. the period immediately following the beginning of activity as a *fujō*; and
4. the period of practicing as an experienced *fujō*.

During the first stage, after a psychosomatic disturbance has occurred for some reason, the victim visits *fujō* and religious healers in an effort to be cured. She deepens her devotion in the process, until she comes to fully entrust herself to the kami and buddhas. Then suddenly she falls into an extraordinary psychosomatic state. Because her behavior and speech deviate so noticeably from the norm, her close relatives and the public do not consider her condition simply as illness, but label it as “strange.” The afflicted person herself, however, claims that her situation is the result of possession by a kami. The possession is involuntary, heteronomous, and unintentional. We might say that because she is regarded as a social deviant for entrusting herself fully to the kami and buddhas this is an attempt to justify her behavior through reference to the spiritual power of a kami. The kami who possess her are of various kinds. If these kami and buddhas were religiously and socially authenticated beings, this alone would be sufficient, but because the woman imagines them as having a special relationship to her own life history, she tries to coordinate and control her psychosomatic state by perceiving her special psychosomatic situation within the interpretive framework of folk religion and the concept of possession that it entails.

Special psychosomatic states continue intermittently even after her first

possession. Because she suffers from doubts as to whether her possession is caused by a benevolent kami or an evil kami or spirit, she gradually deepens her devotion and dedicates herself wholeheartedly to ascetic exercises. These doubts are of a different quality from the feelings that are aroused by her specific psychosomatic state. Accordingly, we can imagine that possession by a benevolent kami produces an exalted and good feeling, while possession by a malevolent kami creates a bad feeling of depression.

In this situation the *kamisama* utters oracles and prophecies and takes care of sick people as she has been directed to do by the kami. She breaks out of her world of belief and begins to have an impact on the public. This comes from the conviction that the legitimacy of her possessing kami needs to be acknowledged not only by herself but also by the people around her. When she conducts herself as the kami directs her to do, she is often socially treated as a strange person. However, on some unexpected occasion she helps people by correctly foreseeing a dangerous situation, discovering a lost item, or curing an illness. As a consequence, the spiritual power of the kami and her own charisma are acknowledged for the first time. The news gradually spreads among the local people through word of mouth, and little by little she begins to work as a *fujō*.

A certain *kamisama* telling how she visited an intimate friend who had fallen sick and prayed that the person would recover said: "If another person's sickness is cured I am in a good mood, and every time I do incantations or exorcisms I have a good feeling myself." For this *kamisama* her first curing of an illness served as proof of the kami's spiritual power and also its acknowledgment of her decision to pursue her career as *fujō*. It is of particular interest in this account that the curing of an illness concomitantly produced a recovery from her own psychosomatic disturbance and promoted the stabilization of her own psychosomatic state. To help people, that is, to engage in the work of a *fujō*, means curing other people's illnesses while at the same time curing one's own. This marks the second stage in the development of a *kamisama*.

When a woman demonstrates her spiritual power for the first time, she is not immediately acknowledged by the local society as a *fujō*. Neither does it mean that the stability of her psychosomatic state is maintained. From time to time involuntary and heteronomous possession by a kami occurs, and she falls into a special psychosomatic state. During this period she restricts her time with clients and instead takes cold water ablutions, fasts, pays visits to famous shrines and temples throughout the country, climbs the three mountains of Dewa, and on her own initiative dedicates herself to frequent devotions and ascetic exercises.

One *kamisama* spoke of her experience shortly after she had begun

working as a *fujō* saying: “When I cleansed my body and prayed to the kami with my whole heart not to torment me, the kami taught me many things and my body felt well.” A woman who has just become a *fujō* practices shamanic rites for herself when she is not visited by clients or when the family business allows, and strives for possession by a kami to occur voluntarily at her own instigation. In a manner of speaking, she trains her body to become the receptacle for possession by a kami. It can therefore be said that she strives to control and regulate possession by a kami and with it her own psychosomatic state.

Because few clients visit her at this time, she might even search for people who suffer from some illness. According to one *kamisama*, if there is somebody who suffers from some illness, she feels the illness registered within her own body. The evil spirit or *hotoke* who causes the illness also causes an uncomfortable feeling in the body of the *kamisama*. Stated the other way around, if she falls into an unusual psychosomatic state and experiences a bodily feeling of discomfort, she can assume that a sick person suffering from the attack of an evil spirit is somewhere nearby. If she expels the evil spirit and cures the sick person, this results also in a cure of her own unusual psychosomatic state.

We can assume that she learns by way of experience through trial and error—and, as I will discuss below, based on her concept of kami and *hotoke*—how to regulate and control her specific psychosomatic state. This at times occurs separately from her ordinary state, and the *fujō* might purposely encourage it during her practice of shamanic rites by beating a drum and chanting incantations. Shamanic rites of healing are aimed at other persons, but at the same time they provide a venue for self-healing. This is because they allow the *fujō* to interpret her own special psychosomatic state as possession by a kami or a *hotoke*, to coordinate it with the possession pattern and thereby control it. This training to routinize possession by kami or *hotoke*—to familiarize oneself with the possession experience, form it into a pattern, and thereby “domesticate” it—represents the third stage in the *kamisama*’s development.

Having passed through these three stages, the *fujō* becomes able in the fourth stage to willfully initiate possession by a kami during a shamanic rite, to adjust her psychosomatic state to the needs of the clients, and to determine what evil spirit or *hotoke* affects them. Possession caused by kami or *hotoke* is specified in two independent and contrastive psychosomatic sensations, as I have mentioned above, and as such it may be routinized and formed into a pattern. Yet, to simply draw her own psychosomatic sensation into the form of possession by kami or *hotoke* is insufficient; she must also be able to reverse the process. She needs to acquire the ability within the

context of a shamanic rite to willfully induce and manipulate a specific psychosomatic sensation corresponding to the specific possession pattern of either kami or *hotoke*.

If, depending on its situation within a shamanic rite, the specific psychosomatic sensation is to be regulated and formed into a pattern as possession by a kami or *hotoke*, then it becomes possible, as a consequence, through continued drumming or the repetitive chanting of *norito* and sutras to control specific psychosomatic sensations and to induce an altered state of consciousness as well as make one disappear. It may also be possible to manipulate the occurrence of a formalized psychosomatic sensation of a kami or a *hotoke* even while being in a state that is practically normal.

If a person arrives at this level, it can then be said that she has fully mastered the technique of possession. In contrast with the woman who has only recently become a *fujō* and finds it difficult to control her psychosomatic states, the accomplished person now performs shamanic rites in an almost normal condition. Learning to perceive a specific psychosomatic sensation as possession by a kami or *hotoke*, and thereby drawing it into the context of a healing ritual, is the unseen process in a *fujō*'s mastery of the possession technique.

Possession by kami or hotoke and psychosomatic sensation

In the case of the *ogamisama*, the kami who possessed her during the *kamitsuke* ritual, which is for her the ritual of becoming a *fujō*, does not appear in her shamanic rites but rather is the object of veneration as the guardian deity or the guardian *honzon* of shamanic rites. For a *kamisama*, however, the kami who manifested itself in her first possession becomes the possessing spirit in almost all her shamanic rites. It thereby displays its spiritual power and endows the *kamisama* with spiritual power of her own. There are also a small number of *kamisama*, for whom the possessing spirit changes from the kami who first possessed them to another kami. In the case of both the *ogamisama* and the *kamisama*, it is assumed that the kami of a shamanic rite is a benevolent spirit with positive spiritual power. In other words, it is no different from the kind of kami recognized by the people in general.

In relation to a *hotoke*, the *ogamisama* and *kamisama* are alike in that for both, as for the bulk of the population, the *hotoke* represents the spirit of a dead person or an ancestor. They differ, however, in their understanding of the *hotoke* who appears in a shamanic rite and with whom they have to cope.

In the shamanic rites of an *ogamisama*, a *hotoke* appears in a *kuchiyose*. A *kuchiyose* called *furukuchi* or *higanguchi* (also *higanbayashi*), which is mainly performed at the time of the spring *higan*, involves summoning the

spirit of an ancestor who is already past the first annual memorial service, and is believed to have reached buddhahood and gained the “rank of a buddha” (*hotoke no kurai* 仏の位). The *shinkuchi*, by contrast, is a *kuchiyose* which is performed immediately after the funeral of a deceased person or within forty-nine days after the person’s death. The *hotoke* represents the spirit of this person and is believed to be doing ascetic exercises in order to attain buddhahood.

The first type of *hotoke* protects its descendants, sometimes appearing in a dream standing by the head of a descendant’s bed to announce imminent misfortune. It also provides oracles about coming good or bad fortune, and serves as a “guardian deity” (*mamorigami* 守り神) who protects the family. The latter *hotoke* reveals the thoughts it had while still alive, what it was unable to accomplish, and what it was unable to say to its family. It expresses gratitude for the assistance it has received from the family, requests that they perform the prescribed memorial services, and tells them that it seems to be on the way to successfully attaining buddhahood. These *hotoke* are ancestors similar to those of folk belief in kami and buddhas. Their *kuchiyose* is performed by the *ogamisama* as part of the ancestral rites intended to pray for the continuation of the household (*ie* 家). This *hotoke* is considered a kami who holds the positive spiritual power to promote the prosperity of its descendants and household.

In the shamanic rites of the *kamisama*, on the other hand, a *hotoke* does not appear as a “guardian deity” offering protection and favor to its descendants because it is not called forth as an ancestral spirit in response to its descendants’ request. No rite is performed to allow it to speak. Like so many evil spirits, it represents the spirit of a dead person or ancestor who cannot attain buddhahood, or it is a wandering spirit who brings sickness, accident and misfortune to its descendants. It clearly expresses the character of a “haunting deity” (*tatarigami* 祟り神).

It happens that the *kamisama* herself, at the time before or shortly after she becomes a *kamisama*, is possessed by a *hotoke*, in this case representing an ancestral spirit who has not attained buddhahood. She consequently falls sick, experiences unusual psychosomatic states, and has unpleasant psychosomatic sensations. The *kamisama* then cleanses her body, invokes the kami, and with the help of the kami’s spiritual power helps the *hotoke* reach buddhahood, thereby curing her own illness and freeing herself from discomforting feelings. In her work as a *fujō*, if a *hotoke* is recognized as the cause of a client’s sickness or misfortune she helps it attain buddhahood by performing memorial rites (in the case of an ancestral spirit) or memorial rites and exorcisms (in the case of a wandering spirit). In this way she expels the offending *hotoke* from her

clients. For the *kamisama*, a *hotoke* has to be dealt with as a kami, but one having the negative spiritual power to bring misfortune.

The shamanic rites of *ogamisama* and *kamisama* are distinguishable in terms of whether the possessing spirit appears in them or not, but a greater distinction is apparent in their respective handling of a *hotoke*. This difference goes hand in hand with the process of becoming a *fujō* and is reflected in the psychosomatic sensations each type experiences during a shamanic rite.

An *ogamisama* learns an established possession technique from the tradition handed down by her master. Because she conducts shamanic rites under possession by a kami that is believed to have positive spiritual power or by a *hotoke* that has already reached buddhahood, the possession experience has no influence on her psychosomatic state. Regardless of which type of being she induces to possess her, she does not experience any special psychosomatic sensations. Possession by a *hotoke*, such that the *hotoke* descends upon the *ogamisama* and speaks through her, is made possible by a belief shared by both the *fujō* and the people in general. As a consequence, an *ogamisama* does not engage in speech and actions that deviate from the norm; she can carry out a shamanic rite in a normal state.

In contrast with an *ogamisama*, the *kamisama* presents a significantly different approach. First of all, she does not follow an institutionalized process to become a *fujō* as is the case for an *ogamisama*. For a *kamisama*, a psychosomatic disturbance, something that the public at large would consider a malady, marks the starting point of her becoming a *fujō*. It is possible to relate the cure of this psychosomatic disturbance to the acquisition of a possession technique. As I mentioned earlier, based on rituals by folk religious practitioners and the possession beliefs of the people, a *kamisama* gradually acquires the technique of possession by regulating and controlling the special state that arose from her psychosomatic disturbance.

From the time between stages two and three as earlier described, up until the time when a woman begins to work as a *fujō*, she sometimes engages in violent speech and actions because her psychosomatic disturbance is not completely cured, and she falls into a psychosomatic state which deviates from the norm. She seems to be visited by various states. At times she is in an exalted, refreshing, and excited state, but there are also times when she finds herself in a depressing gloomy state accompanied by a feeling of discomfort. It is possible to interpret these states as possession by a kami or *hotoke*, and to imagine that they are regulated and controlled. I surmise, on the grounds of what I have heard from the *kamisama* themselves, that on one side the exalted and refreshing psychosomatic state is realistically imagined as possession by a kami, while on the other side the gloomy and uncomfortable psychosomatic state is imagined as possession by a *hotoke*. It

is further possible to suppose that the *kamisama* regulates and controls her psychosomatic sensations by differentiating two from among the various psychosomatic states, one as the positive refreshing sensation caused by possession by a benevolent kami, the other as the negative uncomfortable sensation caused by an evil *hotoke* who has not yet attained buddhahood and thus brings suffering and sickness to the living. This is a technique to control mind and body, a possession technique which is quite difficult to acquire in the early period after a woman has become a *fujo*. Consequently she may in her shamanic rites at times behave violently and as if she had deviated from the normal path due to her unstable psychosomatic sensations.

During the fourth stage clients come to visit in great numbers, the *kamisama* performs shamanic rites frequently, and with her increasing experience the possession technique changes. Her psychosomatic disturbance has already been cured and her psychosomatic state is stabilized. Possession techniques of the kind mentioned earlier have become obsolete. She turns possession techniques on their head and by means of the concept of possession by kami or *hotoke* succeeds in producing a specific psychosomatic state on her own. Saying that refreshing psychosomatic sensations are the result of possession by a kami, while uncomfortable psychosomatic sensations are the result of possession by a *hotoke*, she differentiates two kinds of psychosomatic sensations based on her concept of kami and *hotoke* and constructs an arrangement of psychosomatic sensations which realistically organize and systematize the sensations of kami and *hotoke*. It is possible to say that this eventually results in putting these sensations into a fixed form and making them into customs.

In the third stage, through possession by a severe kami in her shamanic rites who pressures her violently to put the mission to help people into practice, kami or *hotoke* intrude into her body and her behavior is quite frequently viewed as strange because it deviates from the norm. However, when she reaches the fourth stage, to the degree that she becomes experienced at shamanic rites, the kami, rather than intruding into her body, visit the area of her forehead or of her front and limit themselves to giving directions so that the *fujo* is capable of conducting her shamanic rites in a psychosomatic state that differs hardly at all from the normal. Toward the *hotoke* who attaches itself to a client who suffers sickness and misfortune the *fujo* no longer receives the evil power, that is, the fate and sins of the *hotoke*, within her own body. She can now handle the *hotoke* by helping it reach buddhahood and by expelling it. Possession by a kami or *hotoke* is not judged by specific psychosomatic sensations; it is rather conceivable that a *fujo* produces the psychosomatic sensations herself based on formalized possession

by kami or *hotoke* as a conceptual arrangement in order to execute shamanic rites in answer to her clients' requests.

Even a *kamisama* with a long history as a *fujō* who masters these possession techniques and is well trained says: "It is really not the way of a *hotoke-sama*, it is the way of a *kamisama*. Therefore, it is easy with a *kamisama*, you see." A *kamisama* avoids the handling of ancestral spirits who have not yet attained buddhahood and of wandering spirits as matters of a *hotoke*. To perform incantations and exorcisms according to her possessing spirit as matters of a kami is easier for her body, and she happily performs the matters of a kami. In the matters of a *hotoke*, the *kamisama* has to take upon herself a *hotoke's* fate and the sins a client suffers, she experiences uncomfortable feelings and a sensation of exhaustion, it affects (*sawaru*) her body. Although her initial psychosomatic discomfort is cured, it is possible that she continues to face innumerable dangers that they might occur again, and that she is captive to such fears. While a *kamisama* dislikes the matters of a *hotoke*, she is usually faced with the necessity to help people who are troubled and suffer from a *hotoke*.

Both *ogamisama* and *kamisama* are experts in possession technique. Neither of them acquire this expertise easily, however. They must first wander a difficult path, crossing the so called "valley of tears," and acquiring their skills only at the end of severe training. This includes not only the *ogamisama* and *kamisama* themselves, but also "the sentiment of a heartless world" (*kokoronaki sekai no shinjō*) of the people who visit the *fujō*. Untold misfortune visiting people without interruption is the character of this world. The phenomenon of possession, in the case of the *fujō* as well as in that of the people in general, tells of the "sentiment of a heartless world" while it shows a way out of this sad reality.

NOTES

* This article was translated by Peter Knecht.

1. Translator's note. The *nando* is the innermost room of a house, used to store valuables and as sleeping quarters for the younger couple of the household.

2. Translator's note. A pilgrim who visits sixty-six sacred places (*reijō* 霊場) throughout Japan, offering the Lotus Sutra and doing ascetic exercises.

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