

Tales of the pacification of malicious deities

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The families that conducted pacification festivals for malicious deities

There are more than ten tales related to malicious deities (*araburu kami*) in *Fudoki* such as *Harima Fudoki* (including in the *Fudoki* fragments). The actual names of families, individuals, or named ancestors of families appear in seven of these. The storyline is that a malicious deity is pacified by them and peace and safety are brought to travellers and the district as a result. There are several in which a motif of ‘half die and half live’ occurs in the first half of these texts, such as ‘five out of ten are killed, three out of five are killed’. The following table lists the seven such passages, by province.

With only one exception, numbered 6 in the Table, the locations of all are believed to be where major overland transportation routes intersected with river crossings or mountain passes. These stories have hitherto generally been treated as ‘deities that obstruct transportation’ at boundaries on roads, and have attracted attention mainly for elucidating the ritual and magical actions of those who walked past them. However, we should regard the tales in *Fudoki* as having been passed down by people who attempted to settle there, not as about people from other districts who were just passing through.

With that in mind, I think we should interpret these tales as local stories handed down orally by the particular people such as the Kinunui, Ayahito, Nukatabe no muraji, or the families of the *agata-nushi* or ancient kings (*kimi*) of Tsukushi who appear in the Table, who conducted the rites for the malevolent deities at each such place at the time of the compilation of *Fudoki* or at any rate not long before that. More accurately we should see them as tales about their founding fathers. In the case of Kazeko who had come from Tsukushi (tale 4) and Kuwao from Settsu (tale 6), the names of their families are not recorded; but they can still be regarded as some kind of ancestral tale. And Kuto in the tale of Oshikawa in Harima (tale 2) seems to have been an ancestor of the Nukatabe no muraji.

Table: Tales of the pacification of malicious deities in *Fudoki*

Place name (<i>kuni, kōri, sato, place</i>)	Putative or actual site	Tale: place name origin myth
1. Harima, Ihibo, Hayshita, Iseno	Himeji-shi, Hayashida-chō, Kami-ise, Shimo-ise	When people built houses on this grassland they could not live at ease. Then the ancestors of Kinunui no Ite and Ayahito Tora , intending to settle there, erected a shrine at the foot of the mountain. They worshipped Isetuhiko and Isetuhime, the children of the Great Deity Iwa, who resided on the peak. Thenceforth their houses were untroubled and in due course they formed a hamlet. Thus it was called Iseno.

<p>2. Harima, Ihibo, Hiroyama, Oshikawa</p>	<p>Tatsuno-shi, Honda-chō, Hiroyama</p>	<p>During the reign of King Ōjin, the Great Deity Mikage of Izumo resided on Mt. Kamio in HIRAKATA Sato, and <u>allowed half of the passers-by to live but killed the other half</u>. Kohote of Hōki Province, Fukuro of Inaba Province and Tsukiya of Izumo Province were distressed by this and petitioned the Court. The Court sent Nukatabe no muraji Kuto and had him conduct prayers. Kuto built a shrine at Yakatada and a sake brewery at Sasayama. He held a drinking party and they all celebrated. They cut oak branches from the mountain and poked them in their waistbands, went down the river and offered them [to the deity]. That is why it was called Oshigawa.</p>
<p>3. Harima, Ihibo, HIRAKATA, Saioka</p>	<p>Ibo-gun, Taishi-chō, HIRAKATA</p>	<p>The Great Deities of Izumo who resided on Mt. Kamio <u>killed five of every ten Izumo people who passed here and three out of every five</u>. So the people of Izumo manufactured a spade and offered it on this hill (Saioka) to them, but the deities would not accept it. The reason was that the male deity arrived here first, and the female came later, but the male deity had already left for elsewhere without being pacified. So the female deity was enraged. Later, continental immigrants (<i>Ayahito</i>) from HIRAKATA Sato, Mamuta Kōri in Kawachi Province came to live in the vicinity of this mountain. They worshipped the deity and managed to pacify her. It was called Mt. Kamio because of her presence. The place where they made and dedicated the spade to her was called Saioka.</p>

4. Hizen, Ki, Himekoso	Border of Saga-ken and Fukuoka-ken, along Akimitsu River	<p>Once upon a time, a malicious deity resided to the west of the Yamaji River which flows through this village, and <u>she killed half of all travellers</u>. When they performed a divination to find out the reason for her divine vengeance, the oracle replied, 'Have Kazeko, a man from Munakata Kōri in Tsukushi Province, enshrine me here. Providing he complies with my wishes, I shall no longer cause trouble.' So they sought out Kazeko and had him enshrine the deity. What Kazeko did was to raise a banner while praying to her, saying, 'If you really wish to heed my prayers, please let this streamer fly away on the breeze and land where you are.' He let the banner go, whereupon it first came to rest at Himekoso Shrine in Mihara <i>Kōri</i>, then it came down at the waterside of the Yamaji River; thereby Kazeko learnt the whereabouts of the deity. That night, Kazeko dreamed that a <i>kutsubiki</i> and a <i>tatari</i> danced about and pressed down on his body. Thereby he learned that this was a female deity [of weaving], and he erected and consecrated a shrine to her. Thereafter she no longer killed any passing travellers; she was called Himekoso and so was the <i>Sato</i>.</p>
5. Hizen, Saka, Saka <i>Kōri</i> name	Saga-shi, upper Kase River	<p>There was once a malicious deity in the upper reaches of the Saka River. <u>It let half the passes-by live, but killed the other half</u>. So Ōarata, the ancestor of the agata-nushi, performed a divination and asked the deity for its motive. At that time there were two <i>tsuchigumo</i> (native) women living there, called Ōyamadame and Sayamadame. They said, 'Take some clay from Shimoda hamlet and make effigies of people and horses. If they please the deity, she will be appeased.' Ōarata did as instructed and the deity was pacified. Ōarata said, 'These women are truly wise (<i>sakashi</i>). I name this place after them.' So it was called Sakashime <i>Kōri</i>, but now it has been shortened to Saka <i>Kōri</i>.</p>

6. Settsu (fragment), Shitabiyama	Unidentified	Once upon a time, there was a great deity. He was called Amatsuwani. He turned into an eagle and flew down to the foot of this mountain. <u>Out of every ten people who passed by, he killed half and let the other half live.</u> A man called Kuwao came to this mountain, where he dug and laid down a culvert (<i>shitabi</i>). It led to where the deity was. Whenever he passed through the culvert, he prayed to Amatsuwani. That is why is was called Shitabiyama.
7. Chikugo (fragment), Tsukushi no saka	Fukuoka-ken, Mikunisaka	Once upon a time, a malevolent deity rampaged on the border between the provinces of Chikuzen and Chikugo. <u>It allowed half of the passers-by to live and killed the other half.</u> Consequently it was dubbed the ‘Life-stealing [<i>inochi tsukushi</i>] Deity’. The King of Tsukushi and the King of Hi performed a divination, and appointed Mikayorihime, the ancestor of the kings of Tsukushi , as shamans, and had her enshrine the deity at the mountain pass. Thereafter, people were no longer afflicted by the deity when they crossed over the mountains.

* In tales 2 and 3, while the place name Mt. Kamio is the same place, they are two distinct tales about the deity. It is thought that the same deity was the object of veneration by people from different districts.

Oral worship and rituals

Tales about malevolent deities did not merely narrate events of long ago: they aimed to explain the ‘present’ reality of the descendants’ families through stories about their ancestors. Descendants demonstrated their origins and legitimacy for conducting and passing on the rituals for the malevolent deity by reciting the meritorious past deeds of their ancestors who had placated it. We can surmise that these tales were probably not handed down in writing but orally, at the time of festivals, when the incumbent priestly family recited them to the local inhabitants.

What is noteworthy in respect of orality is that in most of these tales the expression “killed half and let half live” appears. This is one kind of set phrase containing both specificity and repetition, and can be regarded as a mnemonic device of orality to reinforce the impression of the contents upon the ears of the audience. Designation of a specified number has the effect of increasing the plausibility of the tale. And the trope that half of the passers-by are killed rather than all of them serves to make listeners feel the supernatural malevolence of the deity.

In other words, at the festivals for placating the malevolent deities everywhere, there was a ritual for reciting orally the story of the founding fathers of the family who led the worship, and that played a major role in the festival overall. That being so, how precisely were their origins and their legitimising of the family’s right to conduct the festival demonstrated in the latter part of such tales?

Tales that honour great deeds of the founding fathers

Unlike the first halves of these tales, the latter parts share no particular devices of orality in common. The content is not just touched on lightly but the actions of the ancestors that led to the pacification of the deity are related in some detail. For example, in tale 3 of the Table, the Ayahito

who had moved to this place from Kawachi somehow or other placated the malevolent deity, the cause of whose anger the people from Izumo had been unable to perceive: i.e., that the female Himegami was resentful that the male Hikogami had fled from her. In tale 6, Kuwao of Settsu Province enshrined the deity by making full use of new technology: by constructing an underground culvert that led to the deity 'Amatsuwani'.

In tale 4, Kazeko had come from far away Munakata *Kōri* in Tsukushi Province; he determined the location of the malevolent deity in Tsukushi and Hizen Provinces by means of sending a streamer fluttering on the wind. Then he succeeded in pacifying the deity by learning the gender of the deity in a 'dream'. The act of throwing the streamer would have been actually carried out in the festivals too, and this tale can also be regarded as an origin tale for its performance at the festival.

On the other hand, tales 1, 2, 3 and 5 are stories of ancestors who appeased the wrath of the deity by means of a festival that differed from those hitherto, as in the case of the ancestors of Kinunui no Ite and Ayahito Tora at Iseno, the Ayahito family of Hirakata *Sato*, and Nukatabe no muraji Kuto in Hiroshima *Sato*—all in Harima Province—and the Ōarata family in Hizen Province. They 'built a shrine [to the deity] at the foot of the mountain', 'built a brewery on the peak and enshrined the deity there' and 'enshrined the deity by offering effigies of people and horses'.

When seen in this light, the latter parts of these tales can be interpreted as stories to honour the meritorious deeds of the ancestors who placated the terrifying anger of the malevolent deity. There are two ways of honouring them: the first is that the founding father had special powers or talents such that they could determine the identity of the deity and the cause of its anger, and had activated those powers at this particular place; and the second is that the founding father placated the deity by introducing a new form of ceremony there. Either way, these first ancestors did not resort to using main force against the deity.

The aim of reciting these tales was to demonstrate the family's pedigree of inheriting the extraordinary knowledge and talents of their founding father: in short, that they had appropriate family credentials for the position of priest at these festivals. This was the overarching purpose of telling these stories.

The significance of continuing to worship the malevolent deity

Disruptive natural threats such as the flooding of rivers, flash floods and sudden downpours would not actually have ceased even if such festivals were continued. But as has long been pointed out, in the world of Japanese native religion it was thought that when the deities and spirits of gods who brought about disasters and harm were repeatedly worshipped, they gradually turned into the protective or tutelary deities of those who worshipped them. By respectfully continuing to worship the malevolent deities of the various districts, it was believed that these deities who caused natural disasters would turn into tutelary deities who would bring peace to travellers and the land.

One further aspect of the locations of these tales

This being so, why was it necessary for the families who appear in these tales to recite tales about their own ancestors to the local residents? In large part it was because the family groups at the centre of such tales had been 'outsiders' to the respective districts in question, as most of their founding fathers are described as having come from overseas or from distant places in Japan. However, their immigration had probably not been voluntary settlement, but was based on planned, enforced resettlement by the Yamato Court. This probably dates back to the first half of the sixth century.

As noted above, the locations of these tales were sites where extreme natural phenomena frequently occurred, such as where main overland routes crossed major rivers or went over mountain passes. On the other hand, under normal circumstances, such places were trading posts where river transportation met overland trackways, or they could be turned into strategic points for the military. In the case of tales 2 and 3, for example, there are traces from archaeology and medieval records of the district around Mt. Kamio in Harima having been of considerable economic importance; later it was a centre for Buddhist temples, and it was an important battleground during the medieval Genpei Wars.

Seizure of the land and land reclamation by the Yamato Court

It is thought that families like the Kinunui, Ayahito, Nukatabe no muraji and so on were deliberately relocated there, being forced to take on the role of seizing important land, managing it, and developing it for farming. The first thing they had to do as newcomers from elsewhere was

to establish direct sacerdotal rights over the respective local deities (i.e., the malevolent deities). Then the individual who was their founding father actually experimented with land improvement projects such as construction of riparian embankments, installation of ferry crossings, etc, along with discovering the identity of the deity and the cause of its wrath, and introducing a different form of worship from hitherto. No doubt this conduct as a whole was reflected in the tale about the great works of the first ancestor who had appeased the anger of the malevolent deity. The establishment of sacerdotal rights over the malicious deity was, so to speak, a symbolic action for claiming the district.

Tales in *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* and tales in *Fudoki*

Malicious local deities as seen in *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* are consistently the object of punitive expeditions and suppression by the Yamato Court and the royal family. Hitherto this has been interpreted as indicating an ideological response of the Yamato Court of the sixth century onwards, in their attempt to despotically suppress the folklore beliefs and independent deities of other regions. By contrast, in the tales of pacification of malicious deities in *Fudoki*, the deities are not described as the object of punitive expeditions, as such: rather, the basic stance is one of planning coexistence with those deities. Even so, direct sacerdotal rights over them were seized by the families who had been dispatched there. It was thought that the malicious deity would gradually evolve into their own tutelary deity by worshipping it respectfully. This is a different kind of strategy for the subjugation of local deities by the Yamato Court from that outlined above in *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*.

In the Namekata passage in *Hitachi Fudoki*, there is the story of Yahazu no uji Tamachi who appeased the vengeance of the deity 'Yato no kami', and this also resembles the tales of placation of malevolent deities. Matachi was being obstructed in developing this land by Yato no kami, and eventually he set up a marker post at the boundary, showed his intention of coexisting with the deity, and swore, 'We shall worship you in perpetuity as your priest'. Once he had done all that, he was successful in reclaiming more than 10 chō (approximately 10 ha.) of paddy fields. This was said to have occurred during the reign of King Keitai in the early sixth century.

The policy of dispatching particular families and having them take over direct sacerdotal rights over local deities goes back at least to the time of King Keitai in the early sixth century, and it probably continued even after the establishment of the ideology of despotic rule over such local deities within the Court. At any rate, tales of the pacification of malevolent deities can be regarded as historical sources that reveal one aspect of regional development policy by the Yamato Court, no less than the policy of establishing and running *miyake* rice estates.