

Mediating between the Religious World and the Masses:  
Picture Deciphering by the Itinerant Nuns of Kumano

by

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B.A., Ryukoku University, 2007  
B.A., University of Victoria, 2010

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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## Abstract

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Kumano *bikuni* (the Buddhist nuns of Kumano) are itinerant female religious performers who were particularly active between the 16th and 18th centuries in Japan. Travelling across the country, they promoted the syncretic belief of the Kumano mountains, popular pilgrimage sites that have attracted a variety of people regardless of class, gender, and religious affiliation. To raise funds for temples and shrines there, they performed *etoki* (literally, picture deciphering) that addressed the everyday concerns of the masses, and especially women. Conceptualizing Kumano *bikuni* as mediators who bridged the religious world and the masses, this thesis examines how Kumano *bikuni* reflected perspectives of the audience at *etoki* performance and responded to diverse interests of different groups.

## Table of Contents

### Contents

Supervisory Committee .....	ii
Abstract .....	iii
Table of Contents .....	iv
List of Figures .....	v
Acknowledgments.....	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Definitions of Key Terms and Concepts.....	8
Theoretical Framework .....	15
Primary Sources .....	16
Structure of the Thesis .....	18
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	20
Chapter 3: Background .....	37
The Religious Landscape of the Kumano Mountains.....	37
The Kumano <i>hongan</i> Temples ( <i>honganjo</i> ).....	51
Women in the Medieval and the Early Modern Periods.....	60
Chapter 4: The Kumano Heart Contemplation Ten Worlds Mandala .....	68
The Worldview Expressed in the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala .....	70
Kokoro .....	75
The Hill of Age .....	77
Hell: The Court of Enma, Gendered Hell, Children’s Limbo.....	78
The Story of Mokuren and the Segaki Ritual .....	87
Summary .....	91
Chapter 5: <i>Etoki</i> Performance .....	94
Representations of Kumano <i>bikuni</i> in Paintings and Writing.....	96
Possible Representations of Kumano <i>bikuni</i> at <i>etoki</i> Performance .....	102
Practical Techniques Provided by Kumano <i>bikuni</i> .....	104
Summary .....	106
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	108
Bibliography .....	113

## List of Figures

Figure 1 Kyō meisho fūzoku byōbu (京名所風俗屏風) Burke Collection. ....	3
Figure 2 Bikuni Fushimi Tokiwa (比丘尼伏見常盤), illustrated by Hagawa Chinjū who published his works during 1711-1736. British Museum. ....	4
Figure 3 Nagi Leaf(なぎの葉) .....	28
Figure 4 Sugai(酔貝) .....	28
Figure 5 The Talisman of Daikokuten at Myoshinji (妙心寺の大黒天護符).....	28
Figure 6 The Talisman of the Kumano Hongū Shrine - Kumano <i>goō</i> (熊野本宮大社の熊野牛玉宝印護符).....	40
Figure 7 The Kumano Heart Contemplation Ten Worlds Mandala - Hōsen-in (熊野觀心十界曼荼羅 宝泉院本).....	72
Figure 8 The Court of Enma and the Hill of Age Ending at Death .....	78
Figure 9 Forty-Nine Rice Cakes .....	80
Figure 10 Jizō, the River of Three Crossing, and Datsueba .....	81
Figure 11 Gendered Hell.....	82
Figure 12 The Talisman of Nyoirin Kannon at Seigantoji .....	83
Figure 13 The Hell of Infertility .....	84
Figure 14 Jizō in Children's Limbo.....	85
Figure 15 Mokuren Meeting his Mother in Hell.....	89
Figure 16 Mokuren Asking the Buddha How to Save his Mother .....	89
Figure 17 The Segaki Ritual .....	90
Figure 18 Sumiyoshi jinja sairaizu (住吉神社祭礼図) Freer Gallery of Art.....	96
Figure 19 Kagomimi (籠耳) .....	97
Figure 20 Kinsei kiseki kō (近世奇跡考) .....	98
Figure 21 Kottōshū (骨董集).....	98

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Since the tenth century, the Kumano mountains in Japan have been popular pilgrimage sites which have attracted diverse populations including members of the imperial family, aristocrats, warriors, commoners, and people with physical disability or chronic diseases such as Hansen's disease (leprosy).<sup>1</sup> One of the most remarkable trends of the Kumano pilgrimage saw retired emperors making multiple pilgrimages to the Kumano mountains between the tenth and twelfth centuries. After that, many commoners followed this trend, such that a large number of pilgrims to the Kumano mountains were jokingly called “*ari no Kumano mode* 蟻の熊野詣” (ants' pilgrimage to Kumano).<sup>2</sup> Even today, many people still visit there for their own purposes despite the uneasy access to the sites.

The central religious institutions of the Kumano mountains are the Three Shrines of Kumano, also called Kumano *sanzan* 熊野三山, which consist of the Hongū, Shingū, and Nachi shrines. The Three Shrines of Kumano are located in the southern reaches of the *Kii* peninsula, within modern Wakayama prefecture. They are surrounded by other shrines, Buddhist temples, and nunneries. Although these shrines and temples have their own origins and lineages, they eventually all came to form the religious landscape of the Kumano mountains. Indeed, the religious landscape of the Kumano mountains is informed and shaped by multiple religious traditions, including Shinto mythology,

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<sup>1</sup> Nei Kiyoshi, “Kumano Mōde,” *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō* 70 no. 5 (2005): 79; Tsurusaki Hiro'o “Chūsei ni miru Kumano mōde no shoyōsō,” in *Kumano: Sono shinkō to bungaku, bijutsu, shizen*, ed. Hayashi Masahiko (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1983): 68.

<sup>2</sup> Yamamoto Shigeo, “Kumano bikuni no ichi,” in *Kumano bikuni o etoku*, ed. Nei Kiyoshi and Yamamoto Shigeo (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2007), 449-450.

Tendai, esoteric Shingon, and Pure Land Buddhist schools, a form of Buddhist mountain asceticism (*shugendō* 修験道), Daoist topography, nature worship, and ancestral worship.<sup>3</sup> Besides such complex syncretic beliefs, the Kumano mountains were also known as women-friendly sacred mountains because women were allowed to enter, despite the fact that many sacred mountains in Japan prohibited women's entry until the modern era.<sup>4</sup> One of the reasons for the popularity of the Kumano mountains was a widely held view that the Kumano mountains there welcomed all regardless of class, gender, and religious affiliation.<sup>5</sup>

This thesis focuses on the nuns of Kumano called Kumano *bikuni* 熊野比丘尼 who were organized under the Kumano *hongan* temples (*honganjo* 本願所), which were responsible for construction and financial administration of the temples and shrines in the Kumano mountains. Some of Kumano *bikuni* resided at temples in the Kumano mountains and served administrative tasks there. Some travelled across the country in order to solicit commoners for contributions. The second type of Kumano *bikuni* were known as itinerant religious performers and were particularly active between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>6</sup> While the Kumano mountains were famous

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<sup>3</sup> Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise: Kumano Pilgrimage and the Religious Landscape of Premodern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 181-186. Mt. Ōmine still prohibits women's entry today, and Mt. Kōya used to be one of those sacred places where women's entry was strictly prohibited. See Tsurusaki Hiro'o "Chūsei ni miru Kumano mōde no shoyōsō", 68; Barnard Faure, *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 219-233, 250-252.

<sup>5</sup> Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 1-2.

<sup>6</sup> Nei Kiyoshi, "Kumano bikuni no rikai", in *Kumano bikuni o etoku*, ed. Nei Kiyoshi and Yamamoto Shigeo (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2007), 422. This thesis follows the definitions of the historical periods in *The Kōdansha Bilingual Encyclopedia of Japan*. The medieval period refers to the era up to the abandonment of the Muromachi shogunate in 1573. The medieval period thus includes the Kamakura period (1185-1333) and the Muromachi period (1333-1568). Specifically, the century when the Muromachi shogunate became unsuccessful in maintaining the feudal coalition is known as the Warring States period (1467-1568). The early modern period refers to the era the Azuchi-Momoyama period (1568-1600) and the Edo period (1600-



pilgrimage sites, the temples and shrines there also attempted to collect contributions from those who were unable to make a pilgrimage to the mountains. Kumano *bikuni* were one group of such fundraisers organized under the Kumano *hongan* temples.<sup>7</sup>

They travelled in small groups, and were sometimes accompanied by young girls called *kobikuni* 小比丘尼, who assisted the activities of Kumano *bikuni* as apprentices.

Travelling from place to place, they distributed talismans and performed *etoki* 絵解き, pictorial sermons, which was an effective means of attracting people (fig.1). Since they narrated stories in a simple language with visual aids, it was easier for the audience to understand, even though the audience was not familiar with religious teachings and ideas. Historical documents indicate the popularity of itinerant Kumano *bikuni* among commoners, especially among female commoners.<sup>8</sup>

However, not all “itinerant Kumano *bikuni*” were *etoki* practitioners who promoted the cult of the Kumano mountains. Historical documents also refer to singing



**Figure 1 Kyō meisho fūzoku byōbu (京名所風俗屏風) Burke Collection.**  
Nei Kiyoshi & Yamamoto Shigeo, *Kumano bikuni o etoku*, ii.

1868) until the end of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1868. See *The Kōdansha Bilingual Encyclopedia of Japan*, (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1998), 101-105.

<sup>7</sup> Yamamoto Shigeo, “Kumano bikuni no ichi”, 449-463.

<sup>8</sup> Nei Kiyoshi & Yamamoto Shigeo, *Kumano bikuni o etoku* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2007), i-xv, 3-7.

nuns and prostitutes as “itinerant Kumano *bikuni*”.

Regarding “the composite definition” of Kumano *bikuni*, Barbara Ruch makes a criticism that they tend to be generalized as “devout tonsured women ascetics, capable of performing religious miracles and pronouncing oracles, who expounded profound doctrine, wore makeup, hid their shaved head in scarves, looked sexy, sang a great song, ran bordellos and practiced prostitution”.<sup>9</sup> She claims that such a composite approach does not reveal the real character of Kumano *bikuni* because those who are today defined as Kumano *bikuni* consisted of diverse groups.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the identity of Kumano *bikuni* is ambiguous because of a lack of existing historical documents on them. For example, regarding the transformation of Kumano *bikuni*, Nakayama Tarō maintains that ancient shamanic figures became *etoki bikuni* (picture deciphering nuns) as a result of Buddhist influence, then transformed themselves into *uta bikuni* (singing nuns) with the decline of authority in shamanic beliefs, and were eventually pushed into prostitution.<sup>11</sup> Some scholars suggest the possibility that Kumano *bikuni*



**Figure 2 Bikuni Fushimi Tokiwa (比丘尼伏見常盤), illustrated by Hagawa Chinjū who published his works during 1711-1736. British Museum.**  
Nei Kiyoshi & Yamamoto Shigeo, *Kumano bikuni o etoku*, 72.

<sup>9</sup> Barbara Ruch, “Woman to Woman: Kumano *bikuni* Proselytizers in Medieval and Early Modern Japan,” in *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan*, ed. Barbara Ruch (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2002), 541.

<sup>10</sup> Barbara Ruch, “Woman to Woman”, 541.

<sup>11</sup> Nakayama Tarō, *Nihon Miko Shi*, (Tokyo: Yagi shoten, 1930). Available online at <http://docs.miko.org/index.php/>. Accessed on September 14, 2012.

consisted of different occupational groups and multiple religious orders.<sup>12</sup> Others point out that some Kumano *bikuni* became settled and lived celibate lives at local nunneries.<sup>13</sup>

Despite such heterogeneity in Kumano *bikuni*, this thesis mainly focuses on the analysis of *etoki* (literally “picture deciphering”) practised by itinerant Kumano *bikuni* as a means of promoting Kumano *shinkō* (Kumano belief)<sup>14</sup> and soliciting contributions. In their *etoki* performance, Kumano *bikuni* seemed to particularly focus on the everyday concerns of female commoners and family issues.<sup>15</sup> The pervasive family norm among commoners in late medieval and early modern Japan was the *ie* 家 structure which usually takes the form of the nuclear family. The maintenance of the *ie* lineage by reproducing an heir was very important because *ie* was the basic unit of society and functioned as the site of economic production as well as social security for old age and illness. Therefore, issues related to married life, childbirth and child death were the major concerns for women who were expected to be responsible for the matters within *ie*.<sup>16</sup> Kumano *bikuni* who knew their audience’s needs well addressed these issues at *etoki* performances.

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<sup>12</sup> Barbara Ruch, “Woman to Woman”, 541; Alison Tokita, “Performance and Text: Gender Identity and the Kumano Faith,” *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific* 16 (2008). Available online at <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue16/tokita.htm> accessed on September 14, 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Hagiwara Tatsuo, *Miko to Bukkyōshi* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1983), 131-158; Nei Kiyoshi, “Kumano *bikuni* no rikai”, 425-430.

<sup>14</sup> Also referred to as the Kumano cult. However, this thesis refers to beliefs and practices associated with the Kumano mountains as Kumano *shinkō* because the term cult may carry a negative connotation.

<sup>15</sup> Hayashi Masahiko “Kumano *bikuni* o etoku,” in *Kumano: Sono shinkō to bungaku, bijutsu, shizen*, ed. Hayashi Masahiko (Tokyo Shibundō, 2007), 115; Kumiko Ishiguro, “‘Kumano kanshin jikkaizu’ o meguri josei hyōshō no kinou” *Etoki kenkyū* 18 (2004): 44-49; Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 221-222.

<sup>16</sup> Wakita Haruko, *Josei geinō no genryū: Kugutsushi, Kusemai, Shirabyōshi* (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 2001), 24.

Due to the nature of oral literature, the narratives of Kumano *bikuni* have been lost. The scripts of their *etoki* narratives have not been found, if such things were ever made.<sup>17</sup> However, a number of existing religious paintings are assumed as Kumano *bikuni*'s *etoki* paintings, for example, the Kumano Heart Contemplation Ten Worlds Mandala and the Nachi Pilgrimage Mandala.<sup>18</sup> These paintings express teachings not in the form of language but in the form of visual images. Even though the functions of oral literature and the setting of performance need to be considered in analyzing *etoki* performance, the examination of the mandalas allow us to investigate what Kumano *bikuni* possibly preached for their audience.

The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate the contribution of Kumano *bikuni* to the adaptation of religious teachings to the needs and the interests of female commoners of the era. Although some criticize Kumano *bikuni*'s misogynous attitude,<sup>19</sup> their ad hoc explanation of the Buddhist teachings,<sup>20</sup> or their secular activities including prostitution,<sup>21</sup> their contribution needs to be recognized from the standpoint that they relate female

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<sup>17</sup> Ogurisu Kenji, *Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara* (Tokyo: Iwata shoten, 2011), 248.

<sup>18</sup> Beside these mandalas, other paintings such as the hand scroll of the origin story of Kumano are assumed as Kumano *bikuni*'s *etoki* paintings. See Hayashi Masahiko, "Jinsei no kaidanzu' etoki," *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō* 69, no. 6 (2004): 140. The term "mandala" suggests the psycho-physical universe or a circular depiction of cosmic map "laying out a sacred realm in microcosm, showing the relations among the various powers active in that realm" (Ten Grotenhuis, 2). In esoteric Buddhism mandalas usually indicate schematic representations of the transcendent reality with a principal spiritual symbol at the centre of a configuration consisting of a number of deities and gates in the four directions. However in Japan, mandalas include both schematic representations and other kinds of religious paintings such as representations of abodes of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and Buddhist deities, depictions of shrines and other sacred geographic sites. Elizabeth Ten Grotenhuis, *Japanese Mandalas: Representations of Sacred Geography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 1-2. Also, according to Yamaori Tetsuo, while imported mandalas such as the Two Worlds Mandala focus on the figures of buddhas and bodhisattvas in order to symbolically express the universe, Japanese mandalas tend to integrate natural landscapes into the Buddhist universe in order to syncretize with the world of indigenous deities. Yamaori Tetsuo, *Shūkyō no chikara: Nihonjin no kokoro wa dokoe ikunoka* (Tokyo: PHP kenkyūkai, 1999), 86-88.

<sup>19</sup> Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 230-231.

<sup>20</sup> Nei Kiyoshi & Yamamoto Shigeo, *Kumano bikuni o etoku*, 122-126.

<sup>21</sup> Nakayama Tarō, *Nihon miko shi*; Asai Ryōsen, *Bikuni shi* (Tokyo: Futamastudō shoten, 1929), 83-84.

subjects to the religious world by addressing everyday problems of women. In order to demonstrate their significance, the following questions are addressed in this thesis; What kinds of tales and themes were possibly narrated at Kumano *bikuni*'s *etoki* performance? How did such stories and themes meet the interests and needs of female commoners? How did their *etoki* performance function in delivering the teachings to the audience and in disseminating the narrative? As itinerant religious performers who were marginalized in society, Kumano *bikuni* shared the perspective of their audience and knew their audience's needs well. Thus, while reproducing religious teachings which reflected the perspective of the audiences, they served the worldly and religious interests of the audiences.

## Definitions of Key Terms and Concepts

### Folk Religion (“minzoku shūkyō; 民俗宗教”)

There are various conceptualizations of folk religion and approaches to it among scholars. Early Japanese folklorists such as Yanagita Kunio and Origuchi Shinobu assume the existence of an ancient Japanese spirituality and attempt to pick up its essence from existing folk practices and beliefs. To them, surviving folk practices are the tool to abstract ancient Japanese spirituality before it came into contact with foreign religions.<sup>22</sup> Some scholars are more interested in the roles that folk religion plays in the everyday life of the masses. Although they recognize the syncretic characteristic of folk religion, they basically define folk religion in opposition to established religious traditions.<sup>23</sup> Also, some focus on the conflict between folk religion and established religious traditions. In this context, folk religion is the religion of the local commoners who are oppressed by the religion of urban elites. Some utilize folk religion in a broader sense, so syncretic religions are also referred to as folk religion.<sup>24</sup>

This thesis conceptualizes folk religion in a broad sense because it is interested in the aspect that folk religion is formed through interaction between various religious perspectives. Folk religion is grounded in everyday life of people and it expresses a worldview based on life experience through a variety of ritual practices, annual festivals, rites of passage, and beliefs. It shares similarities with archaic and primitive religions, but it takes diverse appearances depending on the climate, the social structure, the way of life, and so on. It is historically contingent and blends with other religious traditions

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<sup>22</sup> Miyake Hitoshi, *Shūkyō minzokugaku*, (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1989): 9 ; Yamaori Tetsuo, *Monogatari no shigen e: Origuchi Shinobu no hōhō* (Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 1997), 217-220.

<sup>23</sup> Ichirō Hori, *Folk Religion in Japan: Continuity and Change* ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa and Alan L. Miller (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968): 1-2, 10; Miyake Hitoshi, *Shūkyō minzokugaku*, 3-7.

<sup>24</sup> Miyake Hitoshi, *Shūkyō minzokugaku*, 3-7.

depending on changes in the social structure and values. In Japan, folk religion is mingled with various religious elements such as Confucianism, Daoist beliefs and practices, shamanism, and many forms of Buddhism. These elements have been blended with indigenous beliefs and shaped diverse forms of beliefs and practices such as *onmyōdō* 陰陽道 (Japanized Daoism mixed with shamanism) and *shugendō*. Various religious perspectives were reinterpreted overtime throughout history while meeting the changing social structure and value system of the era.<sup>25</sup>

Ichirō Hori argues that the Japanese religious perspective is organized according to two belief systems, a little tradition and a great tradition.<sup>26</sup> A great tradition appears to be the super-structure of the belief system. It includes various established religious traditions such as many schools of Buddhism and Shinto. On the other hand, a little tradition is the sub-structure, namely folk religion. It is completely intermingled with the elements of various religious traditions and indigenous beliefs and practices.<sup>27</sup> A little tradition is unconsciously accepted among the masses, and is “preserve[d] in the lower

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<sup>25</sup> Ichirō Hori, *Folk Religion in Japan: Continuity and Change*: 1-10; Ichirō Hori, Japanese Folk Beliefs, *American Anthropologist, New Series* 61, no. 3 (1959): 406; Miyake Hitoshi, *Shūkyō minzokugaku*, 7-14.

<sup>26</sup> Hori adapts the concepts of a great tradition and a little tradition employed by Robert Redfield in *Peasant Society and Culture*. Redfield utilizes these concepts to understand the cultural system of a peasant society. He argues that the idea of the “autonomous cultural system” is problematic. Although the idea assumes that a culture is independent and self-sufficient, a peasant culture is the product of interaction between a great tradition and a little tradition. He conceptualizes a great tradition as hierarchal culture of “the reflective few”. It is a tradition cultivated in institutions such as schools and temples. On the other hand, a little tradition is a lay culture of “the largely unreflected many”. It works out in the life of a local community. These traditions are interdependent and influence each other. When elements of a great tradition are brought into a little tradition, they may be interpreted in a way which is different from the perspective of a great tradition. Also, elements of a little tradition may be taken up and cultivated by a community of a great tradition, and such cultivated elements may be delivered back to a community of a little tradition. The culture of a peasant society contains elements of both traditions because it has been formed and continues to develop while incorporating elements of both traditions. Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Civilization* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956), 70-71.

<sup>27</sup> Ichirō Hori, *Folk Religion in Japan: Continuity and Change*: 49-50.

structure of society and religious institutions”<sup>28</sup>. Nevertheless, a great tradition and a little tradition are intertwined. When a new religion infiltrates into the masses, it has to be adapted to the religious perspective of a little tradition. At the same time, a little tradition absorbs the elements of the established religious traditions and transforms its own worldview.<sup>29</sup> I argue that the religious landscape of the Kumano mountains is an example of such communication between a great tradition and a little tradition. In the super-structure level, the official appearance of the individual temples and shrines has radically changed depending on political circumstances. However, in the sub-structure level the religious landscape of the Kumano mountains has gone through a slow change while adapting elements of various religious traditions. These two belief systems have influenced each other, developing the highly syncretised religious landscape of the Kumano mountains. Although Kumano *shinkō* (Kumano belief) is organized around the established, state-recognized religious institutions, it has maintained an aspect as folk religion which reflects the perspective of the masses.

### **Itinerant Religious Practitioners as Mediators**

The perspectives of the religious institutions and the masses do not always agree with each other. On one hand, the religious institutions structure practices and objects of worship based on authorized teachings. However, the masses may not always interpret the practices and the objects according to the teachings authorized by the religious

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<sup>28</sup> Ichirō Hori, *Folk Religion in Japan: Continuity and Change*, 18.

<sup>29</sup> Ichirō Hori, *Folk Religion in Japan: Continuity and Change*, 49-50, Miyake Hitoshi, *Shūkyō minzokugaku*, 8-9.



institutions. They may develop a different belief based on their understanding of or imagination inspired by the practices and objects.<sup>30</sup>

Throughout history, itinerant religious practitioners who worked closely with the masses played a significant role mediating the gap because they adapted the perspective of the religious institutions to that of the masses. One such example is itinerant religious practitioners called *kanjin hijiri* 勧進聖 who travelled from place to place in order to raise funds for temples and shrines throughout the medieval and early modern periods. “*Kanjin* 勧進” originally means persuading people to be devoted to Buddhism, but it also refers to fundraising activities for temples and shrines. The *kanjin* activities took a variety of forms including soliciting donations, distributing talismans, and performing rituals and magical activities. These activities were conducted by many professionals such as monks, nuns, other religious practitioners, and street performers. While promoting faiths and teachings of religious institutions, they responded to the various needs of the masses while providing practical techniques to deal with everyday concerns.<sup>31</sup>

This thesis examines *kanjin* activities by Kumano *bikuni* while conceptualizing them as the mediators between different religious perspectives. The ambiguity of Kumano *bikuni* does not allow the simple categorization of their religious identity. Although they were given the title “*bikuni*” and they dressed like Buddhist nuns, they were not ordained nuns.<sup>32</sup> Some argue that the original Kumano *bikuni* were female

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<sup>30</sup> For example, there is a popular belief in stone statues of Jizō Bosatsu (Ksitigarbha bodhisattva) that warts would be removed by worshipping them. The belief came from the imagination of the masses who associated the rough surface of stone statues with wart-covered skin. Murakami Norio, *Kinsei kanjin no kenkyū* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2011), 29-30.

<sup>31</sup> Ōta Naoyuki, *Chūsei no shaji to shinkō* (Tokyo: Kobundō, 2005), 1.

<sup>32</sup> Nei Kiyoshi, “Kumano bikuni no rikai”, 377.

shamans who resided in the Kumano mountains and gave oracles.<sup>33</sup> Some argue that they were called *bikuni* merely because they were married to Buddhist mountain ascetics called *yamabushi*.<sup>34</sup> Hagiwara believes that Kumano *bikuni* were mediators that bridged Buddhism and shamanic traditions.<sup>35</sup> This thesis views Kumano *bikuni* as mediators. Indeed, they bridged the perspective of the religious institutions the perspective of the masses, while responding to the needs of both sides.

### ***Etoki* (Picture Deciphering)**

While various forms of storytelling with visual aids have been employed elsewhere in the world, it was developed as *etoki* in Japan. It particularly contributed to spreading Buddhist teachings among many strata of society because the combination of visual and audio effects was powerful in diffusing the teachings even among those who were not familiar with a specialized religious language.<sup>36</sup> *Etoki* involves two kinds of deciphering processes: the deciphering of written religious languages into illustrations and the deciphering of illustrations into oral language. That is, highly specialized religious language was translated into illustrations and the *etoki* performers were responsible for orally translating the illustrations for the audience. It was not only educational but also entertaining. Especially when it was practised by low-ranking itinerant preachers, the entertainment aspect became more emphasized, involving comical

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<sup>33</sup> Hagiwara Tatsuo, *Miko to Bukkyōshi*, 3; Nakayama Torō, *Nihon mikoshi*.

<sup>34</sup> Yanagita Kunio, “Miko kō”, *Yanagita Kunio shū* 9 (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1969), 286-288.

<sup>35</sup> Hagiwara Tatsuo, *Miko to Bukkyōshi*, 2-3.

<sup>36</sup> Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*, 3-5. Although it originally refers to a method of Buddhist pictorial proselytization, in the contemporary sense it does not necessarily have to be associated with Buddhism.

animation in speech and bodily movement.<sup>37</sup> Ikumi Kaminishi recognizes two styles of *etoki* performance in Japanese history.<sup>38</sup> One is “didactic temple *etoki*”<sup>39</sup> which had started as the technique of the clergy of Buddhist monasteries by the tenth century. In this style of *etoki*, high ranking monks with extensive religious knowledge performed for their patrons. This style of *etoki* often took place at temples, and the performers preached on valuable religious art including screen and wall paintings.<sup>40</sup> The other style, “entertaining itinerant *etoki*”,<sup>41</sup> appeared by the thirteenth century when Buddhism became popularized among and available for commoners. It was practised as a technique by low-ranking monks and street performers. Since they travelled around and their audience was mainly the commoners, they preached on portable, less expensive paintings such as hanging scrolls and handscrolls. A number of surviving materials suggest that hanging scrolls were often used because they could be presented for a larger audience.<sup>42</sup> The performers of this style of *etoki* not only popularized *etoki* but also introduced various entertainment techniques and narrated a wide range of subject matters including non-religious stories.<sup>43</sup> They were not always trained in scriptural studies and were

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<sup>37</sup> Hayashi Masahiko, *Nihon no etoki: Shiryō to kenkyū*, (Tokyo: Miyai shoten, 1981), 109-125; Hayashi Masahiko, “*etoki towa*”, e.d Hayashi Masahiko *Etoki mangekyō* (Tokyo: San’ichi shobō): 6-17; Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures: Buddhist Propaganda and Etoki Storytelling in Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006); Akai Tatsuo, *Etoki no keifu*, (Tokyo: Kyōikusha, 1989), 248-261.

<sup>38</sup> Barbara Ruch recognizes three types of *etoki* practitioners, monks who performed at temples, occupational secular *etoki* practitioners, and itinerant religious practitioners. See Barbara Ruch, *Mō hitotsuno chūseizō: Bikuni, Otogizōshi, Raise*, 159-162.

<sup>39</sup> Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*, 19.

<sup>40</sup> The earliest reference to *etoki* practice in Japan is the one performed by the abbot of Jōgan-ji in 931. The Buddha’s life story painted on the wall of the temple was deciphered for an imperial prince Shigeakira. See Hayashi Masahiko, *Nihon no etoki*, 109-113; Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*, 19-20.

<sup>41</sup> Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*, 19.

<sup>42</sup> Hayashi Masahiko, *Nihon no etoki*, 113-114; Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*, 19-20.

<sup>43</sup> Hayashi Masahiko, *Nihon no etoki*, 111-112.

considered as humble professionals.<sup>44</sup> However, they made religious teachings widely available and responded to the religious needs that were rarely dealt with by monks at monasteries. Thus, many major popular religious groups in Japan such as the Pure Land sects, mountain worship, and Kumano *shinkō* employed *etoki* as a means to promote their beliefs.<sup>45</sup>

*Etoki* belongs to the literary genre called *shōdō* 唱導. *Shōdō* originally referred to the oral practice by religious professionals of explaining doctrines in simple language. In the concept of *shōdō* by Origuchi Shinobu, *shōdō* is characterized by multiple authorship and continuous development of the content. A *shōdō* literary work does not appear as a finished work at a certain point of historical time. Rather, some ideas and themes are gradually generated and developed into various literary works by many authors who transmit them throughout history. Accordingly, the role of the performers is not limited to mere translation of texts and images. They could also function as the authors of texts. Although images used for *etoki* performance are set, the *etoki* performers could develop narratives by adding information or applying their own interpretation to images.<sup>46</sup>

*Etoki* is also a form of ritual performance which expresses a particular worldview. Regarding the functions of ritual performance, Clifford Geertz argues that lived and imagined worlds fuse and religious perspectives appear to be real and rational at a ritual. Because rituals dramatize the worldview by setting themes which are familiar to the

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<sup>44</sup> Hayashi Masahiko, “Kumano bikuni to etoki”, 106.

<sup>45</sup> Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*, 46.

<sup>46</sup> Origuchi Shinobu, *Nihon bungaku keimō*, (Tokyo: Asahi shinbn, 1950), 197-200; Origuchi Shinobu, “Kokubungaku no hassei” in *Origuchi Shinobu zenshū vol. 1*, (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1954), 124-216; Shin’no Toshikazu, “Shōdō no hijiri” *Hijiri to minshū*, ed. Hagiwara Tatsuo and Shin’no Toshikazu (Tokyo: Meicho shuppan, 1983), 279-280; Yamaori Tetsuo, 113-120.

audience, the audience experiences the worldview with a greater sense of reality.<sup>47</sup>

Besides, in oral literature in general, the relationship between the performer and the audience is intimate. While aiming at making the audience believe in their stories, the performers narrate what the audience expects to hear.<sup>48</sup>

Indeed, each *etoki* performance is unique. Since the narrative of the *etoki* performance changes depending on time, space, occasion, audience, and the ability of the performers, there would not be the same *etoki* performance twice, even though the same subject matter is performed.<sup>49</sup>

## Theoretical Framework

The investigation in this thesis is interdisciplinary because the picture, the performers, the audience, and the occasion work together to produce the narratives at *etoki* performance. Therefore, this thesis employs the methodological framework proposed by Miyake Hitoshi, which investigates all aspects of *etoki* performance. In *Shūkyō minzokugaku*, Miyake discusses the methodological framework for the study of folk religion in Japan. According to him, the worldview of folk religion is expressed by three symbolic systems: rituals, oral literature, and religious arts. These three symbolic systems supplement each other. In many cases, while the worldview is explicitly expressed at rituals, religious art functions as the object of worship and oral literatures

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<sup>47</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System” *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 112; Miyake Hitoshi, *Shūkyō minzokugaku*, 138-140.

<sup>48</sup> Miyake Hitoshi, *Shūkyō minzokugaku*, 173.

<sup>49</sup> Hayashi Masahiko, “Etoki towa”, 6-7.

give significance to religious art and rituals.<sup>50</sup> Kumano *bikuni*'s *etoki* performance belongs to this type of expression of the worldview. At *etoki* performance, Kumano *bikuni* presented the painting and gave narrative stories according to the situation. Thus, their worldview has to be examined through the analysis of their narratives, their painting, and the setting of their performance. Due to the nature of oral literature, the narratives of Kumano *bikuni* have been lost. However, since the paintings and their traces in literature still exist, it is possible to investigate what they might have delivered to their audience. Therefore, following the theoretical framework by Miyake, this thesis approaches the worldview of Kumano *bikuni* based on the examination of the paintings, while considering also the functions of oral literature and ritual performance.

## Primary Sources

The main source for the investigation in this thesis is the Kumano Heart Contemplation Ten Worlds Mandala (*Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara* 熊野観心十界曼荼羅; hereafter referred to as “the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala”) which depicts the popularized Buddhist beliefs and practices in the late medieval period. It is the painting that was used by Kumano *bikuni* for their *etoki* practice.<sup>51</sup> As of 2011, 57 Kumano Ten Worlds Mandalas had been identified across Japan. Most of them were kept by temples of various Buddhist schools, some transmitted through family lineages, and some

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<sup>50</sup> Miyake Hitoshi, *Shūkyō minzokugaku*, 12-13, 127.

<sup>51</sup> Some scholars argue that various mandalas were deciphered by Kumano *bikuni*. However, due to a lack of historical evidence, it is uncertain what kinds of paintings were used by Kumano *bikuni*. Many scholars agree with that Kumano *bikuni* deciphered the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala though other *etoki* practitioners might also use the mandala. Some scholars point out that not all Kumano Ten Worlds Mandalas suggest their relationship with Kumano *bikuni*. See Nishiyama Masaru, “Chōsen butsuga kanrochō to kumano kanjin jikkaizu” *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō* 68, no. 6 (2003): 157.

preserved in museums. For the most part these mandalas share the motifs and the arrangement of the motifs, yet they differ from one another in terms of the details of the minor motifs.<sup>52</sup> Among them, this thesis focuses on the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala kept by the Sōtō Zen temple Hōsen-in 宝泉院. The temple is located in Mie prefecture, by the pilgrimage route to the Kumano mountains from Ise, which used to be one of the most popular routes among commoners from the east. The mandala is a patched paper 136.3 centimeters long and 123.7 centimeters broad. It is now mounted as a hanging scroll because it was repaired and mounted in 1988 but the lines which suggest that the mandala used to be folded are recognizable.<sup>53</sup> The mandala was donated in February 1771 along with two other paintings, a painting of the Buddha after his death and the painting of sixteen *yasha* (*yakṣa*; demonic gods) by the wife of Hiramī Chōkurō for her memorial service.<sup>54</sup> Although this particular mandala is the representative of the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala regarding the motifs and the arrangements, attention to the differences from other mandalas is also paid in this investigation.

In addition to visual material, written texts are also examined in order to investigate *etoki* performance by Kumano *bikuni*. Works by intellectuals contemporary with Kumano *bikuni* give brief descriptions of *etoki* performance by Kumano *bikuni*. Also, although it is fictional, a puppet play “*Shuma hangan morihisa* 主馬判官盛久” (“The Stablemaster of Police Lieutenant Morihisa”) by Chikamatsu Monzaemon provides

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<sup>52</sup> Ogurisu Kenji, *Kumano kanshin jikkai mandara* (Tokyo: Iwata shoten, 2011),

<sup>53</sup> There are some mandalas without the lines which suggest that the mandalas used to be folded. According to the classification by Ogurisu, those with recognizable lines mostly share the basic structure and motifs. On the other hand, those without recognizable lines tend to have distinct structure from others. Ogurisu Kenji, *Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara*, 174.

<sup>54</sup> In some cases, the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala is found with the Nachi Pilgrimage Mandala, but the Nachi Pilgrimage Mandala was not found in this case. Ogurisu Kenji, *Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara*, 157.

a relatively long *etoki* narrative by a character disguised as Kumano *bikuni*. In addition, reference is made to several stories depicted in the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala. These stories include the stories of Mokuren 目連 (Mahāmaudgalyāyana), *the Blood Pond Sutra* (*Ketsubon kyō* 血盆經), and the stories of Jizō Bosatsu 地藏菩薩 (Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha). The motifs in the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala will be better understood through examination of these texts.

### Structure of the Thesis

The rest of this thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter 2 reviews scholarship on Kumano *bikuni*. While noting the critical perspective toward Kumano *bikuni* by earlier scholars, this chapter focuses more on the re-evaluation of Kumano *bikuni* since the 1980s. Diverse approaches including those by specialists in *etoki*, specialists in *shugendō* studies, and specialists in studies of visual images will be reviewed. Each approach reveals significant aspects of the activities by Kumano *bikuni*. These diverse approaches demonstrate the significance of an interdisciplinary approach for the comprehensive understanding of the activities by Kumano *bikuni*.

Chapter 3 covers the historical background significant in analysing *etoki* performance by Kumano *bikuni*. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section reviews the religious landscape of the Kumano mountains. Although this landscape has changed over time, this section mainly focuses on the highly syncretized religious landscape developed by the period when Kumano *bikuni* were most active. The second section describes the institutional position of Kumano *bikuni* while looking at the roles of the Kumano *hongan* temples which organized Kumano *bikuni*. The third section



reviews the *ie* system which organized gender relations in the late medieval period.

Through the examination of the *ie* system, this section outlines the position of women of the era and their concerns in everyday life.

Chapter 4 analyzes the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala. Through close examination of key motifs, this chapter investigates the worldview and social implications embedded in the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala. At the same time, by introducing a variety of interpretations on the motifs, this chapter demonstrates that the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala is capable of producing diverse narratives.

Since religious paintings, oral narratives, and rituals function to complement one another to sustain and reproduce the worldview, chapter 5 examines the functions of narrative stories and of settings in relation to Kumano *bikuni*'s *etoki* performance. I argue that Kumano *bikuni* functioned as the authors of the stories as well as the presenters of the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala. Although their *etoki* narratives were based on a fixed painting, they were able to produce different narratives according to the interests of the audience in changing situations. While adapting Buddhist doctrines to the interests and the needs of the audience, they served diverse interests of the audience by delivering appropriate messages and techniques.

Chapter 6 concludes this thesis by incorporating the examinations in the previous chapters. I hope to demonstrate the significance of *etoki* performance by Kumano *bikuni* as mediators of different interests and religious perspectives.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Although some early folklorists recognize the contribution of Kumano *bikuni* to the culture of the masses in Japan,<sup>55</sup> some early intellectuals, including those who are contemporary with Kumano *bikuni*, emphasize the aspect of Kumano *bikuni* as marginalized women. In their view, Kumano *bikuni* were not authentic religious practitioners but a degenerate form of female religious performers.<sup>56</sup> Challenging this perspective, however, contemporary scholars attempt to resituate Kumano *bikuni* in the religious sphere because they recognize their contribution to the religious perspective of the masses. They take diverse approaches to uncover the activities of Kumano *bikuni*. For example, specialists in *shugendō* studies investigate the activities of Kumano *bikuni* who had close institutional relationships with *shugendō* and who were practically associated with the practitioners of *shugendō* (*yamabushi*). Through the examination of the *hongan* temples which organized Kumano *bikuni*, they uncover the institutional position and the expected functions of Kumano *bikuni*.<sup>57</sup> Also, through close examination of the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala, some scholars attempt to uncover the religious narratives as well as the social implications embedded in the mandala.<sup>58</sup> As the historical significance of the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandalas became recognized, researchers have identified many versions of this mandala across Japan, and have

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<sup>55</sup> See Yanagita Kunio, “Miko kō”, 281-289; Origuchi Shinobu “Kokubungaku no hassei”, 192-196.

<sup>56</sup> See Arai Ryōsen, *Bikuni shi*; Nakayama Tarō, *Nihon miko shi*; Nei Kiyoshi & Yamamoto Shigeo, *Kumano bikuni o etoku*, 319-373.

<sup>57</sup> See *Kumano hongansho shiryō*, ed. Kumano hongansho kenkyūkai (Tokyo: Seibundō, 2003).

<sup>58</sup> See Kuroda Hideo, “Kumano kanshin jikai mandala no uchu” in *Taiki bukkyō to nihonjin: Sei to mibun*, ed. Miyata Noboru (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1989), 207-275; Ishiguro Kumiko, “‘Kumano kanjin jikkaisu’ ni okeru monogatari hyōgen to gamen kōsei: Miekē no sakurei o chūsin ni”, *Mie kenshi kenkyū* 20 (2005), 43-70.

investigated the way in which the mandalas were composed and developed.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, specialists in *etoki* studies investigate how the narrative of Kumano *bikuni* was produced at *etoki* performance. Considering that the narrative of *etoki* performance changes according to the situation, they argue that Kumano *bikuni* functioned as the authors of religious narratives.<sup>60</sup> Focusing on the approaches mentioned above, the following briefly reviews the arguments and researches on Kumano *bikuni*.

### **Kumano *bikuni* as the marginalized**

Since the period when Kumano *bikuni* were active, their secular aspect has been criticized by intellectuals. For example, a Pure Land Buddhist monk Asai Ryōi mentions Kumano *bikuni* in *Tōkaidō meishoki*, written in the seventeenth century. According to Asai, Kumano *bikuni* used to practise *etoki* in order to teach the masses the Buddhist teachings, but they eventually stopped practicing *etoki*. Instead, they started singing popular songs to collect contributions. Although they shaved their heads, they appeared to be very different from normative nuns because they wore make-up and dressed in showy clothing. Asai comments that they not only looked like professional prostitutes but also actually prostituted themselves.<sup>61</sup> His description of Kumano *bikuni* was quoted

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<sup>59</sup> See Ogurisu Kenji, *Kumano kanshin jikkai mandala*; Takigawa Kazuya, “Chihō ni nokoru kumano kanjin jikkai mandala: Mieken no sakurei kara” *Etoki kenkyū* 20 & 21 (2007): 43-61.; Nishiyama Masaru, “Jigoku o etoku” in *Chūsei o kangaeru: shokunin to geinō*, ed. Amino Yoshihiko (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1994), 225-273.

<sup>60</sup> See Hayashi Masahiko, *Nihon no etoki*; Akai Tatsurō, *Etoki no keifu*; Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*.

<sup>61</sup> Asai Ryōi, “Tōkaidō meisho ki” in *Kumano bikuni o etoku*, ed. Nei Kiyoshi & Yamamoto Shigeo (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2007), 319-321.

many times by later intellectuals and thus sustained and reinforced the image of Kumano *bikuni* as degenerate, prostituting nuns.<sup>62</sup>

Following the criticism by Asai, a Shingon Buddhist monk, Araki Ryōsen, situates Kumano *bikuni* as degenerate nuns at the margins of society. In *Bikuni shi* published in 1929, Araki illustrates the broad history of Buddhist nuns in Japan. Starting with the very first ordained nuns in Japan, he illustrates how the position of Buddhist nuns has changed according to historical period. He believes that political and social factors had an impact upon the status of nuns. He states that Buddhist nuns should be devoted to spiritual cultivation while remaining celibate and staying away from secular life. However, in his view, the status of nuns was often abused for purposes that had nothing to do with religiosity.<sup>63</sup> Along with criticism toward Buddhist involvement with divorce in the Edo period, he criticizes Kumano *bikuni*'s activities as prostitutes. He argues that such prostituting nuns are not only a shame in terms of morality but also a blasphemy against Buddhism. Accordingly, he does not recognize Kumano *bikuni* as real nuns. Rather, he perceives them as victims who were pushed into a marginalized position because of difficult social circumstances.<sup>64</sup>

While Araki still perceives Kumano *bikuni* as Buddhist nuns, folklorist Nakayama Tarō recognizes Kumano *bikuni* as a Buddhist-influenced form of *miko* 巫女 (female shamans). Nakayama introduces Kumano *bikuni* in *Nihon miko shi*, originally published

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<sup>62</sup> Nei Kiyoshi & Yamamoto Shigeo, *Kumano bikuni o etoku*, 321. Besides Asai, many other writers in the early modern period describe Kumano *bikuni* as prostitutes. See Nei Kiyoshi & Yamamoto Shigeo, *Kumano bikuni o etoku*, 317-373. For example, *Shikidō Ōkagami* (1678) by Fijumoto Kizan, which compile manners, customs, and reputations of pleasure districts across Japan, introduces the manners when visiting Kumano *bikuni*. See Nei Kiyoshi & Yamamoto Shigeo, *Kumano bikuni o etou*, 321-324.

<sup>63</sup> Araki Ryōsen, *Bikuni shi*, 2-6.

<sup>64</sup> Araki Ryōsen, *Bikuni shi*, 83-93.

in 1930. In this work, Nakayama organizes extensive information on *miko* in order to outline their chronological development throughout history. He divides the history of *miko* into three periods according to the transformation of their roles in society.

According to Nakayama's observation, up to the tenth century *miko* in primitive Shinto enjoyed great authority over a variety of affairs including politics, military, culture, and agriculture. From the tenth century to the thirteenth century, with the influence of Buddhism and Daoism, practices of *miko* became diverse. In discussing this period, Nakayama mentions Kumano *bikuni*, while perceiving them as a Buddhist-influenced form of *miko*. From the thirteenth century, the status of *miko* started declining because of oppression by organized religious traditions such as Buddhism and *shugendō* in addition to political pressure. As the result of their marginalized status, *miko* started engaging in sex work. In relation to this period, Nakayama introduces Kumano *bikuni* as an example of *miko* who engaged in sex work as a result of their marginalized status. Throughout his observation of Kumano *bikuni*, Nakayama conceptualizes them as *miko* who were deprived of their original authority.<sup>65</sup>

### **Kumano *bikuni* as Mediators**

Since the 1980s, however, scholars have been questioning the portrayal of Kumano *bikuni* merely as the marginalized. Many scholars recognize the contribution of Kumano *bikuni* to the propagation of Kumano *shinkō* and their significance in shaping the perspectives of the masses.

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<sup>65</sup> Nakayama Tarō, *Nihon Miko Shi*.

For example, in *Miko to bukkyōshi* by Hagiwara Tatsuo, the significance of Kumano *bikuni* as religious practitioners is demonstrated. Hagiwara argues that the religious sphere in Japan had developed through the interaction between Buddhism and the shamanic tradition that was associated with indigenous deities. According to him, while Buddhist elements were more likely to appear on the surface since the adoption of Buddhism, the tradition of female shamans maintained its position as the foundation of the religious sphere. Hagiwara argues that Kumano *bikuni* were one of the successors of the shamanic tradition who mediated between Buddhism and the shamanic tradition. In Hagiwara's view, Kumano *bikuni* were originally female shamans residing in the Kumano mountains. Later, the *shugendō* institutions took them over by giving them the Buddhist title “*bikuni*” because their activities were similar to the ones of *yamabushi* and they were often associated with each other.<sup>66</sup>

Another significant argument by Hagiwara is that he challenges the notion of a linear transition of Kumano *bikuni*. He observes the records on Kumano *bikuni* who locally established themselves. He argues these nuns lived a celibate life at local nunneries while maintaining faith in Kumano *shinkō*. By demonstrating diverse transitions of Kumano *bikuni*, his study challenges the perspective that Kumano *bikuni* degenerated from *etoki bikuni* to *uta bikuni* (singing nuns) and ended up prostituting.<sup>67</sup>

Regarding the conceptualization of Kumano *bikuni*, Wakita Haruko makes an argument which is similar to Nakayama, who states that Kumano *bikuni* were the successors of the shamanic tradition. She differs with Nakayama on one point. Nakayama believes that they were deprived of the authority in the religious and political

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<sup>66</sup> Hagiwara Tatsuo, *Miko to bukkyōshi*, 1-8.

<sup>67</sup> Hagiwara Tatsuo, *Miko to bukkyōshi*, 131-171.

spheres. On the other hand, Wakita recognizes a significant spiritual role that Kumano *bikuni* played in the daily life of the masses in the medieval period. According to her discussion in *Josei geinō no genryū*, as the result of the synthesis of Buddhism and the worship of native Japanese deities (*kami*), *kami* became subordinated to Buddhism.<sup>68</sup> The early ideologies of *shinbutsu shūgō* 神仏習合 (*kami* merging with Buddhist deities) and *wakō dōjin* 和光同塵 (Buddhist deities softening light and mingling with dust of the mundane world) indicate imbalance of power between Buddhist deities and *kami* in medieval Japan. These ideologies imply *kami* were “in a lower position than Buddhist deities”<sup>69</sup> and were “ultimately in need of Buddhist salvation”.<sup>70</sup> However, as Wakita argues, *kami* worship still played a significant role in the religious sphere because it responded to the worldly interests of the masses. While Buddhism seeks the path to enlightenment and perceives that worldly desires are obstacles on the path, *kami* worship was concerned with matters in everyday life in medieval Japan. As the successor of *kami* worship, itinerant religious practitioners such as Kumano *bikuni* were responsible for spiritual needs in everyday life and served the interests of those who were excluded from the framework of monastic Buddhism.<sup>71</sup>

### **The approach from *shugendō* studies**

On the other hand, the scholars of *shugendō* studies basically consider that Kumano *bikuni* were the nuns of *shugendō*. Institutionally, Kumano *bikuni* were

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<sup>68</sup> Wakita Haruko, *Josei gēnō no genryū*, 213-214.

<sup>69</sup> Anna Andreeva, “Medieval Shinto: New Discoveries and Perspectives”, *Religion Compass* 4, no. 11 (2010): 681.

<sup>70</sup> Anna Andreeva, “Medieval Shinto: New Discoveries and Perspectives”: 681.

<sup>71</sup> Wakita Haruko, *Josei gēnō no genryū*, 39-44.

organized under the *hongan* temples which belonged to the Kumano school of *shugendō* (Kumano *shugen* 熊野修験).<sup>72</sup> Therefore, through the investigation of the relationship between Kumano *bikuni* and the *hongan* temples, scholars of *shugendō* studies attempt to uncover the institutional position of Kumano *bikuni* and their assigned activities.

In *Kumano honganjo shiryō*, Suzuki Shōei, Toyoshima Osamu, Nei Kiyoshi, and Yamamoto Shigeo examine the official documents issued by and to the Kumano *hongan* temples affiliated with each of the Three Shrines of Kumano. They illustrate how the *hongan* temples at the Kumano mountains were structured and developed, and how their influence declined. Their investigation uncovers the institutional structure within and among the *hongan* temples as well as the relationship between the *hongan* temples, the Three Shrines of Kumano, the Tokugawa shogunate, and the feudal lords. The *hongan* temples were associated with each other in order to carry out their tasks at the Kumano mountains, but the authorities, responsibilities, and activities were diverse among the *hongan* temples. Also, the scholars observe the tension between the *hongan* temples and the Three Shrines of Kumano. These documents not only demonstrated how Kumano *bikuni* were expected to function under the regulation by the *hongan* temples but also suggest the political circumstances that impacted on the activities of itinerant Kumano *bikuni*.<sup>73</sup>

Observing the relationship between the *hongan* temples and Kumano *bikuni*, Nei emphasizes the aspect of Kumano *bikuni* as an organized religious group. He argues that resident Kumano *bikuni* were trained from a young age and followed a strictly regulated

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<sup>72</sup> Kumano hongan bunsho kenkyūkai (ed.), *Kumano hongan shiryō*, 813.

<sup>73</sup> Kumano hongan bunsho kenkyūkai (ed.), *Kumano hongan shiryō*, 813-840. Also see Toyoshima Osamu and Kiba Akeshi (eds.) *Jisha zōei kanjin hongan shoku no kenkyū*. (Osaka: Seibundō, 2010).



regime under the hierarchal system of the *hongan* temples. Regarding itinerant Kumano *bikuni*, Nei considers that they were the groups of religious practitioners who were granted the occupational title and guaranteed religious status by the Kumano *hongan* temples. Under the control of the *hongan* temples, they actively promoted Kumano *shinkō* and were eventually recognized as part of the Kumano school of *shugendō*. However, the conflict between the *hongan* temples, the Three Shrines of Kumano, and the Tokugawa shogunate resulted in weakening the authority of the *hongan* temples. Nei argues that the declining authority of the *hongan* temples also resulted in pushing itinerant Kumano *bikuni* into a vulnerable position in society in the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>74</sup>

Also, Nei argues that many of the paintings related to Kumano *shinkō* might have been produced by the *hongan* temples for *etoki* solicitation. As an example of the evidence, he points out that the representative stories of all Nachi *hongan* temples are depicted in the Nachi Pilgrimage Mandala which depicts the landscape of the Nachi mountain. He argues that the Nachi Pilgrimage Mandala was composed from the perspective of the alliance of the Nachi *hongan* temples rather than from the perspective of the Three Shrines of Kumano. Considering that the *hongan* temples also organized a variety of craftsmen for construction, Nei argues that the *hongan* temples might have functioned as studios in the production of these paintings.<sup>75</sup>

In “Kumano bikuni saikō: Tokuni kobikuni o megutte”, focusing on *kobikuni* (young girls who assisted Kumano *bikuni*), Kikuchi Takeshi discusses how the activities

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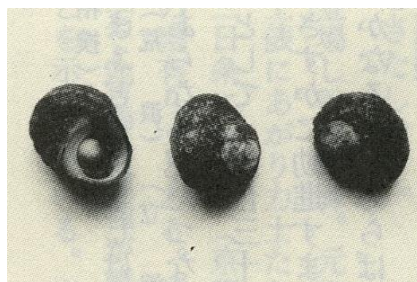
<sup>74</sup> Nei Kiyoshi, “Kumano sanzan no hongan to bikuni tachi” in *Setsuwa: Ikai to shitenno yama*, ed. Setsuwa denshō gakkai, (Tokyo: Kanrin shobō, 1997), 84.

<sup>75</sup> Nei Kiyoshi, “Kumano sanzan no hongan to bikuni tachi”, 78-81, 85.

of Kumano *bikuni* were passed on to the next generation. Observing the hierarchal system within the group of Kumano *bikuni*, Kikuchi argues that the relationship between Kumano *bikuni* and *kobikuni* was like that of master and pupil or seniors and juniors. Under senior Kumano *bikuni*, *kobikuni* were trained to undertake the solicitation tasks while assisting their seniors. According to Kikuchi, it was a common practice for young girls to be sold as street performers or prostitutes, and *kobikuni* were also recruited in a similar manner to be brought up as Kumano *bikuni*.<sup>76</sup>



**Figure 3 Nagi Leaf(なぎの葉)**  
Nei Kiyoshi & Yamamoto Shigeo,  
*Kumano bikuni o etoku*,  
169.



**Figure 4 Sugai(酒貝)**  
Nei Kiyoshi & Yamamoto Shigeo,  
*Kumano bikuni o etoku*, 169.



**Figure 5 The Talisman of Daikokuten at Myoshinji (妙心寺の大黒天護符)**  
Yamamoto Shigeo, “Kumano bikuni no ichi”, 492.

Also, in addition to the institutional structure of the Kumano *hongan* temples, Yamamoto Shigeo investigates the details of the solicitation activities by Kumano *bikuni* under these *hongan* temples. Beside *etoki* performance, he extends his investigation to other fundraising activities such as the distributions of talismans, *nagi* leaves (fig. 3), and

<sup>76</sup> Kikuchi Takeshi, “Kumano bikuni saikō: Tokuni kobikuni o megutte”, *Sangaku shugen* 13 (1994): 51-54.

spiral shells (*sugai*; fig. 4). The talismans of the three shrines of Kumano were produced under the supervision of the *hongan* temples, and only those who were granted the occupational title by the *hongan* temples were allowed to distribute them. Some Kumano *bikuni* distributed the talismans of Daikokuten (fig. 5), a popular Buddhist deity of wealth and prosperity who is the principal deity of one of the *hongan* temples in Shingū. Regarding this, he suggests the possibility that Daikokuten was believed to be the protector of women particularly in terms of childbirth and childrearing. Besides the talismans, *nagi* leaves and spiral shells were distributed in order to attract women and children. *Nagi* leaves, the symbol of a Kumano pilgrimage, were believed to maintain a good relationship between a couple.<sup>77</sup> *Sugai* shells were believed to help safe delivery, and children played with caps of *sugai* shells spinning in vinegar. Considering the objects Kumano *bikuni* used for their solicitation activities, Yamamoto argues that these talismans, leaves, and shells reflect the objective of Kumano *bikuni* who targeted female commoners and served their interests.<sup>78</sup>

### **The approach through visual images**

Another approach to Kumano *bikuni* is the analysis of the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala. Since there is no record on the narrative of Kumano *bikuni*, the visual images utilized for *etoki* performance are critically important to investigate the religious perspective of Kumano *bikuni*.

In “Kumano kanjin jikkai mandala no uchū”, though the close examination of the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala, Kuroda Hideo investigates the worldview as well as

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<sup>77</sup> *Nagi* leaves were also believed to protect pilgrims to the Kumano mountains.

<sup>78</sup> Yamamoto Shigeo, “Kumano bikuni no haisatsu” *Sangaku shugen* 23 (1999): 49-55.

social implications embedded in the mandala. He focuses on the structure: motifs are symmetrically organized and the dominant motifs are placed on vertical and horizontal lines. He argues that different levels of spiritual realms and time are organized in the natural landscape to produce a comprehensive narrative story. According to him, at an *etoki* performance, the audience virtually experienced the journey of life, death, and rebirth in the six realms starting from the hill of age. After witnessing suffering in the lesser realms, the audience eventually returned to the human realm in order to conduct the ritual on behalf of those still suffering in the lesser realms. Also, as Kuroda discusses, reflecting the social norm of the era, the characters in the mandala are presented as families or couples. Thus, it was easier for the audience to see themselves reflected in the characters. His analysis illustrates how social expectations and norms are reflected in the mandala and how Kumano *bikuni* possibly addressed everyday concerns of the audience at the *etoki* performance.<sup>79</sup>

Regarding the central teaching embedded in the mandala, the majority of scholars, including Hagiwara and Kuroda basically agree with that the structure of the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala was developed based on the Chinese Tendai painting “Enton kanjin jikkaihōzu” which depicts the four states of enlightenment and the six realms of sentient beings around the character *kokoro* 心. Since the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala also depicts the character surrounded by the six realms and the four enlightened states, they consider that the character represents the central doctrine of the mandala.<sup>80</sup> In addition, Hagiwara emphasizes the significance of the hill of age because he considers this motif to

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<sup>79</sup> Kuroda Hideo, “kanjin jikkai mandara no uchū”, 222-272.

<sup>80</sup> Hagiwara Tatsuo, *Miko to bukkyōshi*, 102-104; Kuroda Hideo “Kanjin jikkai mandara no uchū”, 219-220.

be uniquely characteristic of the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala.<sup>81</sup> On the other hand, Kuroda argues for the significance of the ritual conducted on behalf of the ancestors, considering that the boy conducting the ritual is positioned at the exact centre of the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala.<sup>82</sup> Nishiyama agrees with Kuroda's discussion on the significance of the ritual. In his view, the major influence came from the Korean Buddhist painting "Kanrozu" which depicts the ritual of saving evil-doers suffering in the realm of hungry ghosts.<sup>83</sup>

In *Kumano kanjin jikkai mandala*, Ogurisu Kenji classifies all versions of the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala identified by 2011 according to a number of criteria. He observes the minor differences between the mandalas as well as artisanal techniques applied for the mandalas. Through the close examination of a number of the mandalas, he investigates how the motifs and the arrangements were developed, and how the differences might have had an impact on the narrative produced at the *etoki* performance. He argues that the differences between the mandalas were produced in order to make it easier for *etoki* performers to narrate the stories. In relation to this, he points out that the theme of parents saved by their child is more emphasized in the later versions of the Kumano Ten Worlds mandalas.<sup>84</sup>

Ishiguro Kumiko makes further arguments concerning the development of the motifs while focusing on the representation of women, particularly the representation of

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<sup>81</sup> Hagiwara Tatsuo, *Miko to bukkyōshi*, 105; Hagiwara suggests the influence of European paintings which depicts the stages of life from cradle to grave.

<sup>82</sup> Kuroda Hideo "Kanjin jikkai mandara no uchū", 268-270.

<sup>83</sup> Nishimura Masaru, "Chōsen butsuga kanro chō to Kumano kanjin jikkaizu" *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kansho* 68, no. 6 (2003): 158-161; Nishiyama Masaru, "Jigoku o etoku", 229.

<sup>84</sup> Ogurisu Kenji, *Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara*, 174-220.

women as mothers in the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala. She argues that as the mandalas developed, the motivation of a mother for salvation became more obvious. In earlier mandalas, the focus is on the son saving his mother from hell. However, as the mandalas developed, the focus shifted to the mother seeking salvation.<sup>85</sup> In addition, Ishiguro discusses how Kumano *bikuni* as performers might be reflected as mother-like characters, arguing that the relationship between Kumano *bikuni* and *kobikuni* could appear as a mother-child relationship in the eyes of the audience.<sup>86</sup>

### **The specialists in *etoki* study**

On the other hand, focusing on the characteristics of *etoki* performance, scholars attempt to investigate how the narratives were produced at *etoki* performance.<sup>87</sup> For example, Hayashi Masahiko, one of the leading scholars of *etoki* study, theorizes on the functions of *etoki* performance. Although *etoki* performers were expected to function as the translators of paintings, they were at the same time the authors of *etoki* performance. The narrative changes depending on time, space, occasion, audience, and the ability of the performer. Accordingly, the live experience of *etoki* performance was different each time it was performed.<sup>88</sup>

Also, Hayashi examines the written and visual documents in order to acquire a more complete picture of Kumano *bikuni*. Through the examination of these documents, he demonstrates the marginalized position of Kumano *bikuni* and observes how *etoki*

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<sup>85</sup> Ishiguro Kumiko, “‘Kumano kanjin jikkaizu’ o meguru josei hyōshō no kinō”, 36-39.

<sup>86</sup> Ishiguro Kumiko, “‘Kumano kanshin jikkaizu’ o meguru josei hyōshō no kinō”, 48

<sup>87</sup> Also see Hayashi Masahiko, *Nihon no etoki*; Akai Tatsuo, *Etoki no keifu*; Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*.

<sup>88</sup> Hayashi Masahiko, “Etoki towa”, 6-7.

nuns gradually transformed into singing nuns and prostitutes in urban areas.

Acknowledging the criticism by the intellectuals of the era, Hayashi points out the gap between intellectuals and the masses in recognizing Kumano *bikuni*. Hayashi argues that Kumano *bikuni* were still recognized as religious practitioners in the eyes of the masses even though they engaged in secular activities.<sup>89</sup>

In *Explaining Pictures: Buddhist Propaganda and Etoji Storytelling in Japan*, conceptualizing *etoki* performance as a propagation practice, Ikumi Kaminishi examines how *etoki* was utilized in order to popularize Buddhism throughout Japanese history. She emphasizes that *etoki* performers had control over the contents of the narrative stories. They could deliver different messages to the audience according to changing situations, while adapting Buddhist doctrines to the interests and needs of the audience. Kumano *bikuni* knew their audience well because they were always in contact with secular life and because they shared concerns with the audience as women.<sup>90</sup>

On the question of how Kumano *bikuni* dealt with the misogynous narratives embedded in the motifs, Kaminishi argues that misogyny was a strategy for achieving their purposes. According to her, while stating that women were condemned to hell because of their female physiology, Kumano *bikuni* offered practical techniques for the audience to escape from these vicissitudes. In her view, the performers were in at the dominant position in producing the narratives. Accordingly, the performers also could control the interpretation of the audience.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Hayashi Masahiko, “Kumano bikuni to etoki” in *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō bessatsu: Kumano sono shinkō to bungaku bijutsu shizen*, ed. Hayashi Masahiko (Tokyo: Shibundō, 2007), 106-122.

<sup>90</sup> Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*, 156-160.

<sup>91</sup> Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*, 156-160.

Regarding the reciprocity between the performers and the audience, some scholars such as Alison Tokita and Keller Kimbrough, disagree with Kaminishi's view. They argue that the audience was not entirely under the control of Kumano *bikuni* considering the marginalized status of Kumano *bikuni*. In this connection, they suggest the possibility that what the texts represent, what Kumano *bikuni* narrated, and what the audience received might not always correspond with one another.<sup>92</sup>

In the view of Barbara Ruch, Kumano *bikuni* were the significant figures not only in the field of literature but also as religious teachers. In *Mō hitotsuno chūseizō: Bikuni, otogizōshi, Raise*, Ruch recognizes the contribution of Kumano *bikuni* to the popularization of “*kokumin bungaku* 国民文学” (People's Literature). She postulates that *kokumin bungaku* is literature which is widely recognized and accepted by all classes of society. Different from literature which expresses the perspective of the authors, *kokumin bungaku* aims at reflecting the perspective of the audience.<sup>93</sup> Ruch argues that Kumano *bikuni* popularized this genre among the masses through *etoki* performance because she considers *etoki* as an audio-visual communication tool which does not require literary proficiency of the audience. Pointing out that picture books could function as talismans, Ruch argues that their activity also contributed to making the masses familiar with books.<sup>94</sup>

Additionally, in “Women to Women: Kumano *bikuni* Proselytizers in Medieval and Early Modern Japan”, Ruch argues for the contribution of Kumano *bikuni* into

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<sup>92</sup> Alison Tokita, “Performance and Text: Gender Identity and the Kumano Faith”; Keller Kimbrough, “Preaching the Animal Realm in Late Medieval Japan” *Asian Folklore Studies* 65, no 2 (2006), 47-57.

<sup>93</sup> Barbara Ruch, *Mō hitotsuno chūseizō: Bikuni, Otogizōshi, Raise*, (Kyoto: Shibunkaku Shuppan, 1991), 156-157.

<sup>94</sup> Barbara Ruch, *Mō hitotsuno chūseizō: Bikuni, Otogizōshi, Raise*, 162-172.



shaping the religiosity of the Japanese, while arguing that Kumano *bikuni* are a rare case of female religious teachers in the history of Japanese Buddhism. She also challenges the perspective that Kumano *bikuni* were a homogenous group. She argues that it is necessary to recognize that they actually belonged to different orders and professions in order to evaluate the contribution of Kumano *bikuni* as religious teachers. Moreover, she suggests a unique interpretation of the motif of the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala. She argues that a piece of paper passed to a woman in the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala is not *the Blood Pond Sutra* but *the Heart Sutra* (*Hannya shinkyō* 般若心經; *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya-Sutra*) which is also represented by the character *kokoro* at the centre of the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala. *The Heart Sutra* is a very popular, much recited sutra in East and Central Asia. It summarizes the doctrine of emptiness that emptiness is a different aspect of, and thus is identical with, the mundane world. While denying all perceptions and concepts of the mundane world including the essential Buddhist teachings, the sutra states that all buddhas and bodhisattvas were enlightened through the perfection of wisdom, which is the realization of emptiness. Considering that the essential experience of *the Heart Sutra* is to vocalize it, Ruch argues that Kumano *bikuni* aimed at offering salvation through their *etoki* performance which was based on *the Heart Sutra*. While *the Blood Pond Sutra* might condemn women to hell, *the Heart Sutra* saves them from hell, transcends the suffering of life, and provides wisdom for spiritual advancement.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Barbara Ruch, “Woman to Woman”, 537-580.

This section has reviewed the approaches taken by scholars of different fields. Indeed, their studies demonstrate the necessity of an interdisciplinary analysis in order to understand the activities of Kumano *bikuni*. Therefore, although the investigation of this thesis is mainly based on the close examination of the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala, related issues such as the institutional and social position of Kumano *bikuni* and the functions of *etoki* performance need to be considered in order to understand the activities of Kumano *bikuni* and their impacts on their audience. Also, as the scholars demonstrate, it is difficult to situate Kumano *bikuni* because they engaged in different activities depending on the historical period and location. Moreover, even among itinerant Kumano *bikuni* who practiced *etoki*, the issue of heterogeneity needs to be considered because they were organized under multiple *hongan* temples whose authorities and responsibilities were different from one another. Considering these issues, this thesis examines the different aspects of the *etoki* activity of Kumano *bikuni* based on the approaches by the scholars discussed above.

## Chapter 3: Background

### The Religious Landscape of the Kumano Mountains

Among a number of shrines and temples which form the religious landscape of the Kumano mountains, three are particularly significant because they represent Kumano *shinkō* as the Three Shrines of Kumano. The Three Shrines of Kumano consist of the Hongū, Shingū (also called Hayatama shrine), and Nachi shrines. They are said to originate in nature worship, such as the worshipping of rivers, a huge rock, or a water fall.<sup>96</sup> Each of the three shrines has a different origin and a lineage and developed distinctly. However, they started incorporating into one cult around the tenth century. Eventually, all three shrines praised the same deities called Kumano *gongen* (権現; avatar)<sup>97</sup>, the twelve deities who are the manifestations of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other Buddhist deities.<sup>98</sup> The religious landscape of the Kumano mountains embodied popular religious perceptions grounded in the everyday life of the medieval period. At the time, the lives of the masses were structured around a number of religious cults. Reflecting the perspective widely accepted by the masses, the religious landscape of the Kumano mountains is informed by a variety of religious traditions such as Shinto

<sup>96</sup>The former shrine complex of the Hongū shrine was located in the middle of three rivers to worship water force. The Shingū shrine originates in worship of a huge rock which is enshrined in the Kamikura (Kan'nokura) shrine. The Nachi shrine originates in worship of a waterfall which is enshrined in the Hirō shrine.

<sup>97</sup>Based on the idea of *honji suijaku* (original ground and manifest traces), it came to be believed that buddhas, bodhisattvas, and Buddhist deities may manifest in various provincial forms in order to save sentient beings in Japan. These manifest traces are called *gongen*.

<sup>98</sup>Suzuki Shōei, "Kumano no shugendō", *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō*, 68, no.10 (2003): 115; Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*; Toyoshima Osamu "Kumano: Kodai kara kinsei e" in *Kumano: Sono shinkō to bungaku, bijutsu, shizen*, ed. Hayashi Masahiko (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1983): 36-37; Nachi identifies the thirteen deities including Hirō *gongen* (identified with Senju Kannon; Avalokiteśvara with a thousand arms), the principal deity of the Hirō shrine. For the list of deities and their Buddhist grounds, See Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 75-76.

mythologies, several Buddhist traditions, *shugendō*, nature worship, and ancestral worship. Throughout history, new ideas and beliefs were constantly brought there, forming a multi-layered religious landscape.<sup>99</sup>

Max Moerman utilizes Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopias to explain the multi-layered significance integrated into the Kumano mountains. Heterotopias are existing physical spaces, and are also imagined places of multiple worldviews. In contrast to a utopia, which represents the perfected form of a society that is yet fundamentally unreal, a heterotopia is a real space which is a parallel site or counter-site of a utopia.<sup>100</sup> In a heterotopia, "all the other real sites that can be found within the culture are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted".<sup>101</sup> It is a place that is capable of presenting heterogeneous sites that are not comparable by themselves.<sup>102</sup> Illustrating the religious landscape of the Kumano mountains using the concept of heterotopia, Moerman argues, Kumano is "a location at which cultural ideas – about death, salvation, gender, and authority – are represented, contested, and even at times inverted".<sup>103</sup> Indeed, the Kumano mountains functioned in various ways, and had diverse significance for people who were associated with them. For people living nearby, the mountains were the place of their ancestors. Ascetics sought spiritual advancement in the Kumano mountains. Political authorities attempted to legitimize their power through the authority of the Kumano *gongen*, while pilgrims experienced ritual death and rebirth in the mountains.

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<sup>99</sup> Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 2-3.

<sup>100</sup> Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 2-3. Michel Foucault, & Jay Miskowicz "Of Other Spaces" *Diacritics* 16 no. 1 (1986), 24.

<sup>101</sup> Michel Foucault & Jay Miskowicz "Of Other Spaces", 24

<sup>102</sup> Michel Foucault & Jay Miskowicz "Of Other Spaces", 24

<sup>103</sup> Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 3.

### **The Kumano mountains as the abode of the dead**

The Kumano mountains are said to be the abode of the dead or the entrance to the other world. The term “Kumano” originally signifies a place covered up with deep forests, or a place where the dead’s spirits hold retreat. In ancient Japanese belief, the mountains and lands across the sea are where the spirits of the dead reside. This belief was derived from ancient funeral practices when cremation and inhumation were not common ways to deal with dead bodies. In earlier times at the Kumano mountains, dead bodies were abandoned so that the defilement of death could be purified there.<sup>104</sup> Also, water burial was practised in Nachi, and this practice was later transformed into the belief that people could reach Kannon’s Pure Land from the shore of Nachi.<sup>105</sup>

Moreover, the perception of the Kumano mountains as the abode of the dead is expressed in ancient mythology. *Nihon shoki*, one of the oldest written records of Japanese mythical history, composed in the eighth century, illustrates the association of the Kumano mountains with the first mythic death. The earliest creation goddess Izanami died because of injuries she received in childbirth, and was buried in Kumano. Her partner Izanagi visited her in the world of the dead with the hope to bring her back to the world of the living. He entered the world of the dead by crossing a mountain pass that connects the two worlds. However, upon seeing her decaying body, he escaped from the world of the dead and then closed the mountain pass. In anger and humiliation, Izanami declared that she would take one thousand people to the land of the dead each day. As

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<sup>104</sup> Toyoshima Osamu, “Kumano: Kodai kara kinsei e”, 32-33.

<sup>105</sup> Nei Kiyoshi, “Fudaraku Tokai” in *Kumano: Sono shinkō to bungaku, bijutsu, shizen*, ed. Hayashi Masahiko (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1983), 96.

shown in this mythic story, Kumano is associated with the first death, the creation of death, and the world of the dead, which is polluted yet sacred.<sup>106</sup>



**Figure 6 The Talisman of the Kumano Hongū Shrine - Kumano *goō* (熊野本宮大社の熊野牛玉宝印護符)**

Another Shinto myth associated with Kumano is the story in *Kojiki*, in which mythic Emperor Jinmu conquered Yamato where he became the first emperor of Japan. On the way to Yamato, Jinmu faced difficult situations in Kumano. However, he overcame them with help from the gods, and eventually he reached Yamato with the guide of Yatagarasu, a divine messenger in the form of a crow with three feet.<sup>107</sup> In Kumano *shinkō*, crows are considered as *misaki*, divine messengers, the spirits of the dead, or/and divine spirits purifying the defilement of death. Thus, the talismans of the Three Shrines of Kumano depict many crows forming characters (fig.6). Regarding this, Gorai Shigeru argues that the belief in crows originates in an ancient funeral practice to abandon dead bodies in mountains. Animals such as crows and dogs took a significant role in this practice because they were supposed to help purifying the defilement of death and to tame the spirits of the dead by eating dead bodies which were considered as impure.<sup>108</sup>

### **The Kumano mountains as training sites for mountain ascetics**

Like other sacred mountains in Japan, the Kumano mountains were training sites for religious practitioners. Among various religious practitioners who sought spiritual

<sup>106</sup> Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 44-45.

<sup>107</sup> Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 46.

<sup>108</sup> Gorai Shigeru, *Kumano mōde: Sanzan shinkō to bunka* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2004), 43-50.

advancement there, the practitioners of *shugendō* (*yamabushi*) recognized a special significance of the Kumano mountains. *Shugendō* is a form of Buddhist mountain asceticism which was organized as a religion around the ninth and tenth centuries.

Through various ascetic practices in the mountains, *yamabushi* sought to gain supernatural power and utilized that power through magico-religious activities. Their practices were based on mountain worship and the belief in spirits existing in nature, and were influenced by esoteric Shingon Buddhism, Daoism, and yin-yang belief.

Particularly, heavily influenced by the esoteric Shingon doctrine, *yamabushi* sought to realize Buddhahood within this life and to be rewarded for worldly benefits through a variety of ascetic practices.<sup>109</sup> While *shugendō* developed at sacred mountains throughout Japan, the area from the Yoshino region to the Kumano region was identified with the Two Worlds Mandala (Ryōkai Mandara 兩界曼荼羅) which depicts the esoteric Shingon cosmology.<sup>110</sup> When that cosmology is translated into the geographic area, the Yoshino region is identified with the Diamond Realm (Kongōkai 金剛界; Vajradhātu) and the Kumano region is identified with the Womb Realm (Taizōkai 胎藏界;

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<sup>109</sup> Ichirō Hori, *Folk Religion in Japan*, 77-78.

<sup>110</sup> A pair of the Diamond World Mandala and the Womb World Mandala is called the Two Worlds Mandala, which depicts the fundamental doctrine of esoteric Shingon Buddhism. In Shingon Buddhism, the realization of buddhahood means the identification of oneself with Dainichi Nyorai (大日如来; Buddha Mahavairocana), the personification of enlightenment. Thus, each of the Two Worlds Mandalas depicts a number of buddhas, bodhisattvas, Buddhist deities, and monks to show that all are ultimately part of Dainichi. This pair represents the idea that all phenomena in the physical world are manifestations of the ultimate reality. While the Diamond World Mandala represents reality in the Buddha realm, the Womb World Mandala represents the reality manifested in the phenomenal world. Since each represents one aspect of the reality of the world, each mandala is meaningful only when one is paired with the other. Although these mandalas are based on different sutras composed in different times and places, they were brought together by Kūkai, the founder of Shingon Buddhism in Japan, as the principal teachings. Since these mandalas embodied the core teachings of Kūkai, his monastery on the top of Mt. Kōya was named Kongōbuj, meaning “Vajra, or Diamond Peak Temple”, and Mt. Kōya itself was identified with the Womb World. Such identification of the Two Worlds Mandala with geographic space was observed many places throughout Japan. See Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, *Japanese Mandalas: Representations of Sacred Geography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999), 33-121; Daigan Matsunaga & Alicia Matsunaga, *Foundation of Japanese Buddhism vol.I* (Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1974), 184-193.

Garbhadhātu). Thus, the Kumano *gongen* are considered to be the manifestations of the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the Womb Realm, and the peaks in the Kumano region are identified with Buddhist deities in the mandalas. Travelling between the Yoshino and Kumano regions while practising asceticism, *yamabushi* attempted to physically experience the cosmology and to gain supernatural power.<sup>111</sup>

### **Buddhist influence**

With the increasing influence of Buddhism on Kumano *shinkō*, the Kumano deities came to be identified with buddhas, bodhisattvas, and Buddhist deities. The cult is based on the idea of *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹 (original ground and manifest traces) which allows the association and assimilation of different divinities by perceiving that they all share a common, higher source of power, and thus are mutually interchangeable.<sup>112</sup> In accordance with this idea, each of the Kumano deities acquired various characteristics including Buddhist characteristics, and they came to be called Kumano *gongen* 権現 (avatar).<sup>113</sup> They may take various kinds of provincial forms, but they were actually identical with other divinities such as buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other Buddhist deities.<sup>114</sup> Meanwhile, Pure Land belief gained popularity in the eleventh century. It

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<sup>111</sup> Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 77-80; Suzuki Shōei, “Kumano no shugendō”: 119; Ishida Mosaku, “Kumano mandara ni tsuite” *Kumano* ed. Kurata Zou, (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1968), 69.

<sup>112</sup> Mark Teeuwen & Rabio Rambelli, *Buddhas and Kami in Japan: honji suijaku as a combinatory paradigm* (NY: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 47-48.; Mark Teeuwen and Fabio Rambelli argue that *honji suijaku* “as a theory arguing that the *kami* of Japan have their original sources in buddhas and bodhisattvas was a phenomenon of limited scope”. According to them, *honji suijaku* is not merely the buddhification of *kami*. Rather, “it took the form of complicated networks of associations, establishing links between *kami* and buddhas, but also between *kami* and other *kami*, *kami* and Yin-yang deities, buddhas and other buddhas, wisdom kings, heroes from Japan, China, and India, and even demons and witch animals”.

<sup>113</sup> Kumano *gongen* are also identified with the noble family from India, Buddhist monks from India, China, and Japan, and various Shinto deities.

<sup>114</sup> Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 60.



emphasizes devotion to Amida Nyorai 阿弥陀如来 (Buddha Amitabha) and the desirability of rebirth in his western Pure Land. Since Amida guarantees salvation of all who call out his name, anyone can be reborn in his Pure Land by chanting (*nembutsu* 念仏) the sacred name of Amida. In addition to the political instability at the time, it was believed that the year 1052 was the beginning of the era of *mappō* 末法 when the Buddhist teachings were no longer practised properly and people experienced great suffering. With the rise of the Pure Land belief in the eleventh century, the Kumano mountains transformed themselves from the abode of the dead into Buddhist paradises on earth. According to this idea, Hongū was identified with the western Pure Land of Amida, Shingū was identified with the eastern paradise of Yakushi Nyorai 薬師如来 (Buddha Bhaiṣajyaguru), and Nachi was identified with the southern paradise of Kannon Bosatsu 観音菩薩 (Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara). Particularly, the identification of Hongū with Amida's Pure Land contributed to serving the interests of those who hoped to be reborn in his Pure Land. In fact, one of the purposes of the pilgrimage to the Kumano mountains is to ritually realize Amida's promise for rebirth in his Pure Land within this life and to secure the rebirth there in next life. Pilgrims purified themselves on the way to the Kumano mountains, experienced rebirth in the Pure Land at the mountains, and came back to the ordinary world. Also, Amida in Kumano *shinkō* was believed to guarantee not only people's rebirth in his Pure Land but also worldly benefits in this life.<sup>115</sup>

The retired emperors who wielded political power in the eleventh century were also those who sought the miraculous power of the Kumano *gongen* in this life and the

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<sup>115</sup> Toyoshima Osamu, *Kumano shinkōshi kenkyū to shomin shinkōshi ron* (Osaka: Shibundō, 2005), 37-42.

next. They made a number of pilgrimages to the Kumano mountains in order to legitimize their political power with religious authority and to ensure their rebirth in Amida's Pure Land.<sup>116</sup> These retired emperors not only financially contributed to the Three Shrines of Kumano but also had an impact on the religious landscape by establishing the institutional relationship between the Three Shrines of Kumano and the Tendai Buddhist temple Onjōji. Their relationship started when Zōyo, a monk from Onjōji, served as the pilgrimage guide for the retired emperor Shirakawa in 1090. In thanks, Shirakawa set a new official position titled *kengyō* to manage the affairs of the Kumano mountains, and he appointed Zōyo to this position. Since then, many of the head priests from Onjōji served as *kengyō*, the administrative officer of the Three Shrines of Kumano. The position itself was an honorary position with little authority over the actual administration at the Kumano mountains. However, the Three Shrines of Kumano gained status in the religious sphere by associating with the court system.<sup>117</sup> While the Buddhist elements had practically been brought to the Kumano mountains by the religious practitioners and with the common folk beliefs, the Buddhist influence was further enforced through this institutional affiliation.

Another Buddhist school which has a close relationship with the Kumano mountains is the Ji sect of Pure Land Buddhism. The Ji sect was founded by Ippen (1239-1289) who travelled across the country with his followers while distributing amulets and persuading people to call out the name of Amida. Their activity was unique and prominent because they sang out the name of Amida while dancing. The Kumano mountains were an important place for the followers of the Ji sect because the pilgrimage

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<sup>116</sup> Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 150-153.

<sup>117</sup> Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise* 48-49; Suzuki Shōei, "Kumano no shugendō", 117-119.

to the Kumano mountains was the turning point for Ippen's religious career. He is said to have received an oracle from the Kumano *gongen* and realized the principle of his teaching. According to the legend, the Kumano *gongen* told Ippen that the salvation of all is promised by Buddha Amida, thus individuals do not even have to have faith in him in order to be reborn in his Pure Land.<sup>118</sup> Therefore, the task for Ippen as a monk was not to persuade people to be devoted to Amida but simply to distribute amulets so that people could call out the name of Amida printed on the amulets.<sup>119</sup> The inclusive attitude of the Ji sect is expressed in the statement by the Kumano *gongen*: "Do not choose between believers and unbelievers. Do not distinguish the pure from the impure".<sup>120</sup> Because the inclusive attitude of the Kumano *gongen* was widely recognized, the Kumano mountains attracted a variety of people including those who were despised in society.<sup>121</sup>

### **The women friendly sacred mountains**

Although the Kumano mountains represented the pervasive religious perspective of the medieval period, they had a distinct attitude toward the populations who were often excluded from sacred space. As the legendary story of Ippen suggests, the Kumano mountains have long been famous for their attitude of welcoming all, including those

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<sup>118</sup> In other Pure Land sects, faith in Amida is an essential condition for rebirth in his Pure Land and complete devotion to the power of Amida is emphasized. For example, Shinran's Jōdo shinshū theology states three qualities of mind which are required for rebirth in Pure Land: sincerity, faith, and aspiration for rebirth in Pure Land. These three qualities are the products of merit that Amida accumulated over his bodhisattva career, and he transfers them to sentient beings to make their unenlightened minds enlightened. These three qualities are given in conjunction with the name of Amida. Thus, there is an inseparable relationship between the three qualities of mind and chanting his name. See Alicia Matsunaga & Daigan Matsunaga, *Foundation of Japanese Buddhism vol. II* (Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1976), 97-99.

<sup>119</sup> Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 72-74

<sup>120</sup> Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 74

<sup>121</sup> For instance, many people with Hansen's disease (leprosy) made pilgrimage to the Kumano mountains because it was believed that the miraculous power of Kumano *gongen* would cure them. See Nei Kiyoshi, "Kumano mōde", 78-79.

who were considered to be religiously and physically defiled. Particularly for female pilgrims, the Kumano mountains were well known for the absence of rules restricting women's religious practices.<sup>122</sup>

The sacred sites which strictly excluded women are called *nyonin kekkai* 女人結界. Though the origin of *nyonin kekkai* is obscure, the notion of excluding women from religious practices first appeared in the ninth century, and became pervasive by the eleventh century.<sup>123</sup> Until the modern era, many sacred mountains in Japan prohibited women's entry.<sup>124</sup> Women might climb up to certain points of the mountains. However, they were not allowed beyond the specific boundary which divides the sacred and the profane. At the foot of those sacred mountains which prohibited women, there were often places for female believers. Since women were not allowed to cross the boundary, they practised before the boundary and supported male ascetics practising in the mountains.<sup>125</sup>

According to scholars such as Taira Masayuki and Bernard Faure, in addition to the attitude that women are obstacles to the spiritual advancement of male religious practitioners, the idea of *nyonin kekkai* is informed by the concept of the blood taboo, the theory of five obstacles, and the notion of the three dependences.<sup>126</sup> In ancient belief,

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<sup>122</sup> Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 181

<sup>123</sup> Taira Masayuki, "Chūsei bukkyō to josei" in *Nihon josei seikatsushi: Chūsei*, ed. Joseishi sōgō kenkyūkai (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1990), 80-81.; Taira, Masayuki, "Kyūbukkyō to josei" in *Josei to shūkyō*, ed. Sōgō joseishi kenkyū kai (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1998), 167-171.

<sup>124</sup> Excluding women from certain religious practice was mostly abolished by the order by the Meiji government in 1872, though some places still prohibit women's entry today. For example, women are not allowed to enter Mt. Ōmine.

<sup>125</sup> Barnard Faure, *The Power of Denial*, 236-237; Taira Masayuki, "Kyūbukkyō to josei", 157.

<sup>126</sup> Bernard Faure, *The Power of Denial*, 62; Taira Masayuki "Chūsei bukkyō to josei", 82-83; Also, some argue that the belief in the jealous female mountain deity contributed to the exclusion practice of women from the mountain. Since the female mountain deity prefers men to women, she gets angry when women enter her domain. Ikeda Genda, "Yama no Shinkō" *Minzokugaku kenkyū* 32 no. 4 (1968): 291. In addition, Bernard Faure explains *nyonin kekkai* in terms of the conflict between Buddhism and local cults. While ancient female shamans served and represented the mountain deities of local cults, male monks who took

blood was considered as the source of life because humans die from lack of blood when they are badly injured. However, women do not die even though they shed blood when giving birth and menstruating. Because such female physiology was considered as extraordinary, women during menstruation, at and after childbirth were temporarily excluded from conventional living space. Though the ancient belief might not necessarily associate female physiology with defilement, it gradually developed as a blood taboo, which maintains that Shinto deities generally dislike impurity. There are two main categories of impurity that Shinto deities dislike: black impurity and red impurity. Black impurity is directly connected with death, thus people who encounter any kind of death are supposed to refrain from visiting sacred places where deities reside. Red impurity refers to defilement caused by female physiology, namely blood spilled at childbirth and menstrual blood.<sup>127</sup>

While the notion of the blood taboo merely concerns temporal defilement,<sup>128</sup> defilement was internalized in the female sex when it was combined with the spiritual inferiority of women. The theory of the five obstacles is the Buddhist theory which postulates a woman's inability to be reborn as any of five sacred figures including a Buddha. Women have to be reborn as men first in order to become these sacred figures,

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over the mountains represented Buddhism. The exclusion of women from the mountains might symbolize Buddhism's attempt to dominate local cults. Bernard Faure, *Power of Denial*, 228, 308.

<sup>127</sup> Also, because deaths of mothers or/and children at delivery were not unusual, childbirth could also be associated with black impurity. Miyata Noboru, "Sōron: minzoku shūkyō no nakano ketsuekan" in *Sei to mibun*, ed. Miyata Noboru (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1989), 18-19; The defilement caused by childbirth is specifically called *shira fujō* (white impurity), and a couple was expected to refrain from visiting shrines for certain periods after their child was born. Miyata Noboru, *On'na no minzokugaku* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2006), 56.

<sup>128</sup> Taira Masayuki "Chūsei bukkyō to josei", 83.

thus it implies women's spiritual inferiority to men.<sup>129</sup> However, in Buddhism, even though monks and nuns are expected to be separated in order to maintain celibacy, the rule does not prohibit women's visits to the temples and their hearing of the teachings at the temples. Women were permanently excluded from Buddhist sites only when the attitude toward women was associated with the blood taboo.<sup>130</sup>

Moreover, subordination of women in society, expressed in the Confucian notion of three dependences reinforced such practices of excluding women from sacred sites throughout Japan. The concept of three dependences suggests the patriarchal social relationship between men and women within a family. That is, a woman is subordinated to and has to obey her father, husband, and son. This does not allow women's autonomy in relation with men because women are expected to contribute to the advancement of male family members. The concept of temporary physical defilement of women and the idea of spiritual inferiority of women were combined, reinforced by the increasing subordination of women in society, and resulted in the customary practice of excluding women from religious practice in sacred spaces.<sup>131</sup>

Unlike many other sacred mountains, the Kumano mountains have been basically free from such exclusionary practices. Female pilgrims were welcomed, thus many politically powerful women financially contributed to the Three Shrines of Kumano as enthusiastic devotees. Moreover, women actually resided there as either religious practitioners or laity. In both theory and practice, the female sex was not thought to

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<sup>129</sup> Taira Masayuki, "Chūsei bukkyō to josei", 90-91. Taira argues that the emphasis on women's inferiority is the principal means for the salvation of women. Also, he argues, by being excluded from sacred space, women gained religious aspiration.

<sup>130</sup> Taira Masayuki, "Chūsei bukkyō to josei", 82.

<sup>131</sup> Taira Masayuki, "Chūsei bukkyō to josei", 82-83.

pollute the sacredness of the Kumano mountains. For example, the story of Izumi Shikibu, a female poet of the Heian court, presents the attitude of the Kumano *gongen* toward female physiology. In the story, Izumi Shikibu gave up visiting the Hongū shrine because she started menstruating at the foot of the mountain. However, Kumano *gongen* appeared in her dream to allow her to visit the Hongū shrine. He declared that his superior sacredness would never be polluted by menstrual blood.<sup>132</sup> Concerning this story, Moerman argues that transgressing the boundary between the sacred and the profane in the Kumano mountains was “a purificatory rather than polluting act”.<sup>133</sup> Thus, there would be no problem accepting any kind of population.

This section has briefly illustrated how the multi-layered religious landscape of the Kumano mountains developed by absorbing the elements of various religious traditions throughout history. Even after new religious perspectives were introduced, the existing beliefs were not entirely abandoned. Rather, the existing religious perceptions were blended with the newly adapted religious elements and together bore the religious landscape of the Kumano mountains. Besides the episodes introduced in this section, there are many other stories constituting the religious landscape of the Kumano mountains. For instance, a variety of origin stories of Kumano composed throughout history trace the origin of the Kumano deities to Indian noble families, the mountain deity at the Chinese headquarters of Tendai Buddhism, and monks from India, China, and

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<sup>132</sup> Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 194-196; Tsurusaki Hiro'o, “Kumano to Izumi shikibu, Oguri hangan” *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō* 68. No. 10 (2003): 79-80

<sup>133</sup> Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 196.

Japan, and so on.<sup>134</sup> These foreign figures are given the name of Shinto deities and are also identified with Buddhist divinities as *gongen*. Thus, the Kumano mountains were simultaneously the abode of the dead, training sites for ascetics, the geographical manifestation of the Shingon cosmology, and multiple Buddhist paradises. Also, it is where foreign buddhas and bodhisattvas were manifested as the Kumano deities, where pilgrims experienced ritual death and rebirth, and where religious discourses were produced. The representation of the different religious perspectives is also a characteristic of Kumano *gongen*. Heterogeneous divinities are associated within Kumano *gongen* and served various religious needs of the masses whose lives were organized around heterogeneous religious authorities. Though these are pervasive religious phenomena in the medieval period, the Kumano mountains also served the interests of those who were often excluded from the sacred mountains. While many sacred mountains maintained sacredness by excluding unqualified populations, the Kumano mountains maintained sacredness by purifying them.

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<sup>134</sup> *Chōgan kanmon*, a court document of 1163, maintains that the Kumano deities came from Mount Tiantai, the Chinese headquarter of Tendai Buddhism. *Ōmine engi*, a foundational text of Kumano *shugen*, identifies the Kumano deities with an Indian noble family. Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 58-59. Also, one version of *Kumano no honchi*, the origin story of Kumano, identifies the Kumano deities with another Indian noble family. Hagiwara Tatsuo, *Miko to bukyōshi*, 38-56.



## The Kumano *hongan* Temples (*honganjo*)

During the transition period from the medieval period to the early modern period, the warrior class gained power while other elite institutions including aristocrats and religious institutions lost authority. Accompanied by the decline of the Muromachi shogunate, local warriors vied for control over one another between the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries before the Tokugawa shogunate consolidated power in the seventeenth century. In this period of transition, fundraising religious practitioners (*kanjin hijiri* 勧進聖) served the interests of both the masses and the religious institutions.<sup>135</sup> On the one hand, fundraising religious practitioners served the interests of the masses because it was believed that people could gain merit (*kudoku* 功德; Sanskrit, *puṇya*) by making financial contributions to temples and shrines.<sup>136</sup> It was particularly significant for migrants in urban cities. Because they did not have family temples, they could not expect memorial services to aid them after death.<sup>137</sup> On the other hand, the *kanjin* activities were financially very significant for the religious institutions. The expenses for construction and maintenance of facilities at temples and shrines were usually covered by income from estates, donations from followers, and government grants. However, when these resources did not provide the expenses because of social and political instability, temples and shrines relied on fundraising religious practitioners. In the medieval period, the *kanjin* activities were temporally conducted for extra financial needs, and were basically put out to contract with itinerant religious practitioners who were not permanent members of temples and shrines. However, when many temples and

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<sup>135</sup> Murakami Norio, *Kinsei kanjin no kenkyū*, 3-4.

<sup>136</sup> Ōta Naoyuki, *Chūsei no shaji to shinkō*, (Tokyo: Kobundō, 2008), 1.

<sup>137</sup> Murakami Norio, *Kinsei kanjin no kenkyū*, 372-373.

shrines lost their financial base in the fifteenth century, *kanjin* activities were expected to be the constant financial resources and fundraising religious practitioners were gradually organized at temples and shrines. The *hongan* temples (*honganjo* 本願所) which emerged in the late fifteenth century across Japan were the organized groups of such fundraising religious practitioners.<sup>138</sup>

In the case of the Three Shrines of Kumano, they financially relied on donated estates from patrons and government grants. However, after the court and aristocracy lost their political power and the Muromachi shogunate declined, the main economic resources for the Three Shrines of Kumano collapsed. By the late fifteenth century, the Three Shrines of Kumano could no longer expect financial support from the estates and the Muromachi shogunate. Although the Kumano mountains had attracted a large number of pilgrims, the Three Shrines of Kumano still faced financial difficulty.<sup>139</sup> Responding to this situation, fundraising religious practitioners started being organized, and the Kumano *hongan* temples were formed by the late fifteenth century.<sup>140</sup> These *hongan* temples were associated with one another and worked together as one institutional body of the Three Shrines of Kumano. Beside construction and fundraising, the tasks of the Kumano *hongan* temples included collecting contributions and tolls from pilgrims at the Kumano mountains, supporting annual events, conducting rituals, producing and distributing talismans, consulting with the priesthood at the Kumano

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<sup>138</sup> Ōta Naoyuki, *Chūsei no shaji to shinkō*, 157.

<sup>139</sup> Suzuki, Shōei, “Kumano *hongan* ryakushi” in *Kumano hongansho shiryō*, ed. Kumano hongansho kenkyūkai (Tokyo: Seibundō, 2003), 815.; Ōta Naoyuki, *Chūsei no shaji to shinkō*, 159-161.

<sup>140</sup> Ōta Naoyuki, *Chūsei no shaji to shinkō*, 158.; Yamamoto Shigeo “Daikibo na Kumano sanzan *honganjo* no tenkai” in *jisha zōei kanjin honganshiki no kenkyū* ed. Toyoshima Osamu & Kiba Kiba Akeshi (Osaka: Seibundō, 2011), 36; While some historical documents state that the Kumano *hongan* temples were established by the fourteenth century, Ōta questions the reliability of the documents considering the cases of other *hongan* temples.

mountains, and communicating with the shogunate, federal lords who governed local regions, and patrons.<sup>141</sup>

The Kumano *hongan* temples were nine in number, and each of the three shrines of Kumano had at least one *hongan* temple. The *hongan* temple which was responsible for Hongū was called Hongū anshu 本宮庵主. Although its existence is recorded, the details of its activities and structure are unknown because many of historical documents have been lost. However, the documents suggest that Hongū anshu declined relatively early, compared to other *hongan* temples in the Kumano mountains. By the seventeenth century, the temple was abandoned.<sup>142</sup>

At Shingū, the *hongan* temple called Shingū anshu 新宮庵主 served for the construction and maintenance of its facilities.<sup>143</sup> Shingū anshu was considered to be highest in rank among the Kumano *hongan* temples and exercised the special authority over the members of the *hongan* temples, for example, granting higher ranks to them. Unlike other *hongan* temples at the Kumano mountains, Shingū anshu developed with the authority of powerful temples outside the Kumano mountains. In the mid-sixteenth century, a monk from a well-known *shugendō* temple was invited to be the head of the *hongan* temple. By this, the *hongan* temple became a branch temple of the Tōzan school

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<sup>141</sup> Suzuki Shōei, “Kumano hongan ryakushi”, 823-824. ; Ōta Naoyuki, *Chūsei no shaji to shinkō*, 203-222. ; Nei Kiyoshi, “Kumano no honganjo” *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō* 68 no.10 (2003): 130. In the sixteenth centuries, the *hongan* temples asked the local warriors to allow Kumano *bikuni*'s *kanjin* activities within their domains. For example, Imagawa Yoshimoto issued a permission to Shingū in 1556, and Mōri Motonari (1497-1571) submitted a document to a magistrate to guarantee Kumano *bikuni*'s *kanjin* activities within his domain. Nei Kiyoshi, “Kumano bikuni no rikai”, 422.

<sup>142</sup> Suzuki Shōei, “Kumano hongan ryakushi”, 836.

<sup>143</sup> At Shingū, there was also a group of *hongan* temples which were specifically affiliated with the Kamikura shrine. The Kamikura shrine enshrines a huge rock which is originally the sacred body of the deity at Shingū. These *hongan* temples divided responsibility among themselves and served construction and fundraising for the Kannokura shrine. They were considered to belong to Shingū anshu. See Suzuki Shōei, “Kumano hongan ryakushi”, 817-818, 824; Nei Kiyoshi, “Kumano no honganjo”: 131-132.

of *shugendō*, Umemoto-in. Its association with *shugendō* influenced other *hongan* temples, and the members of the Kumano *hongan* temples were considered to belong to the Tōzan school. Yet, because the members were directly organized by the Kumano *hongan* temples, they were considered to form a distinct group, the Kumano group of *shugendō*. In the late sixteenth century, Shingū anshu also became a branch temple of the Tendai school because it contributed to raising funds for temples at Mt. Hiei,<sup>144</sup> the headquarter of the Tendai school.<sup>145</sup>

At Nachi, seven *hongan* temples shared responsibilities and were incorporated as an association of *hongan* temples.<sup>146</sup> While Shingū anshu developed based on its relationship with powerful temples, the *hongan* temples at Nachi developed based on its popularity as a pilgrimage site in the Nachi mountains. Because of the popularity of the Kansai Kannon pilgrimage to thirty three Buddhist temples, a large number of pilgrims visited Nachi, since the first temple to be visited was located there. With an increasing number of pilgrims, the *hongan* temples sought to collect contributions from pilgrims. They set up lodging facilities and many places to collect tolls at Nachi, and they propagandized pilgrimages to Nachi to invite more pilgrims.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Mt. Hiei is at the modern prefectural border of Kyoto and Shiga, and is located in the northeast of Kyoto which was the capital at that time.

<sup>145</sup> Ōta Naoyuki, *Chūsei no shaji to shinkō*, 166- 172; Suzuki Shōei, “Kumano hongan ryakushi”, 828-830.; Nei Kiyoshi, “Kumano no honganjo”: 130-131.; Shingū anshu ended its relationship with Umemoto-in in the eighteenth century when the Tokugawa shogunate separate *shugendō* from the Kumano *hongan* temples, and it officially became a Tendai temple.

<sup>146</sup> Their association was called *Nana hongan* 七本願 or *Nanatsu kokuya* 七つ穀屋. In Nachi, *kanjin hijiri* started appearing in the fourteenth century. Their activity became active in the mid-fifteenth century and *hongan* temples were organized. Ōta Naoyuki, *Chūsei no shaji to shinkō*, 172-173. Also see Toyoshima Osamu, “Chūsei makki ni okeru kumano nachi hongan ni suite: seigantōji bunsho o chūshin ni” in *Kumano Shinkō* ed. Miyake Hitoshi (Tokyo: Yūzankaku shuppan, 1990), 287-301.

<sup>147</sup> Ōta Naoyuki, *Chūsei no shaji to shinkō*, 172-186.; Nei Kiyoshi, “Kumano no honganjo”: 132-134.

The members of the *hongan* temples were called *gan'nin* 願人. Those included Kumano *bikuni*, Kumano *yamabushi*, and the laity. There were mainly two types of *gan'nin*. One resided at the *hongan* temples. They served for a variety of tasks in the Kumano mountains, such as organizing and supervising construction, communicating with the priesthood of the Three Shrines of Kumano, the shogunate, the federal lords, and powerful patrons, collecting offerings at the shrines and temples, participating at annual events, and conducting rituals.<sup>148</sup>

The other type of *gan'nin* engaged in fundraising activities outside the Kumano mountains. They were granted an occupational title by the Kumano *hongan* temples to raise funds, and worked under the authority of the Kumano *hongan* temples. Their main task was to receive contributions from followers outside the Kumano mountains and to raise further funds while promoting Kumano *shinkō*. In order to raise funds, they engaged in various activities including preaching, practicing *etoki*, singing, and distributing various talismans and magical objects such as *nagi* leaves and *sugai* shells.<sup>149</sup> They were particularly active in urban areas, but their activities were widespread throughout Japan.<sup>150</sup> When they formed local groups, senior Kumano *bikuni* or *yamabushi* served as leaders and communicated with the *hongan* temples. Around the end of the year, they were required to come back to the Kumano mountains to deliver contributions to the Kumano *hongan* temples, to get supplies for their activities, and to

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<sup>148</sup> Nei Kiyoshi, "Kumano *bikuni* to *etoki*" *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō* 68 no. 6 (2003): 170-171; "Kumano no *honganjo*": 135-136.

<sup>149</sup> *Nagi* leaves were believed to have power to maintain good relationship with one's partner and *sugai* shells functioned as talismans for safe delivery. Also, as the symbol of Kumano pilgrimage, *nagi* leaves were said to protect travellers.

<sup>150</sup> They travelled all over Japan except Hokkaido. See Hasegawa Kenji, "Kumano *shinkō* no *hirogari*" *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō* 68 no. 10 (2003): 67-76

renew the licenses and permits for solicitation.<sup>151</sup> As a number of the branch shrines of the Three Shrines of Kumano across Japan demonstrate, they successfully worked with the masses and promoted Kumano *shinkō*.

Nevertheless, toward the early modern period, the attitude toward fundraising religious practitioners in general became increasingly negative. According to Murakami Norio, many itinerant religious practitioners established relationships with local communities or religious institutions by the mid-seventeenth century. While some became the members of *hongan* temples to respond to financial difficulties of religious institutions, others located in villages to respond to the increasing demands for funerals and memorial services for ancestors. In accordance with this, unattached religious practitioners became to be despised in society. They came to be considered as beggars, and the attitude toward itinerant religious practitioners in general also became more severe. The word “*kanjin*” came to refer to begging rather than fundraising activities for temples and shrines. This general tendency also explains the situation of Kumano *bikuni* after the mid-seventeenth century. Although they were authorised by well-known religious institutions, the Three Shrine of Kumano, it might gradually have become difficult for them to collect contributions because of increasing negative attitudes toward itinerant religious practitioners.<sup>152</sup> In this difficult situation, itinerant religious practitioners were strongly required to attract the masses and to serve the various interests of the masses. It was around the mid-seventeenth century when Kumano *bikuni* started

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<sup>151</sup> Yamamoto Shigeo, “Daikibo na Kumano sanzan honganjo no tenkai”, 39-42; Suzuki Shōei, “Hongan to shugendō” in *jisha zōei kanjin honganshiki no kenkyū* ed. Toyoshima Osamu & Kiba Akeshi (Osaka: Seibundō, 2011), 192-195.

<sup>152</sup> Murakami Norio, *Kinsei kanjin no kenkyū*, 367-369.

being criticized for their secular activities such as singing and wearing make-up.<sup>153</sup>

Even though the Kumano *hongan* temples disliked their activities and attempted to regulate them, the authority of the Kumano *hongan* temples was declining itself around this period.<sup>154</sup>

The authority of the Kumano *hongan* temples started declining in the mid-seventeenth century because of the pressure from the priesthood in the Kumano mountains, the Tokugawa shogunate, and the federal lords. There were consistent conflicts between the Kumano *hongan* temples and the priesthood regarding the authority of the Kumano *hongan* temples. While the *hongan* temples sought to establish their position as the recognized members of the Three Shrines of Kumano, the priesthood expected merely the financial contribution from the *hongan* temples and did not welcome their participation in annual events and rituals.<sup>155</sup> The priesthood of the Three Shrines of Kumano gradually became dominant because they received ideological and financial support from the political authorities. The federal lord there favored Shinto over other religious traditions, as this trend was observed many other places throughout Japan.<sup>156</sup> In the Edo period, there were widespread intellectual movements asserting “Shinto as ‘the original teaching’ of Japan”.<sup>157</sup> These intellectuals generally agree with each other to

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<sup>153</sup> Murakami Norio, *Kinsei kanjin no kenkyū* 375-376.

<sup>154</sup> Nei Kiyoshi, “Kumano sanzhan no hongan to bikuni tachi”, 81-82.

<sup>155</sup> Ōta Naoyuki, *Chūsei no shaji to shinkō*, 157.

<sup>156</sup> Ōta Naoyuki argues that the religious policy by the federal lord of the *Kii* Domain Tokugawa Yorinobu (1602-1671) had an impact on the increasing authority of the priesthood of the Three Shrines of Kumano over the Kumano *hongan* temples. See Ōta Naoyuki, *Chūsei no shaji to shinkō*, 227, 231-232.

<sup>157</sup> Anna Andreeva, “Medieval Shinto: New Discoveries and Perspectives” *Religion Compass* 4 no. 11(2010): 684.

exclude foreign elements, particularly Buddhism.<sup>158</sup> Also, under its policy to regulate religious institutions, the Tokugawa shogunate attempted to separate *shugendō* from the *hongan* temples. By this, Shingū anshu ended its relationship with the *shugendō* temple Umemoto-in. Some scholars argue that the *hongan* temples started losing their control over itinerant *gan'nin* after the separation because *gan'nin* also belonged to *shugendō*.<sup>159</sup> Also, in the early modern period, *kanjin* activities required permission from the Tokugawa shogunate. Only those temples and shrines which did not get sufficient financial support from the shogunate were allowed to conduct *kanjin* activities. Upon the approval of the Tokugawa shogunate, the Kumano *hongan* temples still conducted fundraising activities. However, in 1736, the Tokugawa shogunate made a monetary contribution to the Three Shrines of Kumano, intended as funds for moneylending to be managed by the priesthood of the Three Shrines of Kumano and the officials of the shogunate. At this point, the Kumano *hongan* temples' authority to conduct *kanjin* activities was denied. Moreover, responding to the consistent conflict between the *hongan* temples and the priesthood, the Tokugawa shogunate issued documents regarding the authority of the Kumano *hongan* temples in 1744. The documents basically stated that the Kumano *hongan* temples were subordinate to the priesthood of the Three Shrines

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<sup>158</sup> In the later Muromachi period (1336-1565), there was a movement to revive the original teaching of Japan as “Shinto”. The proponents of this movement asserted that Shinto deities are more important than figures and teachings of foreign religions such as Buddhism and Confucianism, although some put an emphasis on Chinese morality as important teachings. In the Edo period (1603-1868), the proponents of a neo Confucian Shinto movement attempted to exclude Buddhist elements from their theory and practices. Also, the National Learning (*Kokugaku* 国学) school led by Hirata Atsutane and Moto'ori Noribnaga adapted Shinto deities for “the symbolic nucleus of national and state identity”. Anna Andreeva, “Medieval Shinto”, 684; Robert Neelly Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion: The Cultural Roots of Modern Japan* (Free Press, 1985), 98-103.

<sup>159</sup> Suzuki Shōei, “Kumano hongan ryakushi”, 831-833.; Nei Kiyoshi, “Kumano no honganjo”: 137.; However, Ōta Naoyuki disagrees with that the Kumano *hongan* temples lost their control over *gan'nin* because of the order by the Tokugawa shogunate. Rather, he argues that the *hongan* temples strengthened their control over *gan'nin* by the order. See Ōta Naoyuki, *Chūsei no shaji to shinkō*, 224.



of Kumano and their activities had to be under the supervision of the priesthood. Besides, the Kumano *hongan* temples were deprived of a number of responsibilities including the production of talismans and involvement in construction. As their authority was minimized, some of the *hongan* temples were abolished. Eventually, following the orders to separate Buddhism from Shinto by the Meiji government in the nineteenth century, Buddhist elements were excluded from the Three Shrines of Kumano and all *hongan* temples were abolished.<sup>160</sup>

Though the priesthood did not recognize the *hongan* temples as equal members of the Three Shrines of Kumano, the Kumano *hongan* temples took a significant part in the religious and institutional history of the Kumano mountains. As illustrated above, a number of *hongan* temples associated with one another to carry out various tasks in the Kumano mountains. Their tasks were not limited to financial administration and construction. They were also involved in religious activities in the Kumano mountains, such as annual events and rituals. Certainly, they took part in forming the religious landscape of the Kumano mountains while financially contributing to the Three Shrines of Kumano. At the same time, the *kanjin* activities organized by the *hongan* temples were significant for the masses because the masses got the opportunity to relate themselves to the religious world. Through the *kanjin* activities, the interests of both the religious institutions and the masses met, and the fundraising religious practitioners functioned as mediators between interests on both sides.

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<sup>160</sup> Suzuki Shōei, “Kumano hongan ryakushi”, 837-839.; Ōta Naoyuki, *Chūsei no shaji to shinkō*, 224-232.

## Women in the Medieval and the Early Modern Periods

Kumano *bikuni* were active between the sixteenth and the eighteenth century, a period of transition. The social arrangements made by political authorities during the transitional period from the medieval period and the early modern period were not unified, and the lives of all classes of people were influenced by the rapid political and social changes. The gender relationships also varied. It was not only because social and political circumstances drastically changed but also because people's life experiences were conditioned according to class, economic opportunity, occupations, and regions.<sup>161</sup> For example, among farm women in the early modern period, opportunities “were largely a function of economic class and social status”, and “the picture is further complicated by regional differences that produced a variety of social arrangements”.<sup>162</sup> Despite the diverse experiences of women, gendered division of labour based on the patriarchal household structure (the *ie* structure) was observed in many strata of society.<sup>163</sup> Regarding this household structure, some argue that women were deprived of their authority and were subordinate to male family members. Some suggest that the gender relations in the public sphere were different from the gender relations within the household. Though women were underrepresented in the public sphere, they exercised considerable authority within the household. Also, while some consider that the authority

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<sup>161</sup> Tabata Yasuko, “Women’s Work and Status in the Changing Medieval Economy” trans. Hitomi Tonomura, in *Women and Class in Japanese Society* (Ann Arbor: Centre for Japanese Studies, the University of Chicago, 1999), 99-100; Anne Walthall, “The Life Cycle of Farm Women in Tokugawa Japan” in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945*. ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 45.

<sup>162</sup> Anne Walthall, “The Life Cycle of Farm Women in Tokugawa Japan”, 43.

<sup>163</sup> Haruko Wakita, “The Medieval Household and Gender Roles within the Imperial Family, Nobility, Merchant, and Commoners”, trans. Gary P. Leupp, in *Women and Class in Japanese Society* (Ann Arbor: Centre for Japanese Studies, the University of Chicago, 1999), 81.

of women was increasingly diminished toward the early modern period, others point out that the actual practices of the masses did not always follow this tendency.<sup>164</sup> The following addresses gender relations based on the *ie* structure while considering the diversity among the female population in this era.

*Ie* (家) is a form of the household structure which became common among both the elites and the masses in the medieval period when coresidential marriage became pervasive.<sup>165</sup> *Ie* as the medieval household is distinct from the contemporary sense of the household because it functioned like the modern family but also as a site of economic production. The *ie* system assumed a division of labour in which a husband was the representative of *ie* and a wife was responsible for domestic affairs. However, since *ie* was also the site of economic production, domestic affairs included not only reproductive and housekeeping activities but also economic activities. The role of women was significant because women were responsible for maintaining the *ie*, which was the site of reproduction, economic production and social security for illness and old age.<sup>166</sup>

According to Wakita Haruko, three fundamental characteristics of the principal wife were expected for the operation of *ie*, namely, motherhood, household management and sexuality. Motherhood was celebrated because childbirth and childrearing were

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<sup>164</sup> Gotō Michiko, “‘ie’ ni okeru josei no nichijō to yakuwari: chūsei kōki no kakukaisō o megutte” in *On’na to otoko no jikū: Nihon josei saikō III Chūsei* ed. Kōno Nobuko, et. al. (Tokyo: Fujiwara shoten, 1996), 229-230; Wakita Haruko, “Marriage and Property in Premodern Japan from the Perspective of Women’s History” trans. Suzanne Gay. *Journal of Japanese Studies* 10 no. 1 (1984): 96-97.

<sup>165</sup> Not all women were included in the *ie* structure. Some women such as nuns, entertainers, and prostitutes formed matrilineal households which centered around female heads. The members of the households were not necessarily related by blood, and they were often brought together by a leader. Wakita Haruko, “The Medieval Household and Gender Roles”, 91.

<sup>166</sup> Haruko Wakita, “The Medieval household and Gender Roles”, 81; Tabata Yasuko, “Women’s Work and Status in the Changing Medieval Economy”, 113-116.

essential for perpetuating the *ie* lineage, and sexual love brings prosperity to it.<sup>167</sup> At the same time, women's participation in economic activities was significant though the ways in which they engaged in economic activities were diverse. For example, because the peasant households were self-sufficient, women engaged in farming activities in addition to reproductive and housekeeping activities. In urban cities characterized by a specialization of labour, women spent more time engaging in commercial and handicraft activities because some domestic activities such as basic food preparation were often put out to professionals.<sup>168</sup> Women from wealthy households were less likely to be involved in economic activities. Instead, they were often responsible for managing a large number of servants in the households.<sup>169</sup>

Within the *ie*, there were certainly expected functions and responsibilities for each gender. However, the dichotomy between genders was not rigidly practised, and the relationship between them was more gender complementary than hierarchal.<sup>170</sup> Kathleen S. Uno argues that until the mid-twentieth century, the division of labour within the household was tentative rather than fixed. The members of the household including women, men, and children participated both in productive activities and reproductive work such as childrearing and housekeeping. Although things could be different in wealthy families and the ruling classes, not only farmers but also artisan and merchant households operated with the participation of all family members in both productive and

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<sup>167</sup> Wakita Haruko "The Medieval household and Gender Roles", 83-84.

<sup>168</sup> Wakita Haruko, "The Medieval Household and Gender Roles", 89; Wakita Haruko, "Chūsei kōki, machi ni okeru 'on'na no isshō'" in *Nihon jōsei kenkyūshi 2 chūsei*, ed. Josei sōgō kenkyūkai (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppan kai, 1990), 173-176.

<sup>169</sup> Ann Walthall, "The Cycle of Farm Women in Tokugawa Japan", 59-60.

<sup>170</sup> Tabata Yasuko, "Women's Work and Status in the Changing Medieval Economy", 113; Kathleen S. Uno, "Women and Changes in the Household Division of Labour", in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945*. ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 21.

reproductive works. Besides women's involvement in economic production, men's involvement in childrearing was crucial especially for farm, merchant, and artisan fathers whose trades did not require extensive formal education. These fathers were responsible for training their sons for the continuity of the households. Therefore, the birth and successful rearing of a child was not the responsibility solely of a wife. Although a division of labour according to seniority and gender existed within a household, women in the majority of households engaged in many forms of productive work and men performed some types of reproductive work. Moreover, children of both sexes participated in both productive and reproductive tasks. All the members of the household worked together for the maintenance of the status, wealth, and the continuity of the household.<sup>171</sup>

As the maintenance of the *ie* lineage was emphasized based on the *ie* structure, worshiping of the ancestors also became important. In addition, with the popularization of Buddhism among the masses, the procedures of their funerals became more complex and memorial services were expected to be held on regular basis. In the early modern period, it was not desirable for people to die and be buried without family. It was important for them to have family members to perform funerals properly and guarantee memorial services on regular basis because these practices would aid them after death.<sup>172</sup> Indeed, the maintenance of *ie* was significant not only for the lives of the surviving members but also for their ancestors. Women might be concerned with this issue more than their male counterparts, considering the general tendency that women lived longer than their partners. Women often served as the key old-age security for their husbands,

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<sup>171</sup> Kathleen S. Uno, "Women and Changes in the Household Division of Labour", 25-35.

<sup>172</sup> Anne Walthall, "The Life Cycle of Farm Women in Tokugawa Japan", 69.

and these women expected their children to function as their own old age security.<sup>173</sup>

However, of course, not all women reproduced children, and the mortality rates among children, infants, and pregnant women were high.<sup>174</sup>

Another tendency which became pervasive among the masses toward the early modern period is the belief in female defilement. As discussed in relation with *nyonin kekkai*, a belief in female defilement existed and the related practices were observed before the medieval period. For example, according to the court regulation *Engishiki* (927), pregnant women and menstruating women were excluded from the court during rituals in order to maintain purity of the court. Also, meals for these women had to be prepared by a different fire source since it was believed that their defilement would be transferred through fire. By the early modern period, the belief was widely accepted among the masses.

In addition, *the Blood Pond Sutra* (*Ketsubonkyo* 血盆經) gained its popularity among the masses in the early modern period. The sutra was composed in China probably after the tenth century, and introduced to Japan by the fifteenth century.<sup>175</sup> Itinerant religious practitioners were associated with the Tendai school are said to have contributed to the diffusion of the belief in the sutra. Particularly, Kumano *bikuni* are considered to be representative of these itinerant religious practitioners who popularized

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<sup>173</sup> Anne Walthall, “The Life Cycle of Farm Women in Tokugawa Japan“, 67; Nishimura Hiroko, “Nihon chūsei no rōjinkan to rōjin no fuyō: josei o chūshin toshite” *Shiraume gakuen tanki daigaku kikō* 36 (2000): 105.

<sup>174</sup> According to Walthall, in the early modern period, every rural mother “would probably experience the loss of at least one child”. Anne Walthall, “The Life Cycle of Farm Women in Tokugawa Japan“, 65.

<sup>175</sup> Makino Kazuo & Kōdate Naomi, “Ketsubon kyō no juyō to tenkai” in *On’na to otoko no jikū : Nihon joseishi saikō*, ed. Kōno Nobuko et.al. (Tokyo: Fujiwara shoten, 1996), 82.

the sutra.<sup>176</sup> In the sutra, Mokuren (目連; Mahāmaudgalyāyana), a disciple of the Buddha, sees his mother suffering in the hell where she is forced to drink blood from the pond three times a day. Mokuren asks the Buddha how to save his mother from this hell, and the Buddha replies that evil-doers would be saved if monks recite *the Blood Pond Sutra* at the ritual. There are a number of versions of *the Blood Pond Sutra*, but the narrative generally states that all women are condemned to the blood pond hell because they pollute the earth with their blood shed at childbirth and because water polluted by their menstrual blood is eventually offered for worthies.<sup>177</sup> As observed in *nyonin kekkai*, the notion of the defilement of blood and spiritual inferiority of women are associated in the sutra though the practice of *nyonin kekkai* should be explained along with other theories such as the conflict between Buddhism and local cults, partnership between a male mountain ascetic and a female mountain deity, and strict enforcement of celibacy.

Scholars such as Wakita and Tabata argue that the authority of women decreased toward the early modern period because of the pervasive notion of female defilement emphasized by *the Blood Pond Sutra* and the Confucian notion of the subordination of women to their male family members. In the early modern period, because of the pervasive notion of female defilement, many local customs and taboos concerning childbirth emerged.<sup>178</sup> Also, because of the widespread belief in female defilement, women were excluded from certain kinds of jobs, such as sake brewing. Though sake

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<sup>176</sup> Makino Kazuo & Kōdate Naomi, “Ketsubon kyō no juyō to tenkai”, 101.

<sup>177</sup> Makino Kazuo & Kōdate Naomi, “Ketsubon kyō no juyō to tenkai”, 82; The sutra explains two ways of blood pollution. One is that women’s blood shed at childbirth and menstrual blood touch the ground and pollute the earth god. Another is that garments stained by women’s blood are washed at rivers and pollute the water. Polluted water is used for tea and is eventually offered to buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other worthies. See Faure, *The Power of Denial*, 73-74.

<sup>178</sup> Wakita Haruko, “Marriage and Property in Premodern Japan from the Perspective of Women’s History”, 97.

brewing was traditionally performed by women, it became a man's job because "if a woman so much as entered the brewery, the sake would spoil".<sup>179</sup> Moreover, the Confucian notion of subordination of women to male family members further restricted women. With the increasing patriarchal tendency, mothers' influence over their children diminished. These attitudes toward women were combined together, and "women were seen primarily as childbearers, a duty for which they were no longer even respected".<sup>180</sup>

However, again, considering the heterogeneity of the female population, it is difficult to estimate the degree to which beliefs in female defilement and the subordination of women were reflected in actual practices. Pointing out that women sometimes functioned as representatives of households, scholars such as Nakano Setsuko and Anne Walthall question the perspective that women were entirely excluded from the public sphere in the early modern period.<sup>181</sup> For instance, in merchant households in cities, it was not unusual that women were registered as the heads of the households when their male counterparts were absent. While some women engaged in domestic piecework, others managed relatively large businesses.<sup>182</sup> Even in the warrior class, in which the patriarchal structure was more rigidly practised, wives were expected to function as heads of the household if necessary. The ability of a woman to take the

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<sup>179</sup> Wakita Haruko, "Marriage and Property in Premodern Japan from the Perspective of Women's History", 97; Tabata Yasuko, "Women's Work and Status in the Changing Medieval Economy", 106

<sup>180</sup> Haruko Wakita, "Marriage and Property in Premodern Japan from the Perspective of Women's History", 97

<sup>181</sup> Nakano Setsuko, "Edojidai no 'ie' to josei" *Shishi Kanazawa* 3 (1997): 66; Anne Walthall, "The Life Cycle of Farm Women in Tokugawa Japan", 25-23.

<sup>182</sup> Nakano Setsuko, "Edojidai no 'ie' to josei", 66.



responsibility for representing the household was one of the characteristics of an ideal wife in the warrior class.<sup>183</sup>

Considering the diverse experiences of women, this section has addressed gender relationships based on the *ie* structure pervasive among the masses in the era in question. In the *ie* structure, a husband is responsible for the public affairs while a wife is responsible for the matters within a household which also functioned as the site of economic production. Although both men and women were expected to function in certain ways, the division of labour was tentative rather than fixed. Since the maintenance of the *ie* lineage was the central concern, all members of the household cooperated with one another. Regarding the authority of women, some scholars argue that women were deprived of their authority within and outside the *ie* because of an increasing patriarchal tendency and the notion of female defilement during the early modern period. In fact, the belief in *the Blood Pond Sutra* was widely accepted among the masses and the subordination of women to their male family members was emphasized. Such attitudes may have had an impact on the authority of women, and women may not have enjoyed the same authority they exercised in the medieval period. However, as illustrated earlier, the expected functions for the members of the households were diverse according to class, occupation, economic status, and region. Also, for the maintenance of the *ie*, women's roles had to be flexible depending on the situation. Woman's authority in the medieval and early modern eras depended on a variety of circumstances.

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<sup>183</sup> Gotō Michiko, “‘Ie’ ni okeru josei no nichijō to yakuwari”, 238.

## Chapter 4: The Kumano Heart Contemplation Ten Worlds Mandala

The Kumano Heart Contemplation Ten Worlds Mandala (*Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara* 熊野観心十界曼荼羅; hereafter referred to as the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala; fig. 1)<sup>184</sup> is said to have been carried and used for *etoki* performance by religious practitioners such as Kumano *bikuni*. As of 2011, fifty eight mandalas of this sort have been recognized across Japan,<sup>185</sup> and it is estimated that at least a hundred and probably a few hundred of them were produced.<sup>186</sup> These mandalas started being produced in the sixteenth century<sup>187</sup> when new images of hell emerged. In the medieval period, the image of the posthumous world was informed by the sutras and treatises such as *Ōjōyōshū* 往生要集 (*Collection of Essentials on Birth in the Pure Land*) and *Jizō jūō kyō* 地藏十王經 (*Scripture of the Ten Kings*). *Ōjōyōshū*, composed by the Tendai monk Genshin (942-1017), describes various sufferings in the six realms of sentient beings and expresses a longing for Amida's Pure Land. *Jizō jūō kyō*, which was introduced to Japan by the seventh century, narrates the intermediate state between death and rebirth as

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<sup>184</sup> This chapter mainly looks at the version kept at Hōsen-in, the Sōtō Zen temple located near the Ise pilgrimage route to Kumano from Ise in modern Mie prefecture. According to the classification by Ogurisu, this particular mandala is characterised by the hell of infertility below the court of Enma, Jizō on a lotus flower panel, a human-faced ox and a human-faced horse facing each other in the animal realm. In some other mandalas, the hell of infertility is positioned in the bottom right, bodhisattva Jizō is on a lotus flower, and an ox and a horse do not have human faces. Ogurisu Kenji, *Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara*, 178-179, 186.

<sup>185</sup> Ogurisu Kenji, *Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara*, 6.

<sup>186</sup> Kuroda Hideo, “Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara no uchū”, 213.

<sup>187</sup> The production of the mandalas could be traced back in the sixteenth century, but the majority of the existing mandalas were produced between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century. This period was when the *hongan* temples lost decreased their authority. Ogurisu argues that this might be because of the attempt of the Kumano *hongan* temples to gain control over their members. By providing itinerant members with the uniform mandala, the Kumano *hongan* temples aimed at solidarity among the members. Ogurisu Kenji, *Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara*, 224.

judicial experience.<sup>188</sup> However, with the pervasive notion of the *ie* structure among the masses in the sixteenth century, the perspective toward the posthumous world was developed and diversified while introducing new types of hells, memorial services, and salvation.<sup>189</sup> The Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala visualizes such new perspectives. The Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala is based on the Tendai Buddhist idea of ten worlds while taking motifs from other Buddhist paintings, and popular scriptures and literatures.<sup>190</sup> As Nishiyama Masaru argues, it does not have motifs which specifically represent Kumano *shinkō*. Rather, it presents the visual image of the other worlds which was widely accepted among the masses.<sup>191</sup> These images of the other worlds were further disseminated with narratives by *etoki* performers.

In the study of literary texts with visual images, the latter are often regarded as supplementary elements because the texts can be completed in themselves without visual images. It is considered that a literary text does not require aid of visual images to explain its entire contexts. However, for *etoki* performance, visual images and texts are both indispensable.<sup>192</sup> Ikumi Kaminishi argues, even though visual images may require

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<sup>188</sup> According to *Jizō Jūō kyō*, after death, a person goes through ten purgatorial trials until she or he is reborn. The first seven trials happen every seven days from death. The eighth trial happens after a hundred days and the ninth trial happens after a year. Finally, the last trial happens in the third year. The scripture narrates various suffering that one may experience during this period of trials. It also suggests rituals to be conducted to ease suffering and to aid better rebirths. Stephen F. Teiser, *Scripture on the Ten Kings and the Making Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), 1-3.

<sup>189</sup> Ogurisu Kenji, *Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara*, 314.

<sup>190</sup> The majority of scholars agree with that the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala is based on “Jikkaihōzu” (Ten Worlds Mandala), which depicts the Tendai Buddhist concept of mutual interdependence of the ten worlds. However, Nishiyama Masaru argues that the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala is derived from “Kanrochō”, the Korean painting which depicts a scene in which a number of the deceased receive offerings through the *segaki* ritual. Nishiyama argues it is based on the story of Anan (Ānanda) who conducted the ritual for hungry ghosts in order to escape from his rebirth in the realm of hungry ghosts. Nishiyama Masaru “Jigoku o etoku”, 240-247; Nishiyama Masaru, “Chōsen butsua kanrochō to Kumano kanjin jikkaizu”, 160.

<sup>191</sup> Nishiyama Masaru, “Jigoku o etoku”, 227.

<sup>192</sup> Barbara Ruch, *Mō hitotsuno chūseizō: Bikuni, Otogizōshi, Raise*, 157.

further explanations at *etoki* performance, they are not “incompetent and inadequate translations”<sup>193</sup> of the written texts. Instead of considering that visual images are subordinate to the written texts, she suggests that a visual image is “an original text which redefines the written texts through pictorial forms.”<sup>194</sup> Indeed, the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala is more than merely the translation of written texts. Though the motifs are derived from sutras and religious stories, they could present stories other than what the original texts narrate. The Buddhist worldview and ideas are reconciled with lives and the perspectives of the masses of the era in the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala.

### **The Worldview Expressed in the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala**

The Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala organizes the worldview based on the idea of the ten worlds, which the Tendai teaching associates with states of mind. The ten worlds consist of the six realms of sentient beings and four enlightened states. The six realms are the realms of hell beings, hungry ghosts (*gaki* 餓鬼; *preta*), animals, demi-gods (*ashura* 阿修羅; *asura*), humans, and gods (*deva*). Although all beings in the six realms are captured in the cycle of death and rebirth, rebirths in the first four realms are considered as unfortunate, the results of bad deeds. The hell realm is the worst realm, where bad-doers are tortured in various ways for a very long period. The hungry ghost realm is for those who are greedy for luxury and wealth. They have to suffer hunger and thirst because food and drink in this realm are very limited. Rebirth in the animal realm is the result of stupidity and excessive sexual desire. As animals, they have to suffer various

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<sup>193</sup> Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*, 7.

<sup>194</sup> Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*, 7.

misfortunes caused by humans and environments. The *asura* realm is where *asuras*, jealous demi-gods, keep fighting losing battles against gods. Although rebirths in the human realm and the heavenly realm of gods are considered as fortunate, those in these realms also experience suffering. For example, although there is a chance in the human realm to learn Buddhist teachings, humans experience various forms of sufferings such as old age, illness, and death throughout their lives. In the heavenly realm, gods enjoy sensual pleasures and longevity, but they eventually lose them at death. The rest of the ten worlds are the enlightened states of buddhas, bodhisattvas, *sravakas* (*shōmon* 声聞) or *arhats* (*arakan* 阿羅漢), and *pratyekabuddha* (*enkaku* 緣覺). *Sravakas* are those who seek enlightenment by learning of the teachings of the Buddha. Their goal is to be *arhats*. *Pratyekabuddhas* are those who are enlightened by their own learning. Though the path of bodhisattvas is considered as superior to the paths of *arhats* and *pratyekabuddhas*, these three paths are means to the ultimate enlightenment, buddhahood.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Kuroda Hideo, “Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara no uchū” 221-232, ; Ogurisu Kenji, *Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara*, 160-161; Keller Kimbrough, “Preaching the Animal Realm”, 180-181; Jacqueline I. Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’I Press, 1999), 12-14, 178-181; Daigan Matsunaga & Alicia Matsunaga, *Foundation of Japanese Buddhism Vol. I*, 154-156.



Figure 7 The Kumano Heart Contemplation Ten Worlds Mandala - Hōsen-in (熊野観心十界曼荼羅  
宝泉院本)

Ogurusu Kenji, *Kumano kanjin jikkai mandala*, 54.

Regarding the basic structure of the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala, it depicts the character *kokoro* 心 (literally ‘heart-mind’) at the upper centre and ten worlds which consist of the six realms of sentient beings and the four states of enlightened beings. Red lines connect this character with the ten worlds. Enlightened beings of the four sacred states surround the character. Above the character, Amida Nyorai 阿弥陀如来 (Buddha Amitabha) descends with his attendants. A *pratyekabuddha*<sup>196</sup> is on the right and an *arhat* is on the left of the descent of Amida, and a bodhisattva<sup>197</sup> is on each side of the character. Each of the six realms of sentient beings is marked by a red shrine gate (*tori* 鳥居). The shrine gates marking the realms subject to the cycle of death and rebirth present a worldview in which Shinto and Buddhist perspectives are syncretised.<sup>198</sup> The heavenly realm is represented by two flying goddesses beside the bodhisattva on the left, and the human realm is represented by a group of five people<sup>199</sup> praying toward a bodhisattva on the right. Under the shrine gate at the *asura* realm, a man commits suicide, and warriors fight each other. The animal realm depicts various animals including a human-headed ox and a human-headed horse. In the hungry ghost realm, hungry ghosts suffer because their food and drink turn to fire. The hell realm marked by the shrine gate with a crying monk occupies a large space in the bottom part of the

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<sup>196</sup> Hanioka Ayumi thinks that the motif of a *pratyekabuddha* under the flowering cherry tree is informed by the narrative story of Saigyō, a monk who composed many poems related to cherry blossoms. See Hanioka Ayumi, ‘Sakura no shita no sō’ to sono haikai: kumano kanjin jikkai mandara ni miru setsuwa imeji’ *Etoki Kenkyū* 19 (2005): 77-106.

<sup>197</sup> In some versions, the bodhisattva realm is integrated into the descent of Amida. Ogurisu Kenji, *Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara*, 178-179.

<sup>198</sup> The mandala integrates the natural landscape into the Buddhist universe. It also symbolizes that the physical world of indigenous deities is syncretised with the Buddhist universe. Yamaori Tetsuo, *Shūkyō no chikara*, 86-88.

<sup>199</sup> Some depict a group of three. Ogurisu, *Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara*, 178-179.

screen. It shows various forms of hell including both the traditional and newly emerged hells. Beside these ten worlds, the mandala also presents popular images associated with the experience after death, such as the court of Enma, children's limbo, the river of three crossings, and an old demonic woman (Datsueba 奪衣婆) taking clothing from the dead. Also, just below the character *kokoro*, the *segaki* ritual (*segaki-e* 施餓鬼会) is conducted. At the *segaki* ritual, food and drink are offered for the sake of those in the hungry ghost realm. Though it had been conducted with various Buddhist memorial services throughout the year, it became associated with *urabon* 盂蘭盆 (Ghost Festival), the annual memorial service for the ancestors to be conducted on the fifteenth of July according to the lunar calendar. The hill of age at the top of the painting presents the life stages of a human, from birth to old age and death. The motifs of the sun and moon are positioned at the top corners. While the motifs in the mandala are symmetrically organized in the upper half, the arrangements in the bottom is more random as if it emphasizes the chaotic characteristic of the lesser realms.<sup>200</sup> The mandala depicts various contrasts such as the contrast between the sacred and profane, salvation and suffering, and death and rebirth; these are all integrated in the natural landscape.<sup>201</sup> These complex contrasts and the relationship between the motifs were to be unraveled or restructured at *etoki* performance.

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<sup>200</sup> Kuroda Hideo, "Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara no uchū", 228.

<sup>201</sup> Kuroda Hideo, "Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara no uchū", 224, 230-232



## Kokoro

Though many consider that the central doctrine of the mandala is expressed by the character *kokoro*, the interpretation is not uniform. Scholars such as Kuroda Hideo argue that it is based on the Tendai teaching of interpenetration explained by the concepts of *jikkai gogu* 十界互具 (the mutual interpenetration of ten worlds) and *ichinen sanzen* 一念三千 (three thousand realms in a single thought moment).<sup>202</sup> As mentioned earlier, the Tendai teaching understands the ten worlds as states of mind, thus all ten worlds are comprised in the mind. The idea of *jikkai gogu* states that all ten worlds are mutually inclusive because each contains all ten worlds within itself. These ten worlds appear to be hierarchal and distinct, but they are actually dependent on one another and are all mutually encompassing. This idea denies the distinction between the Buddha and other beings because Buddha nature permeates all ten realms while the buddha realm also includes other nine realms within it.<sup>203</sup> The idea of *ichinen sanzen* concerns this mutually encompassing structure of reality and the “non-duality of the mind and the phenomenal world”.<sup>204</sup> The briefest instance of an ordinary person’s thought comprises the whole of phenomenal reality described as three thousands realms. Each of ten realms contains the other nine realms, and each of them has thirty realms within it. The mutually encompassing realms in the mind are the structure of reality to be contemplated.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Kuroda Hideo, “Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara no uchū”, 219; Keller Kimbrough “Preaching the Animal Realm in Late Medieval Japan”: 181.

<sup>203</sup> Jacqueline I. Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999), 179.

<sup>204</sup> Jacqueline I. Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism*, 178.

<sup>205</sup> Jacqueline I. Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism*, 179.

Therefore, in this context, the character *kokoro* stands for *kanjin* 観心 (mind contemplation), the meditative practice to reveal the nature of one's own mind which contains all three thousand realms in one single thought moment.<sup>206</sup> On the other hand, Keller Kimbrough argues that the character *kokoro* represents *yui shin* 唯心 (heart mind only) “according to which all ten worlds are the emanation of the human mind”.<sup>207</sup> Concerning the origin story of Kumano *bikuni* which states that “living in hell or heaven is the result of one's heart”,<sup>208</sup> Kaminishi furthermore argues that the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala is based on *the Flower Garland Sutra* (*Kegon-kyō* 華嚴經) about “the oneness of things in heaven and hell and in between”.<sup>209</sup> Nevertheless, Barbara Ruch argues that the character *kokoro* represents *the Heart Sutra* which states that existence is empty of independent nature.<sup>210</sup>

While agreeing that the significance of the character *kokoro* is a dominant motif, some scholars suggest that other motifs also deliver important messages. For example, Hagiwara Tatsuo states that the motif of the hill of age characterizes the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala because he stresses the uniqueness of this motif.<sup>211</sup> Also, scholars such as Kuroda and Nishiyama focus on the motif of the *segaki* ritual. They argue that the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala emphasizes the significance of memorial services for the

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<sup>206</sup> Kuroda Hideo, “Kumano Kanjin jikkai mandara no uchū”, 219-220; Hagiwara Tatsuo, *Mikoto bukkyōshi*, 102.

<sup>207</sup> Keller Kimbrough, “Preaching the Animal Realm in Late Medieval Japan”, 180-181.

<sup>208</sup> Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*, 140.

<sup>209</sup> Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*, 139-140.

<sup>210</sup> Barbara Ruch, “Woman to Woman: Kumano *bikuni* Proselytizers in Medieval and Early Modern Japan”, 574.

<sup>211</sup> Hagiwara Tatsuo, *Miko to bukkyōshi*, 105.

deceased, especially for parents.<sup>212</sup> Moreover, the mandala was often considered by the masses as a sort of hell painting. In fact, since a hell tour motif was common in popular literature, it is suggested that the narrative of the mandala might also take the form of hell-tour tales in which humans travel through the six realms and come back to their ordinary life.<sup>213</sup> As the journey stories to the six realms are often dominated by “horrific representations of the tortures of hell”,<sup>214</sup> the hell realm occupies a large part of the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala.

### The Hill of Age

Where the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala is read as a hell-tour tale, the hill of age could function as an introduction which connects the audience with the other worlds.<sup>215</sup> The hill of age (*oi no sakamichi* 老いの坂道) depicts the stages of human life from birth to death. An infant is born in the house at the mountain foot on the right, and the infant starts climbing up the mountain slope from the shrine gate. A number of men and women appear alternately on the mountain slope, and they gradually age as they walk toward the other side. At the top of the hill, a man opens up a golden fan as if he celebrates the prosperity of life,<sup>216</sup> and a woman behind him looks back the way they had

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<sup>212</sup> Kuroda Hideo, “Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara no uchū”, 269-270; Nishiyama Masaru, “Jigoku o etoku”, 240

<sup>213</sup> Kuroda Hideo “Kumano jikkai mandara no uchū”, 236.

<sup>214</sup> Keller Kimbrough, “Preaching the Animal Realm in Late Medieval Japan”, 183.

<sup>215</sup> Kuroda Hideo, “Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara no uchū”, 236.

<sup>216</sup> Kuroda Hideo, “Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara no uchū”, 238. Ogurisu points out the possibility that the man opens up his fan at the top of the hill may represent Taira no Kiyomori, whose clan enjoyed prosperity while his time and declined after his death. Ogurisu Kenji, *Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara*, 222.

come.<sup>217</sup> A few pairs after this scene, a group of four characters are depicted. A young child and a young man are between an old woman in nun's cloth and an old tonsured man. A young child leads the old woman by hand and a young man puts his palms together. Above them, a guardian of hell snatches a person from the mountain slope to take him to the court of Enma.<sup>218</sup> After this, the characters on the mountain slope are all old women, and the hill finally ends at the graveyard (fig. 8).

### Hell: The Court of Enma, Gendered Hell, Children's Limbo



Figure 8 The Court of Enma and the Hill of Age Ending at Death

The court of Enma (*enma chō* 閻魔庁; fig. 8) in the left foot of the slope represents the intermediate state between death and rebirth, which requires a series of memorial services to aid a better rebirth of the deceased. The typical motif of Enma holding a mirror and a balance is derived from *the Scripture of the Ten Kings* which describes the intermediate state “less in psychological terms and more as a bureaucratic

<sup>217</sup> In some versions, a woman does not look back. Ogurisu Kenji, *Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara*, 178-179.

<sup>218</sup> Ogurisu Kenji, *Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara*, 160.

experience.”<sup>219</sup> In three years from the moment of death, the deceased goes through multiple purgatorial trials administrated by ten judges including Enma, and it was believed that the deceased could get a lighter sentence if the family members conduct proper memorial services during this period.<sup>220</sup> This belief, which emerged in China, was introduced to Japan, where it further developed in the Japanese version of *the Scripture of the Ten Kings* (*Jizō jūō kyō*). With the popularity of the belief in the ten kings, practices aiding better rebirths of the deceased became pervasive among the masses. One of the examples of such practices is the forty nine rice cakes depicted beside the shrine gate in the hell realm (fig. 9). A guardian of hell knocks nails into the body of a man, and a woman is saved because the rice cakes get nails for her. It is based on the belief that forty nine nails would be knocked into the body of the deceased during the forty nine days after death. However, if rice cakes are offered for the deceased, the deceased could avoid suffering from the nails.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Stephen F. Teiser, *Scripture on the Ten Kings and the Making Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), 1.

<sup>220</sup> Stephen, F. Teiser, *Scripture on the Ten Kings and the Making Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism*, 1-3.

<sup>221</sup> Kōdate, Naomi, “‘kanjin jikkaizu’ no shijukumochi zuzō ni tsuite” *Etoki kenkyū* 23 (2011): 102; Kawamura Kunimitsu, “On’na no jigoku to sukui”, 41.

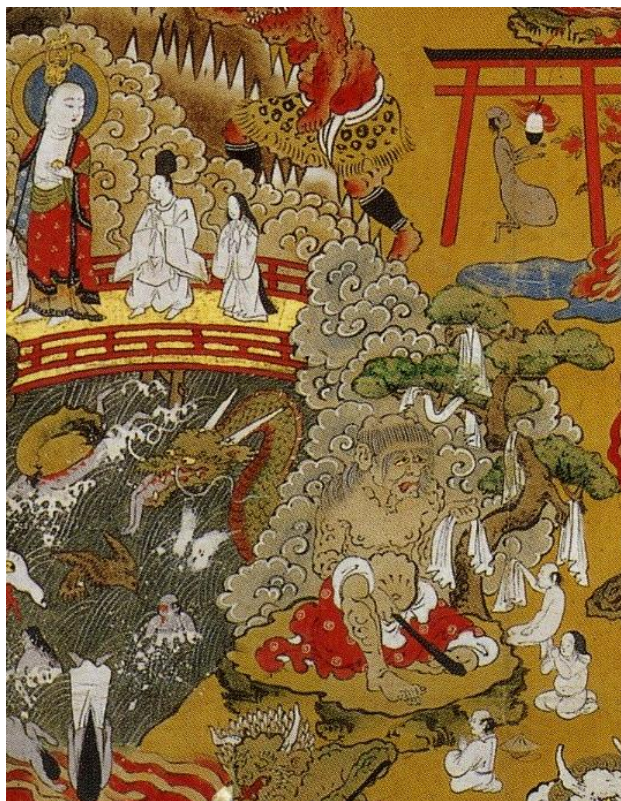


**Figure 9 Forty-Nine Rice Cakes**

Another impact of *Jizō jūō kyō* is that it introduced new images associated with experience after death while emphasizing salvic power of Jizō. Images such as the River of Three Crossing (*sanzu no kawa* 三途の川) and Datsueba<sup>222</sup> (fig. 10) were introduced in *Jizō jūō kyō*, and they were established as part of the popular imagination of hell in Japan.<sup>223</sup> Because Jizō was believed to serve as the saviour of all in the six realms during the period between the Buddha's passing and the coming of the future Buddha and was identified with Enma, his vow to rescue the deceased became particularly emphasized, as depicted in the mandala (fig. 10).

<sup>222</sup> At the River of Three Crossing, those with very bad deeds cross a deeper point, those with some bad deeds cross a ford, and those with good deeds cross a bridge. After they cross the river, they meet Datsueba who is usually presented as an old wrathful hag on the bank of the river. She takes cloths from them and weighs the cloths by hanging them on the tree. She estimates their deeds by checking how much moist their cloths get. She also has the characteristic of a deity of fertility. In a legend, she is said to give people cloths at their birth and take the cloths back when they die. See Bernard Faure, *Power of Denial*, 315-316; Kawamura Kunimitsui, "On'na no jigoku to sukui", 31-38.

<sup>223</sup> Kawamura Kunimitsu, "On'na no jigoku to sukui" in *On'na to otoko no jikū: Nihon joseishi saikō*, e.d Kōno Nobuko and Tsurumi Kazuko (Tokyo: Fujiwara shoten, 1996), 35.



**Figure 10 Jizō, the River of Three Crossing, and Datsueba**

As the mandala was sometimes regarded as a painting of hell, the hell realm occupies a large part of the mandala. In addition to the traditional hells such as hot and cold hells, the mandala presents newly emerged hells which were related to the concerns of everyday life of the masses. For example, the two wives' hell (*ryōfu jigoku* 両婦地獄; fig. 11)<sup>224</sup> in the bottom right depicts a man being tightened by two snakes with human faces. The snake with two horns is said to be a wife and the snake with one horn is said to be a mistress. It condemns not only a man's multiple sexual interests but also women's jealous minds. Women's jealous minds make them reborn as snakes in hell.<sup>225</sup> The tree with knife leaves (*tōyōrin* 刀葉林; fig. 11) beside the two wives' hell is one of

<sup>224</sup> Also called "*futame jigoku* 双女地獄".

<sup>225</sup> Kawamura Kunimitsu, "On'na no jigoku to sukui", 47.

the traditional hells. It presents a man endlessly climbing up and down in order to reach a woman. While it condemns the excessive sexual desire of a man, it also accuses the woman as a seducer.<sup>226</sup> These hells address an issue familiar to the masses, namely the problematic relationship between a man and a woman.



**Figure 11 Gendered Hell**

<sup>226</sup> Kawamura Kunimistu, "On'na no jigoku to sukui", 45.



The visual image of the blood pond hell (*chinoike jigoku* 血の池地獄; fig. 11) emerged in the sixteenth century with the popularity of *the Blood Pond Sutra* among the masses,<sup>227</sup> and the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala is one of the earliest cases which visualize the association between the blood pond hell and Nyoirin Kannon 如意輪観音 (Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara in the form of Cintāmaṇicakra) (fig. 11).<sup>228</sup> As



**Figure 12 The Talisman of Nyoirin Kannon at Seigantoji**

the sutra states, women draw in blood because of the sin associated with their female physiology. In the mandala, two women on a lotus panel and a lotus flower are saved from the blood pond hell by the power of the sutra. Also, above the blood pond hell, Nyoirin Kannon passes a woman a piece of paper which is assumed to be *the Blood Pond Sutra*.<sup>229</sup> According to Kōdate Naomi, the belief which regards Nyoirin Kannon as the savior in the blood pond hell was promoted by religious practitioners associated with the Tendai Buddhist school, and it tends to be associated with the cults which particularly concerned the salvation of women and were attributed to Nyoirin Kannon. In fact, in the case of Kumano *shinkō*, Seigantoji at Nachi is attributed to Nyoirin Kannon (fig. 12), and the Kumano mountains have been famous for their women-friendly attitude.<sup>230</sup> While the motif of the blood pond hell

<sup>227</sup> Kuroda Hideo, “Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara no uchū”, 248.

<sup>228</sup> Kōdate Naomi “Chinoike jigoku no esō o meguru oboegaki: kyūsaisha toshiteno nyoirin kannon no mondai o chūshin.ni” in *Jigoku no sekai* ed. Sakamoto Kaname (Tokyo: Keisuishā, 1990), 681.

<sup>229</sup> Ruch argues that this is *the Heart Sutra*. Barbara Ruch, “Woman to Woman: Kumano bikuni Proselytizers in Medieval and Early Modern Japan”, 574.

<sup>230</sup> Kōdate Naomi, “Chinoike jigoku no esō o meguru oboegaki: kyūsaisha toshiteno nyoirin kannon no mondai o chūshin ni”, 681-682.

visualizes that all women were condemned to hell, it also offers all women a way for salvation.



**Figure 13 The Hell of Infertility**

Another gender specific hell is the hell of infertility (*umazume jigoku* 不産女地獄 ; fig. 13)<sup>231</sup> depicted below the court of Enma. In this hell, women dig bamboo shoots by using limp lamp wicks. Multiple verbal and visual metaphors are observed in the motif. Saitō points out that a bamboo or a bamboo shoot stands for a child and luxuriance of the lineage, and a bamboo grove is sometimes associated with childbirth in narrative stories.<sup>232</sup> Ruch discusses that women “trying to force into a limp wick... is certainly a metaphor for both impotence and barrenness.”<sup>233</sup> Because those women could not obtain children who would foster an abundant lineage, they continue to seek children after death.<sup>234</sup> The textual notion that women without children are condemned to hell first appeared in the early sixteenth century, and the image of the actual punishment in hell

<sup>231</sup> Also called “*Sekijo jigoku* 石女地獄”.

<sup>232</sup> Saitō Kenichi, *Kodomo no chūseishi* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2003), 207-209.

<sup>233</sup> Barbara Ruch, “Woman to Woman: Kumano bikuni Proselytizers in Medieval and Early Modern Japan”, 567.

<sup>234</sup> Saitō Kenichi, *Kodomo no chūseishi*, 209.

was soon visualized.<sup>235</sup> One of the earliest cases of visualization of the hell for women without children is the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala.<sup>236</sup> Indeed, it is the hell based on the idea that women were socially obligated to reproduce children for the maintenance of the *ie* lineage. Those women who could not fulfill their social expectation by producing children were considered to be bad.<sup>237</sup> Reflecting these attitudes toward women and children in the era, the hell of infertility emerged.



**Figure 14 Jizō in Children's Limbo**

The limbo for children (*sai no kawara* 賽の河原; fig. 14) is based on the perspective toward children as the successors of the lineage as well as the conductors of memorial services. Prior to the emergence of the children's limbo, the depiction of children was unusual in paintings of hell. It was considered in the popular folk belief that

<sup>235</sup> Saitō Kenichi, *Kodomo no chūseishi*, 199-220.

<sup>236</sup> Saitō Kenichi, *Kodomo no chūseishi*, 202.

<sup>237</sup> Saitō Kenichi, *Kodomo no chūseishi*, 213-214.

children under the age of seven are in the middling stage between this world and the other world, and therefore they are distinct beings from adult humans who may fall into hell. Accordingly, even among the aristocrats, formal funerals were usually not conducted for children in the medieval period.<sup>238</sup> However, with the increasing significance of children in society, children's limbo first appeared as the place specifically for deceased children in the late fifteenth century. Reflecting the social expectation for children to conduct memorial services for their parents, those children who died before their parents were condemned to this place where they would heap up stones to make stupas for their parents. In addition to the emphasis on social expectations for children, parents' concern for deceased children is also reflected in the children's limbo. Jizō came to be recognized as the saviour of children as a response to parents' concern for children's fates after death. Though Jizō had been popular as a saviour of all sentient beings in the six realms, especially the hell realm, he further gained popularity among the masses in the late medieval period when he also became recognized as the saviour as well as the protector of children.<sup>239</sup>

The motif of a woman with a neck pillory (fig. 11) concerns a parent-child relationship. A woman with a neck pillory gazes down at a young child beside her. In some versions, the motif is positioned besides the office of Enma. In this case this motif tends to be read as a mother who is accused by her aborted child. It emphasizes the sin of abortion or/and infanticide.<sup>240</sup> In other versions including the Hōsen-in version, this motif is grouped with other gendered hells in the bottom right. In this case, it emphasizes

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<sup>238</sup> Kuroda Hideo, *Emaki kodomo no tōjō: Chūsei shakai no kodomozō*, (Kawade shobō shinsha, 1989), 108-109.

<sup>239</sup> Kuroda Hideo, *Emaki kodomo no tōjō: Chūsei shakai no kodomozō*, 112.

<sup>240</sup> Ogurisu Kenji, *Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara*, 160, 201.

the danger of parental attachment. Kuroda and Kimbrough explain the motif by referring to the aphorism, “the parent-child [relationship] is a neck pillory of the three worlds (*oyako wa sangai no kubikase* 親子は三界の首枷)”.<sup>241</sup> Because of attachment to a child, a parent cannot be freed in the past, present, and future. Both readings suggest the strong interest toward childrearing. Indeed, a mother’s rebirth in lesser realms is sometimes associated with her attachment to her child in literatures after the late medieval period. Among them, the story of Mokuren was also transformed to a story that explains his mother’s rebirth as the result of her attachment to Mokuren.

### **The Story of Mokuren and the Segaki Ritual**

The story of Mokuren saving his mother is associated with *the Bon Festival Sutra* (*Urabon kyō* 盂蘭盆經) which tells the origin of the *urabon* ritual (*urabon-e* 盂蘭盆会) to be conducted for the sake of the ancestors. In the sutra, Mokuren, a disciple of Sakyamuni Buddha, saw his mother suffering in the hungry ghost realm and asked the Buddha how to save her. The Buddha taught that one’s parents in this life and in previous lives would be saved from the hungry ghost realm if one offers various sorts of food and drink to monks at the time of the *urabon* ritual conducted on the full moon of the seventh lunar month. Mokuren eventually saved his mother by following the instruction given by the Buddha. This sutra was composed in China and was developed also as a popular story in which Mokuren saves his mother from hell by destroying

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<sup>241</sup> Keller Kimbrough, “Preaching the Animal Realm in Late Medieval Japan”, 191; Kuroda Hideo, “Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara no uchū”, 258; Ogurisu Kenji, *Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara*, 160, 201.

hell.<sup>242</sup> The sutra and the story were introduced to Japan by the seventh century, and the theme of a monk saving his mother developed into various narrative stories.<sup>243</sup> In the sixteenth century, maternal attachment became more emphasized in such stories. While earlier versions of the story of Mokuren regard his mother's rebirth in lesser realms as the result of her vicious and/or greedy personality, the versions after the sixteenth century associate her lesser rebirth with her parental attachment to Mokuren. The latter versions narrate that her desire for Mokuren's success is the motivation for her immoral intentions and actions. Therefore, while earlier versions focus on a child saving his mother, later versions focus on a mother seeking salvation by Mokuren.<sup>244</sup> However, according to Watari Kōichi, at least in the case of the motif in the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala, such a tendency is not very obvious. Mokuren still serves as the main character and the mother is subordinated though Watari points out the possibility that the oral narrative at *etoki* performance could change the context.<sup>245</sup> On the other hand, examining different versions of the Kumano Ten Worlds mandala, Ishiguro Kumiko stresses that the aspiration of the mother for salvation is emphasized more in some versions than in others. According to her, the versions which depict the hell of infertility under the court of Enma tend to centre on the story of a mother seeking salvation by her child, while other versions emphasize women's bad deeds.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Watari Kōichi, "Kushizashi no haha: jigokuzu to mokuren kyūbo setsuwa" in *Sei to shi no zushōzō: ajia ni okeru sei to shi no cosumoroji*, ed. Hayashi Masahiko (Tokyo: Shibundō, 2003), 193.

<sup>243</sup> Watari Kōichi, "Kushizashi no haha: jigokuzu to mokuren kyūbo setsuwa", 241.

<sup>244</sup> Watari Kōichi, "Kushizashi no haha: jigokuzu to mokuren kyūbo setsuwa", 209.

<sup>245</sup> Watari Kōichi, "Kushizashi no haha: jigokuzu to mokuren kyūbo setsuwa", 234.

<sup>246</sup> Ishiguro Kumiko, "Kumano kanshin jikkaizu' o meguru josei hyōshō no kinō":36-39



**Figure 15 Mokuren Meeting his Mother in Hell**



**Figure 16 Mokuren Asking the Buddha How to Save his Mother**

As Kuroda considers the story of Mokuren to be the dominant narrative story, the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala depicts several scenes from the story. The first is the scene in which Mokuren cries upon meeting his mother in the hell realm (fig. 15). The second is the scene where Mokuren receives the teaching from Sakyamuni Buddha (fig. 16). The third is the *segaki* ritual to be conducted at the time of the *urabon* ritual. It is positioned at the centre of the mandala (fig. 17). According to Kuroda, the boy at the exact centre of the mandala represents young Mokuren or a person who is responsible for conducting the ritual for the sake of his or her parents. Also, the boy's parents are illustrated as a couple walking toward the boy from the hungry ghost realm. The lotus leaves placed on their heads symbolize salvation and rebirth.<sup>247</sup> Considering that the *segaki* ritual occupies the dominant position of the screen, he argues that the narrative of

<sup>247</sup> Kawamura Kunimitsu, "On'na no jigoku to sukui", 42.

the mandala is concluded in the story of a child saving his parents by conducting a memorial service.<sup>248</sup>



**Figure 17 The Segaki Ritual**

Agreeing with Kuroda's argument, Ishiguro further examines the relationship between the *segaki* ritual and other motifs arranged around it. According to her, those who are saved and those who suffer are vividly contrasted. For example, the boy who saves his parents by conducting the *segaki* ritual is contrasted with children in the

<sup>248</sup> Kuroda Hideo, "Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara no uchū", 269-270.



children's limbo. By contrasting a filial son with children who fail at filial piety, a child's obligation for her parents is emphasized.<sup>249</sup> Also, Ishiguro points out the contrast between women in the hell of infertility and a couple walking toward the *segaki* ritual. Those who are saved by their child are contrasted with those who suffer because of the absence of children. The hell of infertility emphasizes the necessity of children for salvation and the role of women to reproduce children. Women who do not reproduce children are regarded as guilty and beyond salvation, and a distinction is made based on their reproductive ability.<sup>250</sup> Besides emphasizing that the child-parent relationship is the central theme of the mandala, Ishiguro argues that the hill of age expresses the succession of lineage. These motifs are all based on the idea that the succession is maintained by the reproductive ability of women and that the key factor for salvation is the presence of an heir.<sup>251</sup>

## Summary

This chapter has observed major motifs in the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala. The mandala depicts the Buddhist understanding of death and rebirth, salvation by buddhas and bodhisattvas, and the beliefs and practices which were popular among the masses of the era. Many of these motifs observed in this chapter reflect the concerns that were familiar to the masses in the *ie* structure. For example, while the two wives' hell and the tree with knives as leaves express a problematic relationship between men and women, the hill of age presents an exemplary model of human life based on the *ie*

<sup>249</sup> Ishiguro Kumiko, "Kumano kanshin jikkaizu' o meguru josei hyōshō no kinō":33-34.

<sup>250</sup> Ishiguro Kumiko, "Kumano kanshin jikkaizu' o meguru josei hyōshō no kinō":34.

<sup>251</sup> Ishiguro Kumiko, "Kumano kanshin jikkaizu' o meguru josei hyōshō no kinō": 44-45.

structure. The hell of infertility, a woman with a neck pillory, and the blood pond hell depict the concerns specific to women whose social obligations were associated with reproductive activities. The *segaki* ritual, forty-nine rice cakes, and the office of Enma emphasize children's obligation to conduct memorial services for their parents, and the children's limbo reflects the concern of parents for their deceased children. Indeed, many of those motifs described above originated in the late medieval period, reflecting the social tendency which emphasized the significance of maintaining the family lineage and filial piety. As depicted, the motifs that concern the child-parent relationship are gathered in the middle around the *segaki* ritual in the mandala. The gender specific motifs particularly the blood pond hell and the hell of infertility together condemned all women to the hell realm. However, these hells also suggest that women could be saved if they reproduce children to conduct memorial services for them and thus that women must reproduce children for their own salvation. On the other hand, children must be responsible for conducting memorial services for their parents, especially for mothers because their suffering was caused by their children. Here, social expectations to reproduce heirs and filial piety are translated into a religious context. Reflecting the social structure of the era, the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala promotes the maintenance of a lineage and the virtue of filial piety by emphasizing the significance of reproducing children for their own salvation and, conversely, the significance of children conducting memorial services for their parents' salvation. In addition, the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala reflects capability for multiple interpretations. For instance, many scholars agree that the character *kokoro* symbolizes a profound Buddhist doctrine, but they associate the character with different teachings. Also, while the mandala could be read as

the recommendation for memorial services, it could also be read merely as a hell tour story. Likewise, these mandalas are kept at the temples of different Buddhist schools such as the Tendai, Shingon, Pure Land (including former Ji sect), and Zen (Sōtō and Rinzai) schools.<sup>252</sup> Although their religious perspectives are not uniform, the worldview depicted in the mandala was to some extent acceptable or at least adaptable to these heterogeneous religious perspectives. In fact, many of these temples did not seem to consider the mandalas as the mandalas of Kumano *shinkō*. Rather, they seemed to perceive the mandalas in a more general sense, considering that the temple records refer to mandalas without the term “Kumano”.<sup>253</sup> Indeed, the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala is capable of diverse interpretations. When the mandala was deciphered by *etoki* performers such as Kumano *bikuni*, interpretations could be further developed according to the interests and needs of the audience.

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<sup>252</sup> For the list of temples keeping the mandalas, see Ogurisu Kenji, *Kumano kanjin jikkai mandala*, 154.

<sup>253</sup> In the temple records, the mandalas are referred to as the painting of the ten worlds, of the six realms, of hell and pure land and so on. See Ogurisu Kenji, *Kumano kanjin jikkai mandala*, 157. Some scholars point out that not all Kumano Ten Worlds Mandalas were associated with Kumano *bikuni* and that these mandalas might be used by other religious practitioners. See Nishiyama Masaru, “Chōsen butsuga kanrochō to Kumano kanjin jikkaizu”, 157.

## Chapter 5: *Etoki* Performance

The term “*etoki*” refers to both “elucidation by images” (pictorialization)<sup>254</sup> and “elucidation of images” (decipherment).<sup>255</sup> This is because *etoki* requires two redefining processes; visual images redefine written texts, and the performer further redefines the visual images according to the situation. In addition to these two definitions, *etoki* can also refer to a person who deciphers visual images.<sup>256</sup> These three kinds of *etoki* link three indispensable components of *etoki* performance, namely written texts, visual images, and oral narratives.<sup>257</sup>

As discussed earlier, visual images are not “incompetent and inadequate translations” of written texts but original texts which redefine the written texts. In the same sense, oral narratives are also original texts which redefine written texts and visual images. With the aid of visual images and knowledge of the written texts, the performer reproduces narratives. While the performer could narrate a story by following the written texts that the visual images are based on, the performer could also change the contents of the story by incorporating with his or her own interpretation. Accordingly, the performer functions as both a translator of visual images and an author of oral narratives.<sup>258</sup>

Not only the performer but also the audience has an impact on the reproduction of oral narratives. This is particularly the case of entertaining itinerant *etoki* because the

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<sup>254</sup> Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*, 6

<sup>255</sup> Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*, 6

<sup>256</sup> Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*, 6. Regarding the definition of the term, also see Hayashi Masahiko, *Nihon no etoki*, 110.

<sup>257</sup> Kaminishi explains the relationship between them in a triangular chart. See Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*, 7.

<sup>258</sup> Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*, 6-7.

performer emphasizes the entertainment aspect of *etoki* performance. According to Ruch, unlike sophisticated art works which are concerned with the quality of artistic techniques, popular entertainment performance is more concerned with the perspective of the audience. This is because the aim of such performance is to create an emotional impact on the audience or to receive positive responses from them rather than to achieve a high degree of perfection in the performance. Thus, in order to effectively communicate with the audience, the performer utilizes animation in speech and bodily movement, singing, dancing, and other elements of theatre.<sup>259</sup> Also, they are required to respond to a heterogeneous audience who are not always familiar with the subject matter.<sup>260</sup> As entertaining itinerant *etoki* performers, Kumano *bikuni* utilized these techniques to attract an audience. The following examines the representation of Kumano *bikuni* in paintings and writings; it investigates how Kumano *bikuni* demonstrated their ability as *etoki* performers and how they responded to the religious needs of the audience.

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<sup>259</sup> Barbara Ruch, *Mō hitotsuno chūseizō: Bikuni, Otagizōshi, Raise*, 152.

<sup>260</sup> Barbara Ruch, *Mō hitotsuno chūseizō: Bikuni, Otagizōshi, Raise*, 150-151.

## Representations of Kumano *bikuni* in Paintings and Writing



**Figure 18** Sumiyoshi jinja sairaisu (住吉神社祭礼図) Freer Gallery of Art.  
Nei Kiyoshi & Yamamoto Shigeo, *Kumano bikuni o etoku*, iii.

A number of paintings of the era indicate that Kumano *bikuni* were itinerant religious practitioners who were integrated in the everyday life of the masses. Many screen paintings depict Kumano *bikuni* performing *etoki* at public places in urban areas, such as markets, temples, and shrines where various itinerant entertainers gathered.<sup>261</sup> One such example is a seventeenth century screen painting *Sumiyoshi jinja saireizu* (Festival at Sumiyoshi Shrine; fig. 18). In the painting, a white hooded Kumano *bikuni* performs *etoki* beside the bridge to Sumiyoshi shrine in Osaka. In front of the audience, she sits one knee up, and points toward a motif on a hanging scroll. Right beside the Kumano *bikuni*, a young girl called *kobikuni* assists *etoki* performance. She holds a

<sup>261</sup> See Nei Kiyoshi & Yamamoto Shigeo, *Kumano bikuni o etoku*, i-iv, 3-7.

wooden ladle to solicit contributions from the audience. Though the audience in the painting are women and children, other paintings depict men in the audience (fig. 1).<sup>262</sup> Also, illustrated books in the early modern period inform us regarding *etoki*

practice by Kumano *bikuni* in a more private setting.

For example, an illustration from *Kagomimi (In One Ear and Out the Other)*; fig. 19), published in 1687,

depicts Kumano *bikuni* performing in a house for a

few women. In the illustration, a black hooded Kumano *bikuni* points to a hanging scroll which depicts various scenes of the hell realm. Also, an illustration from *Kinsei kiseki kō*

(*Reflections on Recent Miracles*; fig. 20) by Santō Kyōden published in 1804 depicts a

black hooded Kumano *bikuni* performing *etoki* on a handscroll for a few women.

Another work by Santō Kyōden also shows an illustration of a group of two white

hooded Kumano *bikuni* and one *kobikuni* (fig.21). They are invited to a house to perform *etoki* on handscrolls.<sup>263</sup>



**Figure 19 Kagomimi (籠耳)**

Nei Kiyoshi & Yamamoto Shigeo,  
*Kumano bikuni o etoku*, 5.

<sup>262</sup> Nei Kiyoshi & Yamamoto Shigeo, *Kumano bikuni o etoku*, ii, 3.

<sup>263</sup> The explanatory comment on the illustration states that white hooded Kumano *bikuni* are old fashioned. Considering this comment, Hayashi suggests that white hooded Kumano *bikuni* are *etoki* practitioners in earlier time and black hooded Kumano *bikuni* are those who focused more on secular activities including singing and prostitution in the early modern period. See Hayashi Masahiko, “Kumano bikuni to etoki”, 122.



**Figure 20 Kinsei kiseki kō (近世奇跡考)**  
 Nei Kiyoshi & Yamamoto Shigeo, *Kumano bikuni o etoku*, 6.



**Figure 21 Kottōshū (骨董集)**  
 Nei Kiyoshi & Yamamoto Shigeo, *Kumano bikuni o etoku*, 7.

Although these paintings affirm the popularity of Kumano *bikuni* who had close contacts with the masses, some writers of the era demonstrate a critical perspective toward them because itinerant Kumano *bikuni* appeared to be distinct from the image of celibate nuns at nunneries. Particularly, Kumano *bikuni*'s engagement in secular activities such as singing and prostituting were targeted by many writers of the era. For example, Asai Ryōi, a Pure Land monk in the seventeenth century, mentions Kumano *bikuni* in *Tōkaidō meishoki* (*Record of Famous Places along the Tōkaidō*, 1656). According to him, Kumano *bikuni* used to perform *etoki* in order to preach the Buddhist teachings, but instead they focused on singing popular songs. Asai further comments that “they look just like a courtesan or *shirabyōshi* dancer”<sup>264</sup> because they wear make-up and

<sup>264</sup> Asai Ryōi, translated by Barbara Ruch in “Woman to Woman: Kumano *bikuni* Proselytizers in Medieval and Early Modern Japan”, 547.



dressed in showy cloths, and actually prostituted. As his comments suggest, by the mid-seventeenth century, some Kumano *bikuni* came to be perceived as degenerate nuns.<sup>265</sup> Concerned with such a tendency, the Kumano *hongan* temples announced a number of regulations regarding the activities of itinerant Kumano *bikuni* in order to strictly control them. However, it seems that they were not very successful because of their decreasing authority in the Kumano mountains. Many writers in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries report that Kumano *bikuni* financially contributed to Nachi by singing and engaging in sexual activities.<sup>266</sup>

These writers might have simply repeated gossipy hearsay by referring to earlier writers such as Asai, and they may merely demonstrate the perspective of elite intellectuals who scorned Kumano *bikuni* as lowbrow or degenerate.<sup>267</sup> Nevertheless, some of these writers reveal significant aspects of *etoki* performance by Kumano *bikuni*. For instance, they provided accounts of the general contents of *etoki* performance. They document that Kumano *bikuni* narrated the story of the hill of age, the six realms, hell and pure land, or various kinds of hell such as the hell of infertility, the two wives' hell, the blood pond hell, and the tree with knife leaves. Also, they document that Kumano *bikuni* recited the hymns of Jizō and *the Blood Pond Sutra* during their *etoki* performance.<sup>268</sup> Supposing that Kumano *bikuni* performed on the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala, they highlighted these particular motifs because they were more interested in narrating hell

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<sup>265</sup> Barbara Ruch, "Woman to Woman: Kumano *bikuni* Proselytizers in Medieval and Early Modern Japan", 547; Nei Kiyoshi & Yamamoto Shigeo, *Kumano bikuni o etoku*, 231. While some scholars argue that itinerant Kumano *bikuni* gradually transformed themselves from *etoki bikuni* to street singers and prostitutes, others argue that Kumano *bikuni* consisted of heterogeneous occupational groups. For example, Ruch argues that Kumano *bikuni* consisted of at least three groups that had different responsibilities from one another. See Barbara Ruch, *Mō hitotsuno chūseizō: Bikuni, Otagizōshi, Raise*, 163-164.

<sup>266</sup> Hayashi Masahiko, *Kumano bikuni to etoki*, 106-109.

<sup>267</sup> Ishiguro Kumiko, "'Kumano kanshin jikkaizu' o meguru josei hyōshō no kinō": 27.

<sup>268</sup> Nei Kiyoshi & Yamamoto Shigeo, *Kumano bikuni o etoku*, 122-126.

stories rather than preaching Buddhist doctrines. It was probably because hell stories were visually and emotionally more attractive to the audiences. While Kumano *bikuni* were still religious preachers, it seems that they were also widely recognized as narrators of hell stories.

Furthermore, the writers suggest that Kumano *bikuni* knew the interests of the audience well and effectively responded to them. For example, in *Kagomimi Johaku* Naemura illustrates the interaction between a Kumano *bikuni* and the audience at *etoki* performance. The Kumano *bikuni* did not readily narrate particular stories such as the hell of infertility and the tree with knife leaves because she knew that her audience would donate more money to listen to these stories.<sup>269</sup> Naemura writes, “since the naïve audience wants to know more, they eagerly fish the bottom of their rosary purses. Then she tells about Blood Hell and Needle Hell to attract the special attention of a female audience”<sup>270</sup>. As described here, because the Kumano *bikuni* was aware of the interests of the audience, she selectively narrated the stories in order to maximize the amount of contributions she could collect from the audience.<sup>271</sup>

Also in a comic text *Shikata banashi* (1659), Nakamura Kiun makes fun of Kumano *bikuni*’s “ad hoc explanation of Buddhism”<sup>272</sup> by introducing the episode that the audience asked for a further explanation regarding the hell of infertility. They asked, “[w]hether a woman who gave birth to a baby who did not survive would be considered

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<sup>269</sup> Nei Kiyoshi & Yamamoto Shigeo, *Kumano bikuni o etoku*, 125.

<sup>270</sup> Johaku Nakamura, translated by Ikumi Kaminishi in *Explaining Pictures*, 157.

<sup>271</sup> Even high ranking monks modified the stories to appeal the audience. When the retired emperor Toba visited Shiten’no-ji, the abbot there performed *etoki*, and the retired emperor’s attendants pointed out some errors during *etoki* performance. See Hayashi Masahiko, *Nihon no etoki*, 118-119.

<sup>272</sup> Ikumi Kaminishi in *Explaining Pictures*, 157.

the same as a woman who had no childbirth at all.”<sup>273</sup> The Kumano *bikuni* answered, “such a woman is slightly better, so instead of a candle wick she would be given a thorn as a digging tool”<sup>274</sup>. As Nakamura Kiun comments, the answer given by the Kumano *bikuni* might be irresponsible and it might suggest that she was not a very sophisticated preacher of the Buddhist teachings. However, it also demonstrates the ability of the Kumano *bikuni* as an *etoki* performer who immediately responded to the audience and extemporaneously reproduced narrative stories according to the situation.

Another example is from a *jōruri* (puppet play) text *Shume no hangan Morihisa* (*The Stablemaster of Police Lieutenant Morihisa*, 1686) by Chikamatsu Monzaemon.

The text includes *etoki* narratives by two women disguised as Kumano *bikuni*. Because they do not have an official permit to pass through the highway check-point, they claim that they are Kumano *bikuni* who are officially allowed to travel across the country. In order to make the guard of the check-point believe that they are truly Kumano *bikuni*, these women perform *etoki*. In their *etoki* narrative, they mainly focus on horrific descriptions of the hell realm, namely various kinds of the torture that bad-doers suffer. In addition to traditional hot hells and gendered hells, their narrative includes the description of the torture for a mean checkpoint guard who does not let innocent people pass through. These women include the description of this specific torture because the guard at the checkpoint is their audience and because they need to pass through the checkpoint.<sup>275</sup> The representation of the *etoki* narratives in this text parallels the

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<sup>273</sup> Nakamura Kiun, translated by Ikumi Kaminishi in *Explaining Pictures*, 159.

<sup>274</sup> Nakamura Kiun, translated by Ikumi Kaminishi in *Explaining Pictures*, 159; Nei Kiyoshi & Yamamoto Shigeo, *Kumano bikuni o etoku*, 122. A similar episode is introduced in “Hato no kai no hanashi” in *Jinrin chōhōki* (1696). See Nei Kiyoshi & Yamamoto Shigeo, *Kumano bikuni o etoku*, 123.

<sup>275</sup> Nei Kiyoshi and Yamamoto Shigeo, *Kumano bikuni o etoku*, 194-195.

characteristic of Kumano *bikuni* documented by other writers. Although it is fictional, the text illustrates the *etoki* performer's ability to flexibly adapt the story to the situation.

### **Possible Representations of Kumano *bikuni* at *etoki* Performance**

According to Origuchi Shinobu, there was a tendency in *shōdō* 唱導 literature for the performers themselves to be considered to be the characters in their narrative stories. The audience believed that the performers had experienced or witnessed the events because the performers often narrated stories in the manner of confession.<sup>276</sup> For one example, the narrators of war tales claimed that they were the survivors of wars between rival clans, and they narrated the story based on the confession over their guilt of not having attended their master's death. For another example, there were nuns who claimed that they had lived for centuries. They confessed the loneliness and sorrow they had experienced in their long life since they had eaten the flesh of a mermaid or a merman, a miraculous medicine for perpetual youth and extreme longevity.<sup>277</sup> Also, there were many female *shōdō* performers who narrated romantic love stories as their own experience.<sup>278</sup> The theme of confession is also illustrated in a popular literary work in the early modern period. In *Kōshoku ichidai on'na* (*The Life of an Amorous Woman*, 1868) by Ihara Saikaku, upon a request from two young men who hope to learn mysteries of love, an old woman confesses her past life. The woman, who is originally from a noble

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<sup>276</sup> Origuchi Shinobu, "Kokubungaku no hassei", 194-195.

<sup>277</sup> Origuchi Shinobu, "Kokubungaku no hassei", 195. Although there are variations, the story of a woman who acquired extreme longevity by eating fresh of a mermaid or a merman is pervasive across Japan. See Nei Kiyoshi, "kaikoku no bikuni" in *Hijiri to minshū* ed. Hagiwara Tatsuo & Shin'no Toshikazu (Tokyo: Meicho shuppan, 1986), 332-337.

<sup>278</sup> Barbara Ruch, *Mō hitotsuno chūseizō: Bikuni, Otogizōshi, Raise*, 116.

family, narrates how she has descended to a street prostitute after a series of amorous events.<sup>279</sup>

Since *etoki* is one type of *shōdō* literature, Ruch argues that Kumano *bikuni* also utilized the technique of confession. According to her, some Kumano *bikuni* presented themselves as women who were guilty of romantic love; they reproduced their stories of romantic love based on their contrition over it.<sup>280</sup> When Kumano *bikuni* narrated a story of romantic love as their actual experience, particular motifs in the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala, such as the two wives' hell, might become more appealing to the audience. In fact, for it was a familiar theme and was entertaining as gossip, the theme of the two wives' hell became associated with familiar amorous stories and spread as rumours among the masses in the early modern period.<sup>281</sup>

Besides, Kumano *bikuni* could simply present themselves as guilty of their female sex.<sup>282</sup> Some of the well-narrated stories at their *etoki* performance were the hell of infertility and the blood pond hell. Since almost all women including Kumano *bikuni* themselves are condemned to these hells, they had to debase their own sex when they narrated these stories.

In addition, Ishiguro argues that Kumano *bikuni* were perceived as motherly characters when they narrated the story of a mother, while considering that the representation of Kumano *bikuni* in historical documents is comparable to that of mothers. In the historical documents Kumano *bikuni* were said to have been married to

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<sup>279</sup> Ihara Saikaku "The Life of an Amorous Woman" in *The Life of an Amorous Woman and Other Writings*, trans. Ivan Morris, ed. Ivan Morris (NY: New Directions Book, 1963), 121-208.

<sup>280</sup> Barbara Ruch, *Mō hitotsuno chūseizō: Bikuni, Otogizōshi, Raise*, 116.

<sup>281</sup> Tsutsumi Kunihiko, *Kinsei bukkyō no kenkyū: shōdō to bungei* (Tokyo: Kanrin shobō, 1996), 184.

<sup>282</sup> Ishiguro Kumiko, "Kumano kanshin jikkaizu' o meguru josei hyōshō no kinō" *Etoki kenkyū* 18, (2004): 48.

*yamabushi* and were accompanied by *kobikuni*. Even though they did not actually have intimate relationships with *yamabushi* or blood relationships with *kobikuni*, their association with men and children could remind their audience of their family relationships. Moreover, Ishiguro argues that Kumano *bikuni* actually dedicated part of their identity to a mother-like figure. The origin story of Kumano *bikuni* traces the spiritual lineage of Kumano *bikuni* back to the mother of Kūkai, the founder of the Shingon school in Japan. The mother of Kūkai founded a nunnery in the Kumano mountains after her entry had been refused from Mt Kōya, which strictly excluded women from the summit.<sup>283</sup> Indeed, when the image and the identity of Kumano *bikuni* corresponded with the theme of the story, their narrative stories became more appealing to the audience.

### **Practical Techniques Provided by Kumano *bikuni***

While Hagiwara Tatsuo considers Kumano *bikuni*'s narratives at *etoki* performance to be a teaching by and for women, Moerman questions its emancipatory qualities.<sup>284</sup> As Moerman argues, Kumano *bikuni* might contribute to perpetuating and sustaining misogynous perspectives among the masses rather than preaching salvation. However, as he also acknowledges, such recognition of primordial debasement could sometimes function as the basis for salvation.<sup>285</sup> For example, in the Pure land school the recognition of one's debasement "leads to voluntary submission to the saving grace of

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<sup>283</sup> Ishiguro Kumiko, "'Kumano kanshin jikkaizu' o meguru josei hyōshō no kinō": 46-48.

<sup>284</sup> Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 231.

<sup>285</sup> Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 230-231.

Amida and the intercession of his earthly representatives”.<sup>286</sup> Thus, even if it “unconsciously propelled an ideology that was partly responsible for the suffering itself”<sup>287</sup> it certainly provided one type of liberation. Similarly, Kumano *bikuni* might not be interested in challenging the negative perspective toward the female sex. Rather, they took such negative perspectives for granted and provided the audience with practical techniques to cope with their concerns for this life and the next.

As such practical techniques, for example, Kumano *bikuni* distributed magical objects such as spiral shells, *nagi* leaves, and talismans. While spiral shells could be used as toys, they were considered as sacred objects purified by the sea and were believed to have power for safe delivery.<sup>288</sup> *Nagi* leaves were believed to protect travellers and to maintain intimate relationships. They were distributed among the pilgrims in the Kumano mountains, and they were kept in the backs of mirrors by women who wished to maintain good relationships with their husbands.<sup>289</sup> Besides, Kumano *bikuni* distributed talismans of the Three Shrines of Kumano (Kumano *goō*; fig. 6) and talismans of Daikokuten (fig. 5), which drive off misfortune and invite good luck.<sup>290</sup> These magical objects, especially the talismans of the three shrines of Kumano and *nagi* leaves, were items symbolic of the Kumano mountains. They represent the efficacy of Kumano *gongen* who guarantees one’s wish fulfillment in this life and rebirth in the Pure Land.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> Bernard Faure, *The Power of Denial*, 118.

<sup>287</sup> Bernard Faure, *The power of Denial*, 118.

<sup>288</sup> Yamamoto Shigeo, “Kumano bikuni no ichi”, 499.

<sup>289</sup> Yamamoto Shigeo, “Kumano bikuni no ichi”, 501.

<sup>290</sup> Yamamoto Shigeo, “Kumano bikuni no ichi”, 488.

<sup>291</sup> Yamamoto Shigeo, “Kumano bikuni no ichi”, 500-502.

Considering the theme of the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala, Kumano *bikuni* probably preached the importance of memorial services as a technique for better rebirth. As the motif of the *segaki* ritual suggests, the presence of a filial child was crucial, for the child was supposed to aid the parent by conducting memorial services. Certainly, this is one technique to secure better rebirths. However, many people in urban areas could hardly expect memorial services on a regular basis after death because they did not have family temples. Thus, instead, they were more enthusiastic toward gaining merit through other means such as making contributions and pilgrimages to temples and shrines.<sup>292</sup> Although it was financially and physically difficult for many people to make pilgrimage to sacred sites in remote places such as the Kumano mountains, there were many itinerant religious practitioners to bridge the religious institutions and the masses in urban areas. By raising funds for the temples and shrines in the Kumano mountains, Kumano *bikuni* provided such people with the opportunity to gain merit for better rebirths.

## Summary

Considering the functions of *etoki* performance, this chapter has highlighted the ability of Kumano *bikuni* as *etoki* performers and has examined how they responded to the interests and the religious needs of the audience. Because it was an oral tradition, it is not possible to observe the actual narratives of Kumano *bikuni* today. However, a number of historical documents provide information regarding significant aspects of their *etoki* performance. Visual documents suggest that they had a close relationship with the

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<sup>292</sup> Ōta Naoyuki, *Chūsei no shaji to shinkō*, 1; Murakami Norio, *Kinsei kanjin no kenkyū: Kyoto no minkan shūkyōsha*, 372-373.



audience and that their performance was a familiar event in urban areas. Though the writers of the era tend to be critical toward the activities of Kumano *bikuni*, they document their ability to reproduce narrative stories according to the situation. As a technique to make their narrative stories more appealing to the audience, Kumano *bikuni* sometimes utilized themselves as characters in their narratives. When they made their stories confessions, they might express guilt for love affairs, guilt for being female, or the suffering of mothers. As some point out, Kumano *bikuni* did not seem to challenge negative perspectives toward women and they might have contributed to disseminating a misogynous attitude among the masses. However, they did not merely narrate the stories to scare or to debase the audience. They also provided the audience with practical techniques to deal with the issues they addressed at *etoki* performance.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

In the period when Kumano *bikuni* were active, not only a new operation of religious institutions but also a new religious perspective was demanded because of radical social and political change. Kumano *bikuni* responded to these new demands from both the religious institutions and the masses through their *kanjin* activity. Conceptualizing Kumano *bikuni* as mediators between the religious world and the secular world, this thesis has particularly focused on *etoki* performance as part of their *kanjin* activity. In order to demonstrate their contribution, the following issues have been examined. How were Kumano *bikuni* positioned in society and in the institutions of the Three Shrines of Kumano? How does the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala adapt the Buddhist worldview to the perspective of the masses of the era? How did Kumano *bikuni* function in reproducing narratives at *etoki* performance? What techniques did they provide the audience with in order to deal with the issues addressed at *etoki* performance? By answering these questions, this thesis has attempted to support the argument that Kumano *bikuni* served the religious and worldly interests of the audience, while incorporating with the perspective of the masses of the era.

As fundraisers of Kumano *shinkō*, Kumano *bikuni* bridged the interests of both the religious institutions and the masses. On one hand, Kumano *bikuni* financially contributed to the temples and shrines in the Kumano mountains. Their *kanjin* activity became increasingly significant toward the late medieval period when the Three Shrines of Kumano could no longer expect sufficient support from the aristocracy and income from private estates because of the declining authority of the imperial court. The

Kumano *hongan* temples were organized in order to respond to such a difficult financial situation. While the Kumano *hongan* temples communicated with political authorities and managed to collect contributions from pilgrims to the Kumano mountains, they also sent Kumano *bikuni* off in order to solicit contributions from the commoners outside the Kumano mountains. Although the Kumano *hongan* temples gradually decreased their authority and were eventually abolished, a number of Kumano shrines located across Japan demonstrate how successfully Kumano *bikuni* carried out their tasks.

On the other hand, the activity of Kumano *bikuni* provided the audience with the opportunity to relate to the religious world. The gap between the religious world and the secular world was mediated through *etoki*, which involves a twofold deciphering process. As the first process, visual images redefine written texts and become original texts themselves. To investigate this process, the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala was examined. In addition to the Buddhist understanding of death and rebirth through the six realms, the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala introduces new images of hell and salvation. These new images address various human relationships in the *ie* structure, which emphasizes the significance of the maintenance of a lineage. While the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala depicts an exemplary model of human life, it condemns those who have failed to fulfill social expectations. For one example, while the hill of age presents an ideal life-course relationship between a married couple, the two wives' hell addresses a problematic relationship between men and women. For another example, the *segaki* ritual and forty-nine rice cakes depict parents saved by filial children; in contrast, motifs such as the hell of infertility and a woman with a neck pillory condemn women who do not contribute to the maintenance of a lineage by reproducing or rearing an heir. Also,

the limbo for children reflects the increasing interests taken toward children as successors of lineages. The limbo was visualized based on parents' concern for deceased children and the obligation of children to contribute to the prosperity of a lineage. Although the interpretations of individual motifs could be diverse, the motifs discussed above certainly reflect the perspective of the masses of the era.

The stories depicted in the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala were further developed at *etoki* performance. This is the second process of *etoki*, in which the performer reproduces original narratives by redefining visual images according to the situation. Since one of the central themes of the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala is a filial child saving his or her parent by conducting memorial services, Kumano *bikuni* could address it at *etoki* performance. However, historical documents suggest that Kumano *bikuni* focused on hell stories, particularly the stories of gendered hell. As popular entertainers, Kumano *bikuni* regarded the reaction from the audience as the most important. Thus, they were more interested in narrating the stories that the audience expected to hear. Also, it was essential for Kumano *bikuni* to respond to the heterogeneous audience. The majority of their audience are said to have been women, but their audience actually included men as well. Moreover, even the concerns of women were far from uniform because women's lives were conditioned according to many factors such as class, occupation, economic status, and region. Therefore, in order to meet diverse interests, Kumano *bikuni* selectively narrated, created, or modified stories while interacting with the audience at *etoki* performance.

Indeed, *etoki* performance was ritual performance where the religious world and everyday life fused. The religious world was restructured based on the social structure

in the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala, and Kumano *bikuni* further modified the stories according to the needs of the audience. Through these processes, the religious world was made familiar to the audience and the audience experienced it with a sense of reality. Moreover, when Kumano *bikuni* reflected the stories upon themselves, their narratives appeared more real. Because the use of confession was pervasive among *shōdō* performers in the medieval period, some Kumano *bikuni* also utilized such a technique. For example, by narrating the stories as their own experience, some Kumano *bikuni* made their *etoki* narratives confessions. They presented themselves as the characters who were guilty of love affairs or simply of being female. In addition, they might appear to be mother-like figures in the eyes of the audience when they narrate the story of a mother. As visual documents depict, Kumano *bikuni* were often accompanied by *kobikuni*. Though they did not necessarily have a blood relationship, a pair of a woman and a child might remind the audience of a mother-child relationship.

Some might make a critique that Kumano *bikuni* contributed to spreading a misogynous perspective among the masses. It might be true that Kumano *bikuni* took a misogynous perspective for granted. However, it should also be recognized that they brought women's concerns into the religious teachings. Furthermore, even though the way to salvation suggested in the Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala was tied with the reproductive ability of women, Kumano *bikuni* also provided the audience with other options. In fact, Kumano *bikuni*'s *kanjin* activities involved various techniques to deal with concerns for this life and the next. As such techniques, Kumano *bikuni* distributed various magical objects and talismans such as *nagi* leaves, *sugai* shells, *the Blood Pond Sutra*, the talismans of Daikokuten, and the talismans of the Three Shrines of Kumano.

In addition, making contributions to Kumano *shinkō* itself was a way to make connection with the Kumano deity who guarantees one's rebirth in the Pure Land and rewards one with worldly benefits. Instead of challenging the pervasive perspective of the era, Kumano *bikuni* suggested practical techniques to deal with these concerns.

It should be acknowledged that a lack of historical documents prevents us from uncovering the entire activity of Kumano *bikuni* today. However, as demonstrated in this thesis, the *kanjin* activity of Kumano *bikuni* was one example of how various interests of different groups were met. While mediating between them, Kumano *bikuni* played a significant role in structuring the popular worldview and in responding to the religious and worldly interests of the masses of the era.

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