

On Placating the Gods and Pacifying the Populace: The Case of the Gion "Goryō" Cult

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Neil McMullin

ON PLACATING THE
GODS AND PACIFYING
THE POPULACE:
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GION *Goryō* CULT

One day, so the story goes, a Heavenly Divinity embarked on a long journey of 80,000 *li* to court the daughter of the Dragon King of the Southern Sea. Becoming tired along the way, the Heavenly Divinity sought lodgings at which he might rest. Eventually he came upon two brothers, a wealthy younger one named Kotan Shōrai and a poor elder one named Somin Shōrai. The younger brother refused lodging to the Heavenly Divinity, but the older one, although very poor, was most hospitable; he took in the weary traveler and shared what he had with his guest. Before resuming his journey, the Heavenly Divinity repaid his host for his kindness by presenting his daughter with a wreath made of entwined miscanthus reeds which, he said, she was to wear around her waist whenever disease plagued her land. By wearing that wreath and declaring that she was a descendant of Somin Shōrai, she and any of her descendants who did so would not contract the disease. The Heavenly Divinity then resumed his journey, and eventually he reached the palace of the Dragon King. There he wed the Dragon King's beautiful daughter, and over the next twenty

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years the Heavenly Divinity and his queen produced eight children and gathered a retinue of 84,654 attendant divinities. Eventually the Heavenly Divinity, accompanied by his family and great retinue, left the Dragon King's palace and traveled back to the homeland of Kotan Shōrai and Somin Shōrai, the latter of whom had died by that time. Upon arriving there the Heavenly Divinity, with the aid of his children and his retinue, destroyed all the inhabitants of that land with the exception of the daughter of Somin Shōrai and her descendants.

This story, which is recounted in a number of versions that were composed over the centuries from the Nara period (712–84) down to the Meiji period (1868–1912),¹ is one of the core myths of the cult that is located at Gion, a shrine-temple complex in Kyoto that was referred to over the years by a variety of names² and is at the heart of the ancient and popular “Gion Festival” (Gion *matsuri*), which has been celebrated every summer in Kyoto for almost one thousand years. The Gion cult, which includes one of the most important “Shintō” rituals in Japan, will be discussed in this essay by way of an examination of the foregoing story and of some of the various versions and interpretations of it that were produced over the centuries. This examination will focus on the central myths, rituals, and symbols that were brought together in the ninth and tenth centuries to form the Gion cult but will not try to trace the chronological development of that cult. That topic is a highly frustrating one because of the paucity of historical materials and the conflicting information in those that we do have.³ The present exercise should shed some light on several facets of the history of Japanese religion: on the early shape of that highly enigmatic and problematic tradition called Shintō; on the ways in which the Japanese fused a variety of disparate beliefs and practices into a single fabric; on how the early inhabitants of Japan understood and dealt with one of the most serious problems of their world, namely, disease, and especially

¹ Space considerations prohibit the inclusion of a list of the various versions of the story that is presented here in a much abbreviated form. The version of the story that was relied on most for this essay is found in the “Gion Gozu Tennō Engi,” fol. 3 of the “Gionsha-ki,” in Yasaka Jinja Sōsho, ed. Yasaka Jinja Shamusho, vol. 2, *Yasaka Jinja Kiroku* (Kyōto: Yasaka Jinja Shamusho, 1961), pp. 49–53.

² Since 1868 the Gion complex has been called Yasaka Shrine (Yasaka *Jinja*), but prior to that time it was referred to over the centuries by a variety of names: Gionji, Gionsha, Gozu Tennō-sha, Kankeiji, Kanshin'in, and others. For a discussion of the history and significance of those names, see Kubota Osamu, *Yasaka Jinja no Kenkyū* (Kyōto: Shintō-shi Gakkai, 1974), pp. 3–29.

³ The origin of the Gion cult is examined in Kubota, pp. 30–84; and Takahara Yoshitada, *Yasaka Jinja* (Tōkyō: Gakuseisha, 1972), pp. 41–73.

epidemics of such contagious and virulent diseases as typhoid fever, smallpox, leprosy, tuberculosis, and others; and, finally, on the relation between the development of the Gion cult and developments in the political arena in the ninth century.

The Gion cult as we know it came to be centered at Gion some time in the mid-Heian period (794–1185), but it had been germinating at many places in Japan for centuries before that time, and its roots disappear back into the historical mist of the seventh and eighth centuries. One of the primary roots of that cult is grounded in the ancient belief that disease, particularly disease of epidemic proportions, is caused by divinities (*kami/shin*) called “disease-divinities” (*ekijin*). The early Japanese had good reason to fear epidemics, for in those early days the average life expectancy was only around thirty years of age. As disease-causing agents, the *ekijin* were fearsome beings, but their negative character was somewhat muted by the fact that, as seen in the foregoing story, they could also prevent people from contracting disease, and thus their character was somewhat ambivalent.

The other main root of the Gion cult is the belief that in addition to the malevolent work of the *ekijin*, disease, disasters, and calamities of all sorts—droughts, drownings, earthquakes, famines, ominous dreams, political upsets, stillbirths, thunderstorms, and so on—were also caused by the “departed spirits” (*goryō*) of deceased people. This belief probably originated in Japan with the importation from China of the belief that spirits of the dead might become evil spirits or demons (*kuei*; Japanese, *oni*) unless the proper funerary and memorial rituals were performed for the deceased. In its earliest usage the word *goryō* may have denoted all departed spirits, but as a rule its usage was restricted to the departed spirits of deceased members of aristocratic families who met premature, unjust, and violent deaths as the victims of political machinations. The departed spirits of such people, failing to find rest, haunted those responsible for their deaths and gave vent to their “wrath” (*tatari*) in the form of disasters and troubles of all kinds, political, economic, social, and personal. This belief was intimately related to the ancient Chinese belief that the activities of the rulers had cosmic consequences in that reprehensible political activities were believed to result in disease and other calamities. It is important to note, therefore, that from very early times in Japan the cult associated with *goryō* was imbued with a strong political coloration: disasters of all kinds were a barometer of political injustices.

In order to ward off the diseases and other disasters inflicted by departed spirits and to exorcize those spirits from the community, various types of rituals that were called, in general, *goryō'e* (“departed

spirits rituals”) were performed. Those rituals included an eclectic mix of such practices as yin-yang (Japanese *on'yō* or *onmyō*) magic; shamanistic trances; the techniques of “mountain ascetics” (*yama-bushi*); and, later on, the invocation of the name of Amida Buddha (the *nembutsu*). It is generally thought that *goryō*-related beliefs and practices, called *goryō shinkō* by Japanese scholars, originated in the upper strata of Japanese society, and that they gradually spread among the populace from the early Nara period. With that development the common people came to believe that they too, and not just the aristocrats and priests, had the possibility of attaining some kind of “spiritual” continuity in the afterlife. *Goryō shinkō*, which was mixed up with the beliefs and practices that had to do with disease-divinities, pervaded Japan in the Nara and Heian periods.⁴

It is no accident that *goryō shinkō* arose at a time when large cities, especially Nara and subsequently Kyoto, were developing because epidemics spread like wildfire in the crowded, filthy conditions of the cities. With the spread of *goryō*-related beliefs and practices among the peasantry, the *goryō* rituals acquired a new political tone in that not only did they address the immediate problem of disease, but they also spoke to and, at least indirectly, critiqued the conditions (social, political, and economic) that contributed to the cause and spread of disease. In popularly organized *goryō* rituals the peasants could express their dissatisfaction with their masters, an activity that, as shall be seen, the ruling elite took steps to control or repress.

When and how the belief that departed spirits and certain divinities cause disease began in Japan, and when and how the rituals that served to combat them were developed, are questions that probably never can be answered. The roots of those beliefs and rituals are very complex: they go back to beliefs and practices of the pre-Nara period that were held and celebrated by people native to the Japanese islands as well as by the descendants of continental peoples, the majority of whom came from the kingdoms that composed what is now Korea and who had been emigrating to Japan sporadically from as early as the fourth century. Those beliefs and practices arose from both the “low” traditions—that is, folk traditions indigenous to Japan and imported Chinese and especially Korean popular beliefs and practices—and the “high” traditions of Taoism and Buddhism.

⁴ *Goryō shinkō* is discussed in detail in a number of works. See esp. the collection of pieces by various authors in Gorai Shigeru et al., eds., *Kōza Nihon no Minzoku Shūkyō*, vol. 3, *Kamikannen to Minzoku* (Tōkyō: Kōbundō, 1979). The most lengthy treatment of the *goryō* cult in English is in Ichiro Horii, *Folk Religion in Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), *passim*.

In the story recounted above, a *tenjin* (heavenly divinity) or *tennō* (king of the divinities)—who is a disease-divinity and who, as shall be seen, is identified by various names in the different accounts of the story—presented a miscanthus wreath to a young woman to protect her from the disease that he caused and that killed Kotan Shōrai and his family. The ambivalent character of that disease-divinity, his ability both to cause and to ward off disease, is apparent. That story was produced very early in Japanese history, probably in the pre-Nara period and most likely by *on'yō* practitioners. The original version of the story, which is contained in the *Bingo Fudoki*, a topographical record of Bingo province (modern Hiroshima prefecture) that was compiled early in the Nara period,⁵ was produced, I suggest, to account for a practice that was followed in and before that time, namely, the practice of using a *chi-no-wa*—that is, a wreath (*wa*) made out of miscanthus reeds (*chi*)—to protect its wearer from disease.

Contrary to what is sometimes thought, it is not the case that rituals invariably arise from myths and act out the beliefs contained in those myths. Rather, more often than not myths are produced with the purpose of rationalizing and providing the reasons for certain practices that were engaged in by people long before the myths that account for those practices were formulated. My suspicion in regard to the story of the Heavenly Divinity is that the story did not give rise to the practice of using miscanthus wreaths to ward off disease but, on the contrary, that the practice provided inspiration for the story, which, in turn, provided an explanation of why the practice was followed. Rituals in which miscanthus wreaths play a part are still performed in Japan. For example, in a purification ritual (*oharai*) held every year on June 30 at the Tsushima shrine, a large *chi-no-wa* is suspended vertically and participants in the ritual step through the wreath. Moreover, in some places in modern Japan it is still the custom to use small, six-sided spinning-top-like (draydel-like) amulets on which are written, two ideographs to a side, the expression “I am a descendant of Somin Shōrai, our ancestor of great fortune” (*daifuku chōja Somin Shōrai shisonjin nari*).

The use of certain kinds of amulets that were believed to protect their wearers from disease is one that goes back to prehistoric times in Japan. From very early times the inhabitants of the Japanese islands were accustomed to produce one such amulet from eastward-protruding branches of willow trees. The fact that an eastward-

⁵ The *Bingo Fudoki* version of the story is contained in Yamada Yoshio et al., eds., *Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei* (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1963), 2:65–67.

pointing branch of the willow was used in making that amulet is significant in that the easterly direction was associated from ancient times with disease and death. Such a willow branch was cut off and bent so as to form a pentagonal star (*goryōsei*) that was believed to have disease-preventive powers.⁶ The pentagonal shape is noteworthy in that the pronunciation of the Japanese term for it (*goryō*) is the same as the name of the *goryō* ritual, although the two terms are rendered by different ideographs. That the pentagonal star and the deceased-spirit ritual have the same pronunciation is, I suggest, neither accidental nor trivial, for such homophonous similarities constituted one major mechanism, probably the single most important mechanism, whereby the early Japanese made identifications between otherwise seemingly disparate entities. The ritual use of both the willow and the pentagonal design was known from very early times in various cultures besides the Japanese. Willow festivals (*yanagi matsuri*) are still celebrated at various shrines in Japan, but neither the miscanthus-wreath nor willow-branch amulets play any part in the Gion cult, although the divinities introduced in the story recounted above do have a major role in that cult.

A curious connection between the miscanthus-wreath amulet and a practice followed later in the Gion cult is found in the ideograph that depicts the *chi* (miscanthus reed) of the *chi-no-wa*. That ideograph, which is written 茅, is composed of two parts: the upper part (艹), which is the *kusa-kanmuri* radical, denotes grass, and the bottom part (矛), which is also itself a radical, means spear or halberd (*hoko*), a long-handled spear-like weapon that has a battle-ax at its working end. From very early times the halberd was used in the *goryō* cult as a symbol of the power of the *goryō*'e to destroy the effects of the activities of disease-causing divinities and departed spirits.⁷ How there developed the connection between the halberd symbol and the Gion cult is not clear, but I suspect that the link had to do with the *chi* and *hoko* ideographs. Once again, therefore, language associations, either vocal (homophonous similarities) or written (encoded in the ideographs), played a key role in the development of cults.

At the heart of the Gion cult is a melange of disease-divinities, a family of father, mother, and their eight children, to whom rituals designed to ward off or cure the diseases caused by those divinities

⁶ See Murayama Shūichi, *Nihon On'yōdō-shi Sōsetsu* (Tōkyō: Hanawa Shobō, 1981), p. 328.

⁷ In 869 the court ordered each of the sixty-six provinces to produce a halberd and to send it to Kyoto where they were all assembled for a ritual that was conducted in an effort to stop an epidemic (see Kubota, pp. 59–60). The historicity of this event is questionable.

were performed. In that family structure we see another mechanism whereby divinities that had similar functions but that could not be conflated into a single divinity were linked together; that is, they were assigned places in a family structure.

In the earliest extant version of our story, the Heavenly Divinity is called Mutō Tenjin. Mutō is a curious name: apparently it is not of Japanese origin, and it does not appear in any Indian or Chinese sources. Evidently that name was derived from the Korean term *mudang* (pronounced *muta* or *mutō* in Japanese), which indicates a shamaness, particularly one type of early Korean shamaness, who gained contact with divinities by way of rituals involving music and dance. Such a shamaness could, in a trance, identify the names of the divinities and departed spirits that were causing disease and discern their will.⁸ Because music and dance “hath charms to soothe a savage breast,” it was believed that they were especially effective in soothing disease-causing divinities and departed spirits, and thus they were integral parts of the *goryō* ritual.

The term *muta/mutō* appears also to have had a topographical reference in ancient times in that it indicated a certain type of hill or mountain, namely, one with a trapezoidal shape. According to Shiga Takeshi, Mutō is the name of a certain type of divinity that inhabited a particular kind of natural sacred space, one who resided atop trapezoid-shaped hills.⁹ From ancient times in Korea and Japan mountains and high hills were believed to be places where divinities resided, and they were also associated with the realm of death. It is not simply a coincidence that the Gion cultic center is located in the Higashiyama (Eastern Hills) section of Kyoto at the western foot of a hill that has the shape preferred by Mutō Tenjin.

An early Korean cultic center in the kingdom of Silla was located in the vicinity of a trapezoid-shaped hill that was called, in the Japanese rendering of the classical Korean, *soshimori*. In ancient Korea and Japan, cattle, especially bulls, were sacrificed for rain, good harvests, and the prevention of disease, and *soshimori* was one of the major Korean cultic sites at which such sacrifices were offered.¹⁰ According to Kubota Osamu, the “*soshi*” part of the word *soshimori* means bull and the “*mori*” means head, and thus the site was called “Bull’s Head Mountain.”¹¹ Bull sacrifice is, of course, not unique to

⁸ See Shiga Takeshi, “Nihon ni Okeru Ekijin Shinkō no Seisei,” *Shintō-shi Kenkyū* 29, no. 3 (July 1981): 150; and Hori, p. 112.

⁹ Shiga, pp. 151 and 168.

¹⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 150.

¹¹ Kubota, p. 42. Shiga says that the “*so*” of *soshimori* means bull, the “*mori*” means head, and the “*shi*” is a possessive particle like the Japanese “*no*” (Shiga, p. 168).

the ancient Korean and Japanese cultures, but the role and significance of the bull is especially relevant with regard to our Heavenly Divinity story.

In one early version of that story Mutō Tenjin is identified with Gozu Tennō, the bull (*go*)-headed (*zu*) divinity, but in another version of it Gozu Tennō is said to be Mutō Tenjin's eldest son.¹² In either case Mutō Tenjin and Gozu Tennō are intimately linked in that the name "Gozu" (Korean, *soshimori*) is the same as the name of the hill in Silla where Mutō Tenjin resided. In early Japan various divinities were linked together and traditions conflated, not by way of the well known *honji-suijaku* ("original-trace") mechanism of later days whereby relations of identity were made between specific native divinities and specific Buddhas or bodhisattvas for various and sometimes convoluted reasons but by way of the relatively simple technique of name linkage. That is, a certain divinity known by one name is found to have another name, and thus the formerly two divinities that were identified by different names are coalesced into a single divinity known by several names.

The origin of the cult devoted to the disease-divinity Gozu Tennō is unknown. Some legends provide an Indian origin for that divinity: one such legend, for example, identifies Gozu Tennō as one of the guardian deities of a palatial estate that was donated to Siddhartha Gautama by the merchant Sudatta.¹³ The name of that estate, Jetavana ("Jeta Grove"), which was translated into Japanese as Gion Shōja, inspired the name of the Gion cultic center, which was linked by that name to a cult dedicated to Gozu Tennō. Gozu Tennō is said also to have his traditional home on a sacred mountain in India where there grew a tree called "*candana*" (Japanese, *sendankō*; i.e., sandalwood) from which was produced a medicine that was used to reduce fever. Most significantly, that sacred mountain, like *soshimori* in Korea, was shaped like a bull's or ox's head, and it was called, accordingly, "Bull's Head Mountain" (Japanese, "Gozusan").¹⁴ Once again, therefore, the hero of our story, Mutō Tenjin, is linked to a divinity that has something to do with disease, although not so much as a cause thereof but as one associated with protection and disease-preventing medicines.¹⁵ In ancient China a divinity that was depicted

¹² See "Gion Gozu Tennō Engi" (n. 1 above), p. 49. The Gozu Tennō – Mutō Tenjin relation is discussed in Kubota (n. 2 above), pp. 45–49; and Murayama, pp. 325–28.

¹³ See Kubota, p. 48.

¹⁴ See *ibid.*; Kyōto-shi, ed., *Kyōto no Rekishi*, vol. 1, *Heian no Shinkyō* (Tōkyō: Gakugei Shorin, 1970), pp. 418–19; and Leon Hurvitz, *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), p. 99.

¹⁵ Interestingly, another ideograph for *hoko* (halberd), which is written 𠂔, contains within it the ideograph for bull or cow, i.e., 牛.

with the head of a bull and the body of a man was worshiped as an agricultural divinity, and thus there may have been some connection between ancient Chinese fertility rituals and Korea's *soshimori*.¹⁶ Another bovine connection to be noted is that in ancient times in Japan a type of oil called "*soyu*" was squeezed from the hides of cattle, and from that oil was produced an ointment that was smeared on the body to prevent the contraction of disease.¹⁷

Although there is some debate on this point, it appears that in the Nara period, if not earlier, associations began to be made between Mutō Tenjin and a most important figure in Japanese mythology, namely, Susanoo no Mikoto, who plays a major role in the Japanese founding myth recorded in the *Kojiki* (712 A.D.) and the *Nihon Shoki* (or *Nihongi*) of 720 A.D. In that myth Susanoo no Mikoto is expelled from the plain of the high heaven and descends to the land of Izumo (modern Shimane prefecture) where, in Saint Patrick like fashion, he cleared the land of the snakes that infested it. After ridding Izumo of its snakes, Susanoo no Mikoto, accompanied by his son Itakeru no Kami, traveled across the sea to the aforementioned *soshimori* in Korea, and thus a link is made between him and Mutō Tenjin, the divinity of that place.¹⁸ Susanoo no Mikoto has a complex history: from remote times he was worshiped by the Japanese in various places—including the "Eight Hills Village" (*Yasaka-gō*) area, which will be mentioned below—and in a number of guises (as a storm divinity, a mountain divinity, an agricultural divinity, a *sae no kami*, i.e., one that protects boundaries and crossroads, and others), and he was also worshiped by some Korean peoples.¹⁹ How Susanoo no Mikoto came to be associated with Mutō Tenjin is not clear, but, as Kubota Osamu explains, some time in the ninth century, probably around the year 877 when a major epidemic swept through the country, a number of disease-related cultic sites and divinities—Gion, Gozu Tennō, Susanoo no Mikoto, Mutō Tenjin, and various *ekijin*—were loosely coalesced and their powers invoked against that epidemic.²⁰ In the Nara and Heian periods the names Susanoo no Mikoto and Mutō Tenjin were linked, but it was not until the Kamakura period (1185–1333) that Susanoo no Mikoto came to be identified explicitly with Gozu Tennō.

¹⁶ See Shiga, p. 167.

¹⁷ See Nakamura Hajime, ed., *Bukkyō-go Daijiten*, abbrev. ed. (Tōkyō: Tōkyō Shoseki, 1981), p. 862.

¹⁸ The Susanoo no Mikoto – Mutō Tenjin relation is discussed in Kubota, pp. 45–49.

¹⁹ The complex roots of the Susanoo no Mikoto divinity are discussed in Takahara (n. 3 above), pp. 21 and 56–62.

²⁰ Kubota, p. 49.

Our story contains other important figures in addition to the Heavenly Divinity Mutō Tenjin – Gozu Tennō, notably the daughter of the Dragon King of the Southern Sea whom that divinity wed, and the children they produced. The Dragon King's daughter, who is called by various names (Bari no Uneme, Barime no Miya, Kushiinada Hime, and others) in the different accounts of the story, is obviously associated with water. One root of the tradition in which she developed is a story according to which a certain king who longed to produce a son failed to do so and continued to produce nothing but daughters. When his seventh daughter was born he was so frustrated and disgusted that he named her “Bari Hime,” the “*bari*” of which means to reject or throw away, and the “*hime*” of which means princess. Accordingly, the king had “Princess Reject” cast into the Eastern Sea, but (happily,) she was plucked from the water by the Buddha. Some time later she married a Taoist hermit-wizard, and with the aid of his magical medicinal waters she was able to bring her deceased parents back to life. Thereafter she was revered as a powerful sorceress among whose powers was that of curing snake bites.²¹ From ancient days in the Bingo area people practiced a ritual in which water from a sacred well was sprinkled on the heads of children to preserve them from contracting disease, and the story of Princess Reject is linked to that practice. Eventually various water- and disease-related female divinities were coalesced into a single divinity who was incorporated into the Gion cult as the spouse of Gozu Tennō, and one of the many names and titles that she acquired was Shōshōi, the “*i*” of which means “well.” Mundanely speaking, disease-divinities were associated with water for reason of the connection between disease and the water supply; tainted water was not infrequently the cause of epidemics. In the *Kojiki*, Shōshōi, under the name Kushiinada Hime, is said to be the spouse of Susanoo no Mikoto, who, it will be recalled, also had power over snakes.

The eight children produced by Mutō Tenjin – Gozu Tennō and the daughter of the Dragon King are called, in Japanese, Hachioji (“Eight Royal Children”). The origin of those figures too is unclear, but once again it appears to go back, at least in part, to Korean legends and to the fact that in ancient Korean shamanistic rituals it was customary, for reasons unknown, to employ eight shamanesses. According to one of those Korean legends, once upon a time a heavenly princess descended unto a mountain in Korea where she met and wed a holy man by whom she eventually bore eight female

²¹ See Shiga (n. 8 above), p. 169.

children. Those semidivine children were sent out along the eight major highways, probably as *sae no kami*, which, it will be recalled, had a disease-related function in that as protectors of the crossroads they could impede the movement of disease-causing divinities and departed spirits. Another legend known in ancient Korea told of a celestial lady who wed a wizard and by him produced seven sons. Elsewhere Mutō Tenjin and his queen are said to have borne eight children, one female and seven males.²² Yet another account identifies those children as the divinities that were born from the blood that splattered on the sword wielded by Izanagi, one of the creator divinities in the classical Japanese myth, when he cut off the head of Kagu Tsuchi no Kami, his divine child the fire deity, who caused the death of Izanagi's spouse Izanami when she was giving birth to him.²³ Eventually those various stories coalesced in Japan in such a way as to have a pair of divinities produce eight divine children, five of whom were male and the remaining three female. Later, with the Japanization of the more important cults and the severing of their continental roots, the Hachiōji came to be spoken of as the divine children of Susanoo no Mikoto and his sister Amaterasu, the sun goddess and the ancestral divinity of the Japanese imperial house.

The Hachiōji cult has some roots in Japanese soil but others in a Korean immigrant family named Koma, which immigrated to Japan from the kingdom of Silla some time late in the pre-Nara period or early in the Nara period. Some ancient legends link children, disease, and Korea. According to one such legend, for example, in the reign of Empress Suiko (reigned 593–628) an epidemic was brought to Japan by three children who arrived by boat from Korea in the company of three adults who, as it turned out, were not human beings at all. Those adults had been humans at one time, but they died of the disease that the children carried and turned into *ekijin*. They warned the Japanese that they too would contract that disease, and then, rather incongruously, they demanded that the Japanese bring them some of their favorite food which was, of all things, a type of potato (*satoimo*).²⁴ The offering of food, customarily at crossroads, to disease-divinities was one of the techniques employed from very early times to placate those divinities.

The Eight Royal Children were, like their parents, disease-divinities who participated in the destruction of Kotan Shōrai's family. In early

²² The legends recounted here are found in "Gion Gozu Tennō Goengi," fol. 4 of the "Gionsha-ki" (n. 1 above), p. 56; Shiga, p. 151; Kubota (n. 2 above), p. 46; and Takahara, p. 64.

²³ See Donald L. Philippi, *Kojiki* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1968), p. 50.

²⁴ See Shiga, pp. 152, 161, and 169–70.

times, just as today, children were particularly susceptible to contagious diseases: they contracted whatever was going around more easily than adults did, and they succumbed more quickly. Concern for the health of one's children, and, accordingly, with the divinities that cause disease in children, was natural, especially in a society in which so many people died in childhood as to cause the average life expectancy to be around just thirty years of age. People believed that by way of rituals directed to the disease-causing Hachiōji their children might be spared from contracting disease, and in the cases of children who had already contracted a deadly disease, it was hoped that the rituals would cause the disease to be diminished and to run its course harmlessly or that the disease would be transmuted into a minor illness.

How, when, and by whom the aforementioned divinities came to be coalesced into a single cult that had to do with the causes of disease and the prevention thereof, and how, when, and by whom that cult came to be located at the Gion cultic center are debated issues. It is curious that the source of the earliest account of our story is a topographical record of Bingo province, not one of the Kyoto area where the Gion cult is located. From the early Nara period, if not earlier, rituals designed to ward off disease were performed in the Bingo area, and those rituals were possibly the predecessors of what was to become later the Gion cult. From very early times people of Korean ancestry were settled in several communities in the Inland Sea area in and around Bingo province, and thus a major root of the Gion cult may go back to those people in that area. According to Shiga Takeshi, a cult dedicated to Gozu Tennō was practiced by the Hata people, a maritime people (the word *hata* in classical Korean means "sea") who had come to Japan from the Korean kingdom of Koguryō in the pre-Nara age.²⁵

Another account of the origin of the Gion cult states that a shrine at which rituals were directed to Gozu Tennō was first established in the early eighth century in Harima province (modern Hyōgo prefecture), some distance to the east of Bingo province along the Inland Sea coast. According to that account, a shrine devoted to Gozu Tennō was set up in Harima at Myōkoku no Ura, a bay located at the foot of a ridge called Hiromine, by Kibi no Makibi (693–775), a Japanese nobleman who spent a number of years in China and who landed at that spot in 733 on his return from the continent.²⁶ It is said that Kibi stopped over in Korea on his return trip and that he

²⁵ Ibid., p. 164.

²⁶ See Kubota, p. 35; and Takahara, p. 63.

brought the Gozu Tennō cult with him from there to Harima. Tradition has it that subsequently, for reasons unknown, the cult was relocated from Myōkoku no Ura to nearby Hiromine, and from there it was transferred to the Tōkō'in in the Kitashirakawa (northern Higashiyama) section of Kyoto some time in the middle of the ninth century. Shortly thereafter, by the year 877, it was moved a short distance to the south of the Tōkō'in and established at the present Gion site. However, some scholars reject this "Harima transfer" account of the origin of the Gion cultic center.²⁷

The general consensus, insofar as the establishment of the Gion cultic center can be dated with any accuracy, is that it was founded in the Jōgan era (859–77), probably in the year 876, by a Buddhist monk named Ennyo who belonged to the Jōjūji, a temple that had been relocated to Kyoto from Nara earlier in the ninth century. Ennyo, it is said, built a temple (*tera*) called the Kankeiji on the site of the present Yasaka Shrine, and before long a "divinity hall" (*shinden*) was erected adjacent to it.²⁸ It is generally thought that Ennyo established the Kankeiji at the behest of Fujiwara no Mototsune (836–91), the head of the powerful Fujiwara family, which was assuming control of the most important offices in the country in the mid-ninth century, and thus the Gion complex originated as an institution sponsored by the highest level of the aristocracy. In the *shinden* the central figure was Gozu Tennō (Mutō Tenjin), who was flanked to the west by his queen, Barime no Miya. Some time later, possibly in the year 926, when a building called Tenjindō ("Heavenly Divinity Hall") was built at the Gion site, the Hachiōji were transferred from a nearby site and enshrined alongside their "father" (Gozu Tennō) on the side opposite from their "mother" (Barime no Miya).²⁹ The central object of devotion in the Kankeiji's "main hall" (*hondō*), which was adjacent to the Tenjindō, was Yakushi Nyorai, the Buddha of Medicine, who, given his main function as a healer, was an appropriate choice to associate with Gozu Tennō. Yakushi Nyorai was accompanied by Kannon, the female bodhisattva of compassion, who also has healing powers and who, accordingly, was equated with Barime no Miya.

According to a much later legend, Ennyo established the Kankeiji by transferring the *mizuya* (water purification font) divinity from the Kasuga shrine in Nara to the Gion site. The significance of this legend

²⁷ This issue is discussed in Kubota, pp. 33–35.

²⁸ See "Shake Jōjō Kiroku Jōki Jihitsu Kian," fol. 2 of the "Gionsha-ki" (n. 1 above), p. 37. The establishment of the Gion complex is discussed in Takahara, pp. 30–38.

²⁹ See Kubota, pp. 45–46.

lies in the fact that it established a link between the Gion and Kasuga cultic centers, the latter of which was affiliated with the Kōfukuji, the “family temple” (*ujidera*) of the Fujiwara family, and thus it legitimated the Kōfukuji’s claim that it should have authority over the Gion complex.³⁰

Why it is claimed that the Gion cult was relocated to its present site from Harima province is not clear. That account may be a much later creation that served to legitimate the relation between the Gion cultic center and several shrines in Harima, a relation that developed toward the end of the Heian period or even later when many shrines and temples were establishing “home-branch” (*hon-matsu*) relations with other shrines and temples. Whatever the Harima connection might have been, according to Shiga Takeshi, the Gion cultic center came about as a result of the relocation to the present site of several divinities that prior to the late ninth century were worshiped at other sites in the Higashiyama section of Kyoto.³¹ In either case the establishment of the Gion cultic center involved the geographical bringing together and the cultic coalescence of various disease-related divinities, the ones discussed above, into a single cult, and the establishment of relations among those divinities and between them and appropriate Buddhist divinities, in this case the Buddha of Medicine and the bodhisattva of healing. Thus, Ennyo built a Buddhist temple, the Kankeiji, in an area where there were a number of sites at which rituals were directed to various disease-related divinities and departed spirits in an effort to ingest Buddhist beliefs and practices into the loose assortment of cults then in existence there.

Rituals designed to ward off or cure disease were performed in the Higashiyama section of Kyoto well before Ennyo built the Kankeiji, and thus the roots of the particular rituals that came to be centered at the Gion cultic center go back a long way in the history of that area. According to one legend associated with that area, some time in the mid-seventh century, possibly in the year 656, a man named Irishi, a member of the aforementioned Koma family and the Silla envoy to Japan, immigrated to Japan with eighty-one of his clansmen and took up residence in the aforementioned “Eight Hills Village” (*Yasaka-gō*), which is in Atago county in Yamashiro province where the capital

³⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 88. The Kōfukuji’s centuries-long conflict with the Enryakuji, the head temple of the Tendai school of Buddhism, over the Gion complex is discussed in Neil McMullin, “The Enryakuji and the Gion Shrine-Temple Complex in the Mid-Heian Period,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 14, nos. 2–3 (June–September 1987): 161–84.

³¹ This is a main point of Shiga Takeshi’s “Nihon ni Okeru Ekijin Shinkō no Seisei” (n. 8 above).

city of Kyoto was later built and which included the site later to be occupied by what is now called the Yasaka Shrine.³² Once again the numeral eight appears in connection with the Gion cult. Irishi's people are thought to have brought the Mutō Tenjin – Gozu Tennō cult, and possibly some beliefs and practices involving Susanoo no Mikoto, to Japan with them. In the Yasaka-gō area the Korean immigrants and their descendants built shrines, pagodas, temples, and other religious edifices. For example, the Yasaka Pagoda (Yasaka-tō), a five-storied pagoda at the Hōkanji that a subsequently created legend says was built by Prince Regent Shōtoku (572–621), was built by the Koma people, and the Hōkanji appears to have been the family temple of those people in the seventh and eighth centuries. Legends attributing the construction of that temple to the primordial Japanese hero Shōtoku probably represented an effort on the part of later generations of rulers to bury the Korean roots of various cultic centers by rewriting history.

It is believed, on the basis of the fact that several burial mounds (*kofun*) were constructed there, that the Yasaka-gō people buried—or, in earlier times, simply abandoned—their dead at the foot of or on the hills that rise up to the east of that area. Significantly, as was mentioned earlier, those hills have the trapezoidal shape with which Mutō Tenjin was affiliated in Korean lore. At shrines built near the western foot of those hills, people invited down from the hills divinities and departed spirits of the deceased in order to perform rituals in their honor in the hope of being spared the major curse of those divinities and departed spirits, namely, disease.

From very early times in Japan, as was mentioned earlier with regard to willow-branch amulets, the easterly direction was associated with the dead. The Yōrō code of law, which was composed early in the eighth century, stipulated that an area to the east of the capital city of Nara be set aside as a burial ground for deceased members of the aristocratic families, and, not surprisingly, a number of shrines and temples were built close to that area. When the capital was moved to Kyoto at the end of the eighth century, the practice of burying the dead at the foot of the hills located to the east of the city was continued, and, subsequently, many religious institutions were built in that area.

On occasion, beginning in the late Nara period, the court ordered a *goryō* ritual to be performed,³³ but it appears that at least some

³² Atago, which is also the name of an ancient cemetery on the fringe of the Heian capital, is an Okinawan term, so there may have been people of assorted ancestry living in the Yasaka-gō area at that time (see Takahara [n. 3 above], pp. 20–21).

³³ The court ordered *goryō'e* to be held in 770, 839, 853, and 856 (see Kubota [n. 2 above], pp. 69–72).

goryō'e were unofficial, folk-organized and -conducted events that the common people put on whenever the occasion demanded, that is, when some or other disease was inflicting their community. The *goryō* ritual had some of the qualities of a fiesta: people would assemble in large numbers, participate in rituals that involved music and dance (recall the role of those activities in the rituals performed by Korean *mudang*), and take part in horse races and equestrian archery. The roles of horse races and equestrian archery in the *goryō* rituals are not clear. Horses may have been involved because of the belief, which was held by Taoist practitioners, that because the horse is a powerful yang animal, it could help to counteract the activities of the disease-causing yin divinities.³⁴ From very early times in Japan people made representations of horses out of straw, and carved small statues of horses out of cucumbers, eggplants, and other vegetables and fruit. In one type of early ritual that served to exorcize a community of disease, disease-divinities or the departed spirits of people who had died of the disease that was plaguing a village were symbolically mounted on the backs of the horse images and dispatched from that area—in a way somewhat reminiscent of the scapegoat ritual—by being escorted to the outskirts of the village. In one version of our story Gozu Tennō makes his long trek across the seas on horseback, a rather curious mode of sea travel.³⁵ Archery may have had a part in the *goryō* ritual because bows and arrows, like the aforementioned halberds, symbolized the power of the ritual to destroy the effects of the activities of the disease-causing divinities and departed spirits.

Goryō rituals, which, as was mentioned earlier, arose in a period in which Japan was developing for the first time large urban centers, appear to have been urbanized versions of rural folk rituals. From time immemorial farmers in Japan rid their fields of harmful insects by way of some form of *mushiokuri* (“insect send off”) ritual in which they symbolically led those pests to the outskirts of their villages to the accompaniment of much noisy music. In a parallel way the urban dwellers of the Nara and Heian periods exorcized their cities of the pestilential *goryō*. When the *goryō* cult spread among the rural populace, it came to be believed that one of the ways in which vengeful

³⁴ See Kyōto-shi, ed. (n. 14 above), vol. 2, *Chūsei no Meian*, p. 156. According to Jean Herbert, a custom in the Edo period (1600–1868) was to paint votive pictures of horses, and those pictures “are traditionally in pentagonal frames for reasons which I was not able to elucidate” (Jean Herbert, *Shinto* [New York: Stein & Day, 1967], pp. 101–2). It is evident from our discussion why the horse and the pentagonal shape would have been linked.

³⁵ See that version of our story in Takahara, p. 54. The Heavenly Divinity, so it is said, traded his horse (seahorse?) with Somin Shōrai for a fast boat.

departed spirits expressed their wrath was in the form of crop-destroying insects.

Our story has a subplot that appears, at least on the surface, to have nothing directly to do with disease-divinities and the warding off of disease but that might point to an important theme of the *goryō* rituals. That subplot may be based on a story of Ainu origin for, according to Takahara Yoshitada, the name Kotan (of Kotan Shōrai) is an Ainu term for town or village.³⁶ The meaning of Shōrai is debated, but Takahara suggests that it means “to bring” (*mochikuru*) and that the full name Kotan Shōrai means something like “to bring riches.” Interestingly, in this somewhat curious interpretation of the meaning of the name Kotan Shōrai, urban centers are identified with riches. Somin Shōrai, in contrast, means “to bring something that revives people.” Takahara explains that Kotan Shōrai and Somin Shōrai probably originated as characters in a story the point of which is that whereas the rich tend to hoard their wealth and have little or no sense of justice, the poor have a generous spirit. Thus, says Takahara, the story speaks to a dimension of the human condition that has changed not a whit over the millennia. In the subplot of our story, a divinity teaches people esteem for benevolence.

This subplot suggests, although the evidence is fragile, that our story may contain a criticism of the wealthy urban people by the poor peasants, a criticism that would have been expressed by the peasants in the *goryō* rituals. That is, the story accuses the wealthy elite of being somehow responsible for disease and even threatens them with disaster in that it was the wealthy Kotan Shōrai and his family who were obliterated by Mutō Tenjin and his entourage. As shall be seen, on several occasions early in the Heian period the ruling elite attempted to repress peasant-organized *goryō*, thus giving some support to this point.

In the pre-Nara and early Nara periods some disease-divinities, such as Gozu Tennō, Mutō Tenjin, and the Hachiōji, were identified by name and personified. However, although the departed spirits of people who died of disease were believed to be disease-causing agents, it was not until the late Nara period that the departed spirits of specific deceased persons came to be singled out as disease-causing agents. In the latter part of the eighth century the departed spirits of Nagaya no Ō (684–729) and Fujiwara no Hirotsugu (d. 740) were singled out from the ghostly crowd as two that were especially troublesome.³⁷ According to Hayami Tasuku, the very identification

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

³⁷ See Shibata Minoru, “Goryōjin,” in Gorai et al., eds. (n. 4 above), pp. 240–43.

of specific departed spirits as being particularly responsible for a certain epidemic is a sign of the development of a sense of the individual and of a new awareness of individuality, which is a development that took place in urban centers in Japan in the eighth century but not in rural areas.³⁸ Those specific identifications were most likely made by the ruling elite, not by the common folk, for reasons to be seen. An especially important year with regard to the identification of the departed spirits of specific deceased persons as disease-causing spirits was 863 when there was a very clear case of what might be called the politicization of the dead. This development is intimately related to conditions in the capital in the ninth century.

In the early Heian period there was considerable upset in the new capital of Kyoto. In the ninth century, especially in the latter half of it, there was such great poverty in the provinces that many people abandoned their lands to seek some form of livelihood in the cities, the major ones of which were Kyoto and Nara. As the result of large influxes of people to Kyoto in the Ninmyō (833–50) and Seiwa (858–76) eras, the city's population increased five- to ten-fold. By the end of the ninth century as many as one-half or more of the people who worked the land in various provinces had abandoned those lands and gone off to the cities, a problem of major proportions for the provincial tax collectors. Many people found little relief from their poverty in the cities, with the result that bands of vagabonds, bandits, and robbers formed, and thus unrest, upset, and violence spread throughout the land. In 857, for example, a band of 300 people surrounded the residence of the governor of Dazaifu in Kyushu and burned it down, and several years later another band of over 200 people did the same in Iwami province.

There was also considerable unrest among the ruling elite in Kyoto, the 8,000 to 10,000 major and minor officials who ruled the city and much of the country from their enclave in the northeastern section of the city. In the mid-ninth century a number of aristocratic families were embroiled in a struggle for political and economic power, and one family, the Fujiwara, was more successful than the others. In the Ōtenmon Incident (*Ōtenmon no hen*) of 866, the Fujiwara family, under the leadership of the aforementioned Fujiwara no Mototsune, managed to oust two of its major rivals, the Tomo and Ki families, from political power. Mototsune, who was the head of the northern branch of the Fujiwara family, was also engaged in competition with the other branches of that family, and he was busily purging the court

³⁸ Hayami Tasuku, *Heian Kizoku Shakai to Bukkyō* (Tōkyō: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1975), pp. 157–58.

of people who did not favor the Fujiwara ascendancy. The heads of the Fujiwara family, especially of the northern branch, left a trail of vengeful spirits in their wake as they slashed their way to power.

In 863 *goryō* worked throughout the land spreading tuberculosis everywhere. In order to assuage the departed spirits that spread that disease, on the twentieth day of the fifth month of the year 863, Fujiwara no Mototsune hosted a *goryō'e* at the Shinsen'en, the garden of the imperial palace. The gates of the imperial compound were thrown open to the public, a rare event indeed, and people of all classes were welcome to participate in that *goryō'e*.³⁹ However, what motivated Mototsune to make that egalitarian gesture was something other than his sympathy for the suffering populace.

The *goryō'e* of 863 was performed in front of six *ryōza* ("spirits' seats") that represented the departed spirits of six historical individuals, namely, Sudō Tennō (d. 785), Iyo Shinnō (d. 807), Fujiwara no Yoshiko (d. 807), Tachibana no Hayanari (d. 842?), Bunya no Miyatamaro (d. 843?), and the aforementioned Fujiwara no Hirotsugu. By holding a *goryō'e* in honor of those specific departed spirits, the Fujiwara family was co-opting the *goryō* cult in order to have it serve that family's ends.⁴⁰ The Fujiwara, like their contemporaries, undoubtedly believed that disease was caused by vengeful spirits, and they wanted to placate those spirits by way of a *goryō'e*. However, by identifying the aforementioned six people as being responsible, in their postmortem state, for the present epidemic, they were using the *goryō* cult to present and disseminate a moral interpretation, albeit a highly self-serving one, of both the present and the past. The Fujiwara feared (and had something of a guilty conscience about?) the six departed spirits to whom the *goryō'e* of 863 was directed, and for good reason because all six had become departed spirits prematurely and violently as a result of Fujiwara actions. Sudō Tennō, who was the crown prince (*shinnō*) Sawara during his lifetime, was accused of being involved in the assassination of Fujiwara no Tanetsugu, and, consequently, he was sentenced to exile in Awaji but died on the way. From the 790s onward, there were rumors that his departed spirit was causing the death of farmers in Awaji, and therefore on several occasions (in 797 and 799) the court sent Buddhist monks to Awaji to read sutras in an effort to placate him. In the year 800 Sawara Shinnō was appointed, posthumously, emperor (*tennō*) under the name Sudō as a way of assuaging his rampaging spirit. Iyo

³⁹ The *goryō'e* of 863 is discussed in Kubota, pp. 50–52.

⁴⁰ See Kitayama Shigeo, *Nihon no Rekishi*, vol. 4, *Heiankyō* (Tōkyō: Chūō Kōron-sha, 1965), pp. 226–28.

Shinnō, another crown prince, was falsely accused of being involved in a plot against the Fujiwara, and therefore he too, accompanied by his mother, Fujiwara no Yoshiko, who was a member of the southern branch of the Fujiwara family, went into exile where the two of them committed suicide. Tachibana no Hayanari was implicated in the Jōwa Incident (Jōwa *no hen*) of 842 and, like the others, was sent into exile but died on the way. Fujiwara no Hirotsugu was killed for his alleged involvement in a treasonous plot, and Bunya no Miyatamaro died in exile to which he had been condemned for his involvement in a plot with a number of Silla merchants.⁴¹

Thus the *goryō'e* of 863 served the purpose of directing popular fear of the departed spirits of the dead to the departed spirits of six deceased people who had been enemies of the Fujiwara family and particularly of the northern branch of the family: historical enemies of that family, in their departed-spirit form, were identified as the scourges of the populace, and thus the message of the *goryō* ritual was that enemies of the northern Fujiwara, both living and deceased, were enemies of the people.

The *goryō'e* of 863, which was presided over by a Buddhist monk named Etatsu (who, interestingly, was a member of the aforementioned Hata family), was conducted in high style. At that *goryō'e*, sutras (the *Konkōmyōkyō* and the *Hannyashingyō*) were recited, and daughters (eight in number, perhaps?) of the imperial and aristocratic families, in a way reminiscent of the *mudangs'* practice, performed dances while court musicians played Korean and Chinese court music. In addition to the stately music of the court, the populace brought out musicians who played loud, erotic, and frenzied music with bells, drums, gongs, and other noisy instruments. Shibata Minoru employs the Nietzschean notions of Apollonian and Dionysian to characterize the competing but complementary sides of the musical presentations.⁴² That is, the ecstatic, restless power of the Dionysian folk music and dance was combined with the quiet aesthetic beauty of the Apollonian court music and dance in a single ritual in which the fear and gloom associated with the *goryō* were overcome. Also, the loud music and frenetic dancing generated in the ritual's participants the magical energy whereby they might be cleansed of disease and ill fortune.

The fact that the *goryō'e* of 863 was held at the Shinsen'en is significant in that the garden contained a pond that had both practical and cultic significance for the people of Kyoto. From ancient

⁴¹ Those people are discussed in Kubota, pp. 73–75.

⁴² Shibata, p. 242. Shibata credits Yabuta Kiichirō as having first applied Nietzschean concepts in this regard.

days the pond served as a reservoir that the farmers of the area used in times of drought, and it was also the site at which rituals for rain were sometimes performed. Moreover, a pond was an especially appropriate place at which to perform a ritual designed to get rid of disease-causing divinities or departed spirits because in ancient days it was customary to finish certain rituals that served that purpose by symbolically conducting the disease-divinities to a body of water with the hope that they would sail off to other ports and leave the people in good health.

There is supportive evidence that the Fujiwara family was making a deliberate effort in the mid-ninth century to control the *goryō* cult. In a political climate such as that of Kyoto at that time, it was important that the ruling elite, at least from their perspective, control the populace and prevent any kind of behavior that might be a potential threat to the peace of the capital (i.e., to the elite's well-being). It will be recalled that the *goryō'e* involved not only music and dance but also horse races and equestrian archery. Given that horses and bows and arrows played a major role in warfare of the day, it was very much in the interest of the court to prevent the populace from assembling en masse on their own and engaging in military-like activities, especially since, as was mentioned earlier, one dimension of the popularly organized *goryō'e* was the ritual expression of peasant discontent. The ruling elite's concern in this regard is demonstrated by a document that was issued on the fourteenth day of the sixth month of the year 865, just two years after the *goryō'e* of 863: that document expressly prohibited the populace from assembling "privately" (*shini*)—that is, without the permission of the court—for a *goryō'e* and from engaging in horse races and equestrian archery.⁴³ To what degree that prohibition was heeded is not known, but there is evidence that the populace continued to hold unofficial *goryō'e*. For example, in 999 the famous Fujiwara no Michinaga ordered that a *goryō'e* be stopped and the folk priest-musician who conducted it, a shadowy fellow with the mysterious name of "Boneless" (*mukotsu*), be arrested. (He was not, because he could not be found.)⁴⁴ Similarly, in 1154, the court prohibited a very "Dionysian" type of flower dance called *yasurai* (or *yasurae*) that was performed to placate some *ekijin* who were at work in Kyoto around that time.⁴⁵ There is little doubt,

⁴³ This prohibition is found in Takeuchi Rizō, ed., *Heian Iibun: Komonjo-hen* (Tōkyō: Tōkyōdō, 1965), vol. 2, document 489. See also Kitayama, p. 228.

⁴⁴ See Kubota (n. 2 above), pp. 67 and 72–77.

⁴⁵ See Shibata, p. 243. In modern Japan, that dance is still performed, by two children, at Imamiya Shrine in Kyoto during the *yasurai* festival in April with the purpose of driving off disease-divinities.

therefore, that the ruling elite of the mid to late Heian period were trying to take control of the popular *goryō* cult and to incorporate it into the official cultic structures in order to prevent the populace from having and celebrating their own cult and thus their own ideology.

The *goryō'e* of 863 took place some years before the establishment of the Kankeiji/Tenjindō, and thus, obviously, it had no connection with those institutions. Over the next century, however, in a way and for reasons that are not clear, the *goryō* cult came to be centered at Gion, and that shrine-temple complex became the main cultic site for the performance of *goryō'e*. Indeed, it is likely that Fujiwara no Mototsune had Ennyo establish the Kankeiji in the first place as part of an effort to centralize and take control of the *goryō* cult. In the mid-tenth century Gion came to be recognized as one of the twenty-two major shrines in the country, which meant that its cult was fully incorporated into the official politico-religious structure, and from the latter part of that century down to the modern era *goryō'e* (which were usually called Gion *Tenjin'e*) have been held regularly at Gion.

Into the tenth century there was a gradual change in the attitude toward departed spirits: instead of being feared as dangerous beings that had to be placated, they were elevated to quasi-divinity status and revered as “departed-spirit divinities” (*goryōjin* or *goryōshin*) who, as “protector spirits” (*shugoryō*), had the role of warding off disease. However, perhaps naturally, different families looked on the same departed spirit very differently: that is, the departed spirit of a certain deceased historical individual was looked on as a dangerous, malevolent disease-causing spirit by one family but as a benevolent protector spirit by another family, depending on who that historical individual had been and the relation that he had when he was in human form with the families in question. In other words, one family’s disease-causing spirit was another family’s protector spirit. Similarly, Gozu Tennō changed from being feared as the *ekijin* leader of a hoard of disease-causing attendant divinities, to being worshiped as the benevolent leader of a host of “protector divinities” (*shugokami*) who protect people from disease. Thus an about-face was worked on the gods.

The next major developments with regard to the Gion cultic center were its takeover by the Enryakuji in the late tenth century and the accompanying identification of equations between the Gion divinities and those Buddhas and divinities enshrined at the Enryakuji temple-shrine complex;⁴⁶ the gradual replacement of the *goryō* rituals with

⁴⁶ Gozu Tennō, e.g., is equated with the “Sun Buddha” (Vairocana) in “Gion Gozu Tennō Engi” (n. 1 above), p. 53.

esoteric (largely Buddhist) rituals; and the eventual displacement of the *goryō* cult by other ones, especially ones devoted to Amida Buddha and Jizō, the bodhisattva who saves departed spirits in the six realms of the afterworld. These developments cannot be discussed here.

In conclusion, several general observations might be made. First, it makes little sense to think of the Gion *goryō* cult as a Shintō one, or of the Gion cultic center as a Shintō institution, in premodern (pre-1868) Japanese history. That cult combined, as we have seen, many elements: native folk beliefs and practices, continental (Korean and Chinese) folk traditions, Taoist materials, and, lastly, Buddhist materials. Moreover, the Gion “shrine” was as much a Buddhist institution (the Kankeiji) as it was a “Shintō” one (the Tenjindō). The forced separation of the Buddhist and “Shintō” components of the Gion complex was legislated by the Meiji government in 1868.⁴⁷ Thus it is time that we ceased to use the word Shintō with reference to the Nara and Heian periods as though there existed in those periods a discrete, autonomous tradition of that name.⁴⁸

Second, it is important to recognize just how mixed together Buddhism and “Shintō” (all non-Buddhist beliefs and practices?) were in the Nara and Heian periods. As we have seen, the *goryō*’e of 863, something other than a Buddhist ritual, was presided over by the Buddhist monk Etatsu and involved the chanting of Buddhist sutras. It is absurd to imagine that Etatsu, insofar as he was a Buddhist monk, scrupled about conducting that non-Buddhist ritual for fear that he was committing thereby an act of apostasy. Heian period documents are filled with evidence of Buddhist monks’ participation in non-Buddhist rituals. In 865, for example, Buddhist monks performed a ritual in which they chanted sutras to the *ekijin* of the Kyoto area, and that ritual was identical in all other respects to the ones customarily performed by *on’yō* practitioners.⁴⁹ Buddhist monks, including the highest-ranked and most famous abbots, regularly worshiped and even had edifices built in honor of various Hindu, Taoist, and other divinities.

Third, the development of the *goryō* cult, like all others in Japan for that matter, was intimately related to developments in the political

⁴⁷ See Allan Grapard, “Japan’s Ignored Cultural Revolution: The Separation of Shintō and Buddhist Divinities in Meiji (*shimbutsu bunri*) and a Case Study: Tōnomine,” *History of Religions* 23, no. 3 (February 1984): 240–65.

⁴⁸ The best English-language statement on the meaning of the term Shintō in the Nara and Heian periods is Kuroda Toshio, “Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 7, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 1–21.

⁴⁹ See Kubota, p. 49.

arena. To the degree that the *goryō* cult served the ruling elite it was fostered and encouraged, but *goryō* rituals that fell outside the pale of court control and that may have expressed, even indirectly, popular criticism of the ruling elite were repressed. It was not only the *goryō* *é* that the ruling elite tried to repress or control, but all folk-organized and -conducted rituals. In the Tenchō era (824–34), for example, the Kyoto “police” (*kebiishi*) were ordered to tear down a divinity hall called Okamotodō that had been erected by the peasants of the aforementioned Atago county in Yamashiro province.⁵⁰ Control of the cult goes hand in hand with control of the state.

It might be appropriate to conclude these considerations on the following ironic note. In 1796 the English physician Edward Jenner developed a vaccine that enabled people to produce antibodies that would protect them against smallpox, the main disease that Gozu Tennō regularly inflicted on the early Japanese. I suspect that it would have come as no surprise to the people who took part in the *goryō* rituals in early Japan that that vaccine is produced from a virus that infects cows. In the end, Gozu Tennō, the bull/cow-headed divinity, saves.

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⁵⁰ See Kyōto-shi, ed. (n. 14 above), 1:452.