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Japanese Demon Lore

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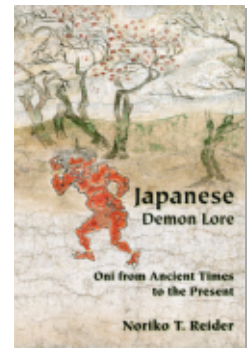
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Yamauba, the Mountain Ogress

Old Hag to Voluptuous Mother

JEALOUSY AND SHAME ARE OFTEN INTRINSIC CHARACTERISTICS of fierce female oni who exact revenge against the men and/or women causing their undying angst. As we saw in chapter three, Uji no hashihime as described in “Swords Chapter” of *Heike monogatari* and the Noh *Kanawa* are good examples.¹ Yet, some female oni are relatively detached from the jealous emotions stemming from heterosexual relationships, and yamauba (literally mountain old women) are prime examples of this.

The medieval Noh text aptly entitled *Yamamba*² describes “yamamba (yamauba) is a female oni living in the mountains.”³ Indeed, even now, to many contemporary Japanese, the word “yamauba” conjures up images of an ugly old woman who lives in the mountains and devours humans. The witch in the Grimm Brothers’ *Hansel and Gretel* and Baba Yaga of Russian folklore can be considered Western counterparts of the yamauba figure. The *Konjaku monogatari* depicts one such yamauba in the story titled “Sanseru onna minamiyamashina ni yuki oni ni aite nigetaru koto” (How a Woman Who Was Bearing a Child Went to South Yamashina, Encountered

1 For the Japanese texts of “Swords Chapter,” *Heike monogatari*, see Asahara, Haruta, and Matsuo 3: 514–47; Mizuhara 1: 59–88. For an English translation, see A. L. Sadler, 1921: 325–354. For the Japanese text of *Kanawa*, see Sanari, 1: 703–714. For an English translation, see Kato

2 The same kanji as yamauba, but pronounced as yamamba.

3 See Yokomichi and Omote 279. For the Japanese text of *Yamamba*, see Yokomichi and Omote 275–87. An English translation is found in Brazell 207–25. In Noh, there are five types of plays categorized according to the role of *shite* (the lead actor). These categories are plays that focus on gods, warriors, women, mad persons and demons 鬼. The play *Yamamba* is categorized as a demon play.

an Oni, and Escaped).⁴ A young pregnant woman secretly gives birth in the mountain hut of a seemingly kind old woman, only to discover that the old woman is actually an oni with plans to eat her newborn baby. The image of the yamauba is, however, complex. Commenting on the medieval Noh play, *Yamamba*, Karen Brazell calls the yamamba character “an impossible bundle of contradictions” (207). By the end of the seventeenth century, the oni in the story has come to be considered the mother of Kintarō, a legendary super-child raised in the mountains. Kintarō is the childhood name of Sakata no Kintoki, one of Raikō’s *shitennō* who, as we saw in the previous chapter, helps eliminate Shuten Dōji. Also by this time, the theme of motherhood in the yamauba legend comes to the forefront, as exemplified in the Kabuki/Puppet play entitled *Komochi yamauba* (Mountain Ogress with a Child, 1712) (see Chikamatsu, *Chikamatsu jōruri shū* 177–226). And in a complete inversion of imagery, in the late Edo period, yamauba comes to be portrayed as an alluring and seductive woman who, far from contemplating infanticide, is quite attached to her son, as exemplified in the works of Kitagawa Utamaro (1753–1806).⁵

This chapter examines the sea change in the representations of the yamauba from the medieval period through the early modern period. These changes reflect a coterminous change in people’s social expectations of oni in general and the yamauba figure in particular. Yet, oddly yamauba’s status as marginalized “other” remains the same, strongly associated in particular with the two groups of strangers or others discussed in chapter two, i.e., those “strangers who are native to the community but shunned by community members,” and those who “live spatially far away from a community, and are thus known to the community through their imagination” (Komatsu Kazuhiko, “Ijin ron – ‘ijin’ kara ‘tasha’ e” 177–78).

Cannibalism

Let us return our attention to the medieval yamauba who is described in the Noh text as “a female oni dwelling in the mountains.” The archetypal yamauba figure appears in the story from the *Konjaku monogatari shū*. Alone and ashamed of her condition, the young pregnant woman journeys deep

4 For the Japanese text, see Mabuchi et al. 38: 54–58. An English translation is found in Ury 161–163.

5 Reproductions of Utamaro’s art are found in *Ukiyo-e Masterpieces in European Collections*, vols. 7 and 9; Narazaki and Kikuchi, *Masterworks of Ukiyoe: Utamaro*.

into the heavily wooded mountains to give birth in secret. She comes upon a dilapidated hut where she encounters an elderly, white-haired woman who offers her assistance. Lured by the old woman's kind words, the pregnant woman stays and gives birth in the hut. A few days later, however, she discovers that the old woman is actually an oni with plans to eat her newborn baby. The old woman in the story is termed oni rather than yamauba (the first appearance of the word "yamauba" is in the Muromachi period [1336–1573]⁶) but she is considered a prototypical yamauba, because she is an old woman with white hair living in the mountains, ready to devour humans who happen to cross her path. As we have seen, because she is an oni, cannibalism is one of her principal occupations.

The cannibalistic aspect of yamauba is underscored in many folktales including *Ushikata to yamauba* (Ox-Cart Puller and Mountain Ogress). In this tale, a yamauba attempts to devour anything she can obtain. First, she demands fish from a young man carrying fish in his ox-cart. After consuming all the fish in his cart, she demands the ox and after devouring the ox, she sets her sights on eating the man. He flees from her and soon comes upon a lone house in the woods that turns out to be the yamauba's dwelling. Eventually he vanquishes the yamauba with cleverness.⁷ Although the yamauba in *Ushikata to yamauba* is portrayed as destructive, these figures are not always entirely negative or destructive. Since, as we have seen, oni are also harbingers of wealth, yamauba have some positive aspects as well. In some versions of this tale, such as one collected in Miyagi prefecture, her corpse turns into carrots ("Ninjin no okori"), thereby bringing some benefit to humans ironically in the form of food.

6 The word "yamauba" does not appear in the *Wamyō ruijushō* (Japanese Names for Things Classified and Annotated; ca. 930s) or the first Japanese language dictionary, *Ainōshō* (1446). However, the *Nippo jisho* (*Vocabulario da Ligoa de Iapam com a declaração em Portugues*), compiled by a Jesuit missionary and published 1603–1604, has an entry for *yamauba* which reads "the face of the yamauba is not known. They are believed to live in the mountains" (Doi et al. 809). Komatsu Kazuhiko notes that the first appearance of yamauba in literary materials occurred in the Muromachi period (Kaisetsu, 428). Interestingly, the *Wakan sansai zue* (1713), an encyclopedia, explains the yamauba as an animal that lives in the regions of Guangdong and Guangxi in China, which has only one leg with three toes and three fingers on each hand, and which begs for food from people at night. The author, Terashima Ryōan, mentions nothing about any Japanese yamauba.

7 For a Japanese text, see Yanagita, *Nihon mukashibanashi meii* 109–13; Seki, *Nihon no mukashibanashi* 1: 155–161. For an English translation, see Mayer, *The Yanagita Kunio Guide to Japanese Folk Tales* 107–110; Seki, "Types of Japanese Folktales" 44.

In another folktale entitled *Tentō-san kin no kusari* (Golden Chain from Heaven), a yamauba comes to a house in the mountains to eat children while their mother is away. She eats the baby, but its siblings narrowly escape her by climbing up a golden chain sent from heaven. She pursues them, climbing another rope sent from heaven, but slips and plummets into a field of buckwheat. Her blood turns the buckwheat red.⁸ While in this story the death of the yamauba does not produce any specific food, her blood is credited with creating the redness of buckwheat, providing a supernatural connection to a certain aspect of that food.

Yamauba as Great Mother and Nurturer

In stark contrast to yamauba's representation in "Sanseru onna minamiyamashina ni yuki oni ni aite nigetaru koto," other tales represent yamauba as a nurturing character, and actually associate the image with motherhood.⁹ Horii Ichiro writes, "In the popular belief of rural areas, the mountain deity is believed to be a goddess who gives birth to twelve children every year. She is therefore called Mrs. Twelve (Jūni-sama), and her twelve children symbolize the twelve months of the year" (*Folk Religion in Japan* 167). According to Ōshima Tatehiko, the mountain deity was probably originally male. The female in the story was there as his subordinate, to serve the mountain god and to give birth to his divine children. Consequently, she came to be revered as a goddess by association ("Yamauba to Kintarō" 52). Indeed, in the fifteenth century, the Zen priest, Zuikai Shūhō (1391–1473), recounts in his diary *Gaun nikkenroku* that a yamauba gave birth to four children. "The reason why the summer of that year had lots of rain was because yamauba gave birth to four children, namely, Haruyoshi (Good Spring), Natusame (Summer Rain), Akiyoshi (Good Autumn), Fuyusame (Winter Rain)" (125). The year's abundant rainfall, the priest suggests, is the result of yamauba's multiple childbirth. Indeed, the quality of the four seasons is implicit in the children's names and reflects a simultaneous expression of reverence to a higher power and hope for good seasonal weather to come.

8 For a Japanese text, see Seki, *Nihon no mukashibanashi* 3: 113–15. An English translation is found in Seki, *Folktales of Japan* 54–57.

9 As Ōshima Tatehiko writes, there are many legends and associated sites that tell of the yamauba giving birth to a child or children and raising him or them ("Yamauba to Kintarō" 51).

An interesting parallel appears in a folktale that describes a yamauba giving birth to a baby boy. In this story titled “Yamauba hōon” (Miyazaki Kazue 428–30), the yamauba comes to a married couple in a village and asks for shelter while giving birth, which the sympathetic couple gives her. After the safe birth of her baby, the yamauba asks the couple to name the baby as well as her other nameless children. The couple feels honored, and names the first child, Natsuyoshikō (Good Summer), the second, Akiyoshikō (Good Autumn), and the third one, Fuyuyoshikō (Good Winter)—names very similar to those in the *Gaun nikkenroku*. The yamauba rewards the couple with two boxes—a magical box that produces abundant gold and a box filled with yarn.¹⁰ Here, the yamauba as an oni-woman is clearly a bringer of wealth. As Yoshida Atsuhiko points out (*Mukashibanashi no kōkogaku* iii, 108–112), the roots of the yamauba can be found in various female deities in Japanese myth such as Ōgetsuhime in *Kojiki* (712) and Ukemochinokami in *Nihongi* (720), who produce food from different parts of their bodies.

The identity of the yamauba is thus complex and contradictory: a dichotomous primordial goddess, the Great Mother, who brings fertility and wealth, as well as death and destruction,¹¹ similar to other mythico-religious figures such as the Egyptian Isis and the Hindu Kali. In medieval Europe, the pagan archetype of the Great Mother always possessing two aspects is no less complicated as it falls under the hegemony of Christianity: the light side is represented by the officially-worshipped Virgin Mary, and the dark side, excluded from the image of Mary and maintaining much of its pagan influence, degenerates into a witch (Franz, *Shadow and Evil in Fairy Tales* 105, 195).¹² Witches, like oni, are typically known for their propensity for cannibalism (Jacoby et al. 201). This trait is shared with yamauba who is labeled as an oni in the aforementioned story from *Konjaku monogatari* as well as in other Japanese folktales.

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- 10 Yanagita recounts a story of a family living on a mountain that finds a yamauba’s *tsukune* (a ball of hemp yarn [dialect word]), which produces infinite yarn. The *tsukune* makes the family rich, but soon after the young wife gives birth to an oni’s child with two horns (“Yama no jinsei” 240).
- 11 Kawai Hayao regards Kannon as the positive Great Mother, and the yamauba, who appears in fairy tales as an all-devouring mountain witch, as the negative image. See Kawai, *The Japanese Psyche*, particularly chapters two and three.
- 12 Marie-Louise von Franz interprets the witch in two of the Grimm Brothers’ fairy tales, *The Two Brothers* and *The Golden Children*, as an archetypal figure of the Great Mother and an archetype of the unconscious. Franz, *Shadow and Evil in Fairy Tales* 104. Also see Jacoby et al. 205–206.

From the viewpoint of gender studies, Mizuta Noriko considers yamauba as gender transcendent. She contrasts yamauba with the women of the village (*sato*). The *sato* was considered a safe place where people were protected and insulated from the various dangers of the mountains. According to Mizuta, the women of the *sato* are idealized and standardized—they are good mothers, good wives, chaste, humble, and obedient to their fathers and husbands (10–12). Conversely, yamauba is someone who falls distinctly outside the norm. Although she is often excessively fertile, she lacks the feminine traits ascribed to the women of the *sato*, namely, chastity, obedience, and compassion. Yamauba defies the norm for the *sato*'s women, for her essential qualities are so complex, nebulous and multivalent that she nullifies traditional gender roles. In other words, yamauba exists outside the *sato*'s system of gender normativity. She refuses to be assigned a household role such as mother or daughter and will not be territorialized. Mizuta emphasizes that while the women of the *sato* stay in one place, yamauba is comparatively nomadic, moving constantly through the mountains, appearing in an array of locales, often outside or away from a town's territorial boundary (10–15).

An excellent literary example of yamauba living on the periphery or margin of a common boundary appears in the *otogi zōshi*'s “Hanayo no hime” (Blossom Princess, ca. late Muromachi period to the early Edo period; see Yokoyama and Matsumoto 10: 530–31). Here the yamauba, formerly human, has survived her own children. Disliked by her grandchildren, she is subsequently expelled from their house. With nowhere to turn, she goes to live in the mountains. Indeed, this yamauba is the quintessential other, a “native to the community but shunned by the community members,” in this case, her very family. Yanagita writes that “yamauba” and “yamahime” (mountain princess) were originally euphemisms used by villagers to explain a mysterious woman living deep in the mountains (“Yama no jinsei” 255). As we saw in chapter one, those who were alienated from mainstream society were sometimes considered oni. Many such outsiders were not actually evil, but, as we have seen, simply differed enough from the hegemonic norm, in appearance, age or lifestyle to rouse suspicion or derision.

The representation of yamauba that exerts the most significant influence on later representations is the medieval Japanese Noh *Yamamba*. Compared with yamauba in *Konjaku monogatari* or “Hanayo no hime,” the Noh *yamamba* (yamauba) is more enigmatic and self-reflective. In the play, a courtesan or entertainer (*tsure* or companion) and her troupe, famous for

their yamamba dance, meet the real yamamba (*shite* or lead actor) on the mountain. She describes herself to them as being “with birthplace unknown, lodgings uncertain” who, “dragging good and evil [with her], makes her mountain rounds.”¹³ Baba Akiko considers yamauba legends representative of the downfall of the *kunitsukami* (deities of the land). Popular during the medieval period, the Noh play *Yamamba* is shrouded by overlapping religious and philosophical subtexts such as “the good and evil are not two; right and wrong are the same” (Brazell 207). The core concept of the Noh *Yamamba* is the transcendental philosophy of non-dualism epitomized in the Heart Sutra (*Hannya shinkyō*), perhaps the best-known Wisdom literature of Buddhism. From the point of view of the statement that “form is nothing other than emptiness, emptiness is nothing other than form” (*shiki-soku zekū, kūsoke zeshiki*), the existence of Buddhas, human beings and/or yamauba is miniscule within the vastness of time and space.¹⁴ This yamauba is a seeker of enlightenment, and would wander the mountains until her delusions ceased to exist, in order to escape the wheels of painful rebirth.

The Noh yamamba has supernatural power to darken the sky so that the courtesan or entertainer is forced to spend a night at her lodging and perform a yamamba dance. She is, at the same time, a lonely old woman who helps humans with their chores—assisting woodsmen and weavers by shouldering their work burdens. During the play, the audience learns that yamamba indeed has human feelings; she is very sensitive to her own image—an image created as she lives “spatially far away from a community, and [is] thus known to the community through their imagination.” She is ashamed as well of the old tale about an oni eating a maiden in one gulp, and asks a group of entertainers to spread her side of the story to people in the capital. This naïve side is not so surprising, because Zeami (1363–1443), to whom the authorship is generally attributed, considered that the human derivation of demons was important in the portrayal of demons. In the treatise titled *Sandō* (The Three Ways, 1423), one of the *hiden* (secret transmissions) written exclusively for the writer’s successor(s), Zeami notes that in composing demon-plays (to which *Yamamba* belongs), the character should have “the form of a demon and the heart of a person.”¹⁵ Zeami rejects any

13 Translation by Karen Brazell. Brazell 220–221. For the Japanese text, see Yokomichi and Omote, *Yōkyōkushū* 284–285.

14 See Baba 284. For the English translation of the *Heart Sutra*, see LaFleur 82–83.

15 Translation by Shelley F. Quinn. Quinn, “How to Write a Noh Play: Zeami’s *Sandō*” 79.

representation of a demon that “has the form of a demon and the heart of a demon,” because this type of demon “precludes the possibility of audience empathy” (Quinn, “How to Write a Noh Play: Zeami’s Sandō” 80–81). The Noh yamamba seeks to help people in her striving after salvation, and sings, “Let the vibrant strains of your music and dance serve as a Buddhist sacrament for then I, too, will escape from transmigration and return to the blessed state of enlightenment.”¹⁶ Zeami’s depiction (or endowment) of a humane yamauba seems to have helped pave the way for more sympathetic portrayals of the Japanese mountain ogress.

Image of Yamauba in the Medieval Period

During the medieval period, the yamamba remains, physically, a wrinkled old woman with a huge mouth, round eyes, and (disheveled) white-hair (the *shite* wears a large white headpiece).¹⁷ *Yamamba* was the fourth most frequently performed piece during the period between 1429 and 1600 (Nose 1314). Its popularity suggests that the visual image of the yamauba it portrays could very well have influenced the general image of the yamauba in the medieval period: ugly, old, and often regarded as evil, as in the *Konjaku monogatari* story. It is of interest to note that if we relocate the yamauba from the mountain to the *Sanzu* river, which divides this world and the next, she looks very much like the terrifying *datsueba*, a hag who mercilessly strips the clothes off the dead. Similar to the yamauba in the *Konjaku monogatari*, the *datsueba* is harmful to human beings, and like the yamauba of “Hanayo no hime,” she personifies old age, ugliness and infertility (due to her advanced age). The Noh yamamba is concerned with Buddhist cosmology. While the *datsueba* is referred to as “ōna no oni” (old female oni), Kawamura Kunimitsu writes that she too has a dichotomous aspect—she strips clothes off the dead but gives clothes before the birth of human being—and so is a goddess of birth and death (“Onna no jigoku to sukui” 35–37). This dichotomous nature is also suggestive of the yamauba.

16 Translation by Karen Brazell. Brazell 213. For the Japanese text, see Yokomichi and Omote, *Yōkyokushū* 279.

17 The yamauba in “Hanayo no hime” brings wealth to the princess who helped kill the coiling worms in the yamauba’s hair, but she also has a grotesque appearance. Her face is square, “her eyes sank deep in her head but her eyeballs protruded nevertheless. She had a big mouth, the ends of which almost touched the edges of her nose. That nose resembled a bird’s beak and her forehead was wrinkled up; her hair looked as though she had recently worn a bowl on her head.”

Although *datsueba* is not associated with images of a mother of many children, could it be that the representational similarities of these women, popular in the medieval period, become entwined with each other, strengthening the trend toward the yamauba's unfavorable visual representation?

Orikuchi Shinobu writes that the yamauba was originally a virgin consecrated to a mountain deity. The maiden nursed the deity to health and later became his wife. These mountain women tended to live long lives, and so the idea of "nurse" (*uba*) came to be associated with elderly women ("Okina no hassei" 363). By the end of the medieval period the yamauba was widely accepted as a frightening-looking old woman with an affinity for human flesh. In stark contrast, she was also known as a compassionate and caring mother of divine children or ones with supernatural powers.

Yamauba in the Early Modern Period: Mother of Sakata no Kintoki

At the beginning of the ensuing Edo period (1600–1867), the yamauba came to be considered the mother of Kintarō, the child name of Sakata no Kintoki (ca. tenth century).¹⁸ Sakata no Kintoki is one of the famous *shitenno* of Minamoto no Raikō, whose feats are discussed in chapter two. Behind the creation of the fictional childhood account of Kintoki is the popularity of stories and plays about Shuten Dōji. *Shuten Dōji* was recited as *jōruri* (performances with musical accompaniment) from the beginning of the Edo period when the *jōruri* repertoire was not yet largely established. The earliest extant *jōruri*'s *Shuten Dōji* was published in 1625, and the entry of 1638 of the *Kabuki nenpyō* (Kabuki Annals) notes that *Shuten Dōji* was popular in Edo society as an auspicious piece (Torii, *Dentō to Geinō* 49–52).¹⁹ The stories of Shuten Dōji in the medieval period describe Raikō as the chief of warriors, but in the *jōruri* piece of the Edo period, he is elevated to being the "protector of the land" and "head of the force maintaining order in the capital" (see, for example, Muroki, *Kinpira jōruri shōhon shū*, 1: 429). This change in status is probably attributable to the fact that the image of Raikō had been superimposed on that of the Tokugawa shogun, who claimed to be head of the Minamoto clan. It should be noted that the creation of *Kan'ei shoke kakeizu-den* (Genealogy of the Lords of the Kan'ei,

18 Regarding the birth of Kintarō and his changing images, see Torii, *Kintarō no tanjō*.

19 For the earliest extant *jōruri* text, see Yokoyama 1: 456–57.

1643), which linked the Tokugawa genealogy to that of the Minamoto clan, greatly helped heighten interest in the ancestors of that clan. Minamoto no Mitsunaka (or Manjū, 912–997), Raikō’s father who had built the base for Minamoto power, was so idealized that it is said Tokugawa Yorinobu (1602–1671), the founder of the Kii branch of the Tokugawa, ordered in his will that his tombstone be placed beside that of Mitsunaka in the inner sanctuary of Mt. Kōya (Itagaki 422, 439). Admiration for Raikō, as a brave warrior and conqueror of supernatural creatures, meant admiration for the Tokugawa shogunate.²⁰ The theme of *Shuten Dōji*—that of courageous good conquering evil, reinforced by the image of the shogunate eliminating its enemies, was certainly auspicious.

From the narrative of Raikō and his *shitennō* came the jōruri stories of their children, the so-called “Kinpira jōruri.” Kinpira jōruri were popular in the 1660s, and extant literary texts reveal that they give some of the earliest Edo literary depictions of yamauba. They describe how Kintoki’s fictional son Kinpira and his fellow warriors pacify insurgents through not only brute force, but also intelligence (Torii, *Dentō to Geinō* 6). The first extant play (or piece of literature) in which the children of Raikō’s four lieutenants make their appearance is *Shitennō musha shugyō* (Military Training of the Four Lieutenants), dated 1659.²¹ In the second play, Tsuna and Kintoki die (the other two were already dead), and their children—the young *shitennō*—play a more active role in the tale. Muroki Yatarō indicates that around 1659 or 1660 there was a dramatic increase in the popularity of youth culture among patrons of jōruri, and Kinpira was probably born out of this trend (*Katarimono no kenkyū* 455).²²

20 See Muroki, *Katarimono no kenkyū* 442–43; Torii, *Dentō to Geinō* 50–51. Regarding censorship, edicts against the treatment of current events in books were issued in 1684. A later edict issued in 1722 prohibited heterodox or pornographic writings. Writings that negatively reflected upon the house of illustrious samurai, or that questioned the authority of the Tokugawa house were similarly banned (Hamada Keisuke 35–37). The effect of these edicts was that any criticism of society, however minor, could be prohibited on the grounds that it was a criticism against the Tokugawa house or the powerful daimyo. It is not difficult to surmise that the writers of jōruri *Shuten Dōji* would have been careful in their descriptions of the ancestors of the Tokugawa family, even though such edicts were not yet issued.

21 See Muroki, *Katarimono no kenkyū* 447, and *Kinpira jōruri shōhon shū* 514.

22 In the Kabuki theater, too, right after the New Year’s Kabuki performance in 1660, *shitennō* repertoire became suddenly popular. Kabuki’s *shitennō* repertoire focused more on the young *shitennō*, the children of Raikō’s original four lieutenants. The basic qualification of Kabuki aesthetics at that time was the physical beauty of the

According to Torii Fumiko, *Kinpira tanjō-ki* (Record of Kinpira's Birth, 1661) is the oldest extant description of Kintoki as the son of yamauba (Torii, *Kintarō no tanjō* 32)—a boy raised in the mountains, who later goes on to become one of Raikō's *shitennō*. It should be noted that the relationship between the yamauba and Kintoki is not established in the earlier *shitennō* (i.e., Raikō's lieutenants) series; rather, it appears that the character of Kinpira was soon so popular it became necessary to clarify his genealogy. *Kinpira tanjō-ki* states, "Kintoki is Yamauba's son. One year Raikō received Kintoki from an oni-woman (i.e. yamauba) in the mountain, and Kintoki entered into the master-vassal relationship" (Muroki, *Kinpira jōruri shōhon shū* 1: 192–211). Similarly in *Kintoki miyako-iri sukune no Akutarō* (Kintoki Entering the Capital, [Struggle of] Akutarō, 1664). Kintoki is said to be the yamauba's son:

One year, Raikō wrongfully received an imperial remonstrator because a high-ranking official, Kiyohara Takafuji, spread lies about him to the emperor. His life in danger, Raikō went into hiding on Mt. Ashigara. There, a yamauba doing her mountain rounds appeared out of nowhere, and gave him her child (Kintoki). Since then, (Kintoki) served Raikō and (Kintoki) became one of his four lieutenants.²³

Today, the Japanese take it for granted that the yamauba dwells on Mt. Ashigara in Kanagawa prefecture, but it is interesting to note that this was not the case before the early modern period. Examining various *jōruri* texts, Torii surmises that a folk belief holding Kintoki to be the son of a yamauba must already have existed at the beginning of the Edo period (*Dentō to Geinō* 8). It could be, however, that the narrator or authors connected the two (yamauba and Kintoki) for the purposes of augmenting literary drama and furthering the intergenerational story line. Indeed, Kintoki's birth as the son of a yamauba may have been added for both dramatic and technical reasons—to explain his son Kinpira's unusual physical strength, as well as to ensure a compassionate perspective of Kintoki to draw audience empathy. What is significant about this creation is, however, more than mere literary creation in that Kintoki, an oni's child, helps kill Shuten Dōji and other famous oni. It is an oni that slays other oni. This is the same paradigm we

young male, and Muroki writes that the stories of young *shitennō* suited the Kabuki trend well (*Katarimono no kenkyū* 447).

23 Muroki, *Kinpira jōruri shōhon shū* 2: 147. For the text of *Kintoki miyako-iri sukune no Akutarō*, see Muroki, *Kinpira jōruri shōhon shū* 2: 147–75.

saw in chapter two that Minamoto no Raikō, the killer of oni, is related to oni himself through the thunder god.

The *Kinpira tanjō-ki*, announcing Kintoki to be the son of yamauba, goes on to explain how Kinpira's mother was actually a giant serpent disguised as a beautiful woman. This is an interesting twist in Shuten Dōji's birth story. According to one text that describes the birth of Shuten Dōji, he was born of a beautiful human female and a god of Mt. Ibuki, previously a giant serpent.²⁴ In fact, Kinpira too is described as an oni child when he was born after being in the womb for five years; he had "a red-face, disheveled, upright hair, ... [and] a big mouth slit from ear to ear" (Muroki, *Kinpira jōruri shōhon shū* 1: 194–95). This supernatural portrayal is a fitting foreshadowing and explanation of his extraordinary physical strength, not to mention his single-minded stubbornness. Satake Akihiro notes, giving examples including super-powerful Benkei (1155–1189)²⁵ as the oni's child in *Benkei monogatari* (Tale of Benkei), that an abandoned oni child growing up by himself on the mountain is a very fitting origin and backdrop for a hero with extraordinary prowess (*Shuten Dōji ibun* 28–34). Although Kinpira is not abandoned on the mountain, he does, by virtue of birthright, possess super physical strength. Since Kintoki is the son of a female oni, Kinpira would likely be an oni as well—a red-skinned one. In the second act of *Kinpira tanjō-ki*, after Kintoki's wife reveals her identity as a serpent and prepares to take her leave, Kintoki implores her to stay because as a son of a "female oni," Kintoki understands her emotional needs. More importantly, Kintoki's human-like emotion and compassion invites empathy (and tears) from the audience. Sakata no Kintoki is known for his red skin color today. I surmise that Kinpira's popularity as an impetuous brave young man could have been a major reason why Kintoki is, in the reverse order, considered to have great strength, a tempestuous childhood in the mountains, and red skin, just like Kinpira in *Kinpira tanjō-ki*.

In the illustrations of the early Kinpira jōruri, *Mida hachiman no yurai* (Origin of Mida Hachiman, 1659 or 1660) the face of Kinpira is portrayed the same way as his fellow lieutenants, without beard or grim features, though Muroki Yatarō notes that Kinpira's countenance becomes increasingly grim and frightening as time passes (*Kinpira jōruri shōhon shū* 1: 527). I suspect

24 See "Ibukiyama Shuten Dōji" in Yokoyama and Matsumoto, 2: 358–65.

25 Benkei is a historic monk warrior of great strength from the time of the Genpei wars and a legendary figure.

that before the birth of Kinpira, Kintoki was considered to be simply one of *shitenno*, a man of ordinary birth (or more precisely, nobody cared about his birth). There is hardly any historical evidence of Sakata Kintoki.²⁶ The lack of an official historical record allowed later playwrights and authors writing about Kintoki greater latitude for imagination. The belief that Kintoki was a yamauba's son was probably established and reinforced through representations of Kinpira, Kintoki's fictional son. Bakhtin suggests:

The work and the world represented in it enter the real world, enriching it, much as the real world enters the created work and impacts it, as part of the natural process of its creation. Thus, there is a continual renewing of the work through the creative perception of listeners and readers. (*The Dialogic Imagination* 254)

Thus a later fictional representation comes to color an earlier "historical" one, creating its own historical truth in the process.

Regarding the connection between the legends of Raikō and *shitenno*, and those of the yamauba, Minamoto no Raikō and his four lieutenants have long been associated with valor in conquering demons and other supernatural creatures. The belief in their relationship with the supernatural makes more plausible the belief that Kintoki is the son of a mountain god and/or yamauba (Torii, *Kintarō no tanjō* 8). Indeed, for people living in Edo-period Japan, the perceived potency of supernatural beings was widely held and the supernatural was seen as a plausible extension of day-to-day reality. The supernatural was also used to explain or rationalize the extremely gifted. Superhuman abilities were sometimes attributed to birth,²⁷ though Izawa Banryō (1668–1730) asserts in the 1715 work *Kōeki zokusetsu ben* (A Refutation of Vulgar Legends for the Benefit of the Public) that the widely held belief that Kintoki was the offspring of a union between a mountain god and yamauba was false, fabricated to make Kintoki's birth more mysterious (185). The mere fact that Izawa felt compelled to produce an extended

26 Vol. 28 of *Konjaku monogatari* tells a story about Sadamichi, Suetake, and Kintoki getting car sick, and vol. 9 of *Kokon chomonjū* (ca. 13th century) mentions Kintoki as a messenger. Other than these, and the stories about Shuten Dōji, there is hardly any mention of him.

27 One example is a story entitled "Sotōba no ko o umu koto" (A Stupa Giving Birth to a Child) in *Otogi monogatari* (Nursery Tales, 1660). The work tells the story of an actor (*waki*) named Hazama who was supposedly born from the *stupa* of his dead mother. Hazama's remarkable acting skills were attributed to his special birth. For the text of "Sotōba no ko o umu koto," see Takada, 1: 82–85.

treatise to argue the falsehood of the literary account of Kintoki's origins reveals the extent to which such beliefs were prevalent and stubbornly held among the masses.

A little more than a decade after *Kinpira tanjō-ki*, the yamauba in *Kiyohara no udaishō* (Kiyohara, General of the Right, 1677) is still described as an “old woman” who asks Raikō to take her son into his service.²⁸ The yamauba tells her child not to consider her his mother anymore, because she is looking for release from the perpetual cycle of rebirth. Linking the yamauba with the Buddhist concept of rebirth is reminiscent of the Noh yamauba, who does her mountain rounds and then mysteriously disappears into thin air. But unlike the Noh character, the yamauba here is the mother of the super-child, Kintoki, already sixteen or seventeen years old. *Kinpira nyūdō yama-meguri* (Lay-priest, Kinpira's Mountain Round), published in the early 1680s, portrays the yamauba as Kinpira's grandmother, ten-feet tall, with white hair and carrying the oni's signature iron staff, and says she “has received supreme supernatural power, travels through the three-thousand realms and, as she continues her mountain rounds, travels to the sky over the clouds. She is called the oni-woman” (see Muroki, *Kinpira jōruri shōhon shū* 3: 144–62). She also tells Kinpira that when he exerts his extraordinary strength, she is helping him, as his protector. The dialogue of the Noh *Yamamba* influences Kinpira jōruri texts. The yamauba's countenance is still old and scary, but her supernatural power is now used to protect her grandson. She is a family woman, and there is no further mention of her cannibalism. Indeed, there is no trace of the voracious yamauba of the *Konjaku monogatari shū* or spurned women of “Hanayo no hime” in the yamauba of the Kinpira jōruri. While they talk about Buddhist karmic causation in the manner of the Noh *yamamba*, they are simply mimicking the respected Noh text, without its deep religious meaning. After Kinpira has been rescued and told that the yamauba's support in this *ukiyo* (floating world) is behind his prowess, the story of *Kinpira nyūdō yama-meguri* goes on without further reference to the yamauba. Given the widely held perception in the medieval period that the yamauba was the mother of many children or super-children, it seems logical and unsurprising then to find her conveniently “popping up” in early modern texts as the mother of a strong warrior who conquers demons. Also given the time of the publication, close

28 Muroki, *Kinpira jōruri shōhon shū* 1: 494. For the text of *Kiyohara no udaishō*, see Muroki, *Kinpira jōruri shōhon shū* 1: 477–502.

to the vibrant Genroku era (1688–1704) when Ihara Saikaku (1642–1693) wrote “human beings are bewitching apparitions” (19) in his *Saikaku shokoku banashi* (Saikaku’s Tales from Various Provinces, 1685), it is not surprising that the jōruri yamauba have been somehow stripped of their religious or philosophical aura.

During the Edo period, many intellectuals attempted to explain supernatural phenomena logically, with, for example, the theory of yin and yang. This helped take the religious aura away from inexplicable events. Yamaoka Genrin (1631–1672), a widely recognized intellectual of his day and author of the work entitled “Kokin hyakumonogatari hyōban” (An Evaluation of One Hundred Strange and Weird Tales of Past and Present, 1686) explains the yamauba as “an evil spirit of mountains and rivers,” underscoring the negative side. He goes on, “... but that *uba* is more like what we call tatsuta-hime (goddess of autumn) and yama-hime (princess of the mountains)” (46). It is interesting to note that this early modern scholar seems to completely conflate the representations of yamauba and *datsueba* that we examined earlier in this chapter. Genrin notes the dichotomous nature of yamauba, and the name yama-hime (Princess of Mountains) does conjure up the image of a youthful woman. This is reminiscent of Yanagita’s observation mentioned above that yamauba and yama-hime were originally euphemisms (used by villagers) for a mysterious woman living deep in the mountains. Genrin writes, “Yamauba is narrated in the Noh piece as associating with weaving and spinning” (46). While the influence of Noh is mentioned, he does not refer to the yamauba as the mother of Kintoki.

Several years later, *Zen-taiheiki* (Chronicle of Pre-Grand Pacification, 1692?), a popular historical narrative widely read throughout the Edo period, describes yamauba as an old woman, a little over sixty years of age. She explains to Raikō that about twenty-one years ago, when she was sleeping atop Mt. Ashigara, she dreamt that a red dragon made love to her. Jarred awake by a sudden clap of thunder, she found herself pregnant, and soon after, she bore a supernatural child. Now in the present, Raikō, on his way to the capital, has found the super-child on Mt. Ashigara, named him Sakata Kintoki and made him one of his four lieutenants (*Zen-taiheiki* 325–328). It is worth noting how the yamauba was impregnated. From the descriptions in both the *Zen-taiheiki* and the *Kōeki zokusetsu-ben*, Takasaki Masahide delineates that the birth of Kintoki is based upon a belief in a thunder god, noting that a red dragon is the symbol of the thunder god; Kintoki’s red

skin color and the axe he carries point to Kintoki's father being a thunder god (13–43). Takasaki also writes that for ancient people, *kami* (deity) meant *kaminari* (thunder). This reminds one of Kondō's theory about the oni's origin being thunder and lightning, and also, as discussed in chapter one, Orikuchi's conjecture that in ancient times there may have been no clear demarcation between an oni and a *kami*. Both were "awesome" beings, although the oni may not have been worshipped. Thus, yamauba is, as are many oni, related to thunder and lightning. Further, *Zen-taiheiki*'s explanation goes along with Orikuchi's explanation of the yamauba being the wife of a mountain deity. Understood by many as a female oni, the yamauba seems to compensate for her evil nature by giving birth to a super-child who ultimately conquers oni.

Zen-taiheiki is also significant in that it places the yamauba in a specific location. As mentioned earlier, Mizuta emphasizes the yamauba's nomadic nature, which refuses to be territorialized as she moves constantly through many mountain regions. Now associated with Mt. Ashigara, she has become more static, and a step closer to the life of the women of the *sato*. In this regard, Yanagita notes:

Until the appearance of *Zen-taiheiki*, the main habitat of yamauba was not necessarily in Mt. Ashigara. Mt. Kintoki in Shinano province (Nagano prefecture) has caves where yamauba and Kintoki were purported to have lived, ponds where Kintoki took his first bath... and this is in accord to the old tale that the yamauba makes rounds of the mountains. But when the yamauba of Mt. Ashigara became the mother of Kintoki in *Zen-taiheiki*, this place alone became famous as the dwelling-place of the yamauba. ("Yama no jinsei" 248)

While there were precedents for the yamauba at Mt. Ashigara, it could be said that the popularity and wide distribution of *Zen-taiheiki* made the relation between the yamauba and Mt. Ashigara definitive. Further, according to Matsui Toshiaki, Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1724) probably got the idea about the relationship between the yamauba and Sakata no Kintoki for his *Komochi yamauba* from the *Zen-taiheiki* (32–33).

Chikamatsu's *Komochi Yamauba* (Mountain Ogress with a Child)

One of the most important and influential yamauba in the Edo period appears in *Komochi yamauba* (Mountain Ogress with a Child, 1712),

authored by Chikamatsu Monzaemon.²⁹ It is a *jōruri*/kabuki play with the familiar themes of love, revenge, and the substitution of a child. Its world is drawn from an amalgam of the tales of Minamoto no Raikō and his lieutenants, and of the yamauba. Chikamatsu modernized these tales, incorporating many up-to-date nuances, including a tobacco peddler and the conversational acumen of a famous contemporary *onnagata* (actor of female roles in the Kabuki theater). Such contemporary elements are often woven into Japanese folklore, especially in stories involving the yamauba. Chikamatsu gives us a new and rejuvenated yamauba on stage—the image of a youthful woman now performed by a male. The traditional yamauba, the old hag with disheveled hair, a solitary mountain-dweller who preys on unsuspecting human beings, has now become a youthful, beautiful, devoted wife and the compassionate mother of a super-warrior charged with killing evil demons. One of the oni’s attributes is transformation power, and yamauba, therefore, can skillfully change her countenance for an urban audience.

Komochi yamauba is a five-act play. The first act introduces the great warrior Minamoto no Yorimitsu (a.k.a. Raikō) who takes into his protection a young couple, Koito and her lover, the man who avenged her father’s death. However, the man whom the couple murdered had been under the protection of Takafuji, a high official, and as a result, Yorimitsu must go into hiding, since it is beneath Takafuji’s dignity to have a man under his protection slain by someone in Yorimitsu’s camp. To further complicate things, Takafuji is in love with Yorimitsu’s fiancée, so framing Yorimitsu seems the best way of getting him out of the picture. While in hiding, Koito’s lover becomes one of Yorimitsu’s *shitennō*. The second act, which is also known as “Shaberi yamauba” (Loquacious yamauba) or “Yaegiri kuruwa-banashi” (Story of Yaegiri in the Pleasure Quarters), introduces Sakata Tokiyuki, now in disguise as the tobacco seller Genshichi, and Yaegiri, a former courtesan.³⁰ Sakata/Genshichi is Koito’s elder brother and Yaegiri’s husband, but he has left Yaegiri to avenge his father’s death. He does not know that Koito has already done so. Sakata/Genshichi and Yaegiri accidentally meet at the residence of Yorimitsu’s fiancée. Under the guise of talking about her former life as a courtesan, Yaegiri tells him about Koito’s successful strike and accuses

29 The play was first performed for *jōruri* in 1712. The first recorded Kabuki performance was 1714. For the text of *Komochi yamauba*, see Chikamatsu, *Chikamatsu jōruri shū* 177–226.

30 The second act is the only act performed today.

Genshichi of spinelessness. Genshichi is deeply ashamed and commits suicide, vowing revenge on Takafuji. As he dies, he swears to Yaegiri that, if he impregnates her, their future son will help Yorimitsu take revenge on Takafuji and also informs her (and the audience) that she will be superhuman from then on. He orders her to leave the worldly life so as to rear their unborn child in the seclusion of the mountains. Yaegiri immediately acquires superhuman power—an attribute of a yamauba—and reveals her prowess before leaving for the mountain by easily repelling encroaching samurai. The third act involves a substitution theme. Takafuji uncovers the location of Yorimitsu's hideout and demands his head from the man hiding him. To save Yorimitsu, the mother of Yorimitsu's stepbrother makes the ultimate sacrifice, killing her own son and giving his head to Takafuji. Subsequently, the mother's husband becomes one of Yorimitsu's four lieutenants. In the fourth act, Yorimitsu and three lieutenants (the original one, Watanabe Tsuna, and two who joined later) encounter the yamauba and her super-child on Mt. Ashigara. Impressed by the superhuman power of the child and well aware of the yamauba's wish, Yorimitsu names the child Sakata Kintoki and makes him one of his lieutenants. In the final act, Yorimitsu and his *shitennō*, including Sakata Kintoki, conquer the demons that were threatening the capital. As a reward, Yorimitsu's fiefdom is restored and he is promoted to be protector of all Japan. At the same time, the truth about Takafuji is revealed and he is finally punished.

Of the five acts, Acts Two and Four deal directly with the yamauba. The former describes the genesis of the yamauba and the conception of Sakata Kintoki, and the latter shows her as a mother of a super-child, a great warrior who helps conquer and vanquish the demons threatening the capital. The yamauba's speech to Raikō about her mountain rounds comes directly from the Noh *Yamamba*, but the story of Kintoki as a child of a yamauba comes from either the *Zen-taiheiki* or the Kinpira jōruri. Probably reflecting the time as well as the genre, Chikamatsu's yamauba carries little philosophical weight; unlike the Noh *yamamba* who explains the concept of non-dualism to a group of entertainers, Chikamatsu's yamauba simply reveals to Yorimitsu how she came to live on the mountain.

Of particular significance in Chikamatsu's yamauba is her noted previous life as a courtesan. According to Matsui Toshiaki, Chikamatsu made the protagonist of his play a former courtesan because the *tsure* in Noh's *Yamamba* was a courtesan/entertainer (33). Yaegiri is described as being very attractive, and even after she has become yamauba, she is called a

“flower among firewood.”³¹ Though Chikamatsu’s yamauba is a beautiful and voluptuous woman, when the audience hears in the fourth act the word “yamauba,” two horns pop up out of her scalp and her eyes sparkle. The sight is frightening but when contrasted with her subsequent behavior it is obvious that the Yaegiri-yamauba is non-threatening. She confesses her past to Raikō, inviting audience sympathy. Instead of eating Raikō, as a typical yamauba would do, she makes herself vulnerable to him. Yet another distinction of Chikamatsu’s yamauba is her age. In contrast to the yamauba of *Zen-taiheiki* where she is described as being about sixty years of age, Chikamatsu’s yamauba is relatively young. She also appears with Kintoki, who, though five or six years old, clings to her and begs to drink from her breast. The image of a mother humoring a small (super-) child is underscored, and this in turn greatly influences later art portraying the yamauba. Elements of the attractive yamauba may have existed previously, but Chikamatsu should be credited with having selected an attractive image of the yamauba, and disseminating this seductive image through the stage. His attractive motherly yamauba makes a good contrast with the predominantly old-hag image prevalent during the medieval period.

Chikamatsu’s yamauba is also a wife. Since the yamauba is represented in folk belief as a mother of super-children, it is not strange that she should be portrayed as a wife. In the aforementioned “Kokin Hyakumonogatari hyōban,” a column on the yamauba states: “People say that the yamauba abduct human beings. Sometimes she disguises herself as a wife” (Yamaoka 46). By the seventeenth century then, the idea that yamauba disguise themselves as wives was relatively common.

31 Ihara Saikaku also connects a stunning beauty to an old mountain hag in a short tale included in the aforementioned *Saikaku shokoku banashi*. In this case, she is not a real yamauba, but an old woman who *looks like* a yamauba because of her advanced age. When she was young, she was exceptionally beautiful, but her eleven lovers died one after another before she was eighteen years of age. After that, she remained single. Her profession was spinning, which reminds us of the Noh yamauba. As she grew old, she became less attractive and more frightening in appearance. This is probably why Saikaku called her “yamauba.” She was shot to death by an arrow while stealing oil from a shrine. When the arrow cut off her head, the head flew in the air and blew fire. After that, anyone who saw the firing head passed out, and some even died (Ihara 142–144). The fire-breathing head is new to yamauba lore, although the character’s evil side remains intact; causing men to pass out or die is indeed reminiscent of the older, more negative image of the yamauba.

The folktale “Kuwazu nyōbō” (The Wife Who Doesn’t Eat) exemplifies the yamauba as a deceptive wife.³² The story opens with the mutterings of a man to himself (in some versions, he mutters to a friend) about how he wants a wife who does not eat. Soon after that, a young woman appears at his house and declares that since she does not eat, she would like to be his wife. The man takes her in, and she becomes his wife. But this seemingly ideal woman turns out to be a yamauba who has a second mouth at the back of her head—a mouth with a ravenous appetite. When the man finds out the truth, the yamauba attempts to eat him whole—as yamauba are generally inclined to do. In contrast to this yamauba, Chikamatsu’s is full of humility and conscientiousness. In fact, Yaegiri is more destructive before she becomes a yamauba. Instead of eating her husband, which may have been too fantastic for an Edo audience, her weapon of choice is shame; delivered in vitriolic bursts, it destroys her husband’s self-esteem and eventually drives him to suicide. Unlike her counterpart in “Kuwazu nyōbō,” her real identity is human—a former courtesan and an attractive wife. Further, similar to the Noh yamamba, Yaegiri possesses a human heart even after her transformation into a yamauba. In fact, she becomes a yamauba as a result of her husband’s death wish, and by the same wish is impregnated with his child, the super-child—Sakata no Kintoki, destined by birthright to avenge his father’s death and become one of Raikō’s four lieutenants.

It is worthwhile to note that it is Genshichi’s declaration that his soul will be reborn as a child to Yaegiri that impregnates her. Not only do his words transform his human wife into a yamauba, but they also impregnate her with a super-child. Masuda Katsumi points out that in folktales if one would express a wish in words the wish would come true (96). For example, in the aforementioned “Kuwazu nyōbō” when the man states aloud, “I want to have a wife who doesn’t eat,” a woman who claims not to eat arrives on his doorstep. The utterance of the words and their transformation into reality reveals the power of language. This is in accord with old Japan’s *kotodama shink*, the reverence of the miraculous power of language (Masuda 96–97).³³ In Chikamatsu’s play, Genshichi’s declaration is sometimes accompanied by

32 For a Japanese text, see Yanagita, *Nihon mukashibanashi meii* 113–17; Seki, *Nihon no mukashibanashi* 1: 162–65. For an English translation, see Mayer, *The Yanagita Kunio Guide to Japanese Folk Tales* 110–114; Seki, “Types of Japanese Folktales” 45.

33 Kawamura Kunimitsu states that what Genshichi did to Yaegiri (entrusting her to avenge his enemy in his dying moment) is based upon *goryō shinkō*, appeasing of the avenging spirits of the dead (“Kintarō no haha” 402).

a green spirit flame coming out of his severed belly and flying into Yaegiri's mouth,³⁴ and in the later Kabuki version, Genshichi puts his entrails into Yaegiri's mouth.³⁵ But in either case, it is Genshichi's spoken desire that impregnates Yaegiri:

Genshichi: Three days after my death, if you feel pain in your womb,
know that my spirit has entered [your womb] and you will
bear a child after ten months.

Narrative: My soul will come back to this world again as a miraculous
superhuman and destroy Masamori.

Genshichi: You, too, will become a wondrous woman from today.

Narrative: Live in deep mountains and raise the child.

Genshichi: Take my soul into your body.

Narrative: He pulled out his entrails and drew his wailing wife to his
side. As soon as he put them into her mouth, he took his last
breath ("Komochi yamauba" 77–78).

Genshichi's utterance endows Yaegiri with superpowers and makes her *komochi yamauba* (yamauba with child). This theme, the utterance of words that become reality, is both fundamental and prevalent in Japanese folklore as seen in *Kuwazu nyōbō*. Genshichi's utterance might be considered reflective of the true nature of performing arts, in that he had to verbalize his wish so the audience would understand it. Yet, this segment could easily have been allotted to the narrator/chanters, and Genshichi could have remained silent.³⁶ It is the power of language and spirit—an old rule of folklore—that magically renders Yaegiri pregnant with the future Kintoki, and through this single wish, she is transformed into a yamauba.

Meera Viswanathan writes "...in *Komochi yamauba*, the yamamba metamorphoses into an entirely different being, one lacking the awesomeness and alien nature of earlier avatars. Instead, she is first and foremost mother and wife, loving, loyal, and somewhat pathetic. Her demonic nature is not intrinsic to her, but merely an unfortunate outcome of her appropriation of

34 See Chikamatsu, *Chikamatsu jōruri shū* 198.

35 For a Kabuki text, see "Komochi yamauba."

36 In *jōruri*, a narrator performs both narration and dialogue. Although there is no strict rule, dialogue tends to be expressed in a more *kotoba* [speech] mode rather than a *ji* [dramatic singing] mode. Genshichi's words, "Three days after my death, if you feel pain in your womb, know that my spirit enters [your womb] and you will bear a child in ten months," is an exemplar of the *kotoba* [speech] mode.

male concerns. She must be sacrificed so that the larger issues of politics and moral justice may be played out” (252). If Yaegiri-yamauba possesses any demonic tendencies, they seem most evident when she is still human; her acts of jealousy and lust are part of her original human makeup. However, as evidenced particularly in Act Four, she does indeed possess a loving and caring nature. She is both maternal and loyal to her husband. This change, or evolution, in the yamauba’s character partially reflects some of the social expectations of Japanese women of the time.

The Edo period is often referred to as a dark age for Japanese women (Hayashi 325), and women’s social activities were extremely limited throughout the period (Fukuda 257). There are numerous references that support the supposition that Japanese women filled a subservient role to men and were held in low regard. For example, *Onna daigaku takarabako* (Treasure Box for Women’s Great Learning, 1716), a popular handbook to educate women about their duties as women, states: “A woman’s infirmities include a lack of submission, ill temper, resentfulness, jealousy, slander of others, and stupidity. Seven or eight out of ten women are afflicted with these infirmities” (46). Comparing women to *jin*, the book says, “*jin* is night and dark. In comparison to men, women are ignorant and do not understand things right in front of them” (54). Similarly, Confucian scholar Kaibara Ekken (1630–1714), detailed in the “Joshi o oshiyuru no hō” (Method of Teaching Women)³⁷ the Three Obediences, a popular maxim of the day regarding women’s conduct: “A young woman obeys her father; a married woman obeys her husband; and a widow obeys her son” (12). A man could have a mistress if he wished, and divorce was essentially the unilateral prerogative of the husband. The ease with which a man could generally get a divorce was apparent in the brief divorce letter called a *mikudariban* (three-and-a-half lines) written by the husband to announce divorce.³⁸ While a woman could own property, her dowry became her husband’s upon marriage.³⁹ A three-and-a-half line divorce letter is exactly what Yaegiri received from her

37 “Joshi o oshiyuru no hō” (Method of Teaching Women) is Volume Five of *Wazoku dōji-kun* (Precepts for Children, 1710).

38 Takagi Tadashi asserts that the legal treatment of divorce among commoners clearly argues against the idea that women’s status was vastly inferior to men’s (Takagi, “Marriage and Divorce in the Edo Period”). Still, women’s status was far from equal to men’s.

39 However, upon divorce, money and land related to the dowry had to be returned to the woman, except in cases where the divorce was initiated by the wife or her family. See Nakada Kaoru 99–110, 140.

husband, Genshichi, so that he could avenge his father. Under these circumstances, it was expected that Yaegiri-yamauba be loyal to her husband. The *Onna daigaku takarabako* listed seven reasons for a husband to divorce his wife and one of them was “jealousy” (34). Jealousy caused Genshichi to be disowned, and Yaegiri herself to be thrown out of the pleasure quarters.

Acting on behalf of her dying husband and making his wish her own may have helped compensate for her impetuous behavior. The empowerment of women through verbal tact and supernatural strength only increased female audience appeal. No doubt many Edo-era women secretly yearned to act like Yaegiri but found themselves restricted by social expectations and conventions. Mizuta Noriko writes that, “one reason why yamauba could become a prototype for modern women’s pursuance of self is that she inherently annuls such concepts as motherhood versus independence, and family versus work” (21). Thus the yamauba transcends this dichotomous perspective. In this respect, Chikamatsu’s Yaegiri-yamauba seems to have melded the two dichotomous concepts into one character/stage persona. Moreover, Chikamatsu accomplished it without bringing the two seemingly opposing perspectives into conflict. In other words, while Yaegiri-yamauba possesses a fantastic prowess to overpower any man to destabilize social order, she is ultimately committed to realize her husband’s wish and devotes herself to Kintarō as a woman was expected to behave in the contemporary society. Thus a potential threat to conventional social order is contained to keep equilibrium. In addition to the verbal and acting acumen of the actor who, ironically, would be a man, the audience would have been attracted to this character specifically because of the seeming conflict in her nature.

Another way of looking at the transformation of Yaegiri is spirit possession—Yaegiri becomes a yamauba by means of Genshichi’s spiritual possession of her. Doris Barga describes spirit possession in the *Tale of Genji* as “spring[ing] from a destructive impulse directed against male dominance,” and goes on to explain that “appearing suddenly in a culture normally characterized by gentleness and indirection the disturbingly violent phenomenon of spirit possession can best be understood as a disguised form of female protest triggered by the psychological hardships of Heian polygyny” (6–7). An interesting point in Yaegiri-yamauba’s case is that although the possessor is a male, the fundamental nature of the possession remains the same. Genshichi’s shame and humiliation are triggered by his wife’s logical verbal assault, and rather than continuing to live on in humiliation, he chooses to commit suicide. The possessed Yaegiri is, unlike the female role

model of the time, an outspoken woman who openly expresses her emotion without any hesitation. In fact, she is not only outspoken but is also physically confrontational in pursuit of her lover in public. It appears that the Yaegiri-Genshichi spirit possession is a kind of *mitate* (allusion, analog), if not a complete parody of spirit possession of the Heian period. As someone possessed, and possessed by a male spirit at that, Yaegiri is not bound to social norms (though it does not mean that she acted according to them previously). Yaegiri-yamauba goes to the mountain where she attends to her child without any concern about social criticism. This may have appealed greatly to the Genroku audience.

The Alluring Yamauba

Chikamatsu's yamauba is extraordinary, for in his modernized tale, he successfully re-engineers yamauba into a seductive courtesan and motherly figure to whom Kintoki clings and cries, "I'm sleepy, Mommy. Give me some milk" (*Chikamatsu jōruri shū* 220). The yamauba's motherly aspect of *Komochi yamauba* gave birth to a Kabuki dance sub-genre called *yamauba-buyō* (*shosagoto*). Torii writes that the yamauba always appears as a beautiful woman in this dance piece (*Kintarō no tanjō* 67). The first yamauba dance piece in the present style is entitled *Shitennō Ōeyama-iri* (Shitennō Enters Ōeyama, 1785) (Kokonoe 257–258). In this work Segawa Jokō (1739–94), the author, amplified the yamauba's motherly affection for her child significantly with such phrases as "he is so dear to me... you may laugh if you want. Everything is for the sake of this child" (332–33).⁴⁰ The yamauba was performed by Segawa Kikunojō III (1751–1810), a very popular and well-known *onnagata*. It is easy to imagine how this Kabuki dance in which a beautiful yamauba declares her undying love for her child, performed by a seductive male actor a number of times, could have had some degree of influence on the ensuing ukiyo-e version of the alluring yamauba.⁴¹ Kabuki actors were popular subjects of the ukiyo-e artists, with their images painted on posters much like present-day celebrities.

40 Kokonoe Sakon writes that this piece became popular because of its theme of motherly love (258).

41 In regard to the yamauba dance, Torii considers that the image of the beautiful yamauba of the ukiyo-e was reproduced on the stage. However, I suspect it was the other way around. The beautiful image of the *onnagata* dance on the stage is what probably influenced ukiyo-e.

During the Kansei era (1795–1801) yamauba was portrayed in ukiyo-e as an alluring, fully matured mother humoring Kintarō (Kintoki). Utagawa Toyokuni (1769–1825), for example, created *Momiji no sode nagori no nishiki-e* (a theatrical scene showing Yamauba and Kintaro, 1812).⁴² The most famous ukiyo-e artist of the yamauba, however, is Kitagawa Utamaro, who produced about forty works on the theme of *Yamauba and Kintarō* (Shimizu Christine 231). His yamauba is loving and voluptuous with long black hair and white skin.⁴³ Motherly love is amply revealed in such prints as *Yamauba to Kintarō ennenmai* (Yamauba and Kintarō, dance) and *Yamauba to Kintarō genpuku* (Yamauba and Kintarō, coming-of-age).

Torii writes that a *kuro-hon* (picture book; literally “black books”)⁴⁴ version of Chikamatsu’s *Komochi yamauba* entitled *Kintoki osanadachi tsuwamono no majiwari* (Stories of Kintoki’s Childhood, 1765) portrays the yamauba as an old woman, and points out that the yamauba in *kusa-zōshi* (illustrated storybooks) is depicted as demonic looking (*Kintarō no tanjō* 74, 87–88). In this light, Utamaro’s yamauba is more of a descendant of Yaegiri on the stage rather than from picture books. His yamauba is an idealized woman, tall and slender, just like Yaegiri (an idealized woman performed by a male actor in Kabuki).

One of the reasons behind the production of a sensual, but less controversial yamauba was the need to avoid censorship. Rather than depicting courtesans, Utamaro portrayed the sexual image of idealized motherly figures through the yamauba (Ōkubo 257–58).⁴⁵ A mother and her child was a safe topic. But a closer look reveals that Utamaro’s yamauba oozes sensuality. For example, in *Yamauba to Kintarō kamisori* (Yamauba and Kintarō, shaving hair), a tall yamauba carefully shaves Kintarō’s hair, while her own hair remains unkempt and her breasts are partially revealed to spark sensual reaction in the viewer’s imagination. Another example is *Yamauba to Kintarō chibusa* (Yamauba and Kintarō, breastfeeding). Kintarō is sucking his mother’s

42 The work is found in Tanba (ill. no. 323).

43 Reproductions are found in *Ukiyo-e Masterpieces in European Collections*, vols. 7 and 9; Narazaki and Kikuchi, *Masterworks of Ukiyoe: Utamaro*.

44 Picture books about popular Kabuki/*jōruri* plays. They were called “black books” because of their black cover.

45 Matsudaira Sadanobu, upon becoming the senior shogun councilor, initiated the Kansei Reforms (1787–93) and strictly controlled people’s morals and lives. Many novelists and artists who depicted pleasure quarters and/or related topics were punished. Utamaro was one of them; his hands were placed in chains for fifty days and it was probably due to the shock of the punishment that he died within two years.



Figure 5. *Yamauba to Kintarō enmenmai* (Yamauba and Kintarō, dance). Courtesy of the Royal Museums of Art and History—Brussels. Catalog number 116.



Figure 6. *Yamauba to Kintarō genpuku* (Yamauba and Kintarō, coming of age). Courtesy of the Royal Museums of Art and History—Brussels. Catalog number 113.

large breast while touching the other nipple with his hand. Her white skin with long unkempt hair reveals certain unrestrained and erotic beauty.

Utamaro, influenced by Torii Kiyonaga (1752–1815) in the portrayal of beauties, had great success through his creation of bust portraits (*Ōkubi-e*; literally “big-head-pictures”); a scary looking yamauba, advanced in age, would not suit this type of portrayal. His yamauba are women ideally portrayed, with sensuously arranged long black hair, small mouths and white skin. Utamaro has transformed the yamauba into a sensual mother and a commodity. These yamauba are “different” in the sense of their ethereal beauty, and are to be gazed upon and admired. According to Pavel Medvedev, this genre is “a specific way of visualizing a given part of reality. . . . new genres reflect changes in real social life. Those changes lead to new views of experience and to different genres of speech, social behavior, and literature” (Morson and Emerson 275–77). It was thus a combination of social, political and commercial forces that helped give birth to the concept of the alluring yamauba. The yamauba as an oni woman is ever transforming.

The impression Utamaro’s yamauba gave to the people in Edo society must have been considerable: Torii notes that, pre-Utamaro, the yamauba was portrayed in picture books as a scary looking oni-woman; after him, she came to be depicted as young and beautiful (*Kintarō no tanjō* 61–67). Indeed, there is great contrast between the beautified yamauba portrayed by Utamaro and those that came before him, including his teacher, Toriyama Sekien (1712–1788). Sekien depicts the yamauba in his *Gazu hyakki yagy* (Pictures of Demons’ Nocturnal Stroll) as a tired-looking old creature. Similarly Nagasawa Rosetsu’s (1754–1799) yamauba, famous as a treasure of Itsukushima Shrine at Miyajima, is a white-haired old hag who looks suspiciously at the beholder. Their artistic renditions depict a skeptical- (or tired-) looking old woman with disheveled white hair, in other words, the familiar image of the medieval period. On one hand, the yamamba in Noh was performed with the old woman’s mask and a white-haired wig, not generally regarded as a sexually attractive visage except in highly stylized Noh art. Also, in the countryside, where urban culture and vogue did not necessarily match the pace of their traditions, the yamauba probably retained much of their indigenous images, the fertile mother, lonely woman, or voracious hag, as local traditions dictated. On the other hand, for commercial appeal and to suggest eroticism without attracting the ire of the government censors, the yamauba in the jōruri/Kabuki theaters and ukiyo-e was portrayed in a sensuous manner, underscoring the sensuality of youth



Figure 7. *Yamauba to Kintarō kamisori* (Yamauba and Kintarō, shaving hair) Courtesy of the Royal Museums of Art and History—Brussels. Catalog number 117.

and motherhood. This urban and urbane type of yamauba was portrayed as sensual, yet, precisely because of her idealized representation, she was at the same time alienated from the audience living in culturally conservative Edo society. Thus, though now beautiful and sensual, yamauba remain nevertheless marginalized others as they “live spatially far away from a community, and are thus known to the community only through their imagination” (Komatsu Kazuhiko, “Ijin ron—‘ijin’ kara ‘tasha’ e” 178). The representations of yamauba vary with individual imagination. With the archetypal image of the yamauba as her base, she evolved as time passed.