

Spirits of the Dead and Curses/Disasters in Ancient Japan: The Background Leading to the Jōgan Goryōe¹

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Author's Statement

In ancient Japan, the spirits of the dead who died with resentment, called *goryō* 御霊 or *onryō* 怨霊, were thought to cast curses. The purpose of this study was to examine and clarify the circumstances under which this idea originated and developed, based on historical sources.

Introduction

This paper seeks to elucidate the imperial court's perception of spirits of the deceased in ancient Japan, specifically aiming to uncover the background and development of the idea that such spirits are responsible for curses (*tatari* 祟り). In recent years, scholarship has focused on the belief that deities' curses cause disasters.² This paper, adopting the view that curses were equated with disasters, seeks to prove the hypothesis that the ancient court addressed the curses of spirits of the dead to prevent and mitigate disasters. It focuses on the background leading up to the Shinsen'en Goryōe 神泉苑御霊会 conducted in Jōgan 貞観 5 (863) (below, Jōgan Goryōe).

The *goryō* 御霊 targeted in the Jōgan Goryōe were spirits of people who died with resentment due to political downfall, among other reasons. Such beliefs became widespread after entering the Heian period (794–1185). As described by Kokushi daijiten

¹ This article is a translation of Kobayashi Norihiko 小林宣彦, "Nihon kodai ni okeru shisha no rei to tatari, saigai ni kansuru kōsatsu: Jōgan goryōe ni itaru haikai o chūshin ni" 日本古代における死者の霊と祟り・災害に関する考察—貞観御霊会に至る背景を中心に—, *Kokugakuin zasshi* 國學院雜誌 123:12 (2022), pp. 85–108. Translated by Dylan L. Toda.

² See Okada, *Kodai tennō to jingi no saishi taikai*; Kobayashi, *Ritsuryō kokka no saishi to saii*.

国史大辞典 (National history dictionary), *goryō* beliefs and practices (*goryō shinkō* 御霊信仰)

involve the fear of spirits of those who met untimely deaths and attempt to appease them to avoid curses and ensure peace. Initially, all spirits of the dead were objects of fear, and especially feared were the spirits of those who died harboring resentment and those whose descendants did not perform rites for them. These spirits were believed to cause curses, and when epidemics, famines, or other disasters occurred, they were often attributed to the curses of these resentful spirits or spirits for which rites were not being performed. . . . However, this form of belief became widespread mainly from the Heian period onward, with rites being widely performed for the spirits of certain individuals, often political failures.³

In ancient Japan, the *Jingiryō* 神祇令 (Regulations of [affairs related to] deities) was established under the influence of the Tang Dynasty's *Ciling* 祠令 (Regulations of worship),⁴ which included the worship of spirits of the dead as a part of rites.⁵ However, in Japan, while the worship of heavenly and earthly deities was specified in the *Jingiryō* and managed by the Jingikan 神祇官 (Department of deities), the worship of imperial mausoleum spirits was handled by the Shoryōryō 諸陵寮 (Bureau of imperial mausolea). The government's official prayers seeking certain outcomes primarily focused on deities, not spirits of the dead, and the worship of spirits of the dead was not adopted as a national prayer ritual method.

As time progressed into the Heian period, Kitanosha 北野社 was established to worship the spirit of Sugawara no Michizane 菅原道真, and by the end of the tenth century, this spirit worship became part of official rites (*ōyake matsuri* 公祭) and included in the twenty-two top ranking imperial court-associated shrines (*nijūnisha* 二十二社). The elevation of spirits of the dead to the status of deity spirits and their incorporation into official prayers marked a significant turning point in Japan's ritual history. This shift appears to have been largely influenced by the belief that spirits of the dead could cast curses. Rituals to appease these spirits, including the *goryōe*, were developed in tandem.

To repeat, this paper aims to clarify how the ancient imperial court viewed dead spirit curses by examining the background of the Jōgan Goryōe becoming an official ritual.

³ Shibata Minoru 柴田実, "Goryō shinkō" "御霊信仰," *Kokushi daijiten*, vol. 6, pp. 58-59.

⁴ Kose, "Amagoi no gishiki ni tsuite."

⁵ 凡祭祀之名有四、一曰祀天神、二曰祭地祇、三曰享人鬼、四曰稷一奠于先聖・先師。

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1. Issues Surrounding the Jōgan Goryōe

First, I will go over the details about this *goryōe* based on records in the *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* 日本三代実録 (The true history of three reigns of Japan).⁶

Historical Source 1: *Nihon sandai jitsuroku*, twentieth day (*mizunoeuma* 壬午) of the fifth month of Jōgan 5 (863)

①於_レ神泉苑_ニ修_レ御靈會_ニ。②勅遣_下左近衛中将從四位下藤原朝臣基經。右近衛權中將從四位下兼行內藏頭藤原朝臣常行等_上。監_中會事_上。③王公卿士赴集共觀。④靈座六前設_レ一施几筵_ニ。盛_レ一陳花果_ニ。恭敬薰修。⑤延_レ律師慧達_ニ為_レ講師_ニ。演_レ一說金光明經一部。般若心經六卷_ニ。⑥命_レ雅樂寮伶人_ニ作_レ樂。⑦以_レ帝近侍兒童及良家稚子_ニ為_レ舞人_ニ。⑧大唐高麗更出而舞。⑨雜伎散樂競_レ其能_ニ。⑩此日宜旨。開_レ苑四門_ニ。聽_レ都邑人出入縱觀_ニ。⑪所謂御靈者。崇道天皇。伊予親王。藤原夫人。及觀察使。橘逸勢。文室宮田麻呂等是也。並坐_レ事被_レ誅。冤魂成_レ厲。⑫近代以來。疫病繁發。死亡甚衆。天下以為。此災。御靈之所_レ生也。始_レ自_レ京畿_ニ。爰及_レ外國_ニ。每_レ至_レ夏天秋節_ニ。修_レ御靈會_ニ。往々不_レ斷。或禮_レ仏說_レ經。或歌且舞。令_下童貫之子_ニ靚粧馳射。膂力之士袒裊相撲。騎射呈_レ芸。走馬爭_レ勝。倡優嫵戲。通相誇競_上。聚而觀者莫_レ不_レ填咽_ニ。遐邇因循。漸成_レ風俗_ニ。⑬今茲春初咳逆成_レ疫。百姓多斃。朝廷為祈。至_レ是乃修_レ此會_ニ。以賽_レ宿禱_ニ也。

(Numbers added by the author.)

Summary

- (1) In Jōgan 5, a *goryōe* was held at Shinsen'en.
- (2) Fujiwara no Mototsune 藤原基經 and Fujiwara no Tokitsura 藤原常行 were dispatched to preside.
- (3) The princes, *kugyō* 公卿 (nobles of third rank or higher), and others gathered to watch.
- (4) Desks and mats were set up in front of the six spirits, and flowers and fruits were abundantly arranged.
- (5) Etatsu 慧達 served as the lecturer, expounding on the *Konkōmyōkyō* 金光明經 and *Hannya shingyō* 般若心經.

⁶ Regarding the *goryōe* and the Jōgan Goryōe, see Higo, “Heian jidai ni okeru onryō no shisō”; Chō, “Jōgan go-nen goryōe ni tsuite no ichi shiron”; Takatori, “Goryōe no seiritsu to shoki Heiankyō no jūmin”; Yasui, “Nagaokakyō no haite to Sawara Shinnō no onryō”; Kikuchi, “Goryō shinkō no seiritsu to tenkai”; Tachibana, “Waga kuni ni okeru onryō shinkō to Daihannya kyō no kankei ni tsuite”; Inoue, “Goryō shinkō no seiritsu to tenkai”; Imaichi, “Jōgan go-nen goryōe no seiritsu ni tsuite”; Miyazaki, “Jōgan go-nen goryōe no seijishiteki kōsatsu”; Yamada, “Goryōe seiritsu no zentei jōken”; Yamada, “Onryō e no taishō”; Yamada, “Onryō no shisō”; Iizumi, “Goryō shinkō no kenkyūshi”; Itō, “Goryōe ni kansuru ichi kōsatsu”; Ōe, “Nihon kodai no kami to rei”; Shibata, “Onryō shisō seiritsu no zentei”; Kobayashi, “Sawara Shinnō onryō gensetsu no hatsume”; Nakamoto, “Jōgan go-nen goryōe no seiritsu to sono igi”; Matsumoto, “Heian jidai no goryōe to toshi sairei”; Dong/Tō, “Kodai Nihon no ekibyō kanren shinkō ni okeru gairaiteki yōso ni tsuite.”

- (6) Musicians from the Gagakuryō 雅樂寮 (Music bureau) performed.
- (7) Children serving close to the emperor and those from good families were made dancers.
- (8) People from the Chinese mainland and the Korean peninsula also danced.
- (9) Competitions in skills, such as miscellaneous skills (*zatsugi* 雑伎) and *sangaku* 散楽 (miscellaneous entertainments), were held.
- (10) On this day, by imperial command, the four gates of Shinsen'en were opened, allowing residents of the capital to freely enter and watch.
- (11) The spirits were Emperor Sudō 崇道, Prince Iyo 伊予,⁷ Lady Fujiwara 藤原,⁸ an inspection official (*kansatsushi* 觀察使),⁹ Tachibana no Hayanari 橘逸勢,¹⁰ and Fun'ya no Miyatamaro 文室宮田麻呂.¹¹ All these people were involved in incidents and killed for their crimes. Their resentful souls became *rei* 厲 (malevolent spirits causing illness and disaster).
- (12) Recently, epidemics have been frequent, with many deaths. People, not only in Kyoto and the Kinai region but also other areas, believe these disasters are caused by the spirits. *Goryōe* ceremonies are held annually in summer and autumn, featuring sutra recitations, dances, children in makeup performing archery, strong men stripped to the waist engaging in sumo, horseback archery, horse races, and entertainers' various performances. The venues are packed with spectators. This custom gradually became a tradition, both near and far.
- (13) Now (in Jōgan 5), an epidemic causing coughing arose in spring, leading to many deaths. The imperial court conducted prayers, but at this time the *goryōe* will express gratitude for previous prayers being answered.

According to Historical Source 1, the *Goryōe* was conducted at Shinsen'en¹² in Jōgan 5. *Goryōe* are spirits that became resentful due to death after being implicated in incidents. The six that were the subjects of this *goryōe* were no exception. This belief, that spirits

⁷ Son of Emperor Kanmu 桓武. Accused of plotting against his older brother, Emperor Heizei 平城, he was confined to Kwaradera 川原寺 (Kōfukuji 弘福寺) and deprived of food and drink. He eventually took his own life by poison.

⁸ This appears to be Fujiwara no Yoshiko 藤原吉子, consort of Emperor Kanmu and mother of Prince Iyo. She, along with Prince Iyo, was accused of treachery and took her own life at Kwaradera.

⁹ Perhaps Fujiwara no Nakanari 藤原仲成, older brother of Fujiwara no Kusuko 藤原葉子. Captured in Kyoto immediately after the Kusuko Incident (*Kusuko no hen* 葉子の變), he was imprisoned at the military/guard office Uhyōefu 右兵衛府 and executed the next day as the main conspirator.

¹⁰ Seen as a conspirator in the Jōwa Incident (Jōwa no hen 承和の變), stripped of his original surname, deemed a *binin* 非人 (non-human) outcast, and exiled to Izu 伊豆 Province. However, he died in Tōtōumi 遠江 Province during transit.

¹¹ Exiled, in connection with the Jōwa Incident, to Izu Province, where is believed to have died. Details are unknown. Regarding his spirit, see Yamasaki, "Jōgan go-nen Shinsen'en goryōe no seijishiteki igi."

¹² Regarding Shinsen'en, see Ōta, "Shinsen'en no kenkyū"; Ono, "Heian jidai shoki ni okeru rikyū no teien."

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cause epidemics, spread from Kyoto and Kinai to other regions, leading to Buddhist rituals and various events to appease these vengeful souls. Attracting large crowds, this became a customary practice. Then, in response to a raging epidemic, the imperial court decided to hold a *goryōe*.

It appears that the *goryōe* originally was a ritual of the people that was then later hosted and conducted by the imperial court. This shift from the popular to official realm is notable. In ancient Japan, popular beliefs, practices, and rituals were often subject to prohibitions. Despite this, the *goryōe* was adopted by the imperial court.

To understand the background leading to the Jōgan Goryōe, I must examine why a popular ritual was able to be conducted as an imperial one. In the next section, I will explore the issues involved therein and how they were resolved.

2. The Imperial Court's Response to Popular Religious Beliefs, Practices, and Rituals

Here I will examine the imperial court's response to popular beliefs, practices, and rituals, based on the below set of historical sources.

Historical Source 2: *Shoku Nihongi* 続日本紀, the twenty-ninth day (*kanoetatsu* 庚辰) of the ninth month of Tenpyō 天平 2 (730)

詔曰。(略)又安芸周防国人等妄說禍福。多集人衆。妖祠一死魂。云有_レ所_レ祈。又近_レ京左側山原。聚_一集多人_一妖言惑_レ衆。多則万人。少乃数千。如_レ此徒深違_一憲法_一。若更因循為_レ害滋甚。自_レ今以後。勿_レ使_一更然_一。(略)

Summary

It is said that in Aki 安芸 Province, people gather in large numbers, worshipping and praying to the souls of the dead in a misguided manner, preaching nonsense about fortune and misfortune. Similarly, in mountainous areas near the capital, many people gather and are deceived by false words (*yōgen* 妖言). The gatherings number in the thousands, some even tens of thousands, deeply contravening the law. If not rectified, this could lead to significant harm. Such things should be prevented henceforth.

Historical Source 3 *Shoku Nihongi*, the seventeenth day (*kanoetora* 庚寅) of the eighth month of Tenpyō-Shōhō 天平勝宝 4 (752)

捉_一京師巫覡十七人_一。配_一于伊豆。隱伎。土左等遠国_一。

Summary

Seventeen shamans of the capital were captured and exiled to remote provinces like Izu 伊豆, Oki 隱岐, and Tosa 土佐.

Historical Source 4 *Shoku Nihongi*, the eighth day (*kinoetora* 甲寅) of the seventh month of Tenpyō-Hōji 天平宝字 1 (757)

勅曰。比者頑奴潛凶_レ反逆_レ。皇天不_レ遠。羅令_レ伏_レ誅。民間或有_レ假託_レ亡魂_レ。浮言紛紜。擾_レ一亂鄉邑_レ者_レ。不_レ論_レ輕重_レ。皆與同罪。普告_レ遐邇_レ宜_レ絶_レ妖源_レ。

Summary

Evil bastards (*gando* 頑奴) plotted insurrection but could not escape the laws of state and were all executed. Amongst the populace, some spread chaos in villages, falsely claiming to speak for souls of the dead (*bōkon* 亡魂) and spreading baseless rumors (*fugen* 浮言). Such actions are equally criminal. A nationwide announcement was made to eradicate these sources of falsity (*yōgen* 妖源).

Historical Source 5 *Shoku Nihongi*, the fourteenth day (*kinoetatsu* 甲辰) of the twelfth month of Hōki 宝龜 11 (780)

勅_レ左右京_レ。如聞。比來無知百姓。構_レ一合巫覡_レ。妄崇_レ淫祀_レ。蒭狗之設。符書之類。百方作_レ恠。填_レ一溢街路_レ。託_レ事求_レ福。還涉_レ厭魅_レ。非_レ唯不_レ畏_レ朝憲_レ。誠亦長養_レ妖妄_レ。自_レ今以後。宜_レ嚴禁斷_レ。如有_レ違犯者_レ。五位已上錄_レ名奏聞。六位已下所司科決。但有_レ患禱祀者。非_レ在_レ京內_レ者。許_レ之。

Summary

Report received of “ignorant peasants interacting with shamans, engaging in false worship, and the streets being filled with straw dogs (*sūku* 蒭狗) and talismans. They seek fortune but are dabbling in harmful magical practices.” This not only shows a lack of fear of the imperial court and the law but also encourages baseless things. Such practices are to be strictly forbidden henceforth. Offenders of fifth rank (*goi* 五位) and above are to be reported by name, while those of sixth rank (*rokui* 六位) and below are to be punished by their respective offices. However, prayers due to illness are permitted outside Kyoto.

Historical Source 6 *Nihon kiriyaku* 日本紀略, the third day (*tsuchinotomi* 己巳) of the fifth month of Enryaku 延曆 14 (795)

右京人上毛野兄国女流_レ土左国_レ。以下自称_レ諸天_レ妖言惑_レ衆也。

Summary

An Ukyō 右京 person Kamitsukeno no Ekunime 上毛野兄国女 was exiled to Tosa Province for calling herself Shoten 諸天 and deceiving people with false words (*yōgen* 妖言).

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Historical Source 7 *Ruiju sandai kyaku* 類聚三代格, the twenty-eighth day of the ninth month of Daidō 大同 2 (807), official document (*kanpu* 官符)

太政官符

応_レ禁_一一斷兩京巫覡_一事

右被_レ右大臣宣_一僞。奉_レ勅。巫覡之徒好託_一禍福_一。庶民之愚仰信_一妖言_一。淫祀斯繁。厭呪亦多。積習成_レ俗虧_一一損淳風_一。宜_一自今已後一切禁斷_一。若深崇_一此術_一猶不_レ懲革_一。事覺之日移_一一配遠国_一。所司知_レ之不_レ亂。隣保匿而相容並准_レ法科_レ罪。

大同二年九月廿八日

Summary

Shamans discuss fortune and misfortune, and the foolish believe their false words (*yōgen*). False worship is frequent and spells prevalent. Having become customs, these are eroding the honest and unpretentious spirit of the people. All such practices are to be forbidden. Those who continue are to be exiled to remote provinces. Officials aware of the existence of such practices but not investigating are to be punished according to the law.

Historical Source 8 *Nihon kōki* 日本後紀, the twenty-sixth day (*kanotomi* 辛巳) of the ninth month of Kōnin 弘仁 3 (813)

勅。恠異之事。聖人不_レ語。妖言之罪。法制非_レ輕。而諸国信_一民狂言_一。言上寔繁。或言及_一国家_一。或妄陳_一禍福_一。敗_レ法乱_レ紀。莫_レ甚_一於斯_一。自今以後。有_下百姓輒称_一託宣_一者_上。不_レ論_一男女_一。隨_レ事科決。但有_一神宣灼然。其驗尤著_一者。国司檢察。定_レ実言上。

Summary

Saints do not speak of the strange. False words (*yōgen*) are not a minor offense. Reports are frequent of people in various provinces believing in mad words (*kyōgen* 狂言). Some statements affect the state (*kokka* 国家), while others falsely explain fortune and misfortune. These seriously violate the law and disrupt order. Henceforth, any peasant speaking of divine revelation, regardless of gender, is to be punished. However, if the deity's revelation is genuine and the miraculous effects appear, the *kokushi* 国司 (provincial governors) shall inspect and report.

From Historical Source 2, one can infer that the imperial court restricted popular beliefs, practices, and rituals, specifically gathering in large numbers, worshipping and praying to the spirits of the dead misguidedly, preaching nonsense about fortune and misfortune, and deception by false words. It thus seems that aspects of the *goryōe*, such

as large crowds and performing rituals for the spirits of those executed for treason, were prohibited. Notably, though, the *goryōe*, a popular practice, was nevertheless adopted as an official event.

Historical Source 4 mentions chaos in villages due to the spreading of words attributed to the souls of the dead (*bōkon*) executed during the Tachibana no Naramaro Rebellion (*Tachibana no Naramaro no ran* 橘奈良麻呂の乱). The people falsely claiming to speak for them are identified as members of the populace, probably like those described as worshiping and praying to the spirits of the dead in a misguided manner in Historical Source 2. The “baseless rumors” (*fugen*) causing chaos in Historical Source 4 probably refer to the words spoken by those possessed by spirits of the executed. The imperial court saw the populace speaking for souls of the dead as mistaken and prohibited it.¹³

Divine revelation (*takusen* 託宣), a deity possessing a person to reveal its name and intentions, is prohibited amongst the populace in Historical Source 8, described as false words (*yōgen*) and mad words (*kyōgen*).¹⁴ Despite the criminalization of divine revelation amongst the populace, many people throughout the country are said to have believed in it. The purpose of divine revelation in the popular context was to explain fortune and misfortune, likely meaning to provide explanations for why disasters occur and how to bring about fortune. For instance, offering remedies for illnesses or ways to avoid potential disasters. The people believed in these revelations as divine words or teachings and tried to avert calamities, but the imperial court prohibited them as false and mad words. Historical Source 2 also holds that the people explaining fortune and misfortune is nonsense.

Divine revelation that affects the state is also prohibited.¹⁵ What the state (*kokka* 国家) refers to here is a complex issue,¹⁶ but according to the interpretation of the *Sōniryō*, it refers to the emperor.¹⁷ The same text’s commentary (*koki* 古記) also defines it as “all the provinces within the great eight islands.”¹⁸ Considering the tense relationship between retired Emperor Heizei 平城 and Emperor Saga 嵯峨 two years prior to Historical Source 8, it can be inferred that this statement was meant to prohibit rumors about the imperial succession.

The prohibition of “false words” (*yōgen*) is a common theme in both Historical Source 6 and Historical Source 7. In the former, Kamitsukeno no Ekunime was

¹³ We can tell that *kari* 仮 in the original means “false” because the *Sōniryō*’s 僧尼令 interpretation states the following: 非_レ真曰_レ仮也。

¹⁴ We can tell that *yōgen* in the original means “false words” because the *Sōniryō*’s interpretation states the following: 過誤為_レ妖言_レ也。Regarding *yōgen*, see Kikuchi, “Haseiki nihon ni okeru ‘yōgen’ no hōsei ni tsuite.”

¹⁵ It is subject to punishment in the *Sōniryō*: 上觀_レ玄象_レ假說_レ災祥_レ。語及_レ国家_レ。妖_レ一惑百姓_レ。

¹⁶ Satō, “Irei toshite no ‘chin’ no sōshutsu.”

¹⁷ 語及_レ国家_レ。不_レ敢指_レ一斥尊号_レ。故託曰_レ国家_レ也。言假說之語。関_レ涉人主_レ也。

¹⁸ 国家謂_レ大八洲之内諸国_レ也。

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exiled to Tosa Province for calling herself Shoten and deceiving people with false words. She likely claimed to be possessed by Shoten and prophesized fortune and misfortune, which people believed to be the words of Shoten. Historical Source 7 holds that prophesies of fortune and misfortune by shamans, folk religious professionals, are *yōgen*, which, as we have seen, was used to describe divine revelation, suggesting that shamans were religious professionals who used revelation and other methods to address various calamities experienced by the populace. Historical Source 5 also reveals that people believed in the magical methods of shamans, which the imperial court prohibited as false worship (*insbi* 淫祠), mysteries (*kai* 恠), spells (*enmi* 厭魅),¹⁹ and baseless (*yōmō* 妖妄).

In Historical Source 3, seventeen shamans in Kyoto were exiled, probably because they claimed to be offering divine revelations of fortune and misfortune, and many people, believing this to be words of deities, came seeking fortune. It is possible that they were exiled because their divine revelations touched on the topic of imperial succession.

Historical Sources 2 through 8 lead to the conclusion that the state prohibited popular beliefs, practices, and rituals characterized by:

1. Claims of divine revelation and prophesies of fortune and misfortune.
2. Inclusion of matters related to the emperor or imperial succession in such prophesies.
3. Large crowds of people.

Although Historical Source 2 might seem to prohibit the worship of the spirits of the dead, it is more appropriate to interpret it as prohibiting rituals and magic based on spirits possessing individuals and speaking. In other words, misguided worship of souls of the dead. It is unthinkable that the likes of ancestor worship was prohibited. Additionally, in Yōrō 養老 2 (718), the obituary of Michi no Kimi Obitona 道君首名 mentions that when he governed Chikugo 筑後 and Higo 肥後 provinces in the late Wadō 和銅 (708–715) years, his achievements brought benefits to the people of both provinces, and, after his death, “peasants worshiped him.”²⁰ This was probably more akin to ancestral shrine worship and differs entirely from rituals in which spirits of the dead speak of fortune and misfortune. Thus, this case of Obitona would not have been prohibited.

Considering the above points, the act of carrying out rituals for spirits of the dead in the popular *goryōe* was not the issue. The problem was bringing in large crowds and the spread of a narrative which held that the *goryōe* resolves resentment-harboring, epidemic-

¹⁹ According to the section on spells (*enmi* 厭魅) in the *Zokutōritsu* 賊盜律 (Penal codes for robbery), curses by living people (*juso* 呪詛)/talismans and spells are used when intending to kill someone out of hatred.

²⁰ *Shoku Nihongi*, the *kinotoi* 乙亥 day of the fourth month of Yōrō 2.

causing spirits of people involved in national incidents.

On the other hand, it is also apparent that the complete elimination of divine revelation by shamans, especially those mentioning the emperor, was not achieved. The following is a summary of an entry from the Enryaku years (782–806):²¹

During the Enryaku years, weapons and armaments, treasures of the Isonokami Jingū 石上神宮, were transferred to the arsenal. Upon the illness of Emperor Kanmu 桓武, it came to be known through the divine revelation of Isonokami Jingū, by a female shaman, that the cause of the illness was the removal of these treasures. The female shaman conveyed the divine revelation while angry (i.e., the angered deity Isonokami possessed her). Eventually, the court returned Isonokami Jingū's treasures.

From the above, it is evident that shamans, popular religious practitioners, were conduits for divine revelation.²²

Moreover, in Historical Source 8, while the court strictly prohibited divine revelation in popular practices as false and mad words, it also said that if the deity's revelation is genuine and brings about miraculous effects, *kokushi* should inspect and report. This indicates an attitude of accepting effective divine revelation.

However, even after the Jōgan Goryōe was conducted, people gathering for *goryōe* continued to be prohibited.²³ This can be understood to mean that there was a consistent regulation against unauthorized large assemblies.

Above, I have pointed out several issues related to the acceptance of the popular *goryōe* as an official ritual and examined how it was institutionally permitted. In ancient times, the imperial court prohibited popular beliefs, practices, and rituals that were held to involve gathering in large numbers, worshiping and praying to the souls of the dead in a misguided manner, preaching nonsense regarding fortune, deception by false words, shamans, and content related to the state. The popular *goryōe* was characterized by large crowds and the belief that spirits of those involved in national incidents are resentful and cause epidemics. Comparing the court's prohibitions with the nature of the popular *goryōe*, I identified several issues that needed to be addressed for the *goryōe* to be accepted as an official ritual. Upon reviewing related historical sources, I found that the

²¹ *Nihon kōki*, the *kanoeinu* 庚戌 day of the second month of Enryaku 24.

²² This entry includes the phrase 令鎮御魂... In light of the context, “making the divine spirit possess” is the most appropriate interpretation. Emperor Kanmu returned the weapons to Isonokami Shrine after having the divine spirit possess a female shaman and finding out the words of the divine revelation. This indicates that the idea of divine spirit pacification had an element of spirit possession. The significance of divine spirit pacification rites should also be reconsidered in light of this. See Kobayashi, “Amanoiwaya denshō to kodai no saishi kōzō ni kansuru kōsatsu.”

²³ *Nihon sandai jitsuroku*, the fourteenth day (*mizunotoi* 癸亥) of the sixth month of Jōgan 7.

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imperial court prohibited prophesizing fortune and misfortune under the guise of divine revelation, touching on matters related to the emperor or imperial succession in these prophecies, and large gatherings of people. Additionally, I showed that while prohibiting these, the imperial court accepted divine revelation and rituals amongst the populace if confirmed to be effective. It was for this reason that the popular *goryōe* could, on an institutional level, be transformed into an official ritual.

The question then arises: what logic did the court use to determine that the *goryōe* was effective? In the next section, I will clarify how the logic that the spirits of the dead cause disasters and can be appeased by rituals arose and developed in ancient times.

3. The Emergence and Development of the Concept of Curses by the Spirits of the Dead

Historical Source 1 indicates that the purpose of the Jōgan Goryōe was disaster management: to stop an epidemic by performing sutra recitations, song and dance, and entertainments for the spirits causing the epidemic.

Now, I will examine how the idea that spirits of the dead cause disasters came about.

Historical Source 9 *Shoku Nihongi*, the second day (*mizunoeinu* 壬戌) of the tenth month of Hōki 6 (775)

前右大臣正二位勳二等吉備朝臣真備薨。(略)十一年。式部少輔從五位下藤原朝臣広嗣。与_二玄昉法師_一有_レ隙。出_レ為_二大宰少貳_一。到_レ任即起_レ兵反。以_レ討_二玄昉及真備_一為_レ名。雖_二兵敗伏_一誅。逆魂未_レ息。勝宝二年左_二筑前守_一。俄遷_二肥前守_一。(略)

Summary

Kibi no Makibi 吉備真備 passed away. In Tenpyō 11 (739), Fujiwara no Hirotsugu 藤原広嗣, due to a rift with Genbō 玄昉, was appointed as the *dazai no shōni* 大宰少貳 (deputy assistant governor of Dazaifu 太宰府) but soon initiated a rebellion, seeking vengeance on Genbō and Makibi. The rebellion failed, and Hirotsugu was executed, but his rebellious soul (*gyakkon* 逆魂) still did not rest. Makibi was demoted to *Chikuzen no kami* 筑前守 in Tenpyō-Shōhō 2(750) and immediately became *Hizen no kami* 肥前守.

Historical Source 9, the obituary of Kibi no Makibi, states that after Fujiwara no Hirotsugu was executed for rebellion, his soul was still rebellious. Makibi's demotion being subsequently mentioned suggests that it was seen as a result of Hirotsugu's rebellious soul. Also, when Genbō died in exile Tenpyō 18 (746), it was rumored to be

²⁴ 世相伝云。為_二藤原広嗣靈_一所_レ害。*Shoku Nihongi*, the *tsubinotoi* 己亥 day of the sixth month of Tenpyō 18.

due to harm caused by the spirit of Fujiwara no Hirotsugu.²⁴

As seen in the case of Fujiwara no Hirotsugu, the idea that spirits of the dead could cause harm existed in the eighth century, but how did such a belief arise in Japan during ancient times?

In the *Zuo zhuan* 左伝, there is a story where the spirit of Bo You 伯有, killed by political enemies in the 30th year of Duke Xiang 襄, causes calamities and terror in the 7th year of Duke Zhao 昭. Therein, Zichan 子産 expresses the following view:

When a person is born, first the *po* 魄 (corporeal soul) forms. After the *po*, the joining of *yang* 陽 energy to the body is called the *hun* 魂 (ethereal soul). When one nourishes the body with food, increasing vitality, the *hun* and *po* become strong, eventually attaining wisdom equal to that of deities. Therefore, if one dies an unusual death, one's *hun* and *po* can attach to others and cast a wicked curse.²⁵

As described above, in ancient China, there was the belief that the corporeal and ethereal souls of a person who died an unusual death could cause harm to others. The idea that Fujiwara no Hirotsugu became a rebellious soul and harmed Genbō was likely influenced by ancient Chinese thought rather than being an idea original to ancient Japan.

However, it is questionable whether the belief that the spirits of the dead cause disasters was well-established after Hirotsugu's death. So, when did this belief begin to develop significantly in Japan?

Table 1 shows the chronology of events leading to Prince Sawara 早良 being posthumously honored as Emperor Sudō.

Table 1. Timeline of Prince Sawara Becoming Emperor Sudō

Enryaku 4	785	Prince Sawara is deposed as crown prince.
Enryaku 9	790	A gravekeeper is appointed for Prince Sawara.
Enryaku 11	792	Divination is performed regarding the illness of Crown Prince Ate, confirming that there is a curse from the spirit of Prince Sawara (caused by the desecration of his tomb). The director of the Shoryōryō is dispatched to Awaji to express apologies.
Enryaku 19	800	Prince Sawara is posthumously honored as Emperor Sudō, and Princess Inoe is restored as empress. The tombs of Prince Sawara and Princess Inoe are officially recognized as imperial mausoleums. <i>Onmyōji</i> 陰陽師 and Buddhist priests perform pacification rituals at Emperor Sudō's mausoleum.
Enryaku 24	805	The spirit of Emperor Sudō is described in writing as a "resentful spirit."

²⁵ *Chūgoku koten bungaku taikei*, p. 357.

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Prince Sawara, a maternal half-brother of Emperor Kanmu, became crown prince upon Kanmu's ascension. After the assassination of Fujiwara no Tanetsugu 藤原種継, he was confined to Otokunidera 乙訓寺 on the grounds that there had been a plot, led by Ōtomo no Yakamochi 大伴家持 and others, to make him the ruler. After fasting for more than ten days while awaiting exile to Awaji 淡路, it is said he then died in transit. His remains were sent to Awaji for burial.²⁶

After Prince Sawara's death, the illness of Crown Prince Ate 安殿 was attributed to his curse, and a ritual of appeasement was performed. The cause of the curse was said to be the desecrated state of Prince Sawara's grave in Awaji Province. At this time, Prince Sawara had not yet been posthumously named Emperor Sudō, nor was his spirit considered resentful. The cause of the curse was solely attributed to the desecration of the grave. We should note, though, that people clearly thought that a spirit of the deceased had cast a curse.

In the eighth century, imperial tomb rituals usually involved, for example, offerings from other countries, and there were no instances of imperial tomb curses. Although in Tenpyō-Shōhō 7 (755) prayers were offered at the tombs of Tenji 天智, Tenmu 天武, Jitō 持統, Monmu 文武, Kusakabe 草壁, Genmei 元明, Genshō 元正, and Fujiwara no Fuhito 藤原不比等,²⁷ the imperial tomb rituals of the time, including the annual offerings in the twelfth month (*nosakihei* 荷前幣), appear to have not been heavily focused on prayers. The logic of prayers and curses was mainly used in deity worship, suggesting that the idea of praying to spirits of the dead and such spirits causing disasters was not yet established in the eighth century.

Considering that there had been hardly any earlier instances of curses cast by spirits of the dead, the spirit of Prince Sawara casting a curse, while attributed to the desecration of his tomb, was likely perceived as an exceptional case.

The background to Prince Sawara's spirit being officially seen as a curse-casting resentful spirit likely has much to do with Emperor Kanmu.²⁸ He was anxious (about the death and illness of close relatives, and his own sickness) and held the belief that Sawara's spirit harbored resentment. Then, perhaps learned individuals, citing various texts including the *Zuo zhuan*, explained the relationship between resentful spirits and curses, and Kanmu accepted this reasoning. Alternatively, given his background as the imperial court's head of education (a position entitled *daigaku no kami* 大学頭),²⁹ he himself might

²⁶ Nishimoto, *Sawara shinnō*.

²⁷ *Shoku Nihongi*, the *hinoeuma* 丙午 day of the tenth month of Tenpyō-Shōhō 7.

²⁸ Recent research on rites during the reign of Emperor Kanmu includes Kure, "Kanmu chō no saishi to rekishi"; Kure, "Kanmu Tennō chō no jingi seisaku"; Sano, "Kanmu Tennō to girei, saishi"

²⁹ *Shoku Nihongi*, the *hinotomi* 丁巳 day of the eighth month of Hōki 1.

have argued for the connection between resentful spirits and curses.

Furthermore, it is not difficult to imagine that various speculations circulated both in the court and among the public regarding the Prince Sawara incident even at the time. After Prince Sawara was deposed and Emperor Kanmu's son, Prince Ate, became crown prince, suspicions likely arose that Prince Sawara had died due to a wrongful accusation. Such suspicions would have made the explanation that Prince Sawara's resentful spirit is casting a curse on Prince Ate convincing to people. Additionally, the perception that Prince Sawara, implicated in an incident and killed for his alleged crime, cast a curse on Prince Ate and Emperor Kanmu due to resentment harbored in his soul probably spread among the court and the people, eventually leading to Prince Sawara becoming an object of *goryō* beliefs and practices.³⁰

Thus, during Emperor Kanmu's reign, the idea that resentful spirits could cast curses became officially acknowledged, leading to an increase in reported imperial tomb curses.

Historical Source 10 *Nihon kiriyaku*, the third day (*hinotobitsuji* 丁未) of the seventh month of Daidō 4 (809)

遣使於吉野山陵。掃一除陵内。并読経。以亢旱累旬。山陵為祟。

Summary

An envoy was sent to the tomb of Princess Inoe 井上 for cleaning and sutra recitation, as the prolonged severe drought was believed to be caused by the tomb's curse.

Historical Source 11 *Ruiju kokushi* 類聚国史, the eighteenth day (*hinoetatsu* 丙辰) of the seventh month of Kōnin 弘仁 1 (810)

遣右大弁從四位上藤原朝臣藤繼・陰陽頭從五位上安倍朝臣真勝等。鎮一祭高島陵。以聖体不予。山陵為祟也。

Summary

Fujiwara no Fujitsugu 藤原藤繼 and Abe no Makatsu 安倍真勝 were dispatched to perform a pacification ritual at the tomb of Fujiwara no Otomuro 藤原乙牟漏.

This was because Emperor Saga's illness is due to the curse of the tomb.

³⁰ The selection of six spirits for the Jōgan Goryōe raises the question of whether it was the court or the people who decided on them. For example, it is unclear why Fujiwara no Nakanari, believed to be the "inspection official," would be considered a spirit for this *goryōe* by the imperial court, as he wasn't a resentful soul wrongfully accused. Thus, it is plausible that the populace chose Nakanari, albeit the reasons unknown. However, given the often uncertain nature of popular rumors throughout history, this assumption seems reasonable. Also, in *Chōkō konkōmyōkyō eshiki* 長講金光明經會式 (A program for a long recitation of the Sutra of Golden Light) and *Chōkō ninnōhannyakyo eshiki* 長講仁王般若經會式 (A program for a long recitation of the Benevolent King Sutra), both by Saichō 最澄, Nakanari and Fujiwara no Kusuko are held to be spirits, so perhaps this logic spread among the people. Regardless, there is no clear reason why the court would have chosen Nakanari, and the fact that he is referred to as an inspection official, not by name, suggests that the court may not have decided upon him after deliberations but, rather, added someone who was already part of the populace's *goryōe*.

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Historical Source 12 *Ruiju kokushi*, the twenty-eighth day (*mizunoeinu*) of the sixth month of Kōnin 7 (816)

神祇官言。伐高阜山陵樹。崇見龜兆者。勅。朕情所敬。唯在山陵。而有司不勤督察。致斯咎徵。求之國典。其刑非輕。自今以後。嚴加禁斷。

Summary

Jingikan: “A curse from cutting down trees at the tomb of Fujiwara no Otomuro has appeared in tortoise shell divination.”

Imperial decree: “Such an inauspicious prognostication has appeared due to the tomb officials not supervising. Penalties for such negligence shall not be light. Henceforth, enforce strict prohibition against negligence in supervision.”

Historical Source 13 *Ruiju kokushi*, the ninth day (*kinoeinu* 甲戌) of the twelfth month of Tenchō 8 (831)

相樂山陵令掃清誦經。為崇也。

Summary

Cleaning and sutra recitation were performed at the tomb of Fujiwara no Momokawa 藤原百川 due to a curse.

Princess Inoe, who had been Emperor Kōnin’s empress, was deposed as such due to accusations of witchcraft (*fuko* 巫蠱) in Hōki 3 (772) and passed away in Hōki 6 (775).³¹ At this time, her child, Prince Osabe 他戸, was also removed from his position as crown prince. It is thought that the machinations surrounding the establishment of Prince Yamanobe 山部 (Emperor Kanmu) as emperor played a role in the mother and child’s downfall.³²

Since Princess Inoe’s honor was restored in the same year as Prince Sawara, she, too, was probably seen as a resentful spirit. Historical Source 10 likely indicates that the perception of a curse having been cast led to cleaning and sutra recitation at her tomb.³³

It is crucial to note that in Historical Source 10 the curse attributed to Princess Inoe’s resentful spirit was not confined to specific individuals or their associates but

³¹ *Shoku Nihongi*, the *mizunotobitsuji* 癸未 day of the third month of Hōki 3, the *kanototori* 辛酉 day of the tenth month of Hōki 4, the *tsuchinotoushi* 己丑 day of the fourth month of Hōki 6.

³² Murao, “Kanmu Tennō”; Inoue, “Kanmu Tennō.”

³³ In Kōnin 1 (810), Princess Inoe and Fujiwara no Yoshiko, along with Emperor Sudō, underwent ordination (*Ruiju kokushi*, the *kinotoushi* 乙丑 day of the seventh month of Kōnin 1). As mentioned in the obituary of Abe no Anio 安倍兄雄, during Emperor Heizei’s reign, Prince Iyo was already seen as having been unjustly deposed (伊予親王無罪而廢、当上盛怒、群臣莫敢諫者; *Nihon kōki*, the *hinotou* 丁卯 day of the tenth month of Daidō 3). Yoshiko was also posthumously conferred junior second rank (*junii* 從二位) in Jōwa 6 (839) because she had cast a curse (*Shoku Nihon kōki*, the *kinotou* 乙卯 day of the tenth month of Jōwa 6). It appears that both were seen as resentful spirits.

believed to impact a wide and unspecified range of people. This association of the curse with widespread disaster rather than specific individuals probably necessitated awareness of the curse even among those not directly involved, broadening the development of belief in and rituals for resentful spirits across the imperial court and the people.

Moreover, instances arose where non-resentful spirits of the dead were believed to cause curses. The spirits held responsible for casting curses in Historical Sources 11, 12, and 13 were those of Fujiwara no Otomuro and Fujiwara no Momokawa. Otomuro was Emperor Kanmu's empress and the mother of both Emperor Heizei and Emperor Saga.³⁴ Momokawa, said to be a highly loyal and trusted figure, played a crucial role in Emperor Kanmu's ascent to the throne.³⁵ Momokawa's daughter, Tabiko 旅子, was the mother of Emperor Junna 淳和.³⁶ Despite lacking elements typically associated with becoming resentful spirits, Otomuro and Momokawa were believed to have cast curses due to the desecration of their tombs.

As we have seen, the resentful spirits of Prince Sawara and Prince Inoe appear to have triggered the development of the idea that spirits of the dead produce curses. This idea was not based on Japan's traditional worldview, as the following historical document shows.

Historical Source 14 *Shoku Nihon kōki*, the fifth day (*kinototori* 乙酉) of the eighth month of Jōwa 11 (844)

文章博士從五位上春澄宿祢善繩。大內記從五位下菅原朝臣是善等。被大納言正三位藤原朝臣良房宣稱。①先帝遺誡曰。世間之事。每有物恠。寄崇先靈。是甚無謂也者。②今隨有物恠。令下所司卜筮。先靈之崇明于卦兆。③臣等擬信。則恠遺誡之旨。不用則忍當代之咎。進退惟谷。未可知何從。若遺誡後有可改。臣子商量。改之耶以否。由是略引古典証拋之文曰。昔周之王季。既葬後有求而成變。文王尋情奉之也。先靈之崇不可謂母。又有幽明異道。心事相違者。如北齊富豪梁氏是也。臨終遺言。以平生所愛奴為殉。家人從之。奴蘇言。忽至官府。見其亡主。々曰。我謂亡人得使奴婢。故遺言喚汝。今不相關。當白官放汝。々謂家人。為我修福云々。又春秋左氏傳。魏武子有嬖妾。無子。武子疾。命其子顛曰。必嫁。病困則更曰。必以為殉。魏顛扞之。從其治也。謂病未至困也。遂得老夫結草之報。尚書曰。女則有大疑。謀及卿士。謀及卜筮。白虎通曰。定天下之吉凶。成天下之亶々。莫善於蓍龜。劉梁弁和同論曰。夫事有違而得道。有順而失道。是以君子之於事也。無適無莫。必考之以義。由此言之。

³⁴ *Shoku Nihongi*, the *kinoeuma* 甲午 day of the intercalary third month of Enryaku 9.

³⁵ *Shoku Nihongi*, the *hinoene* 丙子 day of the seventh month of Hōki 10.

³⁶ *Shoku Nihongi*, the *kanotoi* 辛亥 day of the fifth month of Enryaku 7.

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卜筮所告。不可不信。君父之命。量宜取捨。然則可改改之。復何疑也。朝議從之。

(Numbers added by author)

Summary

Fujiwara no Yoshifusa 藤原良房 consulted Harusumi no Yoshitada 春澄善繩 and Sugawara no Koreyoshi 菅原是善.

- (1) The former emperor (Emperor Saga) left teachings for posterity: “Whenever *mononoke* 物の怪 (enigmatic spiritual entities) are reported, people often hold that they are the curses of ancestral spirits, which is entirely baseless.”
- (2) Currently, there are *mononoke*, and I had the responsible officials (Jingikan and Onmyōryō 陰陽寮 [Bureau of divination]) perform divination, which has clearly indicated a curse from an ancestral spirit.
- (3) Believing the divination results would mean going against the former emperor’s teachings for posterity, and not believing them would mean enduring (curse-induced) calamities. Caught between a rock and a hard place, it is unclear which path to follow. After teachings for posterity, if there is something that should be changed, is it okay to do so?

Harusumi no Yoshitada and Sugawara no Koreyoshi’s Proposal

(Citing various classics) Ancestral spirits’ curses exist. You have to believe what the divination tells you. The words of a sovereign should be interpreted and weighed, and changes should be made if necessary.

The imperial court followed the suggestions of Harusumi no Yoshitada and Sugawara no Koreyoshi (i.e., followed the divination results rather than Emperor Saga’s views).

Historical Source 14 includes Fujiwara no Yoshifusa’s query whether to follow the former emperor’s instructions or the divination results and then Harusumi no Yoshitada and Sugawara no Koreyoshi’s response.

Emperor Saga had criticized as baseless the practice of attributing every *mononoke* to a curse by ancestral spirits.³⁷ However, the Jingikan and Onmyōryō still were performing divinations whenever there is a *mononoke* and report it as a forewarning of a curse from

³⁷ 世間之事。每有物怪。寄崇先靈。是甚無謂也者。

³⁸ (2) above: 今隨有物怪。令下所司卜筮。先靈之崇明于卦兆。

an ancestral spirit.³⁸

In essence, Emperor Saga had expressed skepticism toward the situation of his time in which the Jingikan and Onmyōryō report curses from spirits of the dead based on divinations. His will following his death in Jōwa 9 (843) states “do not believe divinations,”³⁹ reflecting a strong distrust in divination as a deviation from a traditional worldview.

On the other hand, Emperor Saga’s will also states that if his wishes were not followed, his soul (spirit) would grieve in the afterlife and become a vengeful soul for a long time.⁴⁰ This can be interpreted as Emperor Saga explaining the mechanism of becoming a resentful spirit in his own logic.

While affirming the existence of resentful spirits, Emperor Saga rejected that curses are cast by non-resentful ones.

Additionally, in this will, Emperor Saga expressed a desire for a simple funeral, a wish shared by Emperor Junna 淳和, who rejected the traditional burial with offerings⁴¹ and preferred scattering of ashes.⁴² At that time, Emperor Junna said that when a person dies, their spirit returns to heaven, leaving empty tombs that attract other spirits, who eventually cast curses. According to this view, a curse is not cast by the spirit of the dead person themselves but by spirits that come from elsewhere.⁴³

Emperor Saga explained the mechanism by which the deceased becomes a resentful soul, while Emperor Junna believed curses were caused by spirits from elsewhere, but both emperors shared the view that spirits of the dead do not cast curses.

Revisiting Historical Source 14, Fujiwara no Yoshifusa wondered whether to follow Emperor Saga’s view (that it is baseless to believe that ancestral spirits cause curses) or the divination results (indicating that *mononoke* are forewarnings of curses from ancestral spirits). Faced with this dilemma, Yoshifusa consulted Harusumi no Yoshitada and Sugawara no Koreyoshi. Citing various texts, they concluded that ancestral spirits’ curses exist⁴⁴ and that divination results must be believed.⁴⁵ The court adopted their recommendation.

It is notable that due to the learned individuals Harusumi no Yoshitada and Sugawara no Koreyoshi, the belief that spirits of the dead can cause curses was finally officially recognized. If curses caused by spirits of the dead had been part of Japan’s traditional

³⁹ *Shoku Nihon kōki*, the *hinotobitsuji* day of the seventh month of Jōwa 9.

⁴⁰ 後世之論者若不從此。是戮一屍地下。死而重傷。魂而有靈。則冤悲冥途。長為怨鬼。忠臣孝子。善述君父之志。不宜違我情而已。

⁴¹ 歲竟分綵帛。号曰荷前。論之幽明。有煩無益。並須停狀。

⁴² 人歿精魂歸天。而空存冢墓。鬼物憑焉。終乃為祟。長貽後累。今宜碎骨為粉。散之山中。

⁴³ *Shoku Nihon kōki*, the *kanotomi* day of the fifth month of Jōwa 7.

⁴⁴ 先靈之崇不可謂母。

⁴⁵ 卜筮所告。不可不信。

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worldview, Japanese historical texts would have been referenced in their argument, and there likely wouldn't have been a debate in the first place.⁴⁶

The recognition of Prince Sawara's resentful spirit during Emperor Kanmu's reign became a turning point, leading to the expansion of the idea that spirits of the dead cast widespread curses (cause disasters). However, this was not a traditional notion. The debate around Emperor Saga's views led to the official acknowledgment that curses from spirits of the dead can cause disasters. Consequently, rituals for resentful spirits became recognized as effective measures for addressing disasters, gaining wide acceptance across the court and the people.

Next, I will examine the relationship between resentful spirits' curses/disasters and the rituals, events, and rites that addressed them, as well as consider the intellectual background behind the acceptance of the populace's *goryōe* as the Jōgan Goryōe.

4. *The Relationship Between the Goryōe and Addressing Epidemics*

The *goryōe* ritual assumes that epidemics are caused by spirits and attempts to address the former with Buddhist rituals, singing, dancing, and other entertainments for the latter.

The practice of reciting sutras in the populace's *goryōe* likely draws inspiration from the measures taken for Emperor Sudō, such as "cursory sutra recitation (*tendoku* 転読) and repenting,"⁴⁷ "temple building,"⁴⁸ "sutra recitation,"⁴⁹ "sutra copying,"⁵⁰ and "ordination."⁵¹ The fact that Eitatsu expounded the *Konkōmyōkyō* and the *Hannya shingyō* during the Jōgan Goryōe can be seen as following the precedent of performing Buddhist rituals for resentful spirits.

The various activities in the populace's *goryōe*⁵² appear to have been aimed at entertaining the spirits. Thus, the popular *goryōe*, perceiving epidemics to be caused by the curses of spirits, aimed to appease the spirits through entertainment, hoping to mitigate curses and the resulting epidemics.

The imperial court's response to resentful spirits, apart from Buddhist rituals and

⁴⁶ Yamashita offers the following interpretation: Emperor Saga's criticism extended to not only imperial tomb curses but also deities' curses (Yamashita, "Saigai, kaii to tennō.") However, Emperor Saga was specifically rejecting the curses of "ancestral spirits" (*senrei* 先靈). He objected to divination results claiming that spirits of the dead cause curses, saying they were baseless. It appears that he did not deny the traditional system of divine curses.

⁴⁷ *Ruiju kokushi*, the *kinotomi* 乙巳 day of the fifth month of Enryaku 16.

⁴⁸ *Nihon kōki*, the *kinoesaru* 甲申 day of the first month of Enryaku 24.

⁴⁹ *Nihon kōki*, the *binoeuma* day of the second month of Enryaku 24, the *kanotomi* day of the third month of Daidō 1.

⁵⁰ *Nihon kōki*, the *kanoesaru* 庚申 day of the tenth month of Enryaku 24; *Ruiju kokushi*, the *hinotou* day of the seventh month of Kōnin 1.

⁵¹ *Ruiju kokushi*, the *kinotoushi* day of the seventh month of Kōnin 1.

⁵² 歌且舞。令下童貫之子觀粧馳射。膂力之士袒裊相撲。騎射呈芸。走馬爭勝。但優嫚戲。通相誇競上。

offerings (*hōhei* 奉幣), included conferring posthumous ranks and titles as well as restoring titles. This was to eliminate resentment and mitigate curses by removing the causes of resentment and anger through the restoration of honor.⁵³

A common theme in both the imperial court and the people's response to resentful spirits is the belief that the resentment and anger of spirits of the dead lead to curses (disasters) and that addressing this resentment and anger can also calm epidemics. Comparing the court's rituals with the popular *goryōe*, the court's approach is more fundamental, addressing the root causes of such emotions. On the other hand, the popular *goryōe*, aiming to entertain or appease, is a more temporary fix. Being responsible for the appearance of resentful spirits in the first place, the court could implement fundamental solutions like restoring honor. However, as the collateral victims of curses caused by spirits, the people could only adopt temporary measures. Also, the nature of the various *goryōe* events is further evidence of its status as a ritual that arose from the populace.

The imperial court appears to have then also adopted the approach of temporarily alleviating anger and decided to conduct the Jōgan Goryōe based on this reasoning.

Lastly, what led to the idea that spirits are responsible for curses and disasters and that addressing their anger can address these? This notion appears to be structured similarly to deity rites. The below figure on the structure of the *goryō* belief and practices and that of deity beliefs and practice shows common structural elements of both.⁵⁴ Both deities and spirits are perceived as causing curses and disasters, and deity rites and the *goryōe* have the common purpose of resolving or appeasing the anger or resentment causing the curses, thereby eliminating the curses and mitigating disasters.

Furthermore, from the late eighth century, the understanding emerged that leaving imperial tombs in a dirtied state can easily lead to curses from spirits of the dead. This concept is similar to the belief that desecrating Shinto shrines can lead to curses from deities.

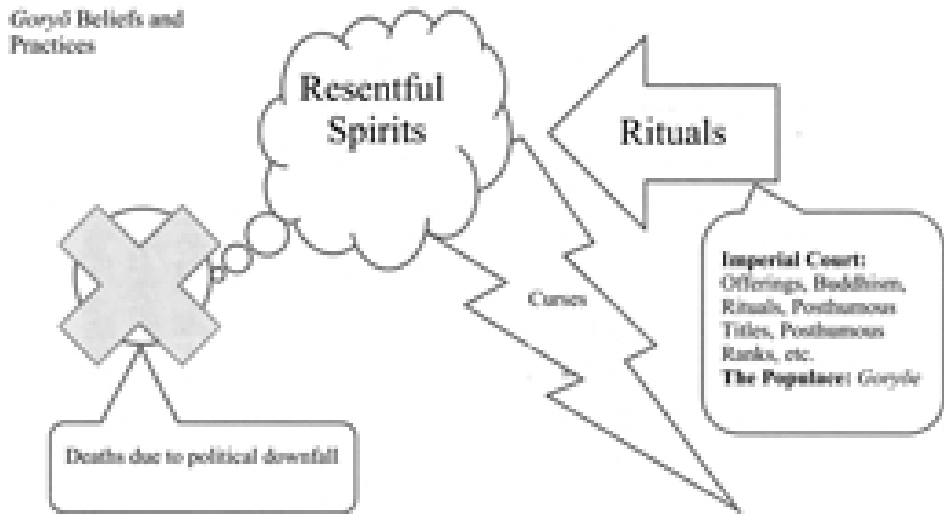
Thus, it can be said that *goryō* beliefs and practices were influenced by the structure of deity rites.⁵⁵

⁵³ Prince Iyo and Fujiwara no Yoshiko were restored to their original ranks in Kōnin 14 based on the Kōnin 10 (819) order of Emperor Saga (故三品中務卿伊予親王・故從三位夫人藤原朝臣吉子; *Nihon kiryaku*, the *tsuchinotoi* day of the third month of Kōnin 10, the *hinotoushi* 丁丑 day of the seventh month of Kōnin 14).

Tachibana no Hayanari, exiled during the Jōwa Incident, was posthumously conferred junior fifth rank lower grade (*shōgoinoge* 正五位下) in Kashō 嘉祥 3 (850) and allowed to be buried his hometown. In Ninju 仁寿 3 (853), he was further conferred junior fourth rank lower grade (*ju shi-i no ge* 從四位下 (*Nihon montoku tennō jitsuroku* 日本文德天皇實錄, the *mizunoetatsu* 壬辰 day of the fifth month of Kashō 3, the *kinoetora* day of the fifth month of Ninju 3).

⁵⁴ Kobayashi, *Ritsuryō kokka no saishi to sai*.

⁵⁵ Nishimoto suggests, "Since it was thought that resentful spirits cause disasters and epidemics because they are suffering, unable to escape karmic destiny, attempts were made to stop disasters and epidemics by bringing about their salvation: cursory recitation (*tendoku*) of the *Hannyakyo* and preaching the leaving behind of attachments



Addressing curse-induced disasters by eliminating or alleviating the grudges of resentful spirits.

Deity Beliefs and Practices



Addressing curse-induced disasters by eliminating the causes of curses (anger, demands) with rites for deities.

Figure. Beliefs and Practices for *Goryō* and Deities: Structures

Conclusion

This paper has examined the process and background by which the idea that spirits of the dead cast curses became established in the ancient imperial court, using the Jōgan Goryōe as a case study.

During the Jōgan years, the court adopted the *goryōe*, originally a popular event, and conducted the Shinsen'en Goryōe. Despite the court's policy of restricting popular beliefs, practices, and rituals since the eighth century, it accepted the *goryōe*. The background of this was fourfold:

1. The court was willing to accept popular beliefs, practices, and rituals if deemed effective.
2. The recognition of Emperor Sudō as a resentful spirit marked the beginning of rituals for resentful spirits being performed as a way to mitigate disasters. Initially, curses of resentful spirits during Emperor Kanmu's reign were directed toward specific targets or their associates. Later, instances where non-resentful spirits of the dead cast widespread curses became frequent. Although this was not a traditional way of seeing the world, the debate around the late Emperor Saga's views led to official acknowledgment that curses from spirits of the dead cause disasters, and then rituals to mitigate these curses further developed.
3. Both the court's rituals for resentful spirits and the popular *goryōe* shared the common belief that curses from resentful spirits cause disasters and that appeasing or resolving their resentment can mitigate the curses and thereby do the same for the associated disasters.
4. This (3) was an application of the ritual structure used in deity beliefs and practices, making it ideologically easier for the court to accept.

These above factors led the court to adopt the popular *goryōe* and decide to conduct the Shin'en Goryōe.

The idea of curses caused by resentful spirits, although introduced from the Chinese continent, only became established in ancient Japan with the resentful spirit of Prince Sawara during Emperor Kanmu's reign. Subsequently, following the discussion around Emperor Saga's views, rituals for resentful spirits evolved into a national ritual method for disaster management. Meanwhile, amongst the people, influenced by the concept of resentful spirits, the *goryōe* independently developed and expanded throughout Kyoto,

and attainment of buddhahood" (Nishimoto, "Shinsen'en goryōe to seitai goji"). This also aligns with the disaster countermeasure configuration of removing suffering to address suffering-induced curses/disasters.

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the Kinai region, and various other provinces. While the populace's *goryōe* was subject to various restrictions by the imperial court, the court recognized its effectiveness and decided to conduct the Jōgan Goryōe.

It should be noted that the reason the Shin'en Goryōe was not continued perhaps can be inferred from Historical Source 1.⁵⁶ Likely, the epidemic it mentions had somewhat subsided by the time the court decided to conduct the Shin'en Goryōe, turning the event into more of a celebratory ceremony. The Shin'en Goryōe, being an exceptional and large-scale event that allowed the people of Kyoto to freely enter an imperial pleasure garden, was probably not continued as it was judged difficult to conduct promptly as a ritual for disaster management.⁵⁷

This paper did not fully discuss the development of rituals for non-resentful spirits' curses, and this topic will be addressed in a separate paper.

(Translated by Dylan L. Toda)

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⁵⁶ 今茲春初咳逆成_レ疫。百姓多斃。朝廷為祈。至_レ是乃修_レ此会_一。以賽_レ宿禱_一也。

⁵⁷ According to the shrine history of Gionsha 祇園社, in Jōgan 11 (869), sixty-six spears were made and a portable shrine sent to Shinsen'en. The development of the *goryōe* is a topic for future research.

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