RENEWING THE WORLD: THE RISE OF YONAOSHI GODS IN JAPAN

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Abstract

This dissertation examines a new category of gods that emerged in Tokugawa Japan (1603–1867), centering on the concept of “world renewal” (yonaoshi). Starting in the late eighteenth century, a number of deified humans and supernatural entities came to be worshipped as “gods of world renewal,” invested with special religious authority to rectify various social evils. Some examples of these “yonaoshi gods” included a samurai who sacrificed his life in order to kill a corrupt ruler; disgruntled peasants who demanded that the government repeal unfair taxation; and a giant catfish believed to live beneath the Japanese archipelago and to cause earthquakes to punish the hoarding rich. The discourse of yonaoshi also remained relevant in modern Japan. In the Meiji period (1868–1912), the new religion Ōmotokyō reinterpreted yonaoshi to mean an apocalyptic world transformation and the establishment of a paradise on earth presided over by a messianic deity. The popularity of yonaoshi gods since the late Tokugawa period reflected a heightened concern with salvation in the present world. Rather than envisioning a better rebirth or life in a postmortem paradise, many sought immediate deliverance from suffering here and now. The “this-worldly” turn of Tokugawa religion has continued to define Japanese religion in the modern and contemporary periods.

Yonaoshi gods have received only cursory academic attention thus far, partly because the emergence of yonaoshi gods is impossible to grasp through the traditional modality of research focused on sectarian movements. To counter this tendency, this study utilizes a variety of documents that are not explicitly “religious” in nature, such as government records, popular media materials, and personal memoirs. Furthermore, this study challenges the scholarly convention of identifying yonaoshi as a millenarian concept without considering the context. An analysis of yonaoshi gods reveals that yonaoshi during the Tokugawa period referred to
rectifications of specific economic conditions that endangered the lives of a particular community, such as the high price of goods, harsh tax obligations, and the gap between the rich and the poor. Only in the Meiji period did a fully millenarian understanding of yonaoshi emerge, most notably in Ōmotokyō’s eschatological doctrine.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the fourth year of Tenmei (1784), one Sano Masakoto佐野政言, a low-ranking guard serving the Tokugawa Bakufu (1603–1867) or shogunate, assassinated Junior Elder Tanuma Okitomo田沼意知. The news of this incident spread quickly through the city of Edo (today’s Tokyo), causing many to speculate as to why Masakoto killed Okitomo. Some said Masakoto did so out of a desire for justice, to end the corruption of the Tanuma family, who had incurred deep resentment among the people of Edo. Nonetheless, the Bakufu ordered Masakoto to commit seppuku (ritual suicide through disembowelment) for his crime. Just after his death, the price of rice in Edo, which had skyrocketed in previous years, dropped sharply all of a sudden. Edo residents connected this to Masakoto’s murder of Okitomo and sacrifice of his life. Soon, waves of people started to pay tribute to Masakoto’s grave at the Tokuhonji Temple徳本寺 in Asakusa and venerate him as a “Great August Deity of World Renewal” (yonaoshi daimyōjin世直し大明神).¹

Masakoto’s apotheosis marks the emergence of deities, deified humans, and other superhuman entities invested with the power to realize “world renewal” (yonaoshi世直し). I argue that these “yonaoshi gods” (yonaoshigami世直し神) represented a new category of divinities that became prevalent in Japanese society during the period between the late eighteenth through early twentieth centuries, a pivotal moment in Japanese history characterized by the gradual collapse of the Tokugawa regime and the birth of Japan as a modern nation-state in the Meiji period (1868–1912). The popularity of yonaoshi gods, I also argue, reflected a heightened concern during this period with salvation in the present world. Rather than envisioning a better

¹ Masakoto’s attack on Okitomo and his subsequent apotheosis are discussed in detail in Chapter 2.
rebirth or life in a postmortem paradise, many sought immediate deliverance from suffering here and now. More precisely, yonaoshi gods in the late Tokugawa and early Meiji years served as savior deities who rescued a particular community of people from poverty by redressing specific problems that caused the impoverished state, such as the high price of goods, harsh tax obligations, and the gap between the rich and the poor. A variety of entities were designated as yonaoshi gods, such as disgruntled peasants who demanded that their local governments repeal unfair taxation; a frugal bureaucrat who cut down administrative spending in order to reduce the financial burden of his constituents; and an earthquake-causing catfish believed to resolve social inequality by destroying the wealth of the hoarding rich. In the mid-Meiji period, the new religion Ōmotokyō 大本教 reinterpreted yonaoshi to mean a cataclysmic transformation of the world and the imminent establishment of a paradise on earth presided over by a messianic deity. As these examples show, individual yonaoshi gods appeared in differing contexts and were not directly linked to one another. Moreover, the concept of yonaoshi itself took on different meanings over time. Yet, the emergence of superhuman agents endowed with a mission to “renew the world” constituted a recurring and pervasive pattern in Japanese society starting in the late eighteenth century.

Although the theme of yonaoshi has occupied a central place in the historiography of nineteenth-century Japan, no previous study has focused on yonaoshi gods. Despite their widespread presence especially in the late Tokugawa period, yonaoshi gods have received only cursory academic attention thus far, partly because scholarship has tended to focus on sectarian traditions and the emergence of yonaoshi gods is impossible to grasp through examination of sectarian movements alone. As in the case of Masakoto above, yonaoshi gods emerged spontaneously without the supervision of religious professionals. In order to examine the rise of
these deities outside the purview of formal religious institutions, it is necessary to overcome the perennial tendency in Religious Studies to give preference to research on organized religions, their representatives, and their texts. To this end, this study utilizes a variety of documents that are not explicitly “religious” in nature, such as government records, popular media materials, personal letters, diaries, and memoirs. Furthermore, because yonaoshi gods appeared in various regions across the Japanese archipelago, this study makes extensive use of local historical records in order to contextualize yonaoshi gods within specific communities.

In addition to introducing a new perspective on yonaoshi by focusing on yonaoshi gods, this study also brings a new methodological insight to the topic of yonaoshi by making a clear distinction between yonaoshi as a historiographical category employed by scholars and yonaoshi as a native concept articulated by historical actors themselves. As discussed in more detail below, scholars have come to use the expression yonaoshi as their own analytical category to refer to a number of popular movements calling for social and political reform in the late Tokugawa and early Meiji periods. This technical usage of the term yonaoshi, however, differs from the native concept of yonaoshi. This study of yonaoshi gods takes seriously the historicity of native concept of yonaoshi and will focus explicitly on cases in which historical actors themselves used the discourse of yonaoshi in venerating certain entities as their savior gods. This new approach calls into question received understandings of yonaoshi, in particular the tendency to identify yonaoshi with millenarianism without considering the context. Based on my analysis of yonaoshi gods, I argue that the concept of yonaoshi during the Tokugawa period did not signify a millenarian transformation of the world. Rather it signified a restoration of the proper state of the world through rectification of unfavorable economic conditions afflicting particular communities. The concept of yonaoshi took on millenarian association only in the Meiji period,
most notably in Ōmotokyō’s eschatological doctrine. *Yonaoshi* as a historical concept was never static. This study will not only highlight the rise of *yonaoshi* gods as a widespread development in Japanese religion between the late 1700s and the early 1900s but also offer a perspective from which to reflect critically upon the significance of the concept of *yonaoshi* in Japanese history.

**What Is *Yonaoshi*? Limitations of Prior Scholarship**

The word *yonaoshi* contains the noun *yo*, which means a world, a society, an era, a generation, or the duration of someone’s life, among other possibilities (Morohashi 1984, 1:268). The word *naoshi*, the nominalized form of the verb *naosu*, means to fix, correct, rectify, straighten, flatten, restore, heal, or start anew (ibid. 8:161). The combination of these two elements produces a number of possible meanings and connotations not containable in a single English phrase. Scholars have translated *yonaoshi* mostly as “world renewal,” “world rectification,” and “world mending.”

Several variations of the term *yonaoshi* also exist. The expression *yonaori*, the nominalized form of the intransitive verb *naoru*, which may imply that the world renews itself. *Yo no tatenaoishi*, the reconstruction of the world or “the restoration of the world,” depending on the context. Although slightly different in connotation, these variations nonetheless retain the basic linguistic and semantic structure as the expression *yonaoshi*.

The concept of *yonaoshi* has a long history, dating back at least to the mid-seventeenth century. In the late eighteenth century, historical actors began to use the language of *yonaoshi* to describe a variety of social phenomena, as discussed in more detail below. Scholars’ use of the expression *yonaoshi* today, however, differs from this “emic” use of *yonaoshi*. Scholars of

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2 This study will adopt “world renewal” as the general translation but will also offer more precise translations whenever appropriate.
Japanese religion and history typically use the expression *yonaoshi* as an interpretive historiographical category through which to analyze a variety of late Tokugawa and early Meiji movements, such as peasant uprisings, other related forms of popular disturbance, and charismatic new religions. Historians’ use of the category of *yonaoshi* hinges upon the Marxist concept of class struggle. Although technical details vary slightly, historians designate many late Tokugawa and early Meiji peasant uprisings as *yonaoshi*, by which they mean examples of resistance to oppression. The category of “*yonaoshi* uprising” (*yonaoshi ikki* 世直し一揆) generally refers to uprisings in which impoverished peasants rise up against wealthy peasants, village officials, and the local government and express their displeasure by destroying the property of the well-to-do.³ Scholars argue that this form of uprising called for a more egalitarian society, aimed at redressing social inequality, and became widespread during the transitional period from Bakufu rule to modern state in the mid-nineteenth century. Sasaki Junnosuke proposed the term “*yonaoshi* condition” (*yonaoshi jōkyō* 世直し状況) to characterize the ending phase of the Tokugawa period as a state of “peasant war” (*nōmin sensō* 農民戦争) and as a kind of “revolutionary situation” (*kakumeiteki jōsei* 革命的情勢) during which the feudal Tokugawa system gradually disintegrated.⁴

Scholars with more direct interest in religion such as Yasumaru Yoshio and Hirota Masaki developed the notion of “*yonaoshi* mindset” (*yonaoshi kannen* 世直し観念) to designate the populace’s presumed inner yearning for liberation (1966, 1). Miyata Noboru similarly defined *yonaoshi* mindset as people’s desire to transform the present hopeless world into a new

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³ Horie Hideichi’s work played an important role in outlining the category of *yonaoshi* uprising vis-à-vis other forms of uprising (1959). For discussions of technical differences in applications of *yonaoshi* as a scholarly category, see Shōji 1967, 33–35 and Tsuda 1979, 99–103.
⁴ Sasaki 1969, 54–55. Sasaki 1979 also represents another application of the same framework.
world (1970, 192). According to these scholars, *yonaoshi* mindset or consciousness manifested in a variety of movements including the so-called *ee ja nai ka* ええじゃないか commotions, a series of spontaneous communal celebrations held in response to sacred talismans falling from the sky in many parts of Japan on the eve of the Meiji Restoration; new religions that featured world-transformation doctrine, such as Tenrikyō 天理教, Maruyamakyō 丸山教, and Ōmotokyō; and various beliefs and practices centered on the messianic figure of Maitreya, the future Buddha believed to manifest on earth in order to revive Buddhist teachings in the latter days.  

A significant gap exists, however, between these historiographical usages of the term *yonaoshi* and the native concept of *yonaoshi*. When scholars discuss certain historical phenomena as examples of *yonaoshi*, *yonaoshi* uprising, *yonaoshi* condition, and *yonaoshi* mindset, they mostly do so without considering whether or not historical actors involved actually invoked the concept of *yonaoshi*. For example, the category of *yonaoshi* uprising does not necessarily refer to uprisings in which peasants themselves used the expression *yonaoshi* to articulate their rebellious aims. Rather, scholars attach the label of “*yonaoshi* uprising” to any uprisings that fit a particular pattern, as described above. Scholars likewise utilize the expressions *yonaoshi* and *yonaoshi* mindset as analytic categories through which to discuss a variety of movements that exhibit a strong desire to transform the present world, even when these movements did not define their goals specifically as *yonaoshi*. Yasumaru and Hirota, for example, see manifestations of *yonaoshi* mindset in millenarian movements in medieval Europe and the Taiping Rebellion in Qing China.  

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6 Yasumaru and Hirota 1966, 1. The two scholars qualify that this interpretation is possible when *yonaoshi* mindset is defined broadly.
as Tenshō Kōtai Jingūkyō 天照皇大神宮教, Sekai Kyūseikyō 世界救世教, and Reiyūkai 霊友会 as modern embodiments of *yonaoshi* mindset, again without providing evidence for the actual use of the language of *yonaoshi* in these movements. In other words, scholars have retrospectively designated a number of historical phenomena as *yonaoshi* or *yonaoshi*-type movements based on a variety of analytic criteria such as class struggle, revolution, and egalitarian ideals, regardless of what historical actors themselves said about those phenomena.

The use of the term *yonaoshi* as an academic category began with works of pioneering scholars of peasant uprisings such as Tamura Eitarō and Shōji Kichinosuke. Both Tamura and Shōji abstracted the expression *yonaoshi* as a category from their analysis of late Tokugawa and early Meiji peasant movements, some of which featured the language of *yonaoshi*. Tamura used the term *yonaoshi* primarily in reference to instances of “smashing and breaking” (*uchikowashi* 打ちこわし) in which peasants destroyed the houses of hoarding merchants and corrupt village officials (1948, 36–116). Shōji used the expression *yonaoshi* to refer to uprisings with subversive and anti-feudal qualities, particularly during the period from the first year of Keiō (1865) to the fourth year of Meiji (1871) (1970, 6–12). Although perhaps initially inspired by the emic language of *yonaoshi*, both Tamura and Shōji utilized the category of *yonaoshi* to refer to any movements that met their analytic criteria, even movements without any reference to *yonaoshi* discourse. Scholars who followed in their footsteps further developed and expanded the scope of the category of *yonaoshi*, some to the point of including phenomena from different cultural and

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7 Miyata 1970, 192. Both Miyata and Yasumaru agree that *yonaoshi* mindset or consciousness manifests especially keenly during times of change and crisis.
8 Tamura’s most representative works include *Kindai Nihon nōmin undō shiron* (1948) and *Yonaoshi* (1960). Shōji’s *Yonaoshi ikki no kenkyū* is also seminal (1970). Also see Shōji 1947 and 1967.
temporal contexts. No one today can tell precisely to which historical phenomena “yonaoshi” refers, because yonaoshi as a category lacks a clear conceptual boundary.

The problem does not lie in the use of yonaoshi as a historiographical category per se. Analytic categories are necessary in order to highlight salient historical patterns, such as a specific form of uprising that became common during a particular period. Categories such as yonaoshi uprising, yonaoshi condition, and yonaoshi mindset have served as important tools for scholars examining the late Tokugawa and early Meiji years, especially those with an interest in the Marxist framework of class struggle as well as proponents of “people’s history” (minshūshi 民衆史) with the goal of highlighting the agency of the populace rather than simply relegating them to the status of oppressed victims. Confusion arises, however, when yonaoshi as a historiographical category becomes so conventionalized or “naturalized” that scholars neglect to pay attention to yonaoshi as a historical concept distinct from the historiographical category. The use of yonaoshi as a blanket, catchall category obscures the significance of yonaoshi as a language and a concept with its own historicity. Scholars do occasionally mention examples of the emic use of yonaoshi, but their analyses depend on a few limited examples directly relevant to their topic of discussion, such as a particular uprising, movement, or event. A wealth of excellent scholarship exists on individual phenomena that scholars have included under the analytical category of yonaoshi. Yet, hardly any research exists on the development of the native concept of yonaoshi itself.

The ambiguity surrounding the term yonaoshi also persists in English-language scholarship on nineteenth-century Japan. The vast majority of works in English follow the lead of Japanese scholars and use the term yonaoshi as a broad historiographical category. However, unlike much of Japanese scholarship, scholars writing in English frequently associate yonaoshi
with millenarianism. This practice first became prominent in the 1970s, most likely as a way to highlight the subversive and anti-establishment characteristics of the movements typically included under the category of *yonaoshi*. This tendency is particularly pervasive in English scholarship, much more so than in Japanese, and many take it for granted today. The association between *yonaoshi* and millenarianism, however, requires scrutiny. Since scholars writing in English, like their Japanese counterparts, have not clearly distinguished between *yonaoshi* as a historiographical category and as a historical concept, it remains unexplored whether the native concept of *yonaoshi* in the late Tokugawa and early Meiji periods was millenarian. In fact, Japanese scholars such as Yasumaru, Hirota, and Miyata argue that the *yonaoshi* mindset in Tokugawa Japan never manifested as full-fledged millenarian movements that could threaten the existing regime. Yasumaru and Hirota in particular surmise that the Japanese populace during the Tokugawa period did not possess a religious framework through which to develop millenarian movements. A few works in English have also questioned the association between *yonaoshi* and millenarianism, including Stephen Vlasto’s study of an uprising in Aizu in 1868 and Gregory Smits’s analysis of the Ansei Great Earthquake in Edo in 1855. These observations based on a few select events, nonetheless, require further elaboration.

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10 Yasumaru and Hirota emphasize that relentless persecutions of Christianity both before and after the establishment of the Tokugawa regime were directly responsible for the dearth of millenarian thought in Tokugawa Japan (1966b, 62–65). Also see Miyata 1987, 49–50.

11 Vlastos 1986 and Smits 2013. Smits’s work in particular is noteworthy in that he examines the emic use of *yonaoshi* in sources related to the 1855 earthquake in Edo. However, his examples come from this one particular earthquake. He also does not distinguish clearly between *yonaoshi* as a historiographical category and as a native concept. This is only expected since he did not treat the native concept of *yonaoshi* itself extensively as his main focus of analysis.
In short, yonaoshi as a subject of academic inquiry requires a fresh angle of analysis. Such an angle must highlight the emic use of yonaoshi and, at the same time, also account for the prevalence of yonaoshi discourse in Japanese society from the late 1700s to the early 1900s from a broader analytical standpoint. This new analytical framework must refine the overblown category of yonaoshi, which has obfuscated the meaning of yonaoshi as articulated by historical actors in their own unique historical and social contexts. This task is urgent given the centrality of the theme of yonaoshi in the study of Japanese religion and history, particularly in the nineteenth century. The task is also unavoidable for anyone interested in the development of millenarian thought in Japan.

**Yonaoshi Gods: A New Approach**

When approaching yonaoshi as a historical concept, one notices an emerging pattern in the late eighteenth century. Starting in this period, historical actors began to worship a number of entities as kami of yonaoshi or as yonaoshi daimyōjin. The rise of this new group of divinities represents an important yet hitherto unexamined way in which the discourse of yonaoshi permeated Japanese society from that time. Based on this, I propose the framework of “yonaoshi gods” as a new lens through which to approach the topic of yonaoshi. “Yonaoshi gods” in this study refers to superhuman entities whom historical actors venerated as divine agents of yonaoshi—yonaoshi as an emic concept as expressed by historical actors themselves.12 “Yonaoshi gods” as a collective category includes those deities worshipped literally as kami of yonaoshi or yonaoshi daimyōjin as well as other superhuman entities attributed with the divine authority to bring about

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12 Scholars such as Miyata, Sasaki, and Hirota mention the phrase “yonaoshi gods,” but it is not their main analytical focus. They also use the word yonaoshi in a broad historiographical sense without paying much attention to the emic use of the language of yonaoshi, as already explained. This study will also take into consideration closely related variations of the language of yonaoshi such as yonaori and yo no tatenaoshi.
yonaoshi, though not necessarily referred to as kami of yonaoshi or yonaoshi daimyōjin in name. An examination of the rise of “yonaoshi gods” based on the emic use yonaoshi will highlight the significance of the concept of yonaoshi in its original context, rather than presume the applicability of the framework of revolutionary consciousness or millenarianism. The lens of “yonaoshi gods” also offers a unique historiographical approach not previously explored in scholarship as it frames the spread of yonaoshi discourse in Japanese society as a proliferation of deities and superhuman entities invested with the power to realize yonaoshi.

Yonaoshi gods emerged in diverse circumstances, anywhere from peasant uprisings to natural disasters to new religions. These individual events occurred independently in their own distinct contexts. Yet, they all shared in common the presiding presence of a superhuman agent with the power to “renew the world.” Whereas previous scholarship lumped together all sorts of historical phenomena as yonaoshi without a clear analytic principle, this study utilizes the framework of yonaoshi gods as a lens through which to bring together and examine independent events usually not discussed alongside one another. This analysis in turn illuminates the pervasive presence of yonaoshi gods in Japanese society since the late eighteenth century.

This study examines the rise of yonaoshi gods through a series of cases studies of individual yonaoshi gods who manifested in a variety of contexts from the late 1700s to the early 1900s. Based on this analysis, it is possible to outline some basic characteristics shared by yonaoshi gods. During the late Tokugawa and early Meiji years, yonaoshi gods in essence functioned as deities who saved a particular group of people by intervening in human affairs and by redressing specific problems that the group faced. These problems were almost always economic in nature, mostly specific conditions that adversely affected the economic wellbeing of the group, such as the high price of rice in the case of Sano Masakoto briefly described above.
Yonaoshi gods at times used violent means to resolve the problems at hand. Yonaoshi gods included many deified peasants in late Tokugawa and early Meiji uprisings who engaged in destructive behavior against the wealthy and the local government in the name of yonaoshi and demanded immediate economic relief. In the second year of Ansei (1855), the people of the city of Edo interpreted a destructive earthquake that struck the city as an act of yonaoshi and upheld as a yonaoshi god a subterranean catfish believed to cause earthquakes in order to redistribute the wealth of the hoarding rich and allow it to circulate in society. At the same time, yonaoshi at times involved no violence whatsoever, as in the case of Tokugawa bureaucrats worshipped as yonaoshi gods for providing financial relief to the poor. In short, although specific means varied, yonaoshi gods each saved a particular a community of people from its economic hardship by granting it immediate, tangible, and economic relief, occasionally accompanied by violent measures aimed at punishing or removing those causing the hardship.

As savior gods who provided the populace with immediate blessings, yonaoshi gods became objects of passionate adoration. Yet, their individual lives were quite transient. Unlike other kami, with some exceptions, the majority of yonaoshi gods did not have permanent shrines or temples dedicated to them or have sets of systematic rituals particularly identified with them. Yonaoshi gods closely resemble what Miyata Noboru has called hayarigami (literally, “gods that are in vogue”), deities who win intense adoration for a brief period of time, usually confined to particularly localities, but quickly fade into oblivion (Miyata 1976). During the Tokugawa period, these deities performed important social functions by offering tangible, this-worldly benefits (genze riyaku) outside the purview of established religions sanctioned by the Tokugawa regime (ibid. 3). The framework of hayarigami is useful in highlighting the basic characteristics of yonaoshi gods, including the ability to respond to immediate concerns of
local communities and a short lifespan as deities. Yet, the history of yonaoshi gods as a whole spans the late eighteenth through the early twentieth centuries. They also emerged in various regions across Japan. In other words, the ubiquitous presence of yonaoshi gods represents an enduring pattern in this period of Japanese history. While it is important to bear in mind the lens of hayarigami grounded in specific local communities, it is also necessary to highlight the greater temporal and regional span involved in the rise of yonaoshi gods.

As already discussed, yonaoshi gods included many deified humans. Japanese religion is rich with examples of human beings deified as kami, including prominent historical figures such as Sugawara no Michizane 菅原道真 (845–903) and Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川家康 (1542–1616) as well as charismatic founders of new religions such as Kurozumi Munetada 黒住宗忠 (1780–1850) and Nakayama Miki 中山みき (1798–1887). Some of these individuals became kami posthumously while others gained a divine status while alive, literally as “living kami” (ikigami 生き神). Living kami became especially prevalent during the Tokugawa period (Miyata 1963, 1). These included individuals such as Munetada and Miki who became leaders of organized religions through their special spiritual prowess. At the same time, some also became living kami not by performing miracles per se but by accomplishing extraordinary deeds that benefited many, including things such as irrigation projects, land development, and virtuous governance. Miyata argues that the latter type of living kami differs from the former because, although these individuals performed great deeds and therefore qualified as kami, their deification often resulted in mere memorialization (ibid. 1–2). Yonaoshi gods included both individuals deified posthumously and while still alive. A few of the yonaoshi gods deified as living kami probably fall under the second type of living kami that Miyata discusses. Unlike Munetada and Miki, these yonaoshi gods did not create a permanent community of adherents who venerated them for their
spiritual powers. The authority of yonaoshi gods focused on redressing specific problems and did not extend beyond these particular concerns. Yet, it would be too hasty to limit the significance of their deification as yonaoshi gods to mere memorialization. The rectification of specific issues directly connected to the economic wellbeing of a particular community constituted a real and tangible blessing.

Yonaoshi gods were resolutely anti-poverty. They emerged when a particular community faced poverty or perceived itself as suffering from poverty. At the same time, they differed fundamentally from ordinary “lucky gods” (fukujin 福神) believed to bring material prosperity. Yonaoshi gods did not merely reward someone with serendipitous wealth. They instead focused on fixing specific problems that led to poverty. Yonaoshi gods operated under the assumption that poverty and other forms of economic hardship resulted from specific causes, such as the hoarding of wealth by the rich and unreasonable financial burden imposed by the local government. Yonaoshi gods and those worshipping yonaoshi gods characterized whatever entities causing these problems endangering the wellbeing of a particular community as evil and deserving punishment, thereby legitimizing the violent means to which they sometimes resorted. Therein lies the core of yonaoshi, an act of restoring, fixing, and renewing the present world to its proper state by redressing particular poverty-inducing, therefore utterly unjustifiable, conditions.

Much like many hayarigami and ikigami who became prominent during the Tokugawa period, yonaoshi gods granted concrete, this-worldly benefits. What Reader and Tanabe calls the “common religion” of Japan, the pursuit of this-worldly, practical benefits, represents a perennial theme in Japanese religion seen across denominational boundaries (1998). This-worldly benefits include anything from safe childbirth to healing of disease to help in finding a marriage partner,
but the benefits that *yonaoshi* gods brought, once again, were almost exclusively economic in nature. Furthermore, *yonaoshi* gods were unique among divine providers of practical benefits in that they focused on saving a particular community. They never granted benefits to discrete individuals. They always provided “communal” this-worldly benefits, addressing specific problems that a particular community faced. The concept of *yo* is flexible in that it does not necessarily refer to “the world” as in the sense of the globe. As Vlastos also notes, during the Tokugawa and early Meiji periods, the “world” of “world renewal”—that is, the *yo* of *yonaoshi*—in most cases referred to the immediate community to which people belonged, such as a village or a city (1986, 152).

As suggested by the general characteristics outlined above, *yonaoshi* gods in the Tokugawa and early Meiji years were not millenarian. Focused on solving specific forms of economic injustice in particular communities, they were not anti-feudal, anti-establishment, or even particularly subversive, for that matter. *Yonaoshi* gods served as important vehicles through which to articulate social critique and highlight specific adverse conditions from which a particular community suffered, but they never posed any direct threats to the existing regime. *Yonaoshi* gods took for granted the legitimacy of the Tokugawa regime and did not attempt to subvert it. They did not propose to create a radically new world, a new kingdom or paradise on earth that differed fundamentally from the existing world. Scholars have highlighted the subversive qualities of movements and events that they have classified under the scholarly category of *yonaoshi*. Yet, *yonaoshi* as a historical concept in the late Tokugawa and early Meiji years was not subversive in a radical, anti-establishment sense, let alone millenarian.

A millenarian articulation of *yonaoshi* emerged later in the Meiji period, in the teachings of the new religion Ōmotokyō, founded by the charismatic leader Deguchi Nao.
(1837–1918). In predicting an apocalyptic end of the world and the emergence of a utopian world ruled over by a cosmic deity, Ōmotokyō reinterpreted yonaoshi to mean a global transformation of the world. This version of yonaoshi went beyond the righting of specific injustices performed by yonaoshi gods in the Tokugawa period, such as lowering the price of rice, destroying the houses of rich merchants, and abolishing unpopular local taxation. The extant historiography dependent on the overblown category of yonaoshi has obscured this change in yonaoshi discourse over time. By tracing the development of the native concept of yonaoshi through the lens of yonaoshi gods, it becomes possible to highlight this significant re-interpretation of the discourse of yonaoshi.

**Oneness of Salvation and Daily Life**

While the rise of yonaoshi gods in and of itself constituted a major development, it also reflected a broader trend in Japanese religion during the Tokugawa period. As already touched upon above, Tokugawa Japan witnessed a proliferation in the number of deities and movements that emphasized immediate, this-worldly salvation. Here I use the word “salvation” broadly to mean deliverance from suffering through the power of superhuman entities. These deities and movements included the aforementioned hayarigami and ikigami as well as new religions that claimed to offer relief from suffering in the here and now through such means as healing of disease and granting of material prosperity. Some of these movements such as Fujikō 富士講, Nyoraikyō 如来教, and Tenrikyō even prophesied the imminent emergence of an ideal world. The rise of yonaoshi gods represented an important aspect of this undercurrent in Tokugawa religion.

Of course, interest in this-worldly salvation was not unique to the Tokugawa period. One can easily find evidence of people turning to religion for this-worldly benefits from earlier
periods. Yet, conceptions of this-worldly salvation in the Tokugawa period were distinct in that people increasingly conceived of salvation in ways that were linked directly to their daily lives. The new religion Tenrikyō expressed its vision of an ideal world as a world where people enjoyed a “bright and happy life” (yōkigurashi 阳気暮らし), affirming this world as a positive place and emphasizing the centrality of people’s daily lives in the group’s soteriology.\textsuperscript{13}

Representatives of various religious communities in the late Tokugawa period emphasized the importance of self-cultivation practices that led to positive results such as health and prosperity (Sawada 2004). In the case of yonaoshi gods, their worshippers interpreted rectification of specific economic injustices, such heavy tax obligations and the high cost of living, as concrete forms of salvation. The conception of salvation directly related to people’s day-to-day realities, or what I describe as “oneness of salvation and daily life” (kyūsai to seikatsu no ittaisei 救済と生活の一体性), became a common theme in Tokugawa religion.

But why this emphasis on daily life, and why did this emphasis emerge during the Tokugawa period? A number of explanations might be advanced, although further research would be necessary to substantiate them. The framework of “Pax Tokugawa” provides one explanatory lens. The relative peace of the Tokugawa period after a long period of civil war perhaps allowed people to focus on their daily lives and develop an increasingly world-affirming outlook, encouraging them to seek ways of improving their lives here and now, at times through the power of religious entities. Some scholars argue that the development of monetary economy in Tokugawa Japan fostered a pragmatic worldview among people, and this encouraged people to conceive of religion and salvation in practical terms and in ways that addressed specific needs.

\textsuperscript{13} For general discussions of world-affirming nature of new religions that emerged in the late Tokugawa period, see Ooms 1993, 83–84 and Reader 1991, 50. Also see an analysis of the “this-worldly” focus of Japanese new religions in Tsushima et al. 1979.
in daily life (Miyata 1963, 2). Instabilities of the late Tokugawa years might have also affected what people sought from religion in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Often described by the phrase “internal woes and external ills” (naiyū gaikan 内憂外患), late Tokugawa Japan faced a series of domestic socioeconomic crises and the encroaching threat of Western powers, most notably the arrival of Commodore Perry in the sixth year of Kaei (1853). It is possible that these unprecedented crises led many to seek help and salvation in ways that addressed their immediate needs.

Although it is difficult to determine precisely what factors contributed to its rise, a heightened concern with salvation in the present world, particularly in ways grounded in people’s daily lives, represents a new development in the Tokugawa period that has continued to define Japanese religion in the modern and contemporary periods. A detailed examination of the rise of concern with this-worldly salvation in Tokugawa Japan itself is beyond the scope of this study.¹⁴ Yet, examination of yonaoshi gods will help illuminate this development from unique perspectives. First, as briefly discussed above, yonaoshi gods provided “communal” this-worldly salvation. Rather than granting blessings to individuals, yonaoshi gods saved a community of people collectively. The communal quality of this-worldly salvation is worth emphasizing because it suggests a broader pattern coinciding with the emergence in Tokugawa Japan of new religions that also stressed communal or collective salvation by prophesying the arrival of an ideal world. Second, as also mentioned above, yonaoshi gods at times took violent measures in order to punish entities causing economic hardships in particular communities. This punitive aspect is important because it frames this-worldly salvation in terms of the binary between good (yonaoshi gods) and evil (the hoarding rich, corrupt officials, etc.). This perspective is helpful in

¹⁴ In addition to Reader and Tanabe 1998, see Nihon Bukkyō Kenkyūkai 1970 and Miyamoto 2003 for extensive treatments of the theme of this-worldly benefits in Japanese religion.
highlighting a particularly moral dimension of this-worldly salvation, which has not received adequate attention partly because scholars have tended to focus on the practical dimension of this-worldly salvation. Tangible economic relief that *yonaoshi* gods provided were not simply practical, but also morally justified.

Furthermore, the lens of *yonaoshi* gods will also help highlight that concern for this-worldly salvation transcended the boundaries of formal religious institutions. *Yonaoshi* gods sometimes emerged within the compounds of Buddhaist temples. At times, historical actors built an entire new shrine to worship their *yonaoshi* god. At other times, *yonaoshi* gods emerged spontaneously without the intervention of religious professionals or institutions, as in the case of *yonaoshi* gods in peasant uprisings. These varied modalities of deification and veneration that did not conform neatly to established institutional categories such as Buddhism and Shinto in turn show that interest in this-worldly salvation, too, cut across denominational boundaries. This characteristic is difficult to perceive from the viewpoint of a single sectarian movement.

**Beginnings of *Yonaoshi* Discourse**

Before diving into an analysis of individual *yonaoshi* gods, it is necessary to outline the development of *yonaoshi* discourse prior to the late eighteenth century before *yonaoshi* gods made their appearance. This is important in showing that the understanding of *yonaoshi* as the redressing of injustice emerged coevally with *yonaoshi* gods. Prior to the emergence of *yonaoshi* gods, the concept of *yonaoshi* for the most part did not carry the connotation of a rectification of injustice. This connotation emerged only with the appearance of gods that could perform the acts of correcting specific social and economic wrongs.

Although many today identify the term *yonaoshi* as a mid-nineteenth century concept, the native concept of *yonaoshi* has a much longer history. *Yonaoshi* finds mention in several
seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literary genres, such as *kanazōshi* 仮名草子 (literally, "books written in kana" or the phonetic Japanese syllabary), scripts of *nō* 能 (a form of traditional dance drama) and *jōruri* 浄瑠璃 (puppet drama) plays, and some anthologies of poems. An analysis of these documents reveals that the expression *yonaoshi* functioned roughly in two different ways: 1) as an expression denoting a fresh start, with the connotation of eliminating bad luck or turning a negative condition into a positive one; and 2) as an apotropaic charm or invocation against calamities such as earthquake and thunder, often used in a repetitive chant as in “*yonaoshi yonaoshi.*”

The poetry anthology *Konzanshū* 崑山集, compiled most likely by the tenth month of the fourth year of Keian (1651), contains a poem that associates the expression *yonaoshi* with the beginning of a new season, specifically a positive transition from winter to spring. The poem reads as follows:

> Swaying in the wind, *yonaoshi*, thus bloom the house cherry blossoms

*Kaze ni yurawa yonaoshi to saki iezakura*

風にゆらは世なおしと先家さくら (Kinsei Bungaku Shoshi Kenkyūkai 1974, 361).

This poem appears in the “Spring” segment of the anthology, under the heading of “Cherry Blossoms.” The “house cherry blossoms” refer to cherry blossoms planted in the gardens of individual households (*iezakura* 家桜). The poem associates the blossoming of the cherry blossoms with the term *yonaoshi*. Cherry blossoms signify the end of winter and the beginning of spring. *Yonaoshi* here then also refers to the process of change from winter to spring, a transformation as well as renewal of the world from one season to the next. It is significant that
the poem connects \textit{yonaoshi} with the beginning of spring, a long-awaited revival of warmth, life, and vitality in the world.

A similar example comes from the document \textit{Shikidō ōkagami} 色道大鏡, an eighteen-volume record of the customs and activities of numerous pleasure quarters (\textit{yūkaku} 遊郭) throughout Japan, compiled in the sixth year of Enpō (1678) by Hatakeyama Kizan 畠山箕山. In one section of this enormous compilation, Hatakeyama lists one hundred poems that outline various rules and codes of ethics by which courtesans must abide. One of these poems contains the expression \textit{yonaoshi}:

Even if the customer does not like the playhouse in which the meeting was arranged, do not change location, saying that it is \textit{yonaoshi}.

\textit{Aisomeshi akeya o kyaku no kirau tomo yonaoshi ite yado o kayuru na}

あひそめし あけやをきゃくの きらうとも よなをしいひて やどを かゆるな (Noma 1961, 110).

This poem instructs a courtesan to stay at the playhouse (\textit{akeya} 揚屋, commonly read as \textit{akiya}) where the meeting with a patron was originally scheduled and not to move to another location, even if the patron is unhappy with the original place. From the poem, it is clear that \textit{yonaoshi} refers to an attempt to start things over by finding a new place, presumably to satisfy the customer who, for whatever reason, does not like the original location. Read together with the above poem on cherry blossoms, it is possible to read \textit{yonaoshi} here to mean making a fresh start in order to remove a specific unfavorable condition (i.e., an unhappy customer or negative feelings caused by him). It is difficult to tell from the original text why courtesans would need such advice. Nonetheless, the meaning and usage of \textit{yonaoshi} themselves are quite clear.

A scene from the famous \textit{nō} play \textit{Dōjōji} 道成寺 features an example of the apotropaic use of the expression \textit{yonaoshi}, the second major usage of the term in these early sources.
Specific lines in the scene differ slightly among editions; the edition cited here dates to the 1680s.

The setting of this play is the Dōjōji temple in Kishū Province, where a new temple bell is about to be dedicated. The scene involves two temple servants who wake up in the middle of the night after hearing the enormous sound of the new temple bell being dropped on the ground:

[Having heard the enormous sound and felt the rumbling of the earth caused by the falling bell]

Temple Servant 1: Oh how tragic!
Temple Servant 2: Yonaoshi yonaoshi 世直し世直し
Temple Servant 1: Kuwabara kuwabara 桑原桑原
Temple Servant 2: Yurinaose yurinaose 揺り直せ揺り直せ
Temple Servant 1: Wow. That was a terribly noisy sound. How mysterious.
Temple Servant 2: What was that just now?
Temple Servant 1: Was it a thunder?
Temple Servant 2: No, it didn’t sound like it.
Temple Servant 1: Was it an earthquake?
Temple Servant 2: The sound was so enormous that my heart is still pounding, my mind unsettled.
Temple Servant 1: I think the sound came from this way. Come.

[the servants discover that the bell has been dropped on the ground]

(Takagi et al. 1963, 137).

Much like the more familiar phrase “kuwabara kuwabara” used to ward off lightning and other calamities, the expression yonaoshi here also functions as an apotropaic invocation. The servants in the scene are unsure as to where the sound came from, and it is not clear here whether the repetitive chanting of the expression yonaoshi is effective against lightning or earthquake. But it is evident that the servants in the scene invoke the chant as though it generated an apotropaic power.\(^\text{15}\)

Another example comes from the kanazōshi story Kaname ishi かなめいし (Foundation Stone), composed by Asai Ryōi 浅井了意 and published most likely in the third year of Kanbun

\(^{15}\) Ibid. The phrase yurinaose yurinaose was also used similarly against earthquakes.
Kaname ishi is a prose narrative based on an actual earthquake that struck Kyoto on the first day of the fifth month in the second year of Kanbun (1662). Kaname ishi describes the extent of the damage caused by the earthquake and the townspeople’s reaction. The expression *yonaoshi* appears at the very beginning of this story, as people of Kyoto first notice the shaking:

> On the first day of the fifth month, at about ten in the morning, the sky clouded over, and it seemed as if dust and ashes filled the air. But the sky did not appear as if it was going to rain soon nor did it appear that there was going to be a sudden shower. People were wondering, “Is this the often-rumored dragon’s ascension to heaven? If not, is this smoke or clouds?” Then from the northeast came a mysterious roaring sound, and the ground began to shake. Nobody was expecting an earthquake, but since the shaking continued, people realized that it was indeed an earthquake. At first people were saying, “*Yonaoshi, yonaoshi*” 世なをし世なをし, but seeing both big houses and small houses shaking tremendously, someone said, “Look! The world is perishing, turning into a mud pool in an instant.” As soon as that was said, people all over Kyoto panicked left and right, fleeing toward the wide streets (ibid. 15).

Kyoto residents chanted “*yonaoshi yonaoshi*” as they perceived the threat of an earthquake. The function of the expression *yonaoshi* here is identical to the example cited from *Dōjōji*. It is difficult to ascertain the logic behind the use of *yonaoshi* as an apotropaic chant just with these two examples alone.\(^16\) However, it is evident that the chant was used in situations calling for apotropaic means to ward off misfortune. Combined with the other two examples of *yonaoshi* introduced above as denoting a fresh start, it is reasonable to surmise that *yonaoshi* as a protective invocation also had the meaning of hoping for a renewal of the present unfavorable situation (i.e. lightning and earthquake).

The brief outline above provides important background information for this study. The precise meanings of the individual articulations of *yonaoshi* discourse are difficult to grasp due

\(^{16}\) Although not cited here, other examples indicate that the repetitive chanting of *yonaoshi* was thought to be effective against lightning as well.
to limited resources. Yet, it is evident that *yonaoshi* prior to the late eighteenth century referred to very specific phenomena and, although it had the vague connotation of turning a negative situation into a positive one, it did not have much significance as a discursive framework through which to interpret or give special meanings to events taking place in society at large. Furthermore, *yonaoshi* discourse did not have any superhuman entities or deities associated with it, although its use as an apotropaic chant most likely derived from some notion of superhuman power. This use of *yonaoshi* discourse will change drastically with the emergence of *yonaoshi* gods in the late eighteenth century. With the appearance of superhuman entities invested with the authority to correct injustices, the discourse of *yonaoshi* took on greater significance as a framework through which to interpret a variety of social phenomena.

**Chapter Outline**

The following case studies examine prominent examples of *yonaoshi* gods in Japanese society up to the early twentieth century. One of the purposes for extending the scope of this study to the early twentieth century lies in countering the tendency in the historiography of Japanese religion to draw a sharp line of demarcation between the end of the Tokugawa period and the birth of modern Japan with the Meiji Restoration of 1868. From this standpoint, this study shows the continuing relevance of *yonaoshi* discourse well after the mid-century regime change. The chapters more or less flow chronologically, except for Chapter 3, which covers a series of peasant uprisings during the period between the 1790s and 1860s.

Chapter 2 focuses on the aforementioned Sano Masakoto, who killed Junior Elder Tanuma Okitomo in Edo Castle, and his deification as a *yonaoshi* god in 1784. Through an examination of documents such as government records, personal memoirs, and diaries, this chapter analyzes the ways in which Edo residents interpreted the 1784 incident and how they
came to venerate Masakoto specifically as a *yonaoshi* god. To the best of my knowledge, Masakoto’s apotheosis represents the emergence of the first *yonaoshi* god. It also marks an important turning point in the ways in which *yonaoshi* discourse functioned in Japanese society. The deification of Masakoto also set an important pattern for the emergence of subsequent *yonaoshi* gods.

Chapter 3 examines late Tokugawa and early Meiji uprisings led by individuals who were deified as *yonaoshi* gods. The first uprising that featured a *yonaoshi* god of this type took place in 1796, and from this point to the end of the Tokugawa period, *yonaoshi* gods emerged repeatedly in peasant uprisings across the Japanese archipelago. As such, tracing *yonaoshi* gods that emerged within the context of these uprisings is helpful in understanding how the category of *yonaoshi* gods gained countrywide currency. In order to analyze the roles that *yonaoshi* gods played in individual localities, this chapter makes extensive use of local historical materials. It also compares these uprisings in Japan with contemporaneous religiously legitimated rebellions in Qing China. The comparison is effective in assessing the applicability of the category of millenarianism in discussing late Tokugawa uprisings. I argue that, where the Chinese rebels readily fit the framework of millenarianism, *yonaoshi* gods do not. *Yonaoshi* gods were concerned with rectifying specific injustices within the existing social framework.

Chapter 4 problematizes the now taken-for-granted understanding of *yonaoshi* as a subversive concept by examining Tokugawa bureaucrats venerated as *yonaoshi* gods. The chapter highlights the cases of Suzuki Chikara from present-day Fukui Prefecture and Egawa Hidetatsu from present-day Shizuoka Prefecture, both of whom were deified as *yonaoshi* gods for providing financial relief to their constituents in the 1830s. More specifically, Suzuki played a leading role in abolishing an unpopular taxation measure in Fukui. For his virtuous governance,
local community members built a shrine for him and named it “World Renewal Shrine” (Yonaori jinja 世直神社). Egawa, on the other hand, was welcomed in Kai Province as an extremely frugal governor (daikan 代官). People in the region eventually venerated him as a yonaoshi god who brought economic prosperity to the region by significantly cutting down administrative spending. Far from being subversive, historical actors used the concept of yonaoshi to glorify their rulers.

Chapter 5 analyzes a major earthquake that struck Edo in the second year of Ansei (1855), the Ansei Great Earthquake. Shortly after the quake, a large number of woodblock prints depicting a giant catfish circulated in the city, reflecting a popular belief in the existence of an earthquake-causing catfish. Some of these prints celebrate the earthquake as yonaoshi, claiming that the catfish had punished the rich by destroying their wealth. I examine these “catfish prints” and analyze how the earthquake catfish is constructed as a kind of deity, a divine agent of yonaoshi. The catfish stands as a unique example among yonaoshi gods introduced in this study in that it represents the only case of an animal being portrayed as a yonaoshi god.

Chapter 6, the concluding chapter, examines how the new religion Ōmotokyō, founded by Deguchi Nao in 1892, developed yonaoshi into a millenarian vision of world transformation. Nao predicted the end of the present world and the establishment of a new world order governed by a deity named Ushitora no Konjin 艮の金神 (literally, the “Golden God of the Northeast”). Ōmotokyō’s scripture inspired by revelations Nao received from Ushitora no Konjin, the Ofudesaki お筆先 (literally, “the tip of the brush”), describes this process of world transformation as the “Rebuilding and Reconstruction of the World” (yo no tatekae tatenaoshi 世の立替え立直し), Ōmotokyō’s version of yonaoshi discourse. Ōmotokyō’s eschatological and utopian doctrine represents a full-fledged millenarian discourse, and Ushitora no Konjin, a truly
millenarian *yonaoshi* god, in contrast to his predecessors. This chapter in particular analyzes Ōmotokyō’s conceptualization of Japan’s special millenarian role, as a country destined to save the world, by examining the *Ofudesaki* as well as other writings by Ōmotokyō’s co-founder, Deguchi Onisaburō 出口王任三朗 (1871–1948). This chapter explores how Ōmotokyō’s understanding of Japan’s relationship to the world helped shape the group’s reinterpretation of *yonaoshi* as a global millenarian concept that implicated the entire world.
Chapter 2

The Emergence of a Yonaoshi God: The Apotheosis of Sano Masakoto in 1784

A short walk to the southwest of the bustling Nakamise-dōri 仲見世通り fronting the famous Sensōji Temple in Asakusa leads one to the less conspicuous Tokuhonji Temple. The history of this temple, now belonging to the Ōtani branch of Jōdo Shinshū, dates back to the first year of Meijō (1492), when the temple’s founder, Enju 円寿, first established it in Mikawa Province. The temple was moved to Kanda in Edo in the nineteenth year of Tenshō (1591) under the patronage of Honda Masanobu 本多正信 (1538–1616), a renowned samurai who served directly under Tokugawa Ieyasu. The temple moved again to its current location in Asakusa in the fifteenth year of Keichō (1610). Inside the temple grounds one finds the grave of Sano Masakoto (1757–1784), a low-ranking guard who attacked Junior Elder Tanuma Okitomo (1749–1784) in Edo Castle in 1784. Okitomo died a few days after the attack, and the Bakufu also ordered Masakoto to commit seppuku. Soon after, multitudes of Edo townspeople flocked to Masakoto’s grave to venerate him as a yonaoshi daimyōjin, as described briefly in the Introduction.

Who was Sano Masakoto? Why did he attack Tanuma Okitomo, ultimately claiming both of their lives? Most importantly, why did Edo residents deify Masakoto specifically as a kami of yonaoshi? The deification of Masakoto represents a pivotal moment in this study of yonaoshi gods as the first instance in which a particular community of people deified a certain individual as a kami of yonaoshi. In other words, it marked the beginning of the rise of yonaoshi gods in Japan and set an important pattern for the emergence of subsequent yonaoshi gods. The people of the city of Edo interpreted Masakoto’s murder of Tanuma Okitomo as a “world-renewing” event.

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1 Nakane 1992, 670. The temple has been destroyed and rebuilt at least several times since its establishment in Asakusa, including after the Great Kanto Earthquake and the Great Tokyo Air Raid. Yamada 1988, 536.
based on two important factors: 1) dissatisfaction with the corrupt rule of the Bakufu as led by the Tanuma family, and 2) a drop in the price of rice in Edo shortly after the attack in Edo Castle. Tangible economic relief provided to the populace accompanied by punishment against evil thus constituted the core of yonaoshi. Accordingly, the people of Edo deified Masakoto as a kami who saved the oppressed from their predicaments here and now. This basic pattern, first articulated in connection with Masakoto’s murder of Okitomo, would come to define yonaoshi throughout the remainder of the Tokugawa period. In order to make sense of Masakoto’s apotheosis, this chapter will first cover basic biographical information about Masakoto and Okitomo and discuss the 1784 incident in some detail, before analyzing Masakoto’s motives for attacking Okitomo and how the people of Edo reacted to the incident. The chapter will then utilize a variety of contemporaneous documents to illuminate Masakoto’s transformation into a yonaoshi god.

Sano Masakoto and Tanuma Okitomo

The main actors of the 1784 incident, Sano Masakoto and Tanuma Okitomo, were both young samurai serving the shogun in Edo. However, the two samurai had come from starkly different backgrounds. Sano Masakoto was born in the seventh year of Hôreki (1757) as the only son of Sano Masatoyo and the youngest child with nine older sisters. The Sano family, based in Kôzuke Province, served as one of the shogun’s direct retainers (hatamoto) with a small landholding of about five hundred koku (a unit for measuring the quantity of rice, used to indicate retainers’ annual stipends). Sano Masakoto became the head of his household in the second year of An’e (1773) and took on the traditional family title of Sano Zenzaemon, the other name by which he was known. Following in his father’s footsteps, Masakoto served
the Bakufu in a variety of security personnel positions. At the time of the 1784 incident, he was serving the Bakufu as a guard (shinban 新番). Based in Edo Castle, guards inspected weaponry and enforced security when the shogun traveled outside of the castle. This was a relatively low-ranking position under the supervision of junior elders. Masakoto had a wife named Iyo いよ, with no children between them. The couple lived with Masakoto’s parents, uncle, and a small group of subordinates and servants. Masakoto was an ordinary Bakufu vassal.

Tanuma Okitomo, on the other hand, was a born elite, as the first child of the powerful elder Tanuma Okitsugu 田沼意次 (1719–1788). The importance of Tanuma Okitsugu in Tokugawa historiography cannot be overstated, so much so that scholars often refer to the period between the mid-1760s and the mid-1780s as the Tanuma Period (Tanuma jidai 田沼時代). Tanuma Okitsugu’s rise to the pinnacle of Tokugawa officialdom was nothing short of meteoric. The start of Okitsugu’s political career was quite humble, however, with a stipend of merely three hundred bales of rice as an attendant (koshō 小姓) (Fujita 2007, 5). Several generations before Okitsugu, the Tanuma family had begun to serve the Kii 紀伊 branch of the Tokugawa household. Okitsugu’s father, in particular, served as an attendant to the eighth Tokugawa shogun, Yoshimune 吉宗 (1684–1751). Okitsugu likewise began to serve as an attendant to Tokugawa Ieshige 家重 (1712–1761), the heir to Yoshimune, at the age of sixteen (1734). In the following year (1735), Okitsugu took over the household after the death of his father (Ôishi 1991, 32–33).

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2 See Hall 1955, 28–29 for a helpful chart of Tokugawa officialdom.
3 Yamada 1988 offers helpful biographical information on Masakoto (especially 537). Also see Chikamatsu 1985.
Ieshige highly valued the service of Okitsugu, reputed as extremely intelligent and strong-willed. When Ieshige became the ninth shogun in the second year of Enkyō (1745) following Yoshimune’s retirement, Okitsugu moved with Ieshige from Edo Castle’s Western Wing (nishi no maru 西の丸), the traditional residence of the heir apparent, to the Central Keep (honmaru 本丸). From there on began Okitsugu’s rapid rise in the Tokugawa hierarchy. For the next several years, Okitsugu occupied various leadership positions overseeing other attendants, before getting promoted to head attendant (okoshōgumi bangashira 御小姓組番頭) in the second year of Kan’en (1748), with an increased stipend of two thousand koku and also a mansion of his own. In the fourth year of Kan’en (1751), Ieshige promoted Okitsugu to the position of the shogun’s aid (sobashū 側衆). In the eighth year of Hōreki (1758), at the age of thirty-nine, Okitsugu became a daimyo with a holding of ten thousand koku in the Sagara domain and also began to play an influential role in the Bakufu’s Central Judicial Council (hyōjōsho 評定所). The tenth shogun Ieharu 家治 (1737–1786) followed Ieshige’s dying instructions to rely on Okitsugu's advice and handsomely rewarded Okitsugu for his continuing service and loyalty. Okitsugu climbed to the position of elder’s aid (osoba goyōnin 御側御用人) in the fourth year of Meiwa (1767) and furthermore to the position of elder (rōjū 老中) in the ninth year of Meiwa (1772). His stipend continued to increase, reaching fifty-seven thousand koku in the fifth year of Tenmei (1785). As Hall notes, Okitsugu’s political ascendancy followed the conventional pattern of promotion within Tokugawa officialdom. However, Okitsugu achieved this ascendancy with unprecedented speed (1955, 40).

Okitsugu boasted an extensive network of political allies and subordinates. He succeeded in building this network by giving his colleagues and subordinates significant stipend increases,
even promoting some to the rank of daimyo with ten thousand koku or more, and by appointing his associates to positions of importance, thereby securing their loyalty and expanding his influence within the Bakufu. Some of the more conspicuous examples of Okitsugu’s political maneuvers include the appointment of Matsudaira Terutaka 松平輝高 (1725–1781) and Matsudaira Yasuyoshi 松平康福 (1719–1789) to the rank of chief elder (rōjū shuza 老中首座)—both with a stipend increase of ten thousand koku—and the appointment of Ii Naohide 井伊直幸 (1729–1789) to the rank of grand elder (tairō 大老). It is said that numerous daimyo and Bakufu vassals visited Okitsugu’s residence daily to pay homage and to win his favor, often through bribes. Okitsugu also expanded his network by arranging marriages and adoptions between his children and members of prestigious families such as the Matsudaira and Mizuno, as if to remedy the humble lineage of the Tanuma household. At the same time, Okitsugu employed capable individuals in various leadership and strategic positions even if they came from lowly family backgrounds. Perhaps most critical to his success, Okitsugu enjoyed the backing of the shogun, first that of the ninth shogun Ieshige and then that of the tenth shogun Ieharu. In a sense, Okitsugu had already established the foundation of the so-called Tanuma period when he started serving Ieshige as an attendant (Fujita 2007, 4–5).

Despite its association with bribes and corruption, some scholars argue that the Tanuma period represented a time of innovation and new initiatives. The Bakufu during this time implemented a number of new fiscal measures, including a currency reform; encouragement of mining projects; tightening of government monopolization of the sales of products such as

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4 See Gotō 1971, 193–196 for a chart of the Tanuma family’s lineage.
5 Recent scholarship on Tanuma Okitsugu in Japanese tends to counter the prevailing image of Tanuma Okitsugu as a corrupt politician and the characterization of the Tanuma period as a period of political stagnation. For example, see Fujita 2012, 184–185.
copper, silver, iron, brass, ginseng, and cinnabar; new taxation on a variety of goods and commercial activities; and promotion of foreign trade. The Bakufu at this time also showed an increasing interest in the northern land of Ezo, an important source for a variety of goods for export to China as well as fish that could be used as fertilizers for commercial agriculture in Japan (Fujita 2012, 120–122). Besides these new economic developments, the Tanuma period also witnessed a flourishing of popular culture and entertainment, represented by the emergence of the literary genre of satirical and comical writings (gesaku 戯作) and the popularity of kabuki plays. Furthermore, important developments took place in realms such as education, as exemplified by an increase in the number of domain schools in various regions, and medicine, represented most notably by the works of the “Dutch-learning” scholar Sugita Genpaku 杉田玄白 (1733–1817) and his colleagues (ibid. 185–209).

Tanuma Okitomo, Okitsugu’s eldest son and heir, was destined to inherit the political reign of the Tanuma family and continue the prosperity of the Tanuma period. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Okitsugu planned out Okitomo’s illustrious political career in its entirety. Okitomo, born in the second year of Kan’en (1749), rose steadily through the ranks. In the first year of Meiwa (1764), at the age of sixteen, he had an audience with Shogun Ieharu and was recognized as Okitsugu’s heir. Okitomo was then given several court ranks and titles, first that of Yamato no Kami 大和守 in the fourth year of Meiwa (1767); then that of Harima no Kami 播磨守 in the first year of Tenmei (1781); and finally that of Yamashiro no Kami 山城守 in the second year of Tenmei (1782). In the first year of Tenmei (1781), Okitomo was appointed as master of shogunal ceremony (sōjaban 奏者番), a position in charge of overseeing rituals and

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6 For more on the fiscal measures implemented under Okitsugu’s leadership, see Hall 1955, 74–86; Ōishi 1991, 84–174; and Fujita 2012, 59–114.
ceremonies in Edo Castle. Although this position did not carry much political weight, it was often seen as a steppingstone for those aiming to become elders. Okitomo indeed was promoted to the position of junior elder in the third year of Tenmei (1783), a rare feat for someone in his early thirties. It was highly unconventional for a father and son to occupy the positions of elder and junior elder concurrently and also unprecedented to appoint an individual who had not yet become the head of his household, as was the case with Okitomo, to the position of junior elder (Fujita 2007, 209–210).

It was clear to all that Okitomo’s speedy rise in the Tokugawa hierarchy was due to Okitsugu’s unabashed nepotism, so much so that Elder Matsudaira Takechika 松平武元 (1713–1779), one of Okitsugu’s predecessors as elder, had to restrain Okitsugu’s incessant attempts to advance his son’s political standing (Hall 1955, 46). Nonetheless, by 1783, with the father serving as elder and the eldest son as junior elder, the foundation of the Tanuma family’s political dominance seemed rock-solid. It came to a sudden and unexpected end, however, with the death of Okitomo at the hands of an obscure, low-ranking guard.

The Incident
The assault took place in Edo Castle, at the very heart of the Tokugawa Bakufu. Edo Castle was an enormous structure, consisting of several major wings. The Central Keep featured the shogun’s personal chambers, various administrative headquarters, reception halls, and the Great Interior (ōoku 大奧, separate quarters housing women serving the shogun). Protected by multiple layers of moats, gates, and watchtowers, the castle symbolized the authority and might of the Tokugawa (Murai 1980, 317–322). For this reason, those entering the castle had to adhere strictly to proper decorum. To cause a disturbance in Edo Castle was a grave crime. It was forbidden to carry one’s sword inside the castle, and only a sword with a short blade (wakizashi
脇差) was permitted (drawing this short sword was prohibited). Nonetheless, over the course of the Tokugawa period, there were occasional occurrences of violence in which this code was violated. The most prominent example of this was the attack on Kira Kōzuke no Suke 吉良上野介 (1641–1703) by Asano Takumi no Kami 浅野內匠頭 (1675–1701) in the fourteenth year of Genroku (1701). In this incident, Kira survived the attack with slight wounds, and Asano was ordered to commit seppuku. Needless to say, this led to the celebrated tale of revenge by the forty-seven vassals of Asano. The incident involving Sano Masakoto and Tanuma Okitomo, although less famous, was no less dramatic.7

On the twenty-fourth day of the third month in the fourth year of Tenmei (1784), four junior elders were exiting their office in the Central Keep of Edo Castle in an orderly procession. The junior elders, in the order of the procession, were Sakai Iwami no Kami Tadayoshi 酒井石見守忠休 (1714–1787), Yonekura Tango no Kami Masaharu 米倉丹後守昌晴 (1728–1786), Ōta Bingo no Kami Sukeyoshi 太田備後守實愛 (1739–1805), and Tanuma Yamashiro no Kami Okitomo 田沼山城守意知.8 Sano Masakoto was waiting quietly in the Guards’ Room (shinbansho 新番所)—he knew that the junior elders would have to walk by this room in order to exist their office.9 When the elders came to pass by the Guards’ Room, Masakoto ran out and shouted, “Yamashiro no Kami, wait!” (mate Yamashiro no kami 待て、山城守). Giving

7 In fact, at the time of the 1784 incident, a kabuki play based on the story of the forty-seven vassals of Asano was at the height of its popularity. See Gotô 1971, 25 and Fujita 2012, 195–196.
8 Egami 1969, 142. Scholars have different theories as to what time of the day the attack took place. Tokutomi 1936 says that it happened around noon (481), while Fujita 2003 says close to one in the afternoon (211). Gotô 1971 states that the incident occurred much later, nearing the evening (18).
Okitomo no time to respond, Masakoto jumped onto him and attacked him with a sword.

Masakoto first slashed Okitomo’s shoulder. Okitomo, completely taken by surprise, escaped toward the nearby Bellflower Room (kikyō no ma 桔梗の間), but Masakoto chased after him and continued the attack, slashing Okitomo several times more in the groin area. Grand Inspector (ōmetsuke 大目付) Matsudaira Tsushima no Kami 松平対馬守 then rushed to the scene and contained Masakoto by restraining him from behind. Matsudaira called for reinforcement, after which Inspector (metsuke 目付) Yagyū Shuzen no Kami 柳生主膳正 (1745–1828) joined Matsudaira and disarmed Masakoto. Okitomo received immediate treatment from available medical staff and was later carried home. His wounds being deep, however, Okitomo died two days later, in the morning of the twenty-sixth day at the age of thirty-six. Masakoto was imprisoned immediately after the attack. He was first declared insane (ranshin 乱心) and was eventually ordered to commit seppuku. Masakoto’s seppuku was conducted on the third day of the fourth month of the same year. He was twenty-eight years old.¹⁰

The news of the attack spread through the city of Edo immediately after its occurrence. Naturally, quite a few contemporaneous sources make note of the incident, including the Bakufu’s official records such as the Chronicle of the Tokugawa (Tokugawa jikki 徳川実紀) and the Diary of the Shogunate (ryūei hinamiki 柳営日次記) as well as unofficial documents such as personal correspondence, notes, and memoirs. A prominent example of the latter is a collection of personal essays (zuihitsu 随筆) by Kanzawa Tokō 神沢杜口 (1710–1795), a former officer (yoriki 与力) of the Kyoto City Magistrate who wrote profusely on a wide-ranging variety of subjects. His essays, along with excerpts from many of the documents he consulted in writing his

¹⁰ For more descriptions of Masakoto’s attack on Okitomo, see Gotō 1971, 18–20; Ōishi 1991, 77–82; and Fujita 2007, 211–214.
essays, were compiled as *Old Man’s Tale* (*Okina gusa* 翁草). In this collection, there is an entry on the Tanuma family and the 1784 incident, titled “A Great Change for the Tanuma Family” (*Tanumake ippen* 田沼家一變). In this entry, Kanzawa recounts Masakoto’s assault in great detail, including the number of wounds Okitomo sustained, and also quotes extensively from official Bakufu documents.

Another helpful resource is a group of documents called the Ishikawa Family Documents (*Ishikawake bunsho* 石河家文書), which includes copies of notes and reports concerning the 1784 incident. These reports were composed by samurai bureaucrats who worked in Edo Castle and were thus most likely the first to hear of the incident. Nonetheless, a report dated the twenty-fifth day of the third month—the day after the assault—says that “although there are many rumors going around, precise details are yet unknown” (*tashika naru gi wa imada ai wakari mōsazu sōrō* 報成儀ハ未相分り不申候), indicating a sense of confusion and panic inside Edo Castle immediately following the incident (Tokugawa Rinseishi Kenkyūjo 2005, 89–90). A document titled *Record of Violent Incidents in Edo Castle* (*Eichi ninjōki* 營中刃傷記) is also a useful source. A compilation of records concerning instances of violence taking place in Edo Castle from the fourth year of Kan’ei (1627) to the sixth year of Ansei (1859), this document also contains records of the 1784 attack. Although there are minor discrepancies among these primary sources in their descriptions of the assault—such as where Okitomo was injured and

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11 This collection was compiled over a period between the late 1760s and early 1790s. The entry on the 1784 incident is contained in Kanzawa 1970, Volume 3, 1632–1648.
13 The document is contained in Hayakawa 1912. It is not clear precisely when the original manuscript was finalized. The manuscript on which the printed version is based also has writings in red ink that were presumably added later.
who rushed to the scene to restrain Masakoto—they all uniformly convey the gravity of the incident.\textsuperscript{14}

The incident came as a great shock to many, including Masakoto’s family and acquaintances. The news of the incident reached Masakoto’s family temple, the Tokuhonji Temple in Asakusa, on the same day. According to a contemporaneous document preserved at the temple, the news came first merely as a vague rumor about a violent incident in Edo Castle with no details as to who was involved.\textsuperscript{15} The following morning, the temple acquired information that the victim was Tanuma Okitomo and the perpetrator was Sano Masakoto. The temple also learned that all sorts of rumors abounded about the incident. Since Masakoto was a parishioner of the temple, Tokuhonji sent out a monk named Keichō 恵潮 to ascertain whether this information was accurate. Keichō was instructed to avoid going to Sano’s residence directly and was told to first visit the house of a Tokugawa retainer with whom the temple had an association, an individual by the name of Niimi Tadaemon 新見忠右衛門. The retainer told Keichō that he was not aware of all the details regarding the incident and suggested to Keichō that he postpone going to Masakoto’s house until things had settled down. Before returning to the temple, Keichō passed by Sano’s house and noticed that the gate was closed and the windows were sealed (ibid.).

The next day, the twenty-sixth day of the third month, Tokuhonji received a letter from Masakoto’s brother-in-law, Masakoto’s older sister’s husband, with the following message:

\textsuperscript{14} Several sections of Record of Violent Incidents in Edo Castle also discuss a rumor that Masakoto had poisoned the blade of his sword so that even a slight wound would kill Okitomo (Hayakawa 1912, 459, 462).
\textsuperscript{15} This document is contained in Yamada 1988, 543. Yamada 1988 is a helpful article that introduces a number of contemporaneous documents concerning the 1784 incident preserved at the Tokuhonji Temple.
The day before yesterday, Sano Zenzaemon [Masakoto], your parishioner, injured Sir Tanuma Yamashiro no Kami [Okitomo] inside Edo Castle. Because of this, he was imprisoned the same day, as announced by Sir Sakai Iwami no Kami. We received word about this yesterday, and we are shocked. Since Zenzaemon is naturally not present at his residence and is not able to communicate with you, I write to you on his behalf.

The twenty-sixth day of the third month
Kasuga Satarō 春日佐太郎 (ibid.)

At this point, Okitomo is described as simply injured.\(^{16}\) This letter to Tokuhonji is accompanied by another note explaining that Keichō was sent to Satarō’s residence the following day to obtain more information. Keichō returned to the temple after learning that Satarō and his family did not know the details of the incident or what grudge Masakoto held against Okitomo. This Tokuhonji document, most likely composed shortly after the incident, indicates that confusion abounded outside Edo Castle as well and even among the immediate family members. The news about the incident spread quickly and there were many rumors in Edo, but nobody was really sure of how and why the incident took place.

Nonetheless, as a result of the incident and the eventual death of Okitomo, Masakoto was ordered to commit seppuku and his landholding was confiscated. Sano Masatoyo, Masakoto’s retired father, was not punished for his son’s crime. Masakoto’s mother’s family took in servants who had worked for Masakoto. Masakoto’s wife, Iyo, returned to her family home after the death of her husband (Fujita 2007, 214).

**Masakoto’s Motives**

Following the initial state of confusion in Edo, several theories emerged as to why Masakoto attacked Okitomo. They can be categorized into three types: 1) personal grudge; 2) anger at the

\(^{16}\) As already mentioned, Okitomo died on the twenty-sixth day of the third month, but the Bakufu announced the date of Okitomo’s death as the second day of the fourth month, the day before Masakoto’s seppuku (Fujita 2007, 214).
corruption of the Tanuma family; and 3) political conspiracy. According to the Bakufu’s “records of oral statements” (kōjōgaki 口上書き), Masakoto confessed that serious tension existed between himself and Okitomo centering on the genealogical records of the Sano and Tanuma families. Two or three years prior to the incident, Okitomo had apparently requested that Masakoto lend him the Sano family’s lineage chart (keizu 系図). After being asked multiple times, Masakoto agreed to let Okitomo borrow it temporarily. Okitomo, however, refused to return the lineage chart despite Masakoto’s repeated requests. Okitomo at one point had also requested to borrow from Masakoto a banner that bore the image of seven stars (shichiyō no hata 七曜の旗). Okitomo likewise refused to return this banner, claiming that the image on the banner actually represented the Tanuma family’s crest, which also featured seven stars.

According to Masakoto, Okitomo also illegitimately seized control of the Sano family’s family shrine in Masakoto’s home province. The shrine was originally dedicated to the kami of the Sano family (Sano daimyōjin 佐野大明神), but Okitomo sent his men to the shrine multiple times and eventually took it over by forcefully renaming the enshrined deity as the kami of the Tanuma family (Tanuma daimyōjin 田沼大明神)\(^\text{17}\).

What is helpful in understanding these disputes is the historical connection between the Sano and Tanuma families. The two families, in fact, shared the same roots. According to the genealogical records of the Tanuma family, the patriarch of the Tanuma family had the surname of Sano, Sano Shōji Masatoshi 佐野庄司政俊. Six generations after him, Iki no Kami Shigetsuna 伊岐守重綱 took on the name of Tanuma based on the place of his residence in

\(^{17}\) Record of Violent Incidents in Edo Castle contains a copy of Masakoto’s confession during the Bakufu’s investigation (Hayakawa 1912, 467–468). A very similar, yet not identical, document can also be found in Tokugawa Rinseishi Kenkyūjo 2005, 97–98. This perhaps suggests that there were multiple copies or versions of Masakoto’s confession. Also see Tsuji 1915, 33–34.
Shimotsuke Province. Shigetsuna served the fourth shogun of the Kamakura Bakufu, Kujō Yoritsune 九条頼経 (1218–1256). Generations after Shigetsuna, the Tanuma family changed their place of residence multiple times, serving different lords. During the Tokugawa period, the family began to serve the Kii branch of the Tokugawa Bakufu, as mentioned above. In other words, the Tanuma family had branched off from the Sano family and technically was subordinate to the main Sano lineage. The Tanumas were aware of their lowly family background and thus sought to enhance their lineage by establishing connections with more prestigious families through arranged marriages and adoptions, as also discussed above. The political power of the Tanuma family had clearly far surpassed that of the Sano family at the time of the 1784 incident. Nonetheless, the Tanumas still coveted the prestige of the main Sano lineage and sought to hijack it, or so Masakoto claims in his confessional report.

Furthermore, Masakoto’s confession also reveals that his personal grudge against Okitomo went beyond these genealogical disputes. Since several years prior to the incident, Masakoto had bribed Okitomo in hopes of being promoted to a position of importance. The report indicates that Masakoto paid some six hundred twenty ryō 両 in total (Hayakawa 1912, 468). Despite the significant amount of money presented, however, Okitomo did not reward Masakoto with a respectable position. In addition, several months prior to the incident, Masakoto had accompanied the shogun’s pleasure hunt at the Kine River. At this time, Masakoto skillfully brought down a bird with his arrow and was hoping that this would come to the shogun’s attention. However, Okitomo, who had also accompanied the hunt, claimed that the arrow that captured the bird was not Masakoto’s and thereby spoiled his opportunity of being recognized by

19 In Masakoto’s confession, the Tanuma family is described as a subordinate lineage (kerai suji 家来筋). Hayakawa 1912, 467.
the shogun (ibid.). These accounts indicate that Masakoto’s attack was motivated by a personal grudge that derived from a combination of genealogical disputes instigated by the Tanumas and Okitomo’s unfair treatment of Masakoto.

Scholars, however, have questioned the authenticity of this confession. They claim that the idea that one could take over another family’s lineage by stealing a family chart, crest, or shrine is nonsensical. Lineage was a matter of grave importance for the samurai class and it was kept in the official records. Masakoto’s confession is most likely a forgery, which also calls into question the authenticity of the stories about Masakoto bribing Okitomo in hopes of getting a promotion and Okitomo preventing Masakoto from being recognized by the shogun during the Kine River hunt.\(^{20}\) Scholars nonetheless maintain the possibility that Masakoto held a personal grudge against Okitomo or the Tanuma family as a whole for the fact that the Tanuma family enjoyed unrivaled political prosperity while the main Sano lineage had been reduced to obscurity.\(^{21}\)

Another theory concerning the incident was that Masakoto was driven by a desire for justice and anger at the corruption of the Tanuma family. This is most evident in a document attributed to Masakoto that outlines seventeen reasons why he decided to kill Okitomo, titled *A Copy of Seventeen Statements Left at Sano Zenzaemon’s Quarters (Sano Zenzaemon shukusho e sashioki sōrō jūnana kajō no utsushi)*.\(^{22}\) Although it

\(^{20}\) For more on the questionable nature of Masakoto’s confession, see Egami 1969, 144; Gotō 1971, 24–25; and Fujita 2007, 215.

\(^{21}\) See Egami 1969, 144–145 for example. Gotō 1971 also suggests the possibility that Masakoto wanted to make a name for himself by mimicking a scene from *Chūshingura* 忠臣蔵, a kabuki play inspired by Asano Takumi no Kami’s attack on Kira Kōzuke no Suke and which was at the height of its popularity at the time of the incident (25).

\(^{22}\) This document is quoted in several different places, including Hayakawa 1912, 468–470; Tsuji 1915, 37–40; and Tokutomi 1936, 485–488. According to Kanzawa, Masakoto was carrying with him a document outlining seven reasons for killing Okitomo at the time of the incident.
was Okitomo who was murdered, this document focuses mostly on his father, Okitsugu. The seventeen reasons listed in the document—there are actually eighteen—mainly deal with Okitsugu’s corruption, nepotism, and cunning political maneuvers. The document also claims that the Tanumas tried to take over the main Sano lineage by stealing the Sano family’s lineage chart and furthermore points out that a series of taxes Okitsugu helped to introduce were harming the lives of ordinary people. After outlining all seventeen (eighteen) reasons, the document concludes with the following statement:

The above seventeen points are all grave crimes that are absolutely inexcusable. He [Okitsugu] has been fortunate to receive the beneficence of the shogun and to be given posts of great responsibility. [However] if things were to be left as they are now, it would surely cause great commotion in the world. Therefore, I am left with no choice but to kill him, despite the sin of using a sword in the shogun’s residence and despite the great disrespect I will be committing. Yet, I take into consideration his years of service to the shogun and also the fact that if I kill his son Yamashiro no Kami [Okitomo], it would be the same as killing the father. Therefore, I will kill Yamashiro no Kami instead, and I will simply accept the severe punishment that will be given to me as a result of my action (Hayakawa 1912, 468–470).

Although the Bakufu declared Masakoto insane, here he seems perfectly aware of his intention. The document emphasizes his commitment to justice and determination to kill Okitsugu, despite the knowledge that doing so would cost him his life. Masakoto knows the gravity of the crime he is about to commit, yet he cannot bear to tolerate any longer the atrocities perpetrated by Okitsugu. Masakoto nonetheless acknowledges Okitsugu’s past service to the shogun and decides to spare his life. He will instead kill his eldest son, Okitomo, as killing the son will have same result as killing the father, or so he claims. Unlike the picture of Masakoto driven by a

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However, one of the investigators disposed of this document by burning it (1970, 1635). This also finds mention in Record of Violent Incidents in Edo Castle (Hayakawa 1912, 468).

23 These two points are the ninth and tenth reasons in the document respectively.
personal grudge as discussed above, Masakoto here is willing to sacrifice his life for the public good. This puts Masakoto’s murder of Okitomo in a completely different light.

Scholars generally agree that this seventeen-point document is also a forgery. It was most likely composed by an individual critical of the political dominance of Tanuma Okitsugu. This would explain why the document focuses on Okitsugu rather than on Okitomo. It would also clarify that the rather forced reasoning behind Masakoto’s decision to kill Okitomo instead of Okitsugu is most likely a later fabrication as well. The document is nevertheless useful for understanding how the people of Edo—or the author of this document and those who shared the author’s view at least—interpreted the death of Okitomo as direct retribution for Okitsugu’s corruption. The author of this document upholds Masakoto a selfless hero who delivered due punishment against Okitsugu.

Finally, some suggest the possibility that the 1784 incident was a political conspiracy. Isaac Titsingh (1745–1812) was a Dutch merchant who resided in Japan in three different occasions between 1779 and 1785, for a rough total of three years and eight months. During his stays in Japan he had associations with a variety of political, commercial, and intellectual communities in Nagasaki and Edo, and he kept in touch with them for some time even after leaving Japan. After returning to Europe, Titsingh organized and translated documents he had collected in Japan and also published a few items on subjects related to Japan. The majority of his publications, however, were posthumous. In 1822, ten years after his death, his Illustrations of Japan was published in London, translated from French. This book was written as an introduction to Japanese culture and custom, including some religious elements such as festivals and funerary practices (Numata 1970, 479–483). The book also contains numerous episodes

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24 The two earliest works on Tanuma Okitsugu, Tsuji 1915 and Tokutomi 1936, already argue that the document is a forgery (Tsuji 1915, 36–37 and Tokutomi 1936, 485).
about contemporaneous political affairs Titsingh became cognizant of while in Japan. Quite
naturally, Titsingh refers to Tanuma Okitsugu and Okitomo in several different sections of the
book. He was also aware of the 1784 incident and gives his analysis of it:

On the 24th of the third month of the fourth year Ten-mio [sic] (May 13th, 1784), Tonoma-yamassiro-no-kami [sic] [Okitomo], counsellor [sic] of state, returning home from the council with his father, Tonoma-tonomo-no-kami [sic] [Okitsugu], counsellor [sic] in ordinary, and his other colleagues, was assassinated by a singo-ban [sic] [shin goban], or soldier of the new guard, named Sanno-sinsayemon [sic][Masakoto], who enjoyed a revenue of five-hundred kof[sic] [koku]. From all the circumstances attending this murder, it is to be presumed that several persons of the highest distinction were privy to, and encouraged, it; and the general hatred which those two counsellors [sic] of state had drawn upon themselves serves to confirm this opinion. It is even asserted, that the original intention was to kill the father, to prevent the reform which he and his son, who were in the highest favor of the Djogoun [sic] [shogun] and his family, were successively introducing into the different departments of the state, and by which they had both incurred great odium. But it was considered that, as the father was old, death would naturally soon put a stop to his projects; whereas the son, who was in the prime of life, would have time to carry into effect all the innovations which they had planned; and that, moreover, it would be impossible to inflict a severer blow on the father than by snatching from him his only son [sic]. The death of the latter, in consequence, was determined upon (Titsingh 1822, 100–101).

Titsingh concludes that Masakoto’s murder of Okitomo was a political assassination, instigated by those unhappy with the reforms introduced by Okitsugu. The phrase “general hatred” is indicative of the dissatisfaction that some factions in the Bakufu or the people of Edo in general held against the Tanuma father and son. Echoing Masakoto’s confession, Titsingh explains that the original intention was to kill Okitsugu but Okitomo was ultimately chosen as the target. As already discussed, scholars agree that Masakoto’s confession is a forgery, but Titsingh’s account suggests that there was a widespread opinion that the person whom Masakoto wanted to kill most was Okitsugu or that the person most people wanted to see dead was Okitsugu.
Furthermore, Titsingh also echoes the image of Masakoto as a selfless hero willing to sacrifice his life for the sake of others:

On the second day of the fourth month (May 20th), it was signified to him [Masakoto], that Yamassiro [sic] had died of his wounds, and that he himself was sentenced to rip himself up [seppuku]. His eyes sparked with joy on hearing of the death of his enemy, and, after taking leave of his friends, he courageously executed his sentence. His wife, a lady of exquisite beauty, and only twenty-two years of age, when informed of his death, commended his conduct and, plunged a dagger into her bosom with a courage equal to that of her husband (ibid. 102).

Here one cannot help but notice that Titsingh did not shy away from using his imagination to dramatize some of his accounts.25 By no means was Titsingh a dispassionate record keeper, and it is unclear from where he collected the information upon which he based his accounts. As Hall points out, his accounts are not completely reliable, as they are not without factual fallacies (1955, 98–100). It is nonetheless probable that he had heard rumors about the incident from his affiliates and had collected some documents related to the incident.26

To whom is Titsingh referring when he writes of “several persons of the highest distinction” who encouraged or possibly planned this assassination? Some scholars suggest the possibility that Okitsugu’s political rival, Matsudaira Sadanobu 松平定信 (1759–1829), was involved in Masakoto’s attack on Okitomo. Ōishi, for example, links Sadanobu to Titsingh’s account introduced above (1991, 82–83). Egami also hints at the possibility of Sadanobu having actively spread negative rumors about Okitsugu and also perhaps having contacted Masakoto

25 Once again, according to Fujita 2007, Masakoto’s wife returned to her family home after her husband’s death (215). It is unclear what evidence Titsingh had for claiming that she was a “lady of exquisite beauty.”

26 This is reasonable given that Titsingh had all the dates related to the incident correct and that he mentions such details as Masakoto’s stipend. Titsingh also discusses the possibility that Masakoto had more personal reasons to attack Okitomo, including the genealogical disputes and Okitomo’s unfair treatment of Masakoto. His accounts, however, differ slightly from those recounted in the Japanese sources discussed above (1822, 159–160).
directly to encourage him to kill Okitsugu or Okitomo for the sake of the world (1982, 192). Egami also introduces an anecdote that Sadanobu later confessed to the eleventh shogun Ienari 家斎 (1787–1837) that he had once thought of assassinating Okitsugu himself (ibid. 200–201).

Although it is impossible to prove Sadanobu’s involvement in the murder of Okitomo, such an explanation remains tempting for some, given that the so-called Tanuma period was followed by the political dominance of Matsudaira Sadanobu as an influential elder.27

These competing theories notwithstanding, Masakoto’s motive remains a mystery. Some suggest that Masakoto really went insane, as the Bakufu announced.28 As discussed above, scholars have doubted the authenticity of the various documents outlining Masakoto’s confession and motives. Yet the production of these forged documents in and of itself reflects some of the contemporaneous sentiments regarding the 1784 incident, as the following section discusses.

Reactions in Edo

The story of a low-ranking guard murdering an elite Bakufu official became a hot topic of discussion in the Shogun’s capital. Edo residents reacted overwhelmingly positively to the incident. They praised Masakoto as a hero and rejoiced at the misfortune of Okitomo or the Tanuma family as a whole. A document titled Record of Violent Incidents Since Kan’ei (Kan’ei irai ninjōki 寛永以来刃傷記) reveals how people reacted to the news of the incident:

Upon hearing the news of Yamashiro no Kami [Okitomo] being attacked by a sword, both samurai and townspeople were ecstatic (hanahada yorokobu koto kagiri nashi 甚悦事限なし). Even luggage carriers from the countryside were talking about it amongst one another, happily pulling along their horses. People especially praised Sano Zenzaemon and

27 Of course, scholars remain cautious when discussing this “conspiracy theory.” Egami himself says that this theory is more suitable to be discussed by a mystery novelist (1992, 192).
28 Fujita 2007, 216–217. Fujita nonetheless also points out that it is problematic to accept the Bakufu’s announcement at face value.
lamented his death. This is because they all regarded Tanuma with hatred. People’s hearts were all the same.  

The news of the attack caused great excitement among Edo residents. People spoke approvingly of Masakoto’s action, because both samurai and townsfolk likely hated the Tanumas, and they all mourned the death of Masakoto. In the passage itself, it is not specified whether “Tanuma” refers to Okitsugu, Okitomo, or both, but it would be safe to assume that the Tanuma political dynasty as a whole was the object of hatred.  

Why were the Tanumas so unpopular? Some say that Tanuma Okitsugu, despite his meteoric rise in Tokugawa officialdom, was an unlucky politician. The period between the mid-1760s and mid-1780s, the so-called Tanuma period, witnessed a series of major disasters, including a severe drought in the seventh year of Meiwa (1770), a catastrophic fire in Edo followed by an equally devastating storm in the ninth year of Meiwa (1772), and an epidemic that killed close to two hundred thousand in Edo in the second year of An’ei (1773) (Egami 1982, 137–139). The Great Famine of Tenmei saw many starved to death starting in the second year of Tenmei (1782), only to be exacerbated by an eruption of Mt. Asama in the third year of Tenmei (1783), which rendered many farmlands unfertile for several years. As a result, the price of rice and other goods skyrocketed in Edo, causing severe economic duress for both samurai and townspeople alike (ibid. 81–84). Furthermore, new tax obligations Okitsugu imposed on a variety of commercial activities were met with fierce opposition in some regions (ibid. 38–45). The Tenmei period saw a peak in the number of peasant uprisings and disturbances in the long history of peasant uprising during the Tokugawa period. It is perhaps excessive to blame Okitsugu alone for all of this, yet it is not difficult to see that by the time of the 1784 incident,  

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29 This document records notable violent incidents involving swords between the Kan’ei (1624–1644) and Tenmei periods (1781–1789). It is quoted partially in Yamada 1988, 534.
there was mounting dissatisfaction and desperation in many segments of Tokugawa society and that these negative sentiments were directed against Tanuma Okitsugu, the de facto leader of the Tokugawa regime.

It is also likely that some factions in the Bakufu did not think favorably of the underhanded nature of the Tanuma political machine, fueled by bribes and blatant nepotism. Bakufu officials’ discontent with the Tanuma family was perhaps subtly manifest at the scene of the attack in Edo Castle. When Masakoto commenced his attack on Okitomo, they were not alone. At least a dozen officials, including Okitomo’s fellow junior elders, were at the scene. After delivering the initial blow to Okitomo, Masakoto had enough time to chase down Okitomo, who tried to escape for dear life, and wound him several more times. In other words, the officials at the scene had ample time to restrain Masakoto or protect Okitomo. But it took Grand Inspector Matsudaira Tsushima no Kami, a seventy-year-old man who was seated relatively far from the scene of the attack, to contain Masakoto. Shortly after the incident, the Bakufu awarded Matsudaira two hundred koku for his action while penalizing other officials who were present at the scene for negligence (Fujita 2007, 217–220). For example, on the seventh day of the fourth month, the following statement was issued to two grand inspectors who failed to respond swiftly:

On the twenty-fourth day of this past month, when junior elders were exiting [Edo Castle], Guard Sano Zenzaemon was deranged (ranshin) and wounded Yamashiro no Kami. At that time, you two were in the Middle Room (naka no ma 中の間)\(^\text{30}\) and you say that you both rushed to the scene. However, in seeing a man with a drawn sword, you two should have responded swiftly and contained him. Yet, you two were slow in responding (temadori 手間取). Because of this, Yamashiro no Kami had to defend himself with the sheath of his sword and was wounded in several places, eventually causing his death. You two were not earnest in meeting the expectations of your position. Therefore, it has been declared that you two will be suspended (kinshin 謹慎) (Kanzawa 1970, 1638–1639).

\(^{30}\) This is the name of the room in Edo Castle in which the attack took place.
It is perfectly possible that the officials at the scene were taken by surprise, just like Okitomo himself, and could not respond on the spot. It is also possible, however, that they harbored ill will toward the Tanumas, and they saw Masakoto, whatever motives he might have had, as acting on their behalf. This would explain why both samurai and townsfolk were ecstatic upon hearing the news of the incident.

The people of Edo rejoiced at the eventual death of Okitomo. During Okitomo’s funeral procession from Okitsugu’s mansion to the Tanuma family temple, Shōrinji 勝林寺 in Komagome, a group of beggars approached the procession and begged for goods. When the officials turned them away, the beggars threw rocks at the procession. Onlookers eventually followed suit, throwing rocks while cursing. Another time, a pair of beggars on the street mimicked the assault in Edo Castle, one playing Okitomo and the other Masakoto. Edo’ townspeople welcomed such caricatures as a means of relieving the frustration they had held against the Tanumas over the years. Likewise, Edoites also produced satirical poems (rakushu 落首) that denounced the Tanuma family. Titsingh recorded in his book some poems that were in vogue, using Romanized spelling or rough approximations thereof. Below is one example:

\[
\begin{align*}
Ki-ra re ta wa & \text{ 斬られたは} & \text{The one who was slain} \\
Ba ka to si yo ri to & \text{馬鹿年寄りと} & \text{Was the stupid elder} \\
Ki kou ta fa ya & \text{聞くとはや} & \text{In hearing about this} \\
Ya ma mo o si ro mo & \text{山もお城も} & \text{The mountains and the castles} \\
Sa wa gu sin ban & \text{騒ぐ新番} & \text{Are disturbed by a guard.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

The “stupid elder” of course refers to Okitomo. There is a pun between waka doshiyori (junior elder), which was Okitomo’s rank, and baka toshiyori (stupid elder). The mountains (yama) and

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31 Fujita 2007, 222–223. Also see Kanzawa 1970, 1636. Kanzawa notes that the story of people throwing rocks at the procession is only a rumor and that he does not know whether it is true.
32 Titsingh 1822, 149. The translation here is mine, although Titsingh also offers his. I follow Tsuji’s reading of Titsingh’s Romanization (1915, 47–48).
castles (shiro) come from the official title of Okitomo, Yamashiro no Kami. Sinban, or the
guard, refers to Masakoto’s position. The poem ridicules Okitomo while subtly praising
Masakoto. Another poem Titsingh recorded goes as follows:

| Si yo dai mi o | 諸大名 | The various daimyos |
| Mou sio ni nikou mo ou | むしように憎む | Cannot help but hate |
| Nanats ou bo si | 七つ星 | The seven stars |
| I ma si kou si re ba | 今しくじれば | Now the stars have failed |
| Si mo no si ya wa si | 下の仕合せ | Happiness for the lowly. |

The “seven starts” refer to the Tanuma family, after the seven stars featured in the Tanuma
family crest. In this poem, both the daimyo and populace alike hate the Tanumas. The poem in
particular presents the “failing” of the Tanuma stars as an auspicious sign for the populace. This
reiterates the positive perception that both samurai and townspeople had of Okitomo’s death, as
discussed above.

Furthermore, a contemporaneous satirical account concerning a certain “Seven-Eyed
Monster” (nanatsume kozō 七つ目小蔵) also conveys similar sentiments (Figure 1).

What follows is a description of this monster:

This is a monster that inhabited Sagara Castle in Tōtoumi Province in recent years. It has seven eyes and three mouths, one each on its left shoulder and thighs. This monster eats people’s money and valuables and

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Titsingh 1822, 155. Also see Tsuji 1915, 50.
brings hardships to many. It has three horns on its forehead. Because of the bad karma of its parent, this monster was hunted down in the region this time.34

This monster clearly stands for Okitomo. Sagara Castle was the home turf of the Tanuma family in the Sagara domain. The seven eyes represent the seven stars in the Tanuma family crest. The three mouths correspond to the wounds Okitomo sustained from Masakoto’s attack, as evident from the blood spilling from these openings. The three horns on its forehead represent the character for mountain or *yama* 嶽, in reference to Okitomo’s title, Yamashiro no Kami.

According to the accompanying description, the monster eats people’s money and valuables, again articulating dissatisfaction with the Tanuma family’s monopolization of political power and the destitute condition in which many found themselves during the Tenmei period. The description also explains that someone killed the monster and that this act reflected the bad karma of the monster’s parent (*oya no inga ga ko ni mukui* 親の因果が子にむくい). This passage also reflects the contemporaneous consensus that the real cause of evil was Okitsugu. The Tanumas were ugly, despicable monsters. They deserved the misfortune that befell them.

Masakoto, on the other hand, became an object of popular adoration and sympathy. Soon after Masakoto committed seppuku, a group of peasants in Masakoto’s home province visited his father to offer words of condolence. Their representative also presented the father with some money they had gathered. The father accepted the money once, as a gesture of his gratitude to the farmers’ kindness, but returned it at a later date saying that he did not wish to cause them financial hardship. The peasants then took that money and donated it to the Sano family temple, Tokuhonji, and asked the priest to use this money for the fees involved in performing Masakoto’s funeral services (Tsuji 1915, 41–42). Furthermore, word eventually got around in

34 The picture of the monster and the explanatory note are both contained in Tsuji 1915, 52.
Edo that the sword that Masakoto had used to attack Okitomo was a work of the sword maker Awataguchi Tadatsuna 穂田口忠綱. The market price of Awataguchi’s swords surged shortly after the incident (ibid. 41).

Around the same time, Edoites rumored that Masakoto was a descendant of the legendary samurai Sano Genzaemon 佐野源左衛門. Genzaemon is famous as the protagonist of the popular nō drama Hachi no ki 鉢木 (The Potted Tree). The story, which takes place in the Kamakura period (1185–1333), focuses on Genzaemon’s steadfast loyalty to the Kamakura Bakufu. It begins on a snowy night in Kōzuke Province. A traveling monk comes to Genzaemon’s humble home seeking lodging for the night. Genzaemon’s house is short on dried wood to make a fire, but in order to provide warmth to this traveling monk, Genzaemon sacrifices his family’s treasured miniature potted trees (bonsai 盆栽) and starts a fire with it. In his conversation with the monk, Genzaemon confesses that he was forced into his current impoverished condition due to conflicts within his family. Genzaemon nonetheless declares that he remains loyal to the shogun in Kamakura despite his poverty. The monk continues on his journey the following morning. Some time later, Genzaemon receives a call to arms from Kamakura and leaves immediately, ready to serve. When he arrived in Kamakura, Genzaemon unexpectedly reunites with the traveling monk and learns that the monk was none other than Hōjō Tokiyori 北条時頼 (1246–1258), the fifth regent of the Kamakura shogunate. Tokiyori, touched by Genzaemon’s loyalty to the shogun and willingness to help a stranger despite his own poverty, rewards Genzaemon by reinstating him to his original position and by giving him new

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35 The author of this drama, contained in many anthologies, is unknown. See Yokomichi and Omote 1963, 407–414.
lands to govern. Sano Genzaemon, of course, is a fictional character. It is nonetheless significant that the people of Edo connected Genzaemon’s story of self-sacrifice to Masakoto’s deed and ultimately the sacrifice of his life.

**Masakoto Deified as a Yonaoshi God**

Edo residents regarded Masakoto as their hero. More than just a popular celebrity, however, Masakoto gained a new status as a *kami*. More specifically, people worshipped him as a *kami* of *yonaoshi*. A number of contemporaneous sources attest to this. One such record comes from a writing of the famous scholar Sugita Genpaku. In the seventh year of Tenmei (1787), Genpaku completed a work titled *Tales for Later Reflection* (*Nochimi gusa* 後見草). This work consists of three sections, the first of which was written by an individual named Kameoka Sōzan 亀岡宗山, who mostly wrote about the Great Fire of Meireki (*Meireki no taika* 明暦の大火) in the third year of Meiwa (1657). Genpaku later added the second and third sections, in which he recounts various natural disasters, political affairs, and other notable incidents from the tenth year of Hōreki (1760) to the seventh year of Tenmei (1787), a period that roughly corresponds to the so-called Tanuma period. In the third section of this work, Genpaku addresses the 1784 incident. Much of what Genpaku provides here overlaps with what other primary sources say about the incident, as already discussed above. However, Genpaku offers an illuminating account of what happened after Masakoto’s seppuku:

> Since the winter of the previous year, people had been suffering from a famine of unprecedented severity. On the day after this person [Masakoto] died, the price of five grains (*gokoku* 五穀) dropped slightly. Because of

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36 Chikamatsu 1985, for some reason, introduces Masakoto as a descendant of Genzaemon (454). But Yamada 1988 clearly states this is not historically accurate (537).
37 It also helped that they had the same surname. Their names also rhyme—Zenzaemon and Genzaemon.
this, foolish individuals (gangu no monodomo 頑愚の者共) gathered together and said, “Oh, how precious! How grateful must we be! This person [Masakoto] is not a human. He is a kami. He manifested himself in this world in order to save us (wareware o sukuwan tame 我々を救ん為). That is why he performed a mysterious deed this time and ascended to heaven as a kami (kami agarase tamai keri 神あからせ玉ひけり).” They gathered everyday at a temple called Tokuhonji in Asakusa Honganji, where Masakoto’s remains were placed. It is said that people visited the temple continuously in a large number, as if they were a troop of ants, and that they worshipped him incessantly as a yonaoshi daimyōjin.38

Genpaku here writes in a critical tone, describing those who worshipped Masakoto as foolish and comparing them to ants.39 He nonetheless provides important information. He observes that multitudes of people visited Masakoto’s family temple day after day to venerate him as a yonaoshi daimyōjin. Some claimed that Masakoto had manifested himself in the world as a kami for the specific mission of saving the suffering populace. Genpaku contextualizes his description of this popular veneration of Masakoto by noting the hardship of an ongoing famine, referring clearly to the Great Famine of Tenmei, and the drop in the price of the five grains that occurred on the day after Masakoto’s death. The five grains typically refers to rice, barley, bean, millet, and sorghum, the most important one being rice. Note here that Masakoto’s deification as a yonaoshi daimyōjin did not occur immediately after his attack on Okitomo or after Okitomo’s death. Rather it happened after the downward movement in the price of important grains following Masakoto’s death. Masakoto’s “mysterious deed” (kikai no koto 奇怪の事) in the text most likely refers to this drop in the price of chief grains, which many understood as made possible by Masakoto’s sacrifice of his life. Masakoto’s death here takes on new significance as his ascension to the heavenly realm of the gods, having accomplished his task of saving the

38 Genpaku’s Tales for Later Reflection is contained in Nihon shomin seikatsu shiryō shūsei. Mori and Tanigawa 1970, 55–86.
39 His critical tone withstanding, Genpaku’s account is generally reliable. See Sekiya’s contextualization of Genpaku’s writing (1970, 55–56).
impoverished populace. Genpaku follows up his account of Masakoto’s deification with a description of the Bakufu’s response:

The magistrate at the time heard of this and saw it as an extreme example of the instabilities of recent years. He ordered the situation be put under control swiftly. He sent his men to the temple and had them block the temple gate. With this, people stopped gathering at the temple for some time. Nonetheless, even after that, people kept visiting the temple to offer their prayers (Mori and Tanigawa 1970, 75).

The Bakufu understandably did not welcome the deification of Masakoto and saw his popularity as a disturbing sign. After all, he had killed one of Bakufu’s elite officials. According to Genpaku, however, the Bakufu’s efforts to suppress the cult of Masakoto proved ineffective.

*Record of Violent Incidents in Edo Castle* also contains an entry concerning Masakoto’s deification as a *kami* of *yonaoshi*:

Multitudes of people, both high and low, visited Sano Zenzaemon’s family temple, Kandasan Tokuhonji in Asakusa. Because of this, the temple contacted the authorities, and officers were dispatched from the Magistrate of Temples and Shrines (*jisha bugyō* 寺社奉行). Those who were not related [to Masakoto] were not allowed to enter the temple. Despite this, many people continued to come to the temple. Some made offerings by throwing in money from outside, some offered flowers, and some even dedicated stone stūpas…In the Asakusa area, people called Sano *yonaoshi daimyōjin*, according to what those from the area said (Hayakawa 1912, 463).

The text reveals that people donated money, flowers, and even stone stūpas in order to commemorate Masakoto’s death and praise his virtues as a *yonaoshi daimyōjin*. The passage here does not specify why these people regarded Masakoto as a *kami* of *yonaoshi*. It does very interestingly note that throngs of people, both high and low (*kisen* 貴賤), came to venerate Masakoto. This implies that Masakoto’s admirers did not consist solely of the poor and destitute but also included those of better financial means. The overwhelming number of people gathering at the temple caused temple officials to contact the authorities, or more specifically the
Magistrate of Shrines and Temples. As already noted above, it is difficult to say precisely when *Record of Violent Incidents in Edo Castle* was finalized as a document and when the particular entry concerning Masakoto’s deification was composed. Yet, it is noteworthy that the description here more or less matches Genpaku’s contemporaneous account. The description also concurs with what Kanzawa has to say about the state of Tokuhonji following Masakoto’s death:

> Numerous people, regardless of whether they had a personal connection [to Masakoto], went to his grave one after another. They offered incense and flowers and praised him. Multitudes of people visited the temple day after day. There were so many of them that the head monk at the temple was worried that people might get injured. So the monk appealed to the Magistrate of Temples and Shrines. It was decided that those not related [to Masakoto] should be denied entry to the temple. However, it was useless. Even more people gathered at the temple, and the voices of praise [for Masakoto] never ceased—so I have heard.

This passage agrees with *Record of Violent Incidents in Edo Castle* that Tokuhonji requested the Bakufu do something about the influx of people storming the temple. Nonetheless, the Bakufu most likely had its own incentives to intervene, as Genpaku suggests in his writing. Most importantly, however, both Kanzawa and the author of the *Record* vividly convey how Masakoto’s grave at Tokuhonji suddenly became a site of popular veneration.

A valuable firsthand account of this fervent worship of Masakoto, albeit from a much later date, comes from Iwase Momoki 岩瀬百樹 (1769–1858), a writer and a carver based in Edo as well as the younger brother of the famous satirical writer Santō Kyōden 山東京伝 (1761–1816). Momoki also had the penname of Santō Kyōzan 山東京山 and produced some satirical works himself, although he made his living primarily as a carver. In the third year of Kōka (1846), Momoki compiled a collection of essays titled *Weaving of a Spider’s Web* (*Kumo no

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40 Kanzawa 1970, 1636. Kanzawa adds a little note at the end of this passage that this is based on what he heard and he is not sure whether this account is true. He makes similar notations in several different sections of his entry on the Tanuma family.
*itomaki* 蜘蛛の糸巻), in which he shares his recollection of events from the Tenmei period. A section in this work focuses on the 1784 incident:

In the spring of the fourth year of Tenmei [1784], the price of rice skyrocketed. On the twenty-fourth day of the third month of the same year, as junior elders were exiting their office, Guard Sano Zenzaemon attacked Sir Tanuma Yamashiro no Kami with a sword. He died the following day [sic]. He was the eldest son of Sir Tanuma Okitsugu. Grand Inspector Matsudaira Tsushima no Kami contained Sano, and Inspector Yagyū Shuzen no Kami took away Sano’s bloodstained sword. On the third day of the fourth month of the same year, with Sir Yamakawa Shimousa no Kami 山河下総守 serving as the overseer, Sano committed seppuku in the prison yard. His lineage was terminated. Sir Tanuma Okitsugu presented himself at Edo Castle three days later and resumed his work as usual. Sir Sano’s remains were placed in Tokuhonji of Asakusa Honganji. Multitudes of people—the young, old, rich, and poor—came to offer incense and flowers to his grave. In this year, I was sixteen years old.\(^{41}\) I followed my *jūjutsu* 柔術 teacher, Honma Jōemon 本間丈右衛門, and went to Tokuhonji. In front of the temple gate, there were three vendors selling flowers and incense on the ground. After going through the gate, there was someone holding a large barrel filled with water and charging fees for washing hands. Around the grave, there were so many flowers being offered that the place looked like a grove. The area was filled with thick incense smoke. There were so many people that one would think the temple was hosting a display of its secret Buddha statues and treasures (*kaichō* 開帳). Because the temple was in such a state, the Magistrate of Temples and Shrines soon prohibited people from going to Sir Sano’s grave, and the temple gate was closed. Because of this, it is said that people secretly snuck into the temple grounds at night. The reason why so many people gathered at the temple was because starting on the day after the attack, the high price of rice began to drop quickly, and with this, the people of Edo said that Sano was a *yonaoshi daimyōjin*. This is indeed mysterious.\(^{42}\)

As a teenager, Momoki witnessed crowds of people visiting Masakoto’s grave to offer incense and flowers, in such a great number that it encouraged some individuals to set up makeshift businesses around the temple grounds. People revered and even fetishized Masakoto, to the extent that they would try to sneak in at night to pay homage to him after the authorities had

\(^{41}\) The traditional way of counting one’s age was to start as a one-year old on the day of birth or the year of birth. This would make Iwase sixteen years old in 1784.

\(^{42}\) Iwase 1846. The passage is also quoted in Tokutomi 1936, 490.
begun to guard the temple gate. Momoki does not explain why his jūjutsu teacher took him to Tokuhonji. But the two of them went inside the temple grounds, saw Masakoto’s grave firsthand, and presumably offered prayers as well. Perhaps his jūjutsu teacher also wished to express his gratitude to Masakoto, like so many others in Edo at the time, or perhaps his curiosity got the better of him. In any case, Momoki here links Masakoto’s deification as a yonaoshi daymyōjin specifically to the drop in the market price of rice. At the same time, he also suggests that this had an impact beyond just the lower class, for he indicates that people of all ages and social backgrounds flocked to the temple (kisen rōnyaku gun o naseri 貴賤老若群をなせり), excluding, most likely, the samurai class. Momoki’s account differs slightly from Genpaku’s in that he says that the drop in the price of rice occurred after the day of the attack, where Genpaku says that it happened after Masakoto’s seppuku. In any case, although written and compiled some years later, Momoki’s recollection serves as an important eyewitness account of the developments following the 1784 incident and Masakoto’s apotheosis.

Momoki’s older brother, Santō Kyōden, also helped to create a satirical piece of work that indirectly corroborates Masakoto’s deification as a yonaoshi god. This work, titled Black and White Water Mirror (Kokubyaku mizukagami 黒白水鏡) and published in the first year of Kansei (1789), belongs to the genre of Kibyōshi 黄表紙 (literally, “yellow cover”) picture books. The satirical writer Ishibe Kinkō 石部琴好 composed the text while Santō Kyōden provided the accompanying illustrations under his artist name, Kitao Masanobu 北尾政演. The story takes place in the Kamakura period, during the reign of the tenth Kamakura shogun. This fictional setting of course refers to the reign of the tenth Tokugawa shogun, Ieharu, at the height of the political dominance of Tanuma Okitsugu. Following the advice of his vassal Kajiwara Kanuma

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43 The National Diet Library holds a copy of this work. Also see Koike et al. 1985, 165–190.
梶原かぬま, the shogun decides to impose a new taxation measure called “feces tax” (hunjō ふんじょう). The vassal Kajiwara Kanuma stands for Tanuma Okitsugu—the pun between Kanuma and Tanuma gives it away—and the feces tax most likely comes from the commercial taxes (unjō 運上) Okitsugu helped to introduce. In this satirical work, however, the government pays tax to the people, reversing the usual taxing scheme. As a result of this new “taxation,” townspeople end up having so much money that they do not know what to do with all their wealth. Pawnshops lend enormous amounts of money for worthless items, thieves try to give away money to strangers, and people get jealous of those with delinquent children who excel at squandering the family wealth. These depictions of overabundant wealth served as a harsh criticism against the Bakufu for its apparent incompetence to do anything about the hardships experienced in the early 1780s.

In the midst of this, Kajiwara Kanuma’s son, Yamajirō 山二朗, gets into an argument with another vassal named Sano no Suke 佐の之介. Needless to say, Yamajirō stands for Tanuma Okitomo (Yamajirō rhyming with Okitomo’s official title, Yamashiro no Kami) and Sano no Suke stands for Sano Masakoto. The conflict between the two begins when Yamajirō steals a secret love note Sano no Suke has received from a courtesan. This mirrors the prevailing theory at the time that Masakoto attacked Okitomo because the latter stole the Sano family’s lineage chart, as discussed above. One day, Yamajirō and Sano no Suke get into a fist fight in the castle, and Sano no Suke beats Yamajirō. Shortly after this “incident,” the shogunate decides to terminate the feces tax and the townsfolk welcome this decision. Around the same time, someone proposes to bury in the ground all the money overflowing the city and mark that space as a “gold mound” (kanezuka 金塚). If people should ever need money in the future, they can get it from
this golden mound. The story concludes by showing a picture of this golden mound, flanked by a banner on which is written *yonaoshi daimyōjin* (Figure 2).

![Figure 2. The banner with the characters of *yonaoshi daimyōjin*. From Ishibe Kinkō 1789.](image)

This golden mound, resembling a grave mound, represents Masakoto’s gravesite. It makes sense that the building of this mound follows the “incident” in the castle, which mimics Masakoto’s attack on Okitomo. The banner bearing the characters of *yonaoshi daimyōjin* reflects Masakoto’s apotheosis as a *kami of yonaoshi*, as recounted in the documents examined above. According to the narrative framework of this satirical work, the golden mound functions as a repository of wealth. By extension then, at least for the authors of this satire, Masakoto’s gravesite symbolizes wealth. By depicting Masakoto’s grave as a symbol of economic prosperity and by placing the banner of *yonaoshi daimyōjin* right next to it, the authors emphasize the connection between Masakoto’s deification as a *yonaoshi daimyōjin* and the understanding shared by many Edo residents that Masakoto contributed directly to the economic wellbeing of the populace by causing a drop in the price of rice and, more broadly, by challenging the political dominance of the Tanuma family. *Black and White Water Mirror*, although published five years after the original incident and even a year after Okitsugu’s death, alarmed the Bakufu, which

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44 No one is ordered to commit seppuku in the story, however.
swiftly banned this publication. The main author, Ishibe Kinkō, faced the punishment of expulsion from Edo, and the illustrator, Santō Kyōden, had to pay a fine (Miyatake 1911, 79).

The evidence analyzed above shows that economic considerations lay at the heart of Masakoto’s apotheosis as a *yonaoshi* god. Against the backdrop of dire hardship caused by a series of natural disasters and a severe famine, the people of Edo embraced the drop in the price of rice, or “the five grains” as Genpaku puts it, as a real and tangible salvation. Although details vary slightly—Momoki says the drop happened right after Masakoto attacked Okitomo while Genpaku says it happened after Masakoto’s death—Edo’s townspeople nonetheless credited Masakoto for the falling price. They worshipped Masakoto as a *kami* who had manifested in this world to save the suffering populace and perhaps interpreted the drop in the price of rice as a kind of practical, this-worldly benefit granted by Masakoto.45 The multitudes of people visiting his grave in Tokuhonji praised him and expressed their gratitude to him, but some of them perhaps also hoped to obtain even more practical benefits by praying directly to Masakoto, who had proven his efficacy by mysteriously bringing down the price of rice and established himself as a very potent *kami*. This would explain why so many individuals flocked to the temple even after the authorities locked the temple gate and even went so far as to sneak into the temple grounds at night or throwing in offerings from outside.

At the same time, the fluctuating price of rice alone did not constitute the basis for Masakoto’s apotheosis. Some primary sources indicate that those who gathered at Tokuhonji consisted of not only the poor but also included people of all social backgrounds, suggesting that Masakoto’s deification stemmed from more than just economic factors. It is impossible to talk about Masakoto’s status as a *kami*, for example, without considering the overwhelmingly

45 Also see Sasaki’s brief comment about the connection between the concept of *yonaoshi* and the market price of rice (1979, 13–14).
negative view the people of Edo held of the Tanuma family, as exemplified by the plethora of satirical poems and anecdotes discussed above. In addition to the charges of nepotism, corruption, and monopolization of power, economic factors of course also contributed to this negative assessment, for people’s hatred of the Tanuma family only grew deeper as their lives grew increasingly difficult during the early Tenmei years. In the eyes of the people of Edo, Masakoto emerged as a long-awaited punisher of the Tanuma family. He succeeded in murdering Okitomo, but also made an ultimate sacrifice by losing his life. In a sense, Edo’s townsfolk saw Masakoto as a kind of gimin 義民 (literally, “righteous folk”), an individual driven by a sense of justice who willingly sacrifices himself/herself for the sake of others. As with many other gimin, Masakoto became an object of popular veneration. He became a kami. Masakoto’s apotheosis as a yonaoshi god thus encompassed both economic concerns connected to the price of rice and Edo residents’ dissatisfaction with the Bakufu, as led by the Tanuma family.

Masakoto’s deification as a yonaoshi daimyōjin represents the first example of the cult of a yonaoshi god. As such, it sets an important pattern for the emergence of subsequent yonaoshi gods and also serves as a useful model through which to outline the general characteristics of yonaoshi gods in the Tokugawa period. As discussed more fully in the Introduction, a yonaoshi god saves a community of people from its economic hardship by granting it immediate, tangible, and economic relief, occasionally accompanied by violent measures aimed at punishing or removing specific entities causing the hardship. Yonaoshi gods or individuals worshipping the yonaoshi gods almost always characterize the entity causing the suffering as evil. They also legitimize violence as a means of punishing or removing that entity. In the specific case of the

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46 See Fukaya 1986, 280–283 for a discussion of the roles of gimin within the context of Tokugawa-period peasant uprisings.
47 See how Scheiner 1973, 586 and Davis 1983, 111–112 also mention Sano as a forerunner in their discussion of nineteenth-century “yonaoshi movements.”
1784 incident, Masakoto punished the Bakufu, both for its inability to alleviate people’s suffering and for its corruption, by murdering the eldest son of Tanuma Okitsu, the very personification of Bakufu leadership. Masakoto lost his life, having committed the grave crime of killing one’s superior. Yet, the people of Edo nonetheless legitimized his action. Edo residents also interpreted the drop in the price of rice as a very tangible blessing granted by Masakoto’s power as a *kami*. This basic scheme recurs in a variety of contexts in which *yonaoshi* gods appeared during the Tokugawa period, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate.

Masakoto’s apotheosis also represents the first example in which the concept of *yonaoshi* functioned as an interpretive framework through which to imbue a particular social phenomenon with unique significance as a “world-renewing” event. This usage of *yonaoshi* marks a significant departure form prior usages where the word *yonaoshi* functioned primarily as 1) an apotropaic charm against natural calamities such as earthquake and thunder or 2) as a word denoting “making a fresh start” or “celebrating a new beginning,” often used with the connotation of turning a negative situation into a positive one, as also elaborated more fully in the Introduction. In other words, with the 1784 incident, the expression *yonaoshi* begins to bear more direct social significance. At the same time, the expression maintained some level of continuity with the previous usage in that it still emphasized the idea of ameliorating the present unfavorable condition. Edo residents welcomed the drop in the price of rice and the death of Okitomo as positive changes and interpreted them as constituting the process of *yonaoshi*, made possible by the superhuman power of a *yonaoshi* god.

However, *yonaoshi* as articulated in relation to the 1784 incident has neither the revolutionary nor millenarian implications that scholars often associate with the term *yonaoshi*. Yes, Masakoto’s apotheosis as a *kami of yonaoshi* served as a direct criticism of the Tokugawa
regime. Accordingly, the Bakufu responded by prohibiting people from going to Masakoto’s grave and also by banning satirical publications. However, criticism does not equal the will to revolution. There is absolutely nothing in the sources related to Masakoto’s apotheosis to suggest an intention to subvert the Tokugawa regime itself or radically transform the world. Nor did yonaoshi here have anything to do with solving social inequality. Masakoto as a yonaoshi god saved the suffering populace by bringing down the price of rice and by punishing the corrupt and incompetent Bakufu by killing one of its elite officials. Nothing more. Nothing less. Later in the Tokugawa period, some yonaoshi gods would actively seek to solve the disparity between the rich and the poor (Chapter 3 and 5 in particular), but not in the case of the 1784 incident. People regarded Masakoto as a catalyst for change, but a change within the existing framework of Tokugawa society and not in a revolutionary, class-driven sense. This example underscores the need to take seriously the historicity of the concept of yonaoshi and understand each articulation of yonaoshi in its proper historical context, rather than assume certain agendas based on preconceptions about the term yonaoshi as a scholarly construct.

**Reverberating Impact of the 1784 Incident**

Like *Black and White Water Mirror*, many satirical works and theatrical plays utilized Masakoto’s attack on Okitomo as their central theme, some of them even years after the original incident. The aforementioned Santō Kyōden, in fact, had composed a story titled *Historical Tales, Two Drums* (*Jidai sewa nichō tsuzumi* 時代世話二挺鼓) in the eighth year of Tenmei (1788), one year prior to his involvement in the production of *Black and White Water Mirror*.\(^{48}\) This story takes place in the Heian period (794–1185), as a retelling of the famous beheading of

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\(^{48}\) Illustrations for *Historical Tales, Two Drums* were provided by Kitagawa Yukimaro 喜多川行麿.
the rebel Taira no Masakado 平将門 (~940) by Fujiwara no Hidesato 藤原秀郷 (unknown). However, in this retelling, Taira no Masakado stands for Okitomo and Fujiwara no Hidesato stands for Masakoto (Tsuji 1915, 54). In the penultimate illustration of the story, Hidesato beheads Masakado, and seven balls gush out of Masakado’s neck. The seven balls represent the seven stars in the Tanuma family’s crest, and this beheading thus stands for Masakoto’s murdering of Okitomo (Figure 3).

Moreover, a jōruri浄瑠璃 play titled Kamakura Mountain, Man Versed in Court and Military Custom (Yūsoku Kamakurayama 有職鎌倉山) also modeled its plot after the incident. First performed in Osaka in the first year of Kansei (1789), this play serves as an illuminating indication that the impact of the incident had reverberated beyond Edo (Furuido 2006, 395). Furthermore, a kabuki play titled Irises, Sano and Yatsuhashi (Hanashōbu Sano no yatsuhashi花菖蒲佐野八橋), also inspired by Masakoto’s attack, first appeared in Edo in the eighth year of Bunka (1811). This play won extreme popularity despite the fact the actual incident had occurred almost thirty years earlier (ibid.).

Despite the overwhelmingly negative assessment of the Tanuma family, as attested by the popularity of the literary and theatrical productions above, some actually spoke highly of the
Tanumas, particularly of Okitomo. Titsingh, for example, laments the untimely death of Okitomo in his 1822 publication:

The eyes of the better informed had been long fixed on Tonoma-yamassiro-no-kami [sic][Okitomo], son of the ordinary counsellor [sic] of state Tonomo-no-kami [Okitsugu], uncle to the Djogoun [sic], a young man of uncommon merit, and of an enterprising mind. They flattered themselves that when he should succeed his father, he would as they expressed it, widen the road. After his appointment to be extraordinary counsellor [sic] of state [junior elder], he and his father incurred the hatred of the grandees of the court by introducing various innovations, censured by the latter as detrimental to the welfare of the empire. He was assassinated on the 13th of May 1784, by Sanno-Sinsayemon [sic][Masakoto]…

Titsingh describes Okitomo as an able politician, working closely with his father on a number of innovations, which Titsingh, as a foreign merchant, welcomed. Many looked to Okitomo not simply as Okitsugu’s successor but also as someone who would achieve even greater things than his father. Okitomo’s unexpected death, which Titsingh surmises resulted from enmity toward the Tanuma father and son within the government, made it clear to all that the Tanuma political dynasty would end with Okitsugu.

A slightly different interpretation on Okitomo’s death comes from a recollection of Tadano Makuzu 只野真葛 (1763–1825), a daughter of Kudō Heisuke 工藤平助 (1734–1801), an intellectual famous for authoring a treatise arguing the need to develop the northern land of Ezo (present-day Hokkaido) titled Analysis of Rumors Concerning Red Ezo (Aka Ezo fūsetsu kō 赤蝦夷風説孝). Both the father and the daughter were living in Edo at the time of the incident. Makuzu’s writing from 1812 concerning her father’s evaluation of the incident goes as follows:

It is said that Sir Tanuma Okitomo, who was killed by Sano Zenzaemon, was an extremely honorable man and also the shogun’s favorite. He was a truly virtuous person. He was about thirty years old. Sano had been planning to kill Okitomo’s father, Okitsugu, but did not have the chance of

49 Titsingh 1822, 183. The passage about Okitsugu being uncle of the shogun is incorrect.
meeting him, so he instead killed Okitomo, his son. My father said, “This is fate (kore tenmei nari 是天命なり). The time for the world to change has come.” Father was happy, saying, “If Sano had killed the father [Okitsugu] as he had planned, then Okitomo would have surely replaced him as elder. Then the same state of the world would have continued. Although it [the method of killing] is unpleasant, it will bring a brighter future to this world” (Takada and Hara 1994, 128).

Makuzu’s evaluation of Okitomo echoes that of Titsingh. Nonetheless, she recollects that her father, Heisuke, saw Okitomo’s death as a positive thing by interpreting it as a necessary impetus for the world to change. Makuzu remembers her father as saying that Okitomo’s death would make the world “brighter.” The “world” (yo) here clearly refers to the world as dominated by the Tanuma family during the 1770s and the early 1780s. Heisuke’s comment implies that the rule of the Tanuma family had continued for too long, generating a sense of stagnation in the world, and the time for change had come. Accordingly, Heisuke emphasizes the significance of the death of Okitomo, as opposed to Okitsugu, for Okitomo represented the future of the Tanuma family. Although Heisuke speaks disapprovingly of the violence involved in realizing this change, he nonetheless judges that it was necessary. Given Heisuke’s wide network of scholars and bureaucrats at the time of the incident, it is possible that his opinion reflected that of many in his circle. In the eyes of Heisuke and perhaps his friends, Masakoto reinvigorated the stagnant political process by terminating the tyranny of the Tanuma family. This process of political reinvigoration, I would argue, represented a different kind of renewal, quite separate from the idea of yonaoshi, which, as discussed above, had to do more with the direct economic needs of ordinary townspeople.

Masakoto’s apotheosis as yonaoshi daimyōjin indeed signaled the beginning of the end of the so-called Tanuma period. Although one must beware of a teleological reading of history, a

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50 Also see Fujita 2007, 225–226 for a discussion of the connection between Heisuke and Okitsugu.
series of events occurred successively after Okitomo’s death to terminate the Tanuma dynasty. 
The most devastating blow to Okitsugu came with the sudden death of the tenth shogun Ieharu in 
the sixth year of Tenmei (1786). Even before this, a group of Okitsugu’s political rivals led by 
Matsudaira Sadanobu had waged a movement in the Bakufu to remove Okitsugu’s subordinates 
from key political posts. Shortly after Ieharu’s death, Okitsugu himself lost the position of elder. 
In the following two years, Okitsugu’s landholdings grew progressively smaller, until his death 
in the eighth year of Tenmei (1788) (Egami 1982, 200–226). The rise of Matsudaira Sadanobu 
accompanied the swift closure brought to the Tanuma period. Through his Kansei reforms 
(Kansei no kaikaku 寛政の改革) from the seventh year of Tenmei (1787) to the fifth year of 
Kansei (1793), Sadanobu reversed many of the reforms Okitsugu had introduced. Given this 
series of events following the 1784 incident, it is not farfetched to say that Masakoto as a 
yonaoshi god played a pivotal role in reorienting the direction of political history in Tokugawa Japan.

For this study of yonaoshi gods, too, Masakoto plays a pivotal role. His apotheosis 
heralds the rise of yonaoshi gods in Japan. Subsequent chapters will outline and examine the 
proliferation throughout the Japanese archipelago of superhuman entities invested with the 
power to execute world renewal.
Chapter 3

The Rush Hour of Yonaoshi Gods in Late Tokugawa Peasant Uprisings: A Comparison with Contemporaneous Religious Rebels in Qing China

This chapter examines how the framework of “yonaoshi god,” following the apotheosis of Sano Masakoto, gradually gained countrywide currency. In particular, the chapter analyzes a number of peasant uprisings that were led by individuals who either claimed to be or were upheld as yonaoshi gods between the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. During this period, the number of yonaoshi gods appearing in peasant uprisings proliferated in various parts of the Japanese archipelago, from the southern island of Kyushu to the northern land of Tohoku. To highlight this development, this chapter will frame the above period as the “rush hour of yonaoshi gods,” borrowing McFarland’s phrase.¹

This chapter will outline this rush hour of yonaoshi gods through a series of case studies on peasant uprisings in which yonaoshi gods appeared and by highlighting the salient characteristics of these deities. It is important to clarify here that the objective of this chapter does not lie in analyzing uprisings that scholars typically include under the category of “yonaoshi uprising” or yonaoshi ikki. As explained in the Introduction, the category of “yonaoshi uprising” does not necessarily refer to uprisings in which historical actors themselves invoked the language of yonaoshi. This chapter will instead focus specifically on uprisings in which historical actors upheld certain entities as yonaoshi gods and the roles that these deities played in these uprisings.

A central guiding question in this chapter is whether the category of millenarianism is appropriate in understanding the significance of yonaoshi gods in late Tokugawa peasant uprisings. As also discussed in the Introduction, scholars have highlighted the concept of

¹ McFarland 1967. The original phrase was the “Rush Hour of the Gods” in reference to the explosive growth of Japanese new religions in the immediate postwar era.
yonaoshi as an example of millenarian thinking that developed within the context of Japanese history. In particular, scholars look to the late Tokugawa years as a transformative period in which people’s desire for yonaoshi manifested outwardly as repeated peasant uprisings and other forms of popular disturbances. Perhaps the most eloquent proponent of this position is George Wilson. In his seminal analysis of the interactions between diverse historical actors that culminated in the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Wilson points to a convergence between the populace’s hope for a new world and the aspiration of some factions of the samurai class to defeat the reigning Tokugawa regime:

Refresh your memory. Let’s go back to the 19th century. The late Tokugawa years were a time of tumult and transformation in Japan. Peasant uprisings and other forms of popular disturbances were common, and scholars have long regarded yonaoshi—the concept of a millenarian remaking of the world to redeem the disarrayed clutter of late Tokugawa Japan—as a key element in understanding these events. Perhaps the most eloquent proponent of this position is George Wilson. In his seminal analysis of the interactions between diverse historical actors that culminated in the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Wilson points to a convergence between the populace’s hope for a new world and the aspiration of some factions of the samurai class to defeat the reigning Tokugawa regime:

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Popular consciousness in its dream of yonaoshi—a millenarian remaking of the world to redeem the disarrayed clutter of late Tokugawa Japan—comes ironically into concurrence with the thrust of the romantic quest by imperial loyalist samurai to redeem Japan not only from defilement by the foreign powers but also from further depredations by those who had proved unworthy to conduct the affairs of the state (1992, 10).

Today, many take for granted the connection between the concept of yonaoshi and millenarianism. However, scholars have been using the expression yonaoshi as their own historiographical category in ways detached from the expression’s original historical contexts. No significant research has been done to approach yonaoshi as an emic concept as understood by historical actors themselves. Accordingly, the question of whether yonaoshi as an emic concept can appropriately be described as millenarian has not been answered.

Peasant uprisings led by individuals deified as yonaoshi gods offer a perfect arena in which to conduct this analysis, partly because when scholars link the historiographical category of yonaoshi with millenarianism, they mostly do so within the context of discussing late Tokugawa peasant uprisings and similar popular disturbances. Whether the designation of

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millenarianism is fitting in capturing the nature of particular social phenomena of course depends on how one defines millenarianism. This chapter will adopt the classic definition of millenarianism as outlined by Norman Cohn, which can be summarized concisely as collective, terrestrial, imminent, total, and miraculous salvation. In particular, Cohn emphasizes that millenarians aim “utterly to transform life on earth, so that the new dispensation will be no mere improvement on the present but perfection itself” (Cohn 2000, 15). In other words, a millenarian transformation of the world signifies a mode of salvation that involves an immediate, radical, and complete transformation of the present world, sanctioned by a divine, superhuman power.

Furthermore, in order to analyze effectively the suitability of the category of millenarianism in describing late Tokugawa peasant uprisings featuring yonaoshi gods, it is necessary to have a conceptual reference point from which to examine the nature of these uprisings. For this, this chapter will adopt a comparative approach and analyze contemporaneous religious rebellions in Qing China (1644–1911), namely the White Lotus Rebellion, the Eight Trigrams Uprising, the Taiping Rebellion, and the Du Wenxiu Rebellion. For both Japan and China, the nineteenth century was a significant turning point, characterized by the gradual decline of the ruling regimes and the accelerating encroachment of Western imperialist forces. Numerous uprisings occurred in both Japan and China during this period, as if to symbolize the state of unprecedented confusion and chaos in which the two East Asian states found themselves. Coincidentally, a number of uprisings featuring religious themes and symbolisms took place in both Japan and China during this roughly contemporaneous transitional period, providing a fertile ground for a comparative analysis.

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3 Cohn 2000, 15. Of course, this is a generalized definition of millenarianism not limited to the original meaning in reference to a thousand-year messianic kingdom that is to emerge after Christ’s Second Coming.
This comparative examination makes evident that it is inaccurate to describe *yonaoshi* gods appearing within the context of peasant uprisings as millenarian. Whereas the Chinese counterparts clearly fit the pattern of millenarianism described by Cohn as expectations of imminent, radical world transformation, the Tokugawa cases do not. The Chinese rebels sought to create a new world order of their own by defeating the existing Qing regime. The *yonaoshi* gods did exhibit a few notable characteristics that could from a certain perspective be described as subversive, such as salvation for the weak and poor and the sanctioning of violence as a form of punishment against the wicked. However, it is incorrect to describe the *yonaoshi* gods as millenarian based on these characteristics alone. The cult of *yonaoshi* gods took for granted the legitimacy of the Tokugawa regime and focused on rectifying specific wrongs and injustices within the existing social framework.

**The Rush Hour of *Yonaoshi* Gods**

Despite the prevailing image of “Pax Tokugawa,” literally thousands of peasant uprisings of varying scale and intensity took place throughout the Tokugawa period (Aoki 1971, 681–682). However, the appearance of *yonaoshi* gods in peasant uprisings was a phenomenon unique to the late Tokugawa period. This section addresses the two earliest examples, from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, then moves on to introduce examples from the 1830s and 1860s. These time periods coincide with relative peaks in the number of peasant uprisings in the late Tokugawa period, and from this it is clear that the appearance of *yonaoshi* gods was conditioned by this general trend. The goal of this section is not to offer exhaustive, detailed analyses of the various socio-economic conditions of individual uprisings but to present a panoramic view of the ubiquitous presence of *yonaoshi* gods in late Tokugawa peasant uprisings. For the former
purpose, there already is excellent research available both in Japanese and English. My contribution to the field is the explicit attention given to yonaoshi gods, and this section will highlight their salient characteristics.

*The Kansei Uprising of 1796*

To the best of my knowledge, the first peasant uprising that featured a yonaoshi god occurred in the twelfth month of the eighth year of Kansei (1796) in the Tōdō domain (present-day Mie Prefecture). Known as the Kansei Uprising (*Kansei ikki* 寛政一揆), this uprising took place largely in response to a series of major land and financial reforms proposed by the local domain in the late eighteenth century. The Tōdo domain was in a serious fiscal crisis by the mid-1700s due to a combination of factors, such as expenditures to repair damages caused by natural disasters, assistance with construction of waterways in other domains, and renovation of the official shrine of the first shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu, in Nikko. A severe famine during the Tenmei period also exacerbated these fiscal challenges (Fukaya 1969, 18–44). Peasants in the domain suffered as well. Many had barely enough to survive; infanticide was common; and there was a significant decrease in the population of farmers in the region in the mid- to late eighteenth century, leaving many farmlands unattended and uncultivated (ibid. 55–65). Needless to say, the destitute of the peasant population—the very source of tax revenues—further strained the domain finance.

Starting in the mid-1790s, the Tōdō domain proposed a variety of measures in an attempt to alleviate this situation. The most drastic of them all was its new policy on land redistribution

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The plan was for the domain to confiscate farmlands in select villages and redistribute them more equally among farming families. The goal was to balance the possession of farmlands and prevent large-scale farmers from buying up available lands and driving small-scale farmers into poverty—which the domain judged to be the root cause of unsatisfactory tax revenues. Other proposed measures included prohibiting wasteful customs (wedding celebrations, elaborate funerals, etc.), requiring farmers to trim tree branches more regularly so as to maintain maximum land productivity, and suspending interest payments on a domain-run community fund to which villagers had contributed money (Umehara and Nishida 1959, 228–237).

These measures met fierce opposition. Farmers reacted especially negatively to the proposed land redistribution. Large- and mid-scale farmers remained skeptical of the government’s intention and method of redistribution, and even some small-scale farmers voiced concerns for increased tax burdens in the future (Fukaya 1969, 231–233). In the winter of 1796, the villagers submitted a collective petition requesting the local government to repeal the proposed land redistribution. However, the domain remained adamant about implementing the plan. Given this, on the twenty-sixth day of the twelfth month of the same year, thousands of local peasants—armed with bamboo sticks and axes—gathered in Ichishi County near the center of the domain. From there, the armed peasants marched toward Tsu Castle (Tsujō 津城). Along the way, they destroyed the houses of local officials and broke into shops to help themselves to food, drinks, and other goods (ibid. 247; Umehara and Nishida 1959, 245). Many more peasants joined the uprising force in the subsequent days.

The domain mobilized its military to guard Tsu Castle and eventually succeeded in quelling the uprising through a combination of intimidating tactics involving the use of firepower.
and compromises on the contested issues, including the annulment of the proposed land redistribution. A heavy snowfall that started in the afternoon of the twenty-eighth day—two days after the start of the uprising—also worked in the domain’s favor (Fukaya 1969, 247–250).

Having achieved their primary objectives, the uprising peasants disbanded on the twenty-ninth day of the same month. Following the uprising, the Tōdō domain kept its promise of canceling the land reform and other related measures. The domain furthermore introduced new poverty-relieving programs, which mostly took the form of providing free rice and other goods directly to the poor (Umehara and Nishida 1959, 254). The local population welcomed these proposals, unlike the previous ones.

The local government did, however, arrest and execute three individuals who were regarded as leaders of the uprising. They were Mori Sōzaemon 森宗左衛門 of Kawaguchi Village, Taki Tōshichirō 多気藤七郎 of Hattaino Village, and Machi’i Tomo no Jō 町井友之丞 of Tanisoma Village. The three individuals, all local community leaders, accepted the charge of organizing the uprising and willingly submitted themselves to execution by beheading.5

Shortly after their execution, the local community upheld and venerated the three individuals as “Great August Deities of World Renewal” (yonaoshi daimyōjin). This is recorded in a contemporaneous document titled Thorns That Stand Strong Like a Rock (Gantachi ibara 岩立茨). This anonymous document is the most extensive and reliable primary source on the Kansei Uprising, offering detailed information on its causes, development, and aftermath. The author explains that the document was composed within a month after the uprising—in the first

5 The precise date of their death is not known today, as there is no record that explicitly indicates the date of the execution. Umehara and Nishida 1959 nonetheless surmises that the execution took place in the twelfth month of the tenth year of Kansei (1798), based on a document found at a local temple (255).
month of the ninth year of Kansei, to be precise. However, one also finds in this document passages that were most likely added a year or two after the uprising (Fukaya 1969, 18–19). Nevertheless, the document gives the following account concerning the three individuals executed for the charge of plotting the uprising:

The leaders of the uprising—Kawaguchi Village’s Mori Sōzaemon, Hattaino Village’s Taki Tōshichi [Tōshichirō], and Tanisoma Village’s Machi’i Tomo no Jō—were executed, for they were responsible for organizing the uprising. They died in place of tens of thousands of farmers. Because of this, people gave them the title of “Great August Deities of World Renewal” (yonaoshi daimyōjin to shōshite 世直し大明神と称して)—following a popular saying in the world these days—and mourned their deaths (Aoki 1981, 7:164).

The text does not make clear precisely in what ways or where the three individuals were venerated, but indicates explicitly that the local peasants—many of whom had undoubtedly participated in the uprisings themselves—upheld the three leaders as gods, in particular as gods of yonaoshi. Noteworthy here is the emphasis placed on the sacrifice made by the three individuals, for their deaths exempted thousands of peasants from being punished. Furthermore, central in the deification of the three leaders as yonaoshi gods was the understanding that they acted selflessly and willingly offered their lives for the sake of others. The uprising succeeded in forcing the domain to repeal its proposed land reform and other measures that would have been detrimental to the lives of ordinary peasants. The domain also decided to provide new poverty-relieving measures as a result of the uprising. Yonaoshi here refers to these rectifications of unjust situations or unfair conditions of existence from the perspective of the poor and weak. Those who made extraordinary sacrifices to make these rectifications possible were deified as yonaoshi gods.

What is also intriguing in the above quote is the phrase “following a popular saying in the world” (yo no kotowaza ni 世の諺に). Although it is unclear whether this “popular saying”
refers to the expression *yonaoshi* or the title of *yonaoshi daimyōjin*, it does imply that peasants in the Tōdō domain knew that they were not the first to deify particular individuals as *yonaoshi* gods and that they did so following a precedent from elsewhere. Fukaya surmises that this statement refers to Sano Masakoto’s deification as a *yonaoshi* god in Edo during the Tenmei period, discussed in the last chapter (Fukaya 1969, 285–286). This is certainly a possibility, and if this is indeed the case, then this shows the impact of Masakoto’s assassination of Tanuma Okitomo beyond the city of Edo even more than ten years after its occurrence. Furthermore, this also illuminates how the title of *yonaoshi daimyōjin* as a new category of divinity was starting to gain currency in different parts of the Japanese archipelago since Masakoto’s incident, at least as far away from Edo as the Tōdō domain (approximately 200 miles apart).

Furthermore, the deification of the leaders of the Kansei Uprising, as the first instance in which a *yoanoshi* god appears within the context of peasant uprising, shares some of the same themes discussed in analyzing Masakoto’s apotheosis, including selfless sacrifice and help offered to the poor and weak. Although Masakoto’s murder of Okitomo and the Kansei Uprising occurred in two separate socioeconomic and geographical contexts, individuals involved in these two events mobilized the same framework of *yonaoshi* god to commemorate and worship their respective hero(es). Given this, it would not be far-fetched to posit that some level of connection existed between *yonaoshi* gods in the Kansei Uprising and the deified Sano Masakoto, although no direct evidence can substantiate this connection. What is clear is that by the time of the uprising in 1796, the category of *yonaoshi* god or *yonaoshi daimyōjin* to be precise had been developing as a category of divinity with a few recurrent themes.
The Bunka Uprising of 1811

The next example comes from the Oka domain (present-day Ōita Prefecture) during the Bunka period (1804–1818). The uprising started in the Yoharu region in the western part of the domain in the eleventh month of the eighth year of Bunka (1811). It also triggered similar revolts in the surrounding domains, some of which lasted until the second month of the following year. Collectively, these uprisings are referred to as the Great Bunka Uprising (Bunka dai ikki 文化大一揆).

Much like the Kansei Uprising in the Tōdō domain, the uprising in Yoharu occurred in response to a series of new laws (shinpō 新法) passed by the domain starting in the fourth year of Bunka (1807). These consisted of a variety of fiscal measures, which included a de facto monopolization by the domain of sales of such goods as salt, tobacco, coals, candles, and various crops. The new laws also raised taxes on farmlands, prohibited farmers from organizing parties and memorial services, and also made harsh demands on farmers such as requiring them to work late into the night to prepare goods such as ropes and sandals (and pay further taxes on those goods).6

On the night of the eighteenth day of the eleventh month of 1811, all men between the ages of fifteen and sixty from villages in the Yoharu region gathered together, as many as four thousand in all. They armed themselves with bamboo sticks, sickles, and short knives; some reportedly even carried guns. Women and children remained at home or hid themselves in local temples. Domain officials first sought to appease the uprising force by sending village officials and local Buddhist monks to negotiate. After snubbing these emissaries, the armed peasants marched toward the domain center (OSS 1983, 1:556–557). They were eventually met by a local

magistrate (gun bugyō 郡奉行) by the name of Nagao Sukegorō (長尾助五郎), who asked them what their demands were and also promised them that he would deliver their demands to his superiors. The peasants replied that they were suffering greatly because of the new laws and wished to have them repealed. Otherwise, they claimed, they intended to destroy the houses of officials responsible for passing these laws and then appeal directly to the domain lord. Nagao reported this to his superior, Inoue Jūrōzaemon (井上十郎左衛門), who after deliberation met with the peasants directly and promised to fulfill their demands and also to abolish the domain’s monopoly on goods. Satisfied, the peasants dispersed and returned peacefully to their respective villages (ibid.).

Soon after this, wooden announcement boards (kōsatsu 高札) were set up in several places in the Yoharu region. On these posts was written the words “Yoharu Great August Deity of World Renewal” (Yoharu yonaoshi daimyōjin 四原世直大明神) (Sasaki 1979, 11–12). This is documented in a contemporaneous personal memoir composed in the seventh month of the tenth year of Bunka (1813), a year and a half after the initial uprising:

After the twentieth day [of the month], a wooden board was placed in Yamategawara 山手河原. On it was written, “Yoharu Great August Deity of World Renewal, [the board was placed by] all worshippers, all people of the town” (Yoharu yonaoshi daimyōjin sōujiko zaijū machijū 四原世直大明神惣氏子在中町中).”

Yamategawara was one of the places in the Oka domain where the armed peasants had congregated. Unlike the case of the aforementioned Kansei Uprising, there are no specific

7 Ibid. 557, 564–571. The peasants made a number of claims, but most of them focused on the new laws.
8 Aoki 1982, 9:13. Not much information is available on this document other than the information given in its brief introduction, in which the author expresses a desire to pass on what he or she had heard about the uprising to the descendants. Not much is known about the identity of the author other than the claim made by Toyota, Hata, and Naomoto 1985 that the author was a samurai bureaucrat from the Oka domain.
individuals being deified as yonaoshi gods here. It is possible that the entire uprising force was being deified as a yonaoshi god collectively. What is notable here also is the use of the word ujiko on the wooden board. Ujiko is an expression traditionally used to refer to worshippers of a local tutelary deity (ujigami 氏神) and also commonly seen in contemporary Japan in various standards or banners used during community festivals (matsuri 祭り) in honor of local deities. This usage suggests the possibility that the Yoharu yonaoshi daimyōjin was conceptualized as a local deity that protected the community of Yoharu as a whole. If this is the case, the yonaoshi god here was not embodied by a specific deified individual but was defined as a kind of communal protective spirit presiding over the community of the Yoharu region.

The work of yonaoshi in this uprising undoubtedly refers to the success of the uprising force in pressuring the domain to recall its new laws, which were negatively impacting the lives of ordinary people. As in the Kansei Uprising, the emphasis is placed on relieving the hardships of ordinary peasants. Sasaki also argues that the yonaoshi god in Yoharu served the function of uniting the uprising peasants. He also argues that, in general, peasants needed to create an alternative form of authority when they wished to express their displeasure against the Tokugawa regime (1979, 12–13). In the case of Yoharu, this alternative form of authority was a specifically religious form of authority. While Sasaki’s point is valid that the presiding presence of the yonaoshi god had the effect of unifying the peasants in confronting the Tokugawa authorities, it is important to note that the uprising in the Yoharu region ceased quietly and peacefully after the domain conceded to the peasants’ demands. In other words, the peasants never questioned the legitimacy of the Tokugawa regime itself.

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9 Sasaki 1979, OSS, and THI all claim that the Bunka Uprising of 1811 represents the first uprising in Japanese history that featured a yonaoshi daimyōjin. As shown above, however, the Kansei Uprising precedes the Bunka uprising by about fifteen years.
The Kamo Uprising of 1836

The Tenpō period (1830–1844) saw a significant rise in the number of peasant uprisings across Japan. This period represents a peak in the number of uprisings, second only to the final few years of the Tokugawa period. A major factor was the so-called Great Famine of Tenpō (Tenpō no dai kikin 天保の大飢饉), which started with unusually cold weather in the spring of the fourth year of Tenpō (1833) and lasted at least until a devastating crop failure in the seventh year (1836) (Bolitho 1989, 117–118). Domain officials in various regions estimated tens of thousands of deaths, and there were reports of villagers surviving by eating leaves and weeds (ibid. 119).

As a result, large-scale peasant uprisings occurred throughout the country and destabilized the foundation of Tokugawa rule.

The Kamo Uprising (Kamo ikki 加茂一揆) in the seventh year of Tenpō (1836) was one such uprising in Mikawa Province (present-day Aichi Prefecture). Mikawa experienced unstable weather that year, with excessive rainfall and not enough sunshine. The inevitable crop failure was also accompanied by a surging price of rice.10 Local farmers rumored that the high price of rice was caused partly by rice merchants and sake dealers who were hoarding available rice (TYKH 1981, 501–508). The uprising began on the night of the twenty-first day of the ninth month in Matsudaira and Kugyūdaira Villages in Kamo County in the southern part of Mikawa. As many as ten thousand peasants participated in the uprising effort and destroyed the houses of rice dealers and sake merchants as well as those of village officials whom the uprising peasants judged were colluding with the former. They furthermore demanded lowering of the price of rice.

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rice, sake, and other goods as well as reduction of the annual tax obligation to the local

A representative primary source on the Kamo Uprising is a document titled A
Disturbance Among Ducks (Kamo no sawagi tachi 鴨の騒立ち), composed shortly after the
uprising by a local Shinto priest by the name of Watanabe Masaka 渡辺政香.\footnote{Hasegawa 2010, 39. There are contents in this document that were added later by someone other than Watanabe. Takahashi nonetheless surmises that the document was completed in its entirety not long after the third month of the ninth year of Tenpō (1838) (1970, 478–480).} There is a pun intended in the title of this document between kamo as in “ducks” and kamo in reference to Kamo Country. The use of puns is a common technique in writings from the Tokugawa period, often meant to be satirical as well as humorous. Watanabe’s shrine was located in Terazu in Hazu County, just southwest of Kamo County (a Hachiman shrine, still extant today). He was an important community leader who often played an intermediary role between domain officials and the local population in the county. Although Watanabe writes disapprovingly of the leaders of the uprising in A Disturbance Among Ducks, he remains sympathetic to the needs of ordinary peasants. Given his intermediary position in the community, Watanabe can be described as a more or less neutral observer.

Watanabe records in detail the actions of the uprising force, and it is in these descriptions that he makes multiple references to yonaoshi gods. On the twenty-third day (of the ninth month presumably), the peasants reached Asuke Village. Asuke was an influential village that housed the residence of the local Tokugawa retainer Honda Mondo 本田宗光 and the houses of many wealthy merchants. By the time the uprising force arrived there, the retainer Honda and his armed subordinates were already in position to guard the village. The uprising force nonetheless
forced themselves into the village, disarming the guards along the way. As the peasants made their entry, they made this triumphant proclamation:

Now, you [addressing Honda, his men, and merchants who lived in the village], listen closely! You use the power of money to buy up rice, and without considering the suffering of the poor, you use this rice to make sake and sell it for a high price, taking away even more money from the poor. You deserve the severest punishment. Today, at this moment, kami of yonaoshi have come to deliver this punishment (yonaoshi kamigami kitarite genbatsu o ate tamau 世直し神々来て現罰を当て給ふ). Now prepare yourselves (Shōji, Hayashi, and Yasumaru 1970, 250).

The expression “kami of yonaoshi” here is in the plural form in the original Japanese (kamigami). This plural expression refers clearly to the peasants themselves. In other words, instead of attributing to some external entity the religious authority to deliver the “severest punishment,” the uprising peasants claimed it for themselves. It is also possible that the peasants regarded themselves as divine representatives of a presiding yonaoshi deity, yet the use of the plural suggests that a stronger emphasis was placed on the individual peasants themselves.\(^{12}\)

After making this statement, the peasants started to destroy the houses and warehouses in the village. They acquired a large sum of money during this process—presumably found in the merchants’ houses—and they dispersed this money in the surrounding regions (ibid.). To destroy, confiscate, and redistribute wealth obtained through unjust means was the divine punishment of the yonaoshi gods.

After attacking Asuke Village, the uprising force moved to the Koromo domain in the northwestern part of Mikawa Province, and there, they were met with Koromo residents and officials armed with spears made of bamboo, ready to confront the uprising force. Looking at the armed people of Koromo, one of the peasants made this declaration:

\(^{12}\) It is also possible that the use of the plural reflects the peasants’ conceptualizing of multiple yonaoshi gods presiding over their actions.
How futile and absurd! Exactly what do you plan on doing with your bamboo spears? Do you dare fight against the kami of yonaoshi? We are not here to have petty arguments or to harm people. All we want is to have our wishes granted. If not, we will just pay visits to the houses of those who oppose us. Are you here to extend a welcome to the kami of yonaoshi (yonaoshi no kami o shōtai ni deta ka世直の神を招待に出たか)? If your intention is to interfere with us, we will punish you with the utmost severity (ibid. 254).

In this intimidating statement, the peasant declares that he and his fellow dissidents have no intention to resort to violence as long as their demands are met, but a severe punishment awaits those who oppose them. The peasant presents himself as a yonaoshi god, impervious to petty weapons such as bamboo spears, and demands that the people of Koromo treat him with proper respect. Despite this self-aggrandizing statement, however, the peasants did not fare so well in Koromo. It turns out that bamboo spears were not the only weapons with which the people of Koromo had equipped themselves. Some of them had guns, to which yonaoshi gods were not so immune. The Koromo force first tried to scare away the peasants by shooting a few shots in the air, but this proved insufficient. Finally, a shot was taken on target, and a yonaoshi god dropped dead. Furthermore, armed reinforcements soon arrived at the scene from nearby regions. Seeing this, the yonaoshi gods started to disperse. Some escaped, but many were caught. Some begged for mercy by prostrating themselves.¹³

As clear from the above two quotations, the notion of punishment occupied an important place in the concept of yonaoshi in the Kamo Uprising. Yonaoshi gods actively sought to punish those who became rich at the cost of others’ suffering or who interfered with the divine work of yonaoshi. This is a theme not overtly apparent in the previous two uprisings analyzed above.

¹³ Ibid. 256–257. It should be noted that there is no evidence that Watanabe himself witnessed any of this firsthand. His accounts are possibly based on things he heard from his acquaintances or rumors floating around shortly after the uprising. Nonetheless, the repeated references to yonaoshi gods suggest that there was some factual basis for the actual use of the term.
although if one looked back to Masakoto’s incident during the Tenmei period, one realizes that the idea of punishing a corrupt ruler was central to Masakoto’s apotheosis. Implicit in this emphasis on punishment was that it was done on behalf of the weak and poor, who did not possess the means to speak for themselves. According to Watanabe’s account, one of the leaders of the Kamo Uprising described the uprising as a “festival of world renewal” (yonaoshi no matsuri 世直の祭り) and that the uprising peasants participated in this “festival” in order to help each other in difficult circumstances (nanjū o sukui au 難渋を救合) (Shōji, Hayashi, and Yasumaru 1970, 267). This leader stresses the communal aspect of yonaoshi and more importantly, its altruistic quality. Furthermore, to the best of my knowledge, the Kamo uprising represents the first instance in which uprising peasants themselves explicitly expressed their authority as yonaoshi gods and claimed to have certain privileges, such as permission to use violent means when necessary and to qualify such violent actions as due punishments against the wicked. The moral assertion of “helping others,” once again, underpinned this claim.

After their defeat in Koromo, the remaining peasants continued their destructive behavior, but by the twenty-sixth day of the month, the majority of them had been arrested, mostly due to vigorous efforts by the Okazaki domain forces from eastern Mikawa who had every incentive to quell the uprising quickly so as to prevent peasants from other counties from participating (TYKH 602–608). Although lasting for less than a week, the Kamo Uprising was one of the largest uprisings even during the tumultuous Tenpo period and certainly the largest in the history of Mikawa Province (ibid. 634–635).

The Shindatsu Uprising of 1866

The Keio period (1865–1868) was an especially chaotic time in Japanese history. The arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry in the sixth year of Kaei (1853) had led to the opening of Japanese
ports, which ended Tokugawa Japan’s two-century-long isolationist policy. Dissatisfied with the Tokugawa regime’s incompetence in dealing with foreign threats and demands, domains such as Satsuma, Chōshū, and Tosa gained strength. After a series of political maneuvers, these domains succeeded in toppling the Tokugawa regime and in restoring the emperor as the legitimate ruler of the Japanese archipelago—the Meiji Restoration (1868).

During the last few years of the Tokugawa period, the number of peasant uprisings skyrocketed, reflecting the political and socioeconomic instabilities of the time. An uprising that occurred in the sixth month of the second year of Keio (1866) in an area known as Shindatsu in the Aizu domain (present-day Fukushima Prefecture) was a particularly large uprising triggered by a number of factors. One was the high price of goods caused in part by a direct military confrontation between Tokugawa forces and the Chōshū domain that had started earlier in the same month. Another factor was a new tax imposed on local sericulture. The Shindatsu region was well known for its production of silk, textiles, and silkworm eggs (Shōji 1979, 241–242). A significant change was brought to the region’s sericulture when, in the second month of 1864, a few silk merchants reached an agreement with the local government to regulate the region’s sericulture operation by establishing a license system (kansatsu sei 鑑札制) and a contract system (ukeoi sei 請負制) (ibid. 244–246). Under the new regulations, those who engaged in sericulture had to pass an inspection by the local officials and receive a certificate (ibid.). The purpose of these new measures, at least ostensibly, was to ensure the quality of silk and silkworm eggs, both of which were becoming important export goods in the early 1860s (Hane 2003, 173). These measures, however, also amounted to a new tax responsibility for farmers, as they now had to pay commission fees for the certificates and production of various silk goods (Fukaya 2004, 474). The regulations also tightened silk merchants’ control over production, for they were
to serve as intermediaries (*kimoiri* 肝煎) between producers and the government and were responsible for collecting the tax (ibid.). Small- and mid-scale farmers in the region submitted a petition to the authorities in the fourth month of 1866, voicing their opposition to the new regulations and highlighting the difficulty of meeting the inspection demands for every silk production cycle (Shōji 1979, 244–245). The domain, however, ignored their petition.

The Shindatsu uprising began on the night of the fifteenth day of the sixth month and lasted for six days until the noon of the twentieth day (ibid. 249). Over forty-nine villages were subjected to the destructive behavior of the uprising peasants, with the total number of buildings destroyed mounting to more than one hundred and fifty (ibid.). The first buildings to be destroyed were the houses of merchants who supported the implementation of the new silk tax and were in charge of collecting it, followed by the houses of rice dealers, wealthy farmers, sake dealers, and pawnbrokers (Fukaya 2004, 473-476). The uprising peasants apparently had prepared a list of houses to be destroyed, but it is likely that some spontaneous destruction also occurred, targeting those against whom the peasants had harbored resentment (Shōji 1979, 250). They also stormed into the local magistrate’s office and demanded the annulment of the silk tax and the lowering of the price of goods (Shōji, Hayashi, and Yasumaru 1970, 276–277). In the end, the peasants secured a promise from the local officials to repeal the silk regulations and tax as well as to halt the rising cost of goods.\(^{14}\)

This uprising was featured in a woodblock-print news leaflet (*kawaraban* 瓦版) that was sold at a bookstore in Edo:

Due to an enormous tax on silk (*shieki bakudai no koto* 糸役ばくだいの事) and the high price of rice, the lives of peasants in the Shindatsu region

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\(^{14}\) The local government authorities, however, later reneged on the promises and re-implemented the silk tax. The tax continued to be levied until shortly after the Meiji Restoration (Fukaya 2004, 475).
were being endangered. A certain Hachirō of Kanaharada Village 
(Kanaharada no Hachirō to mōsu mono かなはだの八郎と申物) 
stood up to save the suffering populace, leading over a hundred thousand 
peasants and raising standards made of silkworm egg papers.\textsuperscript{15}

The leaflet then goes on to describe the destructive deeds of the peasants under the leadership of 
this Hachirō. Hachirō, whose full name was Kanno Hachirō (菅野八郎), was in fact an important 
community member in the Shindatsu region who had the necessary leadership status and 
personal connections to organize a large-scale uprising. At the end of the leaflet, there is a 
drawing of a standard that was reportedly used during the uprising and bearing words that 
portray this Hachirō as a yonaoshi god. The words on the standard read, “Kanaharada Village 
World Renewal, Great August Deity Hachirō (Kanaharada mura yonaoshi Hachirō daimyōjin 
金原田村世直し八朗大明神).\textsuperscript{16}

The leaflet states clearly that Hachirō rose up in order to save the poor. The leaflet also 
reports that the peasants destroyed only the houses of those who were selling goods at a high 
price (kōjikidan uri sōrō mono bakari kowashikeru 高直段売候者斗こわしける), indicating 
that the peasants’ behavior, though destructive, was in accordance with their righteous motives. 
A related primary document written from the perspective of the uprising peasants also describes 
the self-discipline of the yonaoshi peasants. It contains a brief instruction supposedly given to the 
peasants upon arriving at a pawnshop that was to be razed:

\begin{quote}
Be careful not to start a fire and not to spoil rice and other crops in the 
house. Also do not steal items that are in pawn, for they belong to other 
people. Do not take with you any money or other items. Remember that 
this work is not done for personal greed (kono hataraki wa shiyoku ni
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{15} The entire content of the leaflet, along with a photographic image of the original document, 
can be found in Shōji, Hayashi, and Yasumaru 1970, 384, along with Shōji’s helpful 
commentary. 
\textsuperscript{16} Kanaharada is Hachirō’s home village in the Shindatsu region.
Emphasized once again is the altruistic motive that sustained the uprising and the intensity of the punishment delivered against the greedy moneylender.

In the news leaflet, Kanno Hachirō is presented as a deified entity that presided over the uprising. The sanctioning presence of a yonaoshi god had the effect of empowering the uprising peasants with a kind of supernatural authority and intensity, for the same leaflet also reports that the uprising peasants used no special weapons and that their acts of destruction were carried out with bare hands (te ni wa tobidōgu sara ni motta mono nashi, amata no gunzei hirate nite uchikowashi 手にはとびどうぐさらにもった者なし、あまたのぐんぜいひらてにて内こわし) (Shōji, Hayashi, and Yasumaru 1970, 384). The leaflet attributes the intensity with which this feat was executed to the help of a heavenly deity (tennō sama 天王様), a reference to the presence of Kanno Hachirō as a yonaoshi god. The deeds of the peasants are also described as exceeding “the human capacity” (ningen ni arazu 人げんにあらず). 18

The Bushū Uprising of 1866

Another major uprising also took place in the sixth month of the second year of Keio. This occurred in Musashi Province, also known as Bushū and covering an area that includes present-
day Tokyo and Saitama prefectures. The uprising started on the thirteenth day of the sixth month in Naguri Village in the western part of the province (present-day Saitama) and spread quickly to the surrounding villages. Similar to the case of the Shindatsu uprising, the populace in Musashi was suffering from the high price of rice, and the situation worsened in the six month of that year due to the Tokugawa shogunate’s direct clash with the Chōshū domain (Suda 2010, 143). This uprising is particularly famous for its violence and destruction. In the course of less than a week, more than four hundred buildings were destroyed in over two hundred villages (Saitō 1980, 87–89). These destructive deeds were carried out mostly by using agricultural tools, such as axes, pickles, and hammers, although some participants probably also carried more combat-oriented weapons (Saitō 1983, 24–34). As in the other uprisings featuring yonaoshi gods, the main targets of the destruction were the houses of wealthy merchants and farmers in the region, and the demands included distribution of food and money and lowering of the price of crops. Some were spared destruction by complying with the demands, but some were attacked without an opportunity to negotiate. The latter group consisted of individuals against whom the peasants harbored particularly strong resentment, such as those involved in foreign trade (Yokohama muki shōnin 横浜向商人) and moneylenders (Saitō 1980, 95–97). This suggests that the uprising served the function of allowing the peasants to release their accumulated anger, in addition to making specific demands for food and other goods. The peasants themselves of course claimed that the uprising was necessary in order to help the poor and that it was virtuous (Mizumura 2006, 55–58). The uprising was suppressed, however, by the nineteenth day of the same month by the Tokugawa force with far superior firepower.

A popular song (kudoki 古どき) that was most likely composed right after the conclusion of this uprising makes a brief reference to a yonaoshi god:
Due to the high price of goods these days, villages were in a miserable state...then the village people heard that merchants from various provinces were going to do business with foreigners, exchanging crops and goods (gokoku kōeki 五穀交易). If this became a reality, they would surely starve to death in the future. They said to themselves, “Then why not put our lives on the line now and destroy the wealth of all the rich folks, so as to lower the price of goods?”...Raising a standard, at the bottom of which was written the “Great August Deity of World Renewal” (yonaoshi daimyōjin), all the people—three thousand in all—marched out in union on the eleventh day of the sixth month of the year of the tiger.19

Emphasized here again is the suffering of the innocent populace and the point that they had no other choice but to cause this uprising in order to survive. As mentioned above, trade with foreign countries is described here as threatening the lives of ordinary people. Implied also is the greediness of merchants who profit from their business with foreigners, not considering the suffering of the poor. Although it is not clear how destroying the wealth of the rich is going to lower the price of goods, the presence of a yonaoshi god provides the uprising force with a kind of moral authority needed in carrying out its destructive deeds. Interestingly, there are several more contemporaneous documents that record instances in which the expression yonaoshi is used, all of them written specifically on standards used in the uprising:

…[the peasants] put up a standard that bore the word world renewal (yonaoshi) in bold letters...(KSK 1971, 287).

…on a big standard, [the peasants] wrote “Homage to Amida Buddha” (namu Amida butsu 南無阿弥陀仏). On another standard, they wrote in bold letters, “Equalizing General of World Renewal” (heikin yonaoshi shōgun 平均世直将軍). They carried these two kinds of standards... (KSK 1971, 160).

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19 Kinsei Sonrakushi Kenkyūkai (hereafter KSK) 1974, 186–187. KSK 1971 and 1974 together represent the most comprehensive collection of primary sources on the Bushū Uprising (2 volumes). The uprising started on the thirteenth day, but in this song it is recorded as having started on the eleventh. It should be noted that the original Japanese lyrics follow a rhythmical pattern typical of Tokugawa-period popular songs. The translation is unable reflect this unfortunately.
These examples make it more than clear that the concept of *yonaoshi* occupied a central place in this uprising. They also corroborate and render more credible the reference to the *yonaoshi daimyōjin* in the popular song introduced above. The reference to Amida Buddha, the Buddha of the Western Paradise, along with certain “Equalizing General of World Renewal” is fascinating in that it shows that the peasants had multiple sources of religious authority and could also seek the help of Buddhist deities to justify their uprising efforts accompanied by violence. The original Japanese word for the translation “equalizing” is *heikin*, which in contemporary Japanese usually means “the average” but also can be understood to mean “balancing out” or “offsetting the difference.” Within the context of the uprising, this most likely refers to the act of correcting the imbalance of wealth between the rich and poor by destroying the wealth of the rich or by making the rich share their wealth with the rest of the community. The powerful title of “general” (*shōgun*) connotes the awesome might with which these deeds of “renewal” or “rebalancing” were carried out. The reference to Amida Buddha perhaps also helped to substantiate the peasants’ position that the uprising was carried out not because of personal greed or hatred, but for compassionate and virtuous motives of helping the poor and realizing a more peaceful world.

*The Yashū Uprisings of 1868*

Encroaching foreign threats, economic crises, and recurrent peasant uprisings all contributed to the downfall of the Tokugawa regime. On the fourteenth day of the tenth month of the third year of Keiō (1867), the final Tokugawa shōgun, Yoshinobu, formally renounced the right to rule over the Japanese archipelago and conceded this right to the emperor. Soon after, in the first
month of the fourth year of Keiō (1868), the newly empowered imperial army (kangun 官軍) began its western march from the imperial city of Kyoto to put down remnant Tokugawa loyalists, who were now labeled as the rebel army (zokugun 賊軍). Thereby began a long civil war, the epochal Boshin War (Boshin sensō 戊辰戦争), which literally swept through the country as the imperial army drove the Tokugawa factions eastward before finally crushing them in Hakodate in the northern land of Ezo in the fifth month of the second year of Meiji (1869).

Peasant uprisings did not stop even after the Tokugawa regime renounced its right to rule over Japan. When the frontline of the Boshin War was just about to reach the Kantō region, numerous uprisings erupted in the area. Shimotsuke Province (present-day Tochigi Prefecture, also known as Yashū) was one example. In the third and fourth months of the fourth year of Keiō (1868), disgruntled peasants there started to destroy the houses of rice merchants and sake dealers. In general, the peasants in the region demanded that the wealthy distribute rice and money to the less privileged, and in some cases, demanded that pawnshops return their goods to their original owners.²⁰ Aso and Tsuga counties in the southwestern part of the province experienced particularly intense uprisings, some of which featured yonaoshi gods.

The Fujisawa family in Aso County ran a sake brewing business and also operated a pawnshop on the side. Given the nature of their business activities, the Fujisawas most likely were one of the first targets of the angry peasants once the uprising started. In response to the uprising, the head of the Fujisawa household wrote a letter addressed to “the Great August Deity of World Renewal.” The following is a translation of this brief letter in its entirety:

Since it is [time for] world renewal (yonaoshi ni tsuki 世直しニ付き), we will annul all debts you have with us by returning to you all of the items that are now in pawn. You have my word that I acknowledge that this was

²⁰ Tochigi kenshi Hensan Iinkai (hereafter abbreviated as TCHI) 1984, 15. See also Hasegawa 1971, 70–71.
not done in violation of the rules. Furthermore, we will present you with crops in the village, as much as you wish.

The thirteenth day of the fourth month
Nishizawa Tōzaemon 西沢藤左衛門, Shimotsubara Village

[addressed to] Great August Deity of World Renewal (yonaoshi daimyōjin sama 世直シ大明神様)  

This is a letter asking for mercy and forgiveness, in exchange for a cancellation of all existing debts. According to a related Fujisawa family document, this letter was composed when the peasants confronted the family on the thirteenth day of the fourth month. Knowing that the peasants had already caused serious damage to other merchants in a nearby region, the Fujisawas thought it prudent to comply with their demands (Fukaya and Kawachi 1972, 1). This family document also records that as they moved from village to village, the peasants held up a standard on which the words “the Great August Deity of World Renewal” were written (yonaoshi daimyōjin to shiruseru hata o oshitate 世直シ大明神ト記セル紙旗ヲ押立) (ibid.). Given this, it would make sense to presume that the yonaoshi daimyōjin in the above letter refers to the uprising peasants themselves or at least that the peasants regarded themselves as representatives of this yonaoshi god. Fukaya 1986 takes the position that yonaoshi daimyōjin here does not refer to the peasants themselves but to a separate divine entity presiding over the peasants. He argues that the peasants forced the Fujisawas to compose this memo as a proof of his promise to this divine entity.  

Whichever the case, this document gives a glimpse of a rare instance in which a

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21 TCHI ed. 1978, 345. Also in Yasumaru and Fukaya 1989, 10–11, and Fukaya and Kawachi 1972, 1. The name Nishizawa in the memo refers to the name of the store that the Fujisawa family was operating. See also TCHI ed. 1984, 1369–1372.

22 Yasumaru and Fukaya 1989, on the other hand, takes the position that the peasants called themselves yonaoshi daimyōjin in order to gain the moral and religious authority necessary to rectify their community.
target of a violent uprising makes an appeal directly to a yonaoshi god in order to be spared of destruction.

Furthermore, in Shimosawa Village in the neighboring Tsuga County, peasants made a threat in the name of yonaoshi daimyōjin to burn down buildings if their demands were not met. This was done through the use of “fire notices” (kasatsu 火札), which served as warnings when placed on people’s doors or gates. A local village official recorded that “[the peasants] placed fire notices [bearing the name] of the Great August Deity of World Renewal” (yonaoshi daimyōjin no kasatsu o hari 世直し大明神の火札を張).\(^{23}\) Just as in the example above from Aso County, peasants in this village demanded that the rich share their wealth and provide food and crops. The village official laments that the uprising in his village occurred because the world was not governed peacefully and the various instabilities that had emerged as a result encouraged villagers to act selfishly (tenka sama osamarazu ranse ni tsuki murakata wagamama ikken kaki shirusu 天下様納まず乱世に付村方我儘一件書記す) (TCHI 1978, 340).

The uprisings in Shimotsuke Province took place within a temporary vacuum of political power. The Tokugawa regime had just given up their right to rule, and the newly installed imperial government preoccupied itself with hunting down Tokugawa loyalists. Nonetheless, yonaoshi gods appearing at this transitional moment between Tokugawa and Meiji functioned very similarly to their predecessors. They sanctioned violence in the name of helping the poor and weak by rectifying the economic imbalances in their community. Their primary target was the wealthy, and as in the example of the pawnshop owner in Aso County, many were forced to concede to the demands of the angry peasants as representatives or earthly embodiments of yonaoshi gods. What makes the case of yonaoshi gods in the Yashū uprisings unique is the

\(^{23}\) TCHI 1978, 341. The same account can be found also in Yasumaru and Fukaya 1989, 17.
prevailing political conditions in which they found themselves. Given the absence of a single ruling authority over the Japanese archipelago, those who equate *yonaoshi* with millenarianism may be tempted to imagine the possibility of the disgruntled peasants trying to establish their own ideal community in the name of a *yonaoshi* god—a utopia independent of the traditional Tokugawa framework. However, the *yonaoshi* gods in the Yashū uprisings were content making the same specific economic demands against the wealthy as in prior uprisings and did not offer any alternative vision or a radically different form of hope. The *yonaoshi* gods were not millenarians. The Yashū uprisings were put down fairly quickly as well, by the fifth month of the same year by combinatory efforts of remnant Tokugawa forces and imperial troops (Hasegawa 1971, 71).

*Characteristics of Yonaoshi Gods in Late Tokugawa Peasant Uprisings*

During the period between the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, *yonaoshi* gods maintained a fairly ubiquitous presence within the context of peasant uprisings, all the way from Kyushu to Tohoku. Following the emergence of the category of “*yonaoshi* god” with Sano Masakoto’s apotheosis in 1784, new *yonaoshi* gods emerged one after another in uprisings across Japan. By the mid-nineteenth century, following a kind of “rush hour,” the framework of “*yonaoshi* god” had gained countrywide currency.

Some of the recurring themes seen in the appearances of *yonaoshi* gods in Tokugawa peasant uprisings include selfless sacrifice, salvation offered to the weak and poor, and violence legitimated as punishment against the wicked. *Yonaoshi* gods served as potent religious symbols that sanctioned destructive behaviors that would not have been permitted under normal circumstances. Of course, acts of violence within the context of peasant uprisings were not rare during the Tokugawa period; uprising peasants often presented these acts of violence as both
righteous and most importantly, necessary in order to save the poor or to protest government failure to put into practice the ideals of good and virtuous rule promised to the populace. What is particularly significant is the fact that from the late eighteenth century on, some peasants started to provide an extra layer of meaning to these acts of violence through the religious authority of yonaoshi gods. The question of whether uprisings led by yonaoshi gods were otherwise qualitatively different from other Tokugawa uprisings must await a separate analysis, but it is a compelling fact that peasants throughout the Japanese archipelago felt the need to seek a source of religiously sanctioned violence and that this trend continued for more than half a century until the beginning of the Meiji period.

Yonaoshi gods did not, however, claim to create a new world order or pronounce the arrival of a radically different life on earth. Rather than invoking the beginning of a new time and episteme—a brand new cosmological framework—yonaoshi gods made specific demands, most of which dealt with economic and legal matters directly relevant to the daily life of ordinary peasants. Accordingly, yonaoshi gods did not claim to replace the rule of the Tokugawa or to create a new independent governing body. Instead, yonaoshi gods focused on rectifying injustices or what they regarded as unfair or unjust treatments of the populace, all within the existing Tokugawa framework. Even after the fall of the Tokugawa regime, yonaoshi gods did not provide an alternative worldview or predict a cosmological shift that would result in the emergence of a perfect world. Yonaoshi gods were ephemeral beings; they emerged in response to particular needs and once those needs had been met, they were gone. Yes, they were motivated by a kind of agrarian utopianism in which hard working peasants were justly rewarded for their industriousness. Yet, to describe yonaoshi gods’ attempt to realize this ideal—very much grounded within the traditional Tokugawa worldview—as millenarian is misleading. As
Cohn’s definition suggests, millenarians seek “utterly to transform life on earth” (15). Such a description is inconsistent with what yonaoshi gods were trying to achieve.

**Religious Rebellions in Mid- to Late Qing China**

While uprisings led by yonaoshi gods were becoming increasingly prevalent in Tokugawa Japan, Qing China also witnessed a number of major rebellions drawing upon a variety of religious traditions. As the analysis below will show, these Chinese uprisings better fit the classic definition of millenarianism. The Chinese rebels actively sought to defeat the existing Qing regime and proposed a decidedly non-Qing world order. Some of the rebels adhered to an explicitly apocalyptic ideology and saw their uprising efforts as an integral part of a greater cosmological drama. As such, they offer an effective conceptual foil upon which to better understand the nature of Japanese uprisings and the role yonaoshi gods played within them.\(^{24}\)

*The White Lotus Rebellion (1796–1805)*

By the late Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Chinese imperial officials had begun using the pejorative label of “White Lotus Teachings” (*Bailian jiao* 白蓮教) to refer to a group of lay sectarian movements. “White Lotus” was originally a term that lay Buddhist groups used to describe their devotional practices centering on Amitabha (or Amida, the Buddha of the Western Paradise). However, the term eventually turned into a derogatory category employed by the Chinese state and other detractors in describing certain movements as heterodox (*xiejiao* 邪教).\(^{25}\) This usage

\(^{24}\) Much like my treatment of the Japanese uprisings, the goal of this section on Chinese rebellions is to present a panoramic overview and not to offer exhaustive details for each rebellion.

\(^{25}\) See ter Haar 1999 for a full discussion of the evolution of the category of White Lotus and its historiographical treatment. Ter Haar’s work represents a powerful critique of previous scholarship that portrayed White Lotus movements as a unified sectarian tradition in Chinese history. Through an extensive analysis of primary and secondary sources, ter Haar demonstrates
continued into the succeeding Qing dynasty (1644–1912), and accordingly, a devastating rebellion caused by a few sectarian movements in the late eighteenth century is conventionally known as the White Lotus Rebellion (*Bailian jiao qiyi* 白蓮教起義).

The uprising started in the first year of Jiaqing (1796) in response to the arrest of some members of sectarian movements that referred to themselves as “Teachings of Gathering in the Beginning” (*Shouyuan jiao* 収元教), “Teachings of the Great Vehicle of Western Heaven” (*Xitian dacheng jiao* 西天大乘教), and “Teachings of the Undivided Beginning” (*Hunyuan jiao* 混元教), all of which were gaining influence in the bordering region between Hubei, Hunan, Sichuan, and Shaanxi Provinces. Following the arrest, members of the said movements began to rebel against the repressive Qing regime, and their uprising efforts eventually spread to all of the bordering provinces. There were several important leaders of the uprising, such as Song Zhiqing 宋之清 of the Teachings of the Great Vehicle of Western Heaven, Wang Yinghu 王応琥 of the Teachings of Gathering in the Beginning, and Liu Zhixie 劉之協 of the Teachings of the Undivided Beginning (Tanigawa and Mori 1982, 177–179). Under their dispersed leaderships, tens of thousands of rebels based themselves in the mountainous regions in the bordering areas. The scale of the uprising grew exponentially as many non-believers joined their

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that White Lotus was a label attached to a variety of different sectarian movements and did not represent a coherent tradition that identified itself as White Lotus.

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26 Coincidentally, this uprising occurred in the same year as the Kansei Uprising discussed above (1796).

27 Ter Haar 1999, 250. As already mentioned, this uprising is usually referred to as the White Lotus Rebellion. However, those who actually participated in the rebellion did not identify themselves as adherents of the putative “White Lotus” teachings as a collective. Ma 1998 argues that this uprising should not be called the White Lotus Rebellion but should feature the names of the movements actually involved in the uprising efforts (168). For the sake of convenience and clarity, however, I use the conventional name of the rebellion.
ranks, mostly due to pressures from believers and fellow villagers and also due to the fear of the encroaching Qing army.

Rebels who were involved since the initial stage of the uprising shared a belief in Maitreya (Mile 弥勒), the future Buddha who was believed to descend on earth in the latter days to revive the Buddhist teachings. The rebels believed that apocalyptic disasters would accompany the arrival of Maitreya and saw their rebellion as preparing the way for the descent of the future Buddha (ter Haar 1999, 250). The Qing persecution was also seen as a sign of this impending transformation of the world (Tanigawa and Mori 1982, 177). Furthermore, their faith in Maitreya was grounded in specifically anti-Qing sentiments. They believed that Maitreya had already been born on earth bearing the family name of Zhu 朱. This was an indirect insult to the Qing, as Zhu was also the family name of the pre-Qing emperors of the Ming. Some of the rebels referred to this divine earthly figure with the cryptic name of Niuba 牛八, which consists of two characters that can be arranged to form the character Zhu (i.e. 牛+八=朱) (ibid. 184–186). A report by a provincial officer made two years prior to the uprising and citing an adherent of “evil teachings” is helpful in understanding the fundamental motives of the rebels:

Maitreya Buddha has been reincarnated (Milefo zhuanshi 弥勒仏轉世) and is already alive in the family of Zhang on Wuying Mountain (Wuyingshan 無影山) in Henan. [We] must protect Niuba and rise up. Niuba signifies the character Zhu. Those who accept the teachings and donate silver will be spared all miseries in the ages to come. Recently, many people in Henan and Shaanxi have been learning about the teachings (Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Lishi Yanjisuo Qingshishi 1981, 1:3).

According to this, Maitreya Buddha had already manifested in the human realm, and here it is claimed that this manifestation was a certain Zhang in Henan.28 Believers who contribute to the

28 There were disputes as to who the legitimate incarnation of Maitreya Buddha was. See ter Haar 1999, 250.
cause financially are promised divine protection in the future, possibly in reference to the apocalyptic disasters that are to come. The title Niuba is explained clearly here as referring to the imperial name of Zhu, an implicit denial of the legitimacy of the current Qing regime and an expectation of a superior ruler.29 The ultimate goal of the rebels, as evident from the combination of their Matireya-based beliefs and decidedly anti-Qing attitude, was to defeat the Qing and help establish an ideal world presided over by the Future Buddha.30

The uprising lasted for almost a full decade. This prolonged conflict might as well be described as full-fledged warfare. However, the rebels ultimately failed to present a unified front, as their forces were divided among several foci of leadership. After losing their ground in the mountainous regions, the rebels engaged in guerrilla tactics, which required a tremendous amount of time and money on the part of the Qing regime to suppress despite its military superiority (Suzuki 1982, 308–311; Kuhn 1970, 40–41). Although completely crushed by the tenth year of Jiaqing (1805), the uprising dealt an enormous financial blow to the Qing, revealed that the Qing military was not invincible, and in many ways marked the start of the decline of the

29 Suzuki 1971, 104–112. It is tempting to read ethnocentric sentiments in the rebel’s stance against the Qing regime, established by the ethnically foreign Manchus, and the rebel’s goal as the realization of a dominion of the native Han Chinese. However, Suzuki 1971 convincingly argues that the reference to the Ming is simply a result of seeking the basis of a new world order in an older regime and not necessarily an expression of ethnocentric Han supremacist sentiments (see 111–112 in particular).

30 Ter Haar 1999 observes that as the scale of the uprising widened and many non-believers joined force, the emphasis on the initial motives of the uprising became less relevant (250–251). See Overmyer 1976, 39–40 for a discussion of the master-disciple hierarchy that existed among the participants of rebellions associated with the designation of White Lotus and how the teachings concerning the emergence of an ideal world were passed down from teacher to disciple through this hierarchical relationship.
Great Qing. Scholars also agree that the uprising paved the way for a number of intense uprisings in the subsequent century that ultimately brought an end to imperial China.\(^\text{31}\)

The *yonaoshi* gods in the Japanese examples discussed above for the most part made type economic demands to the local government, often in relation to newly introduced taxes or other fiscal practices that were thought to harm the lives of ordinary peasants. The *yonaoshi* gods did not question the validity of the Tokugawa regime itself and did not seek to attack directly or to bring down the Tokugawa hegemony. The Chinese rebels, on the other hand, aimed to topple the Qing regime and expected the arrival of a perfect ruler sanctioned by Maitreya. Their sustained rebellious efforts lasting for ten years also make the subversive acts of the *yonaoshi* gods seem transient in comparison. Both Tokugawa and Qing rebels used religious language and symbols to legitimize their rebellious undertakings, but the Tokugawa rebels did not aim to radically transform the world, whereas the Qing rebels did actively seek to establish a new world order in the manner implied by the adjective “millenarian.”

*The Eight Trigrams Rebellion of 1813*

A group of popular sectarian movements known as “Teachings of the Eight Trigrams” (*Bagua jiao* 八卦教) was regarded by the Chinese state as an offshoot of the putative White Lotus tradition. The group is best known for waging a coordinated attack on the Imperial Palace in the eighteenth year of Jiaqing (1813).\(^\text{32}\) The attack on the palace, however, represented only a part of a grander scheme involving as many as a hundred thousand rebels in several northern provinces including Zhili (present-day Hebei), Henan, and Shandong. A leader of the Eight Trigrams sect

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\(^{31}\) Ibid. Also see Dai 2009 for a discussion of the decline of the Qing military with the White Lotus Rebellion serving as an important turning point.

\(^{32}\) Davis 1971, 57. As a side note, this uprising occurred just two years after the Bunka uprising of 1811 discussed above.
with the name of Lin Qing 林清 played a central role in organizing the rebellion, making use of an extensive network of supporters from several sectarian movements (Seiwert 2003, 339–341). Much like the rebels of the 1796 uprising above, Lin Qing and his collaborators adhered to a form of apocalyptic Maitreya belief and aimed to defeat the reigning Qing emperor in order to realize an earthly utopia, free from suffering of all kinds, under a divine leader. They expected Maitreya to descend to earth as a representative of the Eternal Venerable Mother (Wusheng laomu 無生老母), a universal mother goddess, to initiate the process of world transformation (Naquin 1976, 9–18). Their messages also resonated with the socioeconomic conditions of the time. During the few years preceding the uprising, there were severe floods and droughts in the northern provinces. Contemporaneous records left by traveling government officials reveal that many villages and houses had been abandoned; people were surviving by eating grass roots; and parents were selling children in order to survive (ibid. 111). These harsh conditions of life no doubt provided a fertile ground for the teachings of the Eight Trigrams to spread.

Lin Qing and his conspirators prepared for the uprising over the course of several years, maintaining close contact, expanding the membership base, and keeping their adherents abreast of the “great plan.” Lin Qing eventually predicted that the new golden age would begin on the fifteenth day of the ninth month of the eighteenth year of Jiaqing (1813). Although Lin Qing claimed that this date was determined based on an interpretation of sacred scriptures, there probably was a more practical reason behind its selection. Every summer, the Jiaqing emperor took a trip to Jehol in Northeastern China in order to escape the summer heat of the capital. In

33 See Overmyer 1981, 159–160 for a concise summary of some of the Maitreya-based eschatological hopes shared by members of popular sectarian movements. At the same time, Overmyer 1976 points out that the majority of participants in the rebellion were not members of specific sects. These non-members were recruited without a clear sense of religious adherence or a proper initiation ritual (39–40).
1813, the emperor left the capital in the seventh month and was scheduled to return on the seventeenth day of the ninth month. Lin Qing planned to attack the Forbidden City on the fifteenth day of the ninth month when the city would not be as heavily guarded due to the absence of the emperor. After occupying the city, the rebels planned to attack the emperor on his way back to the Imperial Palace.\(^{34}\)

At noon on the fifteenth day of the ninth month, about seventy rebels—carrying knives and each wearing a white cloth, which had the function of distinguishing them from nonmembers—stormed the Forbidden City through its eastern and western gates. At this point, Lin Qing’s collaborators had already started rebelling in other provinces, expecting Lin Qing to occupy the Forbidden City and kill the emperor. In securing access to the Imperial Palace, Lin Qing had successfully established connections with court eunuchs and had arranged to have them help the rebels enter the Emperor’s residence. Guided by the eunuchs, the rebels from the eastern gate penetrated the palace walls first, but were quickly subdued. The rebels from the western gate offered a more substantial challenge, but the imperial guards, having been alerted by the earlier attack from the eastern gate, succeeded in arresting or killing these rebels as well. Two sons of the emperor, who happened to be in the palace compound at the time of the attack, reportedly played an active role in killing some of the rebels. The poorly coordinated attack ended in a complete failure. By the night of the fifteenth day, the guards were searching the palace thoroughly to make sure that there were no remaining rebels within the palace walls. The

\(^{34}\) Several sects associated with the putative White Lotus tradition had predicted the new age to start on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, so it is possible that Lin Qing’s choice of the fifteenth day of the ninth month was partly based on scriptural interpretations. Naquin 1976, however, argues that Lin Qing chose the ninth month for practical reasons, one of which is discussed above. Another potential reason, Naquin suggests, is related to agricultural concerns. By the ninth month, the work of harvesting spring crops would be over, thus allowing as many farmers as possible to take part in Lin Qing’s uprising without sacrificing their agricultural work (112–113).
emperor, on his way back from Jehol, was notified of the attack about fifty miles away from the
capital and was also quickly given information about a man who was responsible for planning
the attack and who was believed by some to be an incarnation of Maitreya Buddha. Early on the
seventeenth day of the ninth month, Lin Qing was arrested in his residence near the capital (Lin
Qing himself had not joined the attack) and eventually executed (Naquin 1976, 176–190). The
uprisings in the other provinces were also eventually suppressed, and the entire Eight Trigrams
uprising ceased after about three months. In the process of crushing this uprising, however, more
than eighty thousand people lost their lives. The direct assault on the Imperial Palace also
represented an unprecedented challenge and insult to the seat of the emperor. The emperor
himself lamented as follows after returning safely to the capital:

> Ever since the Great Qing was begun one hundred seventy years ago after
> establishing the capital in the city of Yanjing 燕京, my venerable
> predecessors have manifested deep and abundant benevolence and have
> loved the people as their own children. They embodied the highest virtues
> and compassion. How can I exhaust their greatness through words?
> Although I have yet to inherit completely the compassionate and
> benevolent rule that my ancestors had so perfectly mastered, I have also
> not imposed a cruel rule that harms the people (wu hai min zhi nüe shì 無
> 害民之虐事). Now I am beset with this rebellion all of a sudden. This is
> truly incomprehensible (Dai 1990, 21–22).

Susan Naquin’s *Millenarian Rebellion in China* represents the most significant
monograph on the uprising and focuses on the uprising’s message of imminent and apocalyptic
world transformation, anti-establishment sentiments, and utopian hopes. Naquin’s use of the
category of millenarianism has received some criticism, and Naquin herself admits that once the
scale of the uprising expanded and the participants became more numerous and increasingly

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35 This is a traditional way of referring to Beijing.
36 On the theme of millenarianism in Chinese rebellions in general, also see Wakeman 1977,
208–212.
heterogeneous, the original religious message was “greatly diluted.” Nonetheless, the adjective millenarian seems much more appropriate in describing these religious rebels in Qing China than in describing yonaoshi gods in Tokugawa Japan. The core members of the Eight Trigrams movement held apocalyptic anticipations, and they coordinated an attack on the political center of the Qing regime with the plan of killing the emperor and establishing a new divinely sanctioned world order. I know of no case in which a yonaoshi god was involved in a direct military assault against the Imperial Palace in the capital city of Kyoto or the seat of shogun in the political capital of Edo. I also know of no example in which yonaoshi gods, at least within the context of peasant uprisings, evoked apocalyptic imagery to gather followers. The rhetoric invoked by yonaoshi gods overwhelmingly was that of the suffering of the innocent and weak and the corruption of the wealthy and village officials. While this message was undoubtedly very powerful, it was not contextualized within the framework of cosmological transformation or a well-defined eschatology.

The Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864)

Perhaps the best-known rebellion in nineteenth-century China, the Taiping Rebellion occurred about a decade after the great insults of the First Opium War and the Treaty of Nanjing, which in the eyes of many determined the course for the Great Qing’s long path of decline. The opium trade drained China’s silver reserves, driving up the price of silver and in turn harming the lives of ordinary laborers, who had to pay their taxes in silver. The forceful opening of Chinese ports and concomitant trade activities with Great Britain also posed tremendous economic challenges

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37 Naquin 1976, 199. For a critique on the use of the category of millenarianism, see Jensen 1978.
38 The case of Sano Masakoto discussed in Chapter 2 is an example of a yonaoshi god assassinating a Tokugawa official. Yet, the attack focused on a particular individual and not the ruling political regime as a whole.
to many (Mou 1962, 10–12). These oppressed and displaced people later became constituents of the Taiping Rebellion.

The rebellion was led by Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全, who was a member of the Hakka minority in Guangdong Province. Hong had a vision shortly after failing the imperial examination in the seventeenth year of Daoguang (1837) and claimed that he was adopted as a son of God, as the younger brother of Jesus Christ (Mou 1976, 29–31). He furthermore claimed that God had given him a mission to rid China of various evil influences. The ethnically foreign Manchu rulers of Qing China were one of them. Hong decided to commit fully to his religious mission in the twenty-third year of Daoguang (1843) after failing the examination for the last time. Hong’s ultimate goal was the realization of heaven on earth, as made clear by his commentary on the New Testament (on Matthew Chapter 5 to be precise):

The Heavenly Kingdom (tianguo 天国) encompasses both celestial and earthly realms and exists in both of these realms. The Heavenly Elder Brother prophesied that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. The Heavenly Kingdom manifesting on earth means that the Heavenly Father and the Heavenly Elder Brother will descend on earth today and that they will create this Heavenly Kingdom (Tianfu Tianxiong xiafan chuangkai tianguo 天父天兄下凡創開天国) (Jin, Tian et al. 1958, 77).

The Heavenly Elder Brother here of course refers to Jesus Christ. There is a sense of immediacy that the Heavenly Kingdom will be realized imminently and that this heaven is to be created physically in a very tangible sense according to the divine will.

Based on the content of a Christian pamphlet he had picked up from a Chinese Christian convert shortly before his vision, Hong and his cousin baptized each other and began their proselytizing activities (Michael 1971, 24–26). Slowly gaining converts—first his close friends, then other members of the Hakka community in Guangxi Province—Hong soon had a

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39 The Hakkas (literally, the “guest clans”) were originally migrants from North China. They are distinguished as a unique group, although they are ethnically Han Chinese.
congregation of several thousands (Mou 1962, 48–56). This community of faith, called the “Society for Worshipping God” (*Bai shangdi hui* 拜上帝会), grew exponentially and eventually declared the establishment of its own dynasty independent of the Qing in the thirtieth year of Daoguang (also the first year of Xianfeng) (1851) in Jintian Village in Guangxi. The name of this new kingdom was the “Heavenly Kingdom of Supreme Peace” (*Taiping tianguo* 太平天国). In this kingdom, all things belonged to God, and accordingly, all money and goods were controlled and used communally. Hong sat at the top of this system, as the second Son of God and a direct channel for God’s revelations. He called himself the “Heavenly King” (*Tianwang* 天王) and surrounded himself with a small group of co-leaders, who also called themselves “kings” (*wang*).

The newly formed rebel kingdom and its army marched northward from its original location of Jintian and eventually reached the city of Nanjing in the third year of Xianfeng (1853). Along the way, thousands of peasants joined force. Some joined attracted to the utopian promises of the Taiping movement, but some—the more wealthy ones—joined because they embraced the Taiping’s anti-Manchu sentiments. These sentiments are made explicit in a statement issued by the Taiping leaders and distributed widely among the rebels in the second year of Xianfeng (1852):

> [the Manchu rulers] show no compassion for the people when there are droughts and famines. They simply let the people suffer in hunger and homelessness and leave them [to die] on the grasslands. This is because the Manchus want to reduce the number of us Chinese. The Manchus also send their corrupt officials to every corner of China to extort from the people. The people are crying helplessly on the streets. This is because the Manchus want to impoverish us Chinese. Official positions can be obtained through bribery. Punishments can be avoided with money. The rich assume positions of authority, but those who are truly talented are without hope. This is because the Manchus want to exterminate all talented Chinese. The Manchus execute as rebels and bandits those who
seek to revive China and also kill all their families and relatives. This is because the Manchus want to extinguish all heroic movements of us Chinese. The Manchu rulers use whatever means possible to ridicule and insult China…We must get rid of these foreign ways of the Qing, so that the joy of supreme peace can be shared by all (su Qing huqi tongxiang taiping zhi le 肅清胡气同享太平之樂) (Xie, Deng et al. 1966, 162–164).

Anti-Manchu ethnocentrism was an integral part of the Taiping pursuit of heaven on earth. Here the Manchus are portrayed as actively seeking to destroy China and its people as a whole. The Christian God and His two Sons were to free China of this evil and establish a paradise on earth.

The Taiping rebels fought the Qing army and protected their base in Nanjing for eleven years. The rebels set up their own government, their own tax-collecting scheme, and their own capital, renaming Nanjing as Tianjing, the “Heavenly Capital.” The Heavenly Kingdom of Supreme Peace functioned as a state within a state for those eleven years. The Qing, however, eventually succeeded in crushing the Taiping kingdom in the summer of the third year of Tongzhi (1864) with the help of Western powers, who by this time had further secured their positions after the Second Opium War (1856–1860). Some factions in the Western camp had initially expressed a certain level of approval and sympathy to the Christian Taiping rebels and viewed them as a potential alternative to the Qing. However, becoming aware of the Taiping’s staunch opposition to the use of opium, they ultimately sided with the Qing (Nashimoto, 1972, 233). An internal disintegration among the Taiping leaders, which resulted in the deaths of capable leaders, also contributed to their own downfall (Curwen 1977, 7). As the Qing made rapid advances toward Tianjing, conditions inside the heavenly capital’s city walls deteriorated quickly, as food was running low, leadership was absent, and Hong Xiuquan himself often shut himself up in his quarters to pray to God for protection (Jen 1973, 527–529). The younger brother of Jesus, however, killed himself with poison several months prior to the fall of his kingdom. The remaining core Taiping leaders were also arrested and interrogated. Over the
course of fourteen years since the beginning of the rebellion, millions of people were killed, the majority of them civilians.\textsuperscript{40}

Just as the White Lotus and Eight Trigrams rebellions, the Taiping rebels aimed specifically to defeat the Qing and expected an imminent realization of an ideal world on earth. Christianity provided the foundation for their narrative of world transformation, and paradise on earth as imagined by the Taiping was a decidedly Christian China, under the presiding presence of the Heavenly Father and two Sons of God and free of the various negativities associated with the rule of the Manchus.

\textit{The Du Wenxiu Rebellion (1856–1872)}

Often discussed as a prototypical example of a large-scale Muslim uprising in Qing China, this rebellion developed concurrently with the Taiping Rebellion. The Hui people, an ethnic minority in China who are predominantly Muslim, constituted the majority of participants in this rebellion, although members of other ethnic groups also played important roles, including Han, Yi, Bai, and Dai peoples (Ge 2002, 185–186). This uprising occurred in response to the slaughter of Hui minorities in Yongchang County of Yunnan Province at the hands of Qing officials and local leaders.\textsuperscript{41} Qing China in the nineteenth century was not a particularly hospitable place for ethnic minorities, with a number of fatal incidents and confrontations taking place involving Muslim casualties (Tao, Li, and Zhang 2005, 110–111). The rebellion in question was led by Du Wenxiu 杜文秀, a native of Yunnan and a member of the Hui minority himself (Yang 1989, 108). Du had initially sought a peaceful resolution by submitting a petition to the central government

\textsuperscript{40} Some estimate the dead to be around ten million (Weller 1994, 33). Some go as high as twenty million (Tian 2013, 3).

\textsuperscript{41} Chinese scholars also point out that this and other rebellions led by ethnic minorities in the nineteenth century were caused by the state of internal confusion brought by the penetration of Western imperialism. See Tao, Li, and Zhang 2005, 110–111 and Yang 1989, 104–108.
following the slaughter, but was later disillusioned by the inability of the Qing to rectify the situation and protect the Hui minority. He organized and initiated an uprising in the sixth year of Xianfeng (1856), and this sparked a series of uprisings among Muslims in the nearby regions. The rebels regarded the Taiping as an important ally in the common pursuit of defeating the Qing, as is clear from one of their declarations: “We reverently uphold the call from the Heavenly Kingdom of Supreme Peace in Nanjing to topple the Manchu Qing (geming Manqing 革命滿清)” (Ma 2003, 79). The Taiping also recognized Du’s force as an ally, and there was some level of military cooperation between the two factions (ibid. 79–80).

Du’s force quickly overtook the city of Dali. There, Du established a multiethnic community governed in part by Islamic principles. He called this community the “Peaceful Southern Country” (Pingnanguo 平南国) (Lin 1996, 112). Du envisioned it to be an independent Islamic state with its own bureaucracy, military, and economic system. Islamic cultures flourished in this community, as new mosques were constructed and a number of Chinese Islamic classics were published (Tao, Li, and Zhang 2005, 116). Those of the Hui heritage were to follow Islamic laws, but members from other ethnic groups were exempt from this requirement and were expected to follow laws from the Ming dynasty (Lin 1996, 112). In an explicit denial of the legitimacy of the Qing, Du prohibited the use of the Qing calendar years, ordered his followers to abandon the “short hairstyle” (duanfa 短髮) mandated by the Qing, and required the wearing of traditional Ming clothing (Yang 1989, 126). All of these measures were taken in order to “manifest the will to restore our mother country” (biaoshi huifu zuo guo zhi yi 表示恢復祖国之意) (Bai 2000, 1:8).

Du’s community was also envisioned as a kind of multiethnic utopia in which people of different ethnicities coexisted peacefully. A document titled *A Record of Things Heard*
Concerning the Yunnan Hui Rebellion During the Xianfeng and Tongzhi Years of the Qing (Qing Xian Tong jian Yunnan Hui bian ji wen) contains the following account:

At that time, there were many Han Chinese who were angered that the Qing government was neglecting the way (bu jiang rendao 不講人道). These people willingly took up arms to follow [the leadership of Du Wenxiu] and sought to fight against Qing officials. Du Wenxiu entered the city of Dali without a battle. After entering the city, he declared the policy of “not differentiating between Han and Hui and providing protection for all” (bu fen Han Hui yiti baohu 不分漢回一体保護).” The populace rejoiced greatly (Bai 2000, 2:300).

This account stresses the level of dissatisfaction among the Han against the Qing regime and the support that Du’s army succeeded in gaining from them.\(^{42}\) Du also issued the following statement: “All ethnicities are to be treated equally without discrimination (yishi tongren 一視同仁); enmity and cruelty between ethnicities will not be tolerated. Those who violate this principle will be punished severely, regardless of their rank as bureaucrat or soldier” (Bai 2000, 2:118). In accordance with this inclusive and egalitarian policy, many members from non-Hui ethnic groups were given bureaucratic positions of importance; religious traditions of non-Hui groups were also allowed to coexist, as is clear from a number of renovations performed on Buddhist temples in Dali under Du’s supervision (Ma 2003, 82–83; Yang 1989, 125). The legal system of the Peaceful Southern Country in fact imposed harsher punishments on the Hui majority so as to prevent the Hui from becoming an oppressive presence over other ethnic groups. The positive ethnic relations under Du’s leadership was one of the major reasons why a variety of ethnic groups were attracted to his movement and eventually joined force (Ma 2003, 83–87).

\(^{42}\) The account of Du’s force entering Dali without a battle is a bit of an exaggeration, as there was a military confrontation (Yang 1989, 135–136).
The resistance of the Peaceful Southern Country continued for sixteen years until the eleventh year of Tongzhi (1872). After the fall of the Taiping, the Qing regime was able to focus its military resources on other rebels and suppress them more effectively. The Qing force eventually surrounded the city of Dali, and Du killed himself by taking poison, hoping, according to some accounts, that his death would prevent Qing troops from slaughtering his followers. His hope was short-lived, however. The Qing army massacred the adherents inside the city and crushed Du’s Islamic and multiethnic community (Lin 1996, 113). After the collapse of Du’s rebellion, the Qing regime’s stance toward the Hui minority grew increasingly oppressive, leading to the deaths of a significant number of the Hui. Some estimate that as much as ninety percent of the Hui population in Yunnan Province was killed as a result of this Qing oppression (Yu 1996, 235).

Du Wenxiu’s uprising stemmed from an ethnic tension, but ironically developed into an inclusive utopian movement for people of different ethnicities and religions. Du’s multiethnic and multi-religious community was regarded as a kind of earthly utopia, “a place of peaceful residence and joyous livelihood, where one did not have to lock one’s doors at night” (anju leye ye bu bi hu 安居樂業夜不閉戶) (Ma 2003, 89). Du Wenxiu furthermore regarded his uprising as complementing the Taiping Rebellion, suggesting that he also sought an imminent transformation of the world. Much like the Taiping, Du’s adherents were also driven by a combination of explicitly anti-Qing sentiments and religious devotion. Du Wenxiu’s staunch rejection of the Qing worldview and vision of a specifically non-Qing China offers a stark

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43 Chinese scholars generally speak approvingly of Du Wenxiu’s rebellion, noting particularly its ethnically inclusive stance. A conference dedicated to Du was held in the city of Dali in November 1990. Researchers and other professionals engaged with China’s ethnic minorities praised Du’s ethnic policy and his adamant anti-feudal and anti-imperial messages (Ma 2003, 96–99).
contrast to the Japanese uprisings examined above, with neither an adamant rejection of the Tokugawa regime nor an alternative non-Tokugawa vision of the future world. This contrast makes evident that Tokugawa peasant uprisings featuring yonaoshi gods cannot be properly understood as millenarian.

**Diverging Logics of Divine Defiance**

Unlike the yonaoshi gods and their adherents who were content making specific demands and neither denied the legitimacy of the Tokugawa regime nor proposed to create an ideal world of their own, the contemporaneous Chinese rebels actively called for the defeat of the Qing and engaged in prolonged military confrontations with the goal of establishing their own utopian community based on their respective religious inclinations, be it apocalyptic Maitreyaism, Christianity as propounded by the Chinese brother of Jesus, or Islam as a protector of China’s ethnic harmony. Although the uprisings in Japan and China all featured explicitly religious symbolisms and the rebels saw themselves as being sanctioned by a presiding divine entity, both the sheer magnitude and radical qualities of the Chinese rebellions dwarf the Japanese counterparts.

The Japanese and Chinese rebels also operated under different logics of defiance. The former focused on rectifying injustices within a fixed social boundary as defined by the existing regime. True to their slogan of yonaoshi, the Japanese rebels focused on fixing, correcting, or mending (naosu) the imperfect world so that it could be renewed or restored to its proper state. As such, their defiance operated within an existing framework and focused on specific problems that had to be resolved within that same framework. The Chinese rebels, on the other hand, focused on “replacing” the existing regime with a new world order. They were not satisfied with demanding mere improvements. They denied everything that the Qing represented and proposed
a more radical, fundamental change. This vehemently anti-establishment stance is not a characteristic of *yonaoshi* gods, some of whom willingly submitted themselves to be punished or came to a peaceful resolution with the local government after their demands were met. Japanese uprisings led by *yonaoshi* gods are more appropriately described as short-term uprisings or protests that sought improvements in particular domains of society, while the Chinese rebellions analyzed above should appropriately be described as full-scale warfare motivated by millenarian sentiments.

As stated at the very beginning of this chapter, the goal of this analysis has been to understand the nature of *yonaoshi* gods’ uprisings by using contemporaneous Chinese examples as a conceptual point of reference, while keeping in mind the question of the applicability of the category of millenarianism. By analyzing them together and by highlighting the relatively non-radical and moderate quality of the Japanese counterparts, it becomes clear that it is incorrect to use the category of millenarianism to describe Tokugawa peasant uprisings featuring *yoanoshi* gods. This observation is meaningful in destabilizing the connection that has been made traditionally between millenarianism and *yonaoshi* as a historiographical category and is necessary in order to understand *yonaoshi* as an emic concept and the nature of “*yonaoshi* god” as a new framework for conceptualizing divinities. What is ultimately important, however, is not to keep discussing how the concept of *yonaoshi* and *yonaoshi* gods fail to meet the criteria of certain external scholarly category such as millenarianism, but to start assessing critically and without exaggeration what *yonaoshi* really meant and what *yonaoshi* gods sought to achieve and what they accomplished. This chapter’s analysis of the “rush hour of *yonaoshi* gods” and some of the recurring themes that emerged therein, such as selfless sacrifice, salvation offered to the weak, and violence legitimated as punishment represent important steps forward.
This chapter has highlighted a proliferation in the number of *yonaoshi* gods as leaders of peasant uprisings in the late Tokugawa period and analyzed critically some of the salient characteristics of these *yonaoshi* gods by utilizing contemporaneous Chinese rebellions from a comparative standpoint. The chapter that follows offers further analysis from a contrasting viewpoint, by focusing on two Tokugawa bureaucrats who were deified as *yonaoshi* gods.
Chapter 4

Tokugawa Bureaucrats Deified as *Yonaoshi* Gods: Egawa Hidetatsu and Suzuki Chikara

Having analyzed the spread of the category of *yonaoshi* god throughout the Japanese archipelago by examining peasant insurrectionists deified as *yonaoshi* gods, this chapter will take a hundred-eighty-degree turn by focusing on cases in which historical actors apotheosized Tokugawa Bakufu bureaucrats as *yonaoshi* gods. This chapter will show that the poor and downtrodden did not have a monopoly over *yonaoshi* gods. Those in positions of considerable power and authority could also become divine agents of *yonaoshi*. This demonstrates that it is insufficient to think of the concept of *yonaoshi* only in terms of its subversive qualities, an often-observed side effect of the scholarly convention of connecting *yonaoshi* with subversive and millenarian movements.

This chapter will focus on Egawa Hidetatsu 江川英龍 (1801–1855) of Nirayama and Suzuki Chikara 鈴木主税 (1814–1856) of Fukui, both loyal servants of the Tokugawa government. As evident from a variety of contemporaneous documents and historical artifacts introduced below, the two Tokugawa bureaucrats were venerated as *yonaoshi* gods by their subjects, who glorified and celebrated their rulers’ benevolent governance. Egawa and Suzuki will be treated under separate section headings, and for each, his biographical overview will be provided first before an analysis of his deification as a *yonaoshi* god.

**Egawa Hidetatsu: The Michelangelo of Bakumatsu Japan**

The Egawa family in Nirayama (in present-day Shizuoka Prefecture) served the Tokugawa Bakufu as governor (*daikan* 代官) from generation to generation—a practice known as “hereditary governorship” (*seshū daikan* 世襲代官). A governor was in charge of overseeing lands belonging directly to the Tokugawa family, unlike other lands controlled by regional
daimyo. These lands were located in various strategic parts of the Japanese archipelago, and the governor’s primary duty was to collect taxes from and ensure stability in these lands. The Nirayama Governor typically oversaw a vast stretch of land covering today’s Shizuoka, Yamanashi, Kanagawa, and Tokyo Prefectures, although the precise area changed from time to time. Besides their individual personal names, governors in Nirayama all had a common hereditary name attached to the position, Egawa Tarōzaemon 江川太郎左衛門. When people refer to this name today, however, they usually mean the best-known Nirayama governor, and that is none other than Egawa Hidetatsu.

Egawa Hidetatsu, or better known locally as Egawa Tannan 江川但庵, was born in Nirayama as the second son of Egawa Hidetake 江川英毅 in the first year of Kyōwa (1801). He was a studious and filial child, as was every other noteworthy person from the Tokugawa period, it seems. As a child and as a youth, Egawa engaged in a variety of learning and activities, from painting to music to poetry to martial arts, and his father helped him develop these interests through his extensive network of artistic and scholarly acquaintances (Hashimoto 2014, 68–77, 87–93). Although the precise years are unknown, Egawa, together with his elder brother, joined one of the most renowned schools of Japanese fencing (kendō 剣道) in Edo, called Gekikenkan 撃剣館 (literally, the “house of sword strikes”). The Egawa brothers trained at this school until both of them received certificates of mastery (menkyo kaiden 免許皆伝) in the third year of Bunsei (1820). Egawa was especially filial to his mother, Hisa 久. One episode from his childhood in particular illuminates his filial disposition. One day, the young Egawa was playing in the mansion’s garden. His mother then came out to the veranda and started to clip her nails. Egawa then began to pick up and collect the clipped nails one by one. The mother found this amusing and asked the child, “Why are you picking those up?” The child replied, “I’m afraid of
stepping over your nails. Because these nails are part of your body, stepping over them means stepping over your body. I would dare not do that, so I’m picking them up” (ibid. 79).

Egawa’s older brother Hidetora 英虎 was expected to inherit his father’s official position as governor of Nirayama and had already begun his term as Governor’s Trainee (daikan minarai 代官見習い). However, Hidetora died of a foot-related illness in the sixth month of the fourth year of Bunsei (1821) at the age of twenty-five. Egawa Hidetatsu soon replaced his brother as the successor head of the Egawa household and began his assignment as a trainee in the seventh year of Bunsei (1824). Egawa was appointed as governor of Nirayama in the sixth year of Tenpō (1835) following his father’s death.

Nirayama Governor Egawa Hidetatsu is most known today for his contribution to strengthening Japan’s coastal defenses. Long before the arrival of Commodore Perry in the sixth year of Kaei (1853), Egawa was keenly aware of the increasing frequency with which Western ships were approaching the Japanese archipelago. Already since the 1790s to the early 1800s, Russian and English ships had started contacting the Japanese shores. This led many to feel the need to learn more about the West and rethink Japan’s readiness in facing the threat of foreign powers. Egawa was one such individual, and given Nirayama’s location at the heart of the Izu Peninsula, coastal defense was an essential concern for him. An avid learner of Western knowledge, Egawa sought the tutelage of some of the most progressive thinkers of his time such as Hatazaki Kanae 幡崎鼎, Watanabe Kazan 渡辺崋山, and Takashima Shūhan 高島秋帆, all of whom came into conflict with the central Tokugawa regime for their views that contradicted the official closed country policy.

In particular, Takashima Shūhan was instrumental in imparting to Egawa the knowledge of cannon and artillery (hōjutsu 砲術). Since the 1820s, Takashima Shūhan and his father in
Nagasaki had been learning about Western weaponry based on translated Dutch military books and were actively disseminating their knowledge to domains in Kyushu in the 1830s. There eventually developed a school of artillery called the Takashima-style Artillery (Takashima ryū hōjutsu 高島流砲術). The Bakufu came to recognize the importance of this school especially after the devastating outcome of the First Opium War across the shore in Qing China. Egawa first sent a few of his men to Nagasaki to study under Takashima, but in the twelfth year of Tenpō (1841), Egawa had an opportunity to learn from Takashima directly for a few months when the latter stayed in Edo for cannon demonstrations hosted by the Bakufu. In the following year, Egawa was certified by the Bakufu as a “master of artillery” (hōjutsu shihan 砲術師範).  

Based on this newly acquired knowledge of Western artillery, Egawa opened a school of his own in his private residence in Nirayama in the same year he was certified. This school became an important center for Western military training and came to be known as the Nirayama School (Nirayama juku 韬山塾). Some of the more well-known individuals who studied at this school include Kawaji Toshiakira 川路聖謨 and Sakuma Shōzan 佐久間象山. The school also complemented an idea for a drastic military reform Egawa had proposed a few years earlier, a plan for training peasant soldiers (nōhei 農兵). This was a radical proposal, given the long-established tradition of “separating the samurai and peasantry” (heinō bunri 兵農分離).

Although this system did not come to fruition until after his death, Egawa’s foresight on the need to establish such a system, which precedes Takasugi Shinsaku’s 高杉晋作 famous peasant army (kiheitai 奇兵隊), is noteworthy (Hashimoto 2014, 199–200).

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1 Tobayama 1972, vol. 1, sec. 1, 125–135. The first volume of Tobayama 1972 has several different subsections, each of which starts with a new pagination. To avoid confusion, Tobayama’s Volume 1 will be cited as follows: Tobayama 1:section number: page number. See also Hashimoto 2014, 156–160.
In the second year of Kaei (1849), four years prior to the arrival of Perry, Egawa negotiated directly with captain of the English ship *Mariner*, which had arrived in Shimoda on the Izu Peninsula after surveying Edo Bay. Having received an order from the Bakufu to have the English ship leave Japan at once, Egawa boarded a small boat to approach the *Mariner* and through an interpreter, introduced himself to the captain as governor of the region. Although this incident is called the *Mariner* Incident in Japanese historiography (*Marinā gō jiken マリナー号事件*), the exchanges that followed were mostly cordial and diplomatic. Egawa provided the English ship with meat and other requested products, and the *Mariner* captain accepted Egawa’s explanation that the Tokugawa government was unable to welcome the entry of foreign ships. However, soon after this incident concluded peacefully, Egawa submitted a report to the Bakufu arguing that the building of Japan’s coastal defense was an urgent matter (ibid. 130–132).

Although the central Bakufu was not always pleased with Egawa’s progressive views, it could no longer deny the need for a radical change in the face of Commodore Perry’s direct threats. Following the arrival of Perry, Egawa was appointed as Leader of Coastal Defense at the Rank of Examiner (*Kanjō ginmi yaku kaibō gakari 勘定吟味役海防掛*). About a month after Perry’s departure—after promising that he would come back the following year, by which time he expected to hear clear answers from the Tokugawa Bakufu concerning the demands made by the United States—Egawa was placed in charge of building man-made islands in Edo Bay, to be used to emplace artillery to defend the city of Edo. These islands, each of them about the size of a baseball field, came to be called *odaiba お台場* (literally, a “stand place”). The original plan

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2 The name of today’s Odaiba area in Tokyo comes from these man-made islands. There are two islands that are preserved today as historic sites.
was to build twelve of these islands, but only six were built due to a shortage in the Bakufu’s funding.³

Another major project Egawa oversaw after Perry’s arrival—and perhaps Egawa’s most well known project—was the construction of a reverberatory furnace (hansharo 反射炉) in Nirayama. A reverberatory furnace is a special structure designed to melt pig iron at a high temperature, and the Nirayam furnace was designed specifically to cast cannons. The plan was to set up these cannons on the above-mentioned man-made islands in Edo Bay. The construction of the furnace first began in Shimoda, but the location was changed to Nirayama after American ships started to frequent Shimoda. The construction began in the fourth month of the first year of Ansei (1854) in Nirayama. Egawa, however, died in the first month of the second year of Ansei (1855), most likely of pneumonia. The furnace building project was completed eventually by Egawa’s son, Egawa Hidetoshi 江川英敏, only in the fourth year of Ansei (1857) (ibid. 182–185, 237–239).

Egawa’s illustrious political career was dedicated to enhancing Tokugawa Japan’s readiness to face encroaching foreign threats. At the same time, he was an accomplished painter, poet, and calligrapher. His eclectic mind also led him to explore such activities as sword making, stamp making, and hunting (Egawa actively incorporated hunting in the curriculum of the Nirayama School). He is also known in Japan for introducing bread, which he experimented baking as a portable food item for soldiers. He is also said to have contributed to the spread of the use of an early form of smallpox vaccine in the Izu peninsula. These aspects of Egawa’s life cannot be elaborated here and must await a future analysis, especially since there is not a single significant monograph in English on this extraordinary figure. But suffice it to say that Egawa’s

³ Perry came back to Japan much earlier than he had announced, only six months later. The islands were still incomplete for this unexpectedly early return.
extensive and diverse accomplishments have led some to dub him as the “Michelangelo of Bakumatsu Japan” (Mizutani 2007). The following section will shed light upon an aspect of his life that is less well known—his deification as a living god of yonaoshi.

**Egawa Hidetatsu as a Yonaoshi God**

Egawa was deified as a yonaoshi god in a county called Tsuru 都留 in the southeastern part of the province of Kai 甲斐 (present-day Yamanashi Prefecture). This occurred at a very early point in his political career, shortly after he was appointed as governor in Nirayama. Some background must be sketched before dealing directly with Egawa’s apotheosis as a yonaoshi god. As already mentioned, Egawa took his official position in the sixth year of Tenpō (1835) in the midst of the so-called Great Famine of Tenpō. A large number of peasant uprisings were occurring throughout the Japanese archipelago, and areas under Egawa’s supervision were starting to show signs of instability as well. Perhaps given the challenges of the times, Egawa cracked down on luxurious and extraneous spending among his immediate subordinates and his representatives placed throughout the governed regions. He instructed them to practice frugality, both in conducting their business and also in leading their daily life. He practiced it himself in his own household, to the point of re-using a cracked rice bowl by gluing the broken pieces back together and using the same tatami straw mats for years on end (ibid. 1:1:57–59). Egawa hoped, perhaps, that by showing good example to the people, peace and stability could be maintained in his lands. In particular, Egawa paid careful attention to regions bordering Kai Province. Although Kai Province itself was not under his supervision when he was appointed governor, Kai had a reputation as a particularly difficult land to govern and had been placed under the supervision of a number of different governors throughout the Tokugawa period (Tobayama 1972, 1:1:64). It was only natural then that Egawa remained mindful of his territories near Kai Province.
However, in the seventh month of the seventh year of Tenpō (1836), only a year after Egawa became governor, a major uprising occurred in Kai Province, known as the Tenpō Disturbance (Tenpō sōdō 天保騒動).\(^4\) A large-scale uprising in a neighboring region was enough to cause concern for Egawa, especially given that uprisings tended to cause a kind of chain reaction and spread like wildfire. Egawa’s fear became a reality when a group of peasants from Kai Province entered Hizure Village in Sagami Province, which was under his control, and caused a riot (Nakada 1998, 445). Egawa responded swiftly to this. He left Nirayama with twenty of his men, armed with ten rifles, and soon had the situation under control. At this point, Egawa was most likely entertaining the possibility of Kai Province being assigned to him in the near future (this was in fact the case, as will be explained below) (ibid.). Another major uprising took place in the second month of the eighth year of Tenpō (1837), the famous uprising led by Ōshio Heihachirō 大塩平八郎 in Osaka. Although the uprising itself was quelled in a day and was far from Egawa’s assigned territories, Ōshio managed to escape and his whereabouts was unknown for about forty days, causing many to fear that he might plot a new series of uprisings elsewhere.\(^5\)

Following these developments, Egawa departed on a secret reconnaissance to his assigned provinces and also to Kai Province, taking along just one of his subordinates. Although the precise dating of this reconnaissance is unclear, scholars agree that it took place in the eighth year of Tenpō (1837), most likely in response to the Ōshio uprising. Hashimoto 2014 suggests that it took place in the fifth month of the year (105), while Tobayama 1972 argues that it took place in the third month (1:1:66). If the journey was made in response to the escape of Ōshio, it would make sense for it to have happened in the third month, immediately after the Ōshio

\(^4\) This disturbance is also known variously as Gunnai Sōdō 郡内騒動 and Kōshū Sōdō 甲州騒動.

\(^5\) After about forty days, Ōshio committed suicide in Osaka.
uprising in the second month. In any case, the man who accompanied Egawa was Saitō Yakurō 斎藤弥九郎, a master swordsman whom Egawa had befriended during his training at Gekikenkan in Edo. After serving as instructor at Gekikenkan, Saitō founded his own school of Japanese fencing, known as Renpeikan 練兵館 (literally, the “house of military cultivation”), which was to become one of the “Three Eminent Schools” of Japanese fencing in Edo (Edo sandai dōjō 江戸三大道場) (Hashimoto 2014, 84). Egawa recruited Saitō soon after becoming governor and chose him as his partner in setting out on his incognito mission. In order to survey the situation on the ground directly, Egawa and Saitō traveled through the regions while disguised as sword merchants. Although the two traveled through several different provinces, Egawa’s primary concern was Kai Province. Egawa later commemorated this journey in a painting, titled Secret Journey to Kai Province (Kōshū bikō zu 甲州微行図) (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Secret Journey to Kai Province (Kōshū bikō zu), Egawa Foundation

Most likely shortly before or after he conducted his investigative journey, Egawa submitted a report to the central Bakufu in the third month of the same year to outline his
response to the variety of disturbances that had developed in the recent months. This report gives a glimpse of the kind of rule Egawa envisioned to extend over his territories:

Report on the Governance of the Assigned Lands (*shihaisho osamarikata no gi mōshiage sōrō kakitsuke* 支配所治り方の儀申上候書付)

During this time of disturbances in many provinces around the country, each one of us must be especially diligent in ensuring peace in the lands that are entrusted to us. Under my supervision, we are lending to villagers food and various other relief goods upon request. Even before doing this, we had asked those of better means to donate or lend money, rice, and other crops to the poor. Thus we have maintained peace in our lands. We have also instructed people to have a compassionate heart, so as not to let others die of hunger, and in this way, make sure that people’s hearts are not led astray to cause disturbances. Furthermore, we have also taken measures to instruct village officials and others of appropriate means to lend money and other crops to be used to help the poor… (Tobayama 1972 1:1:66–67).

Egawa reports that he has taken active steps to save the hungry and poor from their predicament. In the same report, he does admit that many villagers died from hunger due to a poor harvest in the preceding year and the rising price of rice that resulted from it, but also emphasizes that in his provinces, the government and the wealthy are working together to save the less fortunate. He also points out that there were several instances of rice riots occurring in his provinces in which villagers attacked rice dealers who were hoarding rice. Egawa reports that he has made much effort to persecute greedy merchants who only think of their own profit (ibid. 67–68). Taken at face value, this report indicates that Egawa put much emphasis on the needs of the poor, and in accordance with his policy of extreme frugality, expected the wealthy as well as village officials to contribute some of their wealth to the relief campaign. In fact, as will be shown below, it was the attention Egawa paid to the needs of local communities, combined with this emphasis on frugality, that led to his deification as a *yonaoshi* god in Tsuru County of Kai

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7 Again, because the date for the reconnaissance to Kai Province is unclear, it is not certain whether this report was submitted before or after the reconnaissance.
Province, which was placed under Egawa’s supervision in the seventh month of the ninth year of Tenpō (1838) (Nakada 1998, 445–446).

Information concerning Egawa’s apotheosis appears in a personal letter dated the nineteenth day of the third month of the tenth year of Tenpō (1839). The letter is addressed to Saitō Yakurō, sent by Matsumoto Tokizō 松本斗機藏, a progressive thinker who, like Egawa, argued for the need to strengthen Japan’s coastal defense. This letter is the second letter in a series of two letters sent to Saitō by Matsumoto. The first letter, dated the nineteenth day of the second month of the tenth year of Tenpō (1839), reveals that Matsumoto had promised Egawa to meet him in Edo while Egawa was there on an official business, but Matsumoto expresses regret that he was unable to go to Edo due to illness (Ōno 1984, 63). The letter in question is a follow-up letter expressing Matsumoto’s hope to see Egawa once his official duty is done. More relevant to Egawa’s deification as a yonaoshi god, this letter also indicates that one of Matsumoto’s students recently traveled to Kai Province and while there, was impressed with Egawa’s high reputation among the locals. What follows is a translation of the relevant portion of this letter:

Also, one of my [Matsumoto’s] students recently traveled to Kai Province. The attached paper (besshi 別紙) outlines what he heard over there. I was so happy about this, and I couldn't wait for his [Egawa’s] return. May I trouble you [Saitō] to show this paper to the governor at your earliest convenience? (Tobayama 1972, 1:1:69).

At the time of this letter’s composition, Egawa had been in charge of Kai Province’s Tsuru County for about eight months. The attached letter mentioned in the above citation lists a number of things Matsumoto’s student heard during his stay in Kai. Toward the end of this list, we learn about Egawa’s status as a living god. The following is what Matsumoto reports:
When Nemoto Mataichi 根本又市⁸ visited from village to village to inspect the state of sake brewing in the region, his handling of the situation (torihakaraikata 取計方) was excellent, and everyone present was impressed from the heart. Around the same time, there was also an inspector of the Kantō area, but his handling of the situation was extreme inappropriate (furachi no torihakaraikata 不埒之取計方). After this, the locals came to admire Mataichi’s handling of the situation even more.

In the winter of last year, village officials noticed that Mataichi’s child[ren] was/were not wearing tabi 足袋 socks. In seeing this, the officials felt extremely sorry, noting that this region is much colder in winter than it is in Izu.⁹ However, Nemoto refused to accept any gift or bribe (inmotsu 音物), and the villagers were at a loss as to what should be done. It is said that the previous official in Yamura 谷村¹⁰ received a bribe (yakutoku 役得) of two thousand ryō per year.

Before, when governor visited here for inspection, the cost of lodging per night was about fifteen ryō. The cost for lunch was about five to six ryō. When the present governor visited here for inspection last winter, the cost of his entire visit was less than one night’s stay of the previous governor’s men. The locals are extremely grateful for this. Village leaders are now considering submitting a countywide petition to the Bakufu to have the present governor be in charge of this land forever.

Here, prior to the seasonal festival (sekku 節句), the locals wrote “Yonaoshi Egawa Great August Deity” (yonaoshi Egawa daimyōjin 世直し江川大明神) on paper standards (kaminobori 紙幟) and put these standards up at shrines in various locations….

The above is what my student heard directly when he was visiting the region this time (ibid., 1:1:70).

This attached paper indicates that as new governor in the region, Egawa and his men made quite an impression on the locals. Their extremely frugal ways provided a sharp contrast to the practice of the previous governor. In the first entry, although the description is quite vague, there is no doubt that Nemoto, a man who had been serving the Egawa family since Egawa’s father’s

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⁸ Nemoto was Egawa’s subordinate based in Kai. Hashimoto 2014 has his name as Nemoto Sadasuke 根本定助 (98–99).
⁹ Nirayama is in the Izu peninsula, presumably where the Nemoto family had come from.
¹⁰ Governor’s Office was located in this town called Yamura (Yamura jin’ya 谷村陣屋).
generation, struck the locals as an extremely capable official. The second entry reflects the extent to which Egawa’s men took seriously their superior’s emphasis on frugality, not even providing socks for their own children during the harsh winter of Kai. Another important theme in the second entry is Nemoto’s refusal to accept gifts, or, as the Japanese word inmotsu also implies, bribes. The entry concludes by revealing the amount of bribes the previous official at Yamura supposedly had received every year. The third entry concerns Egawa himself, who visited the region presumably in late 1838. Although the entry does not specify the ways in which Egawa managed to curtail his expense for the entire visit to just one night’s worth of the previous governor’s stay, it is clear that this is also indicative of Egawa’s commitment to frugality. The locals welcomed this change, hoping that Egawa would never be replaced as their governor. Finally, the locals celebrated their governor’s virtues and venerated him as kami of yonaoshi by putting up paper standards bearing his name.

One of these paper standards from Kai is still preserved today (Figure 5).\(^{11}\)

![Figure 5. “Yonaoshi Egawa Great August Deity Standard” (yonaoshi Egawa daimyōjin noboribata 世直江川大明神幟旗). Egawa Foundation.](image)

\(^{11}\) The high quality digital image of the paper standard was kindly provided by Mr. Takayuki Hashimoto, Executive Manager of the Egawa Foundation. Mr. Hashimoto informed me that the standard is currently going through repair and therefore is not available for direct viewing. The section on Egawa in this chapter relies significantly on Mr. Hashimoto’s recent publication as well (2014).
At the top of this standard, the two bold characters read “reverently worship” (hōsai 奉祭). In the middle of the standard, the characters read, “Yonaoshi Egawa Great August Deity” (yonaoshi Egawa daimyōjin 世直江川大明神), exactly as told in Matsumoto’s student’s account. On the two sides of these bold letters in the middle, the names “Sir Nemoto” (Nemoto dono 根本殿) on the right and “Sir Nagasawa” (Nagasawa dono 長澤殿) on the left can be seen. Nagasawa was also one of Egawa’s subordinates, presumably Nemoto’s partner (Katō 1931, 84–85). The two individuals are introduced as “two strong men” (ryōzeki 兩関), positioned to support Egawa in the middle. At the bottom right hand corner, it is written, “May His Rule Last Forever” (oshihai banbanzai 御支配万々歳). On the bottom left hand corner, it is written, “worshippers of this county” (tōgun ujiko 当郡氏子). The Japanese word for “worshippers,” or ujiko, as also mentioned briefly in Chapter 3, usually refers to worshippers of a local tutelary deity (ujigami).

This particular standard was found in Natsugari Village (present-day Tsuru City in Yamanashi Prefecture) in Tsuru County. This standard was brought to the governor’s office in Yamura in the second month of the tenth year of Tenpō (1839). It was accompanied by a letter composed by an official in Natsugari Village by the name of San’emon 三右衛門, who reported that a farmer in the village found this standard by chance. What follows is a translation of this short letter:

A village official from Natsugari Village humbly reports. A farmer in our village, named Sadajirō12 was residing 13 near Hōkyōji 寶鏡寺 in our village. During the evening of the thirteenth day of this month, someone put up a standard—presented together with this letter—in front of his

12 The name of the farmer who found the standard is a bit unclear. The original Japanese is 定次郎親平右衛門. I am not sure if this refers to two individuals, one named Sadajirō and the other Shinpeiemon, or a single individual known by two different names.
13 I am also a bit unclear about the meaning of the Japanese expression here hikiwakeri makari ari sōrō 引分り罷在候. I took it to mean to “live close to or near.”
house. I am writing to report to you about this incident and also submit this standard to you.

Year of the boar, the fifteenth day of the second month,

[submitted to] Yamura Governor’s Office

[from] Village Official Representative,

San’emon (brackets added, in Katō 1931, 86).

This account confirms what Matsumoto’s student heard while in Kai, that these standards honoring Egawa were placed at shrines in various locations, except that in this particular case it was a Buddhist temple (Hōkyōji still exists today in Tsuru City). Although Egawa was venerated specifically as a kami, the locals did not find it contradictory to put his standard up in front of a Buddhist temple, once again problematizing the explicit boundary drawn between kami and Buddhist deities today. The year of the boar corresponds to the tenth year of Tenpō (1839), and since the standard was found in front of the house of Sadajirō on the thirteenth day, it means that the standard was submitted to the governor’s office only two days later, on the fifteenth day. Then the “seasonal festival” or sekku being referred to in Matsumoto’s letter most likely refers to the “first day of the horse” (hatsuuma 初午), traditionally held in the beginning of the second month (Hashimoto 2014, 106).

The central and most obvious theme in the deification of Egawa as a yonaoshi god in Kai is his—and his subordinates’—willingness to reduce the financial burden of the local population. From cutting down the expense involved in governor’s inspection visit to not accepting bribes, much emphasis is placed on frugality and economic scrupulousness, particularly in ways that benefit the locals. This also makes sense given the importance Egawa placed on the needs of the poor, as mentioned above in his dealing with the Tenpō famine. Other measures that Egawa implemented in Kai Province after this region came under his supervision include imposing
tighter control over local gambling operations and cracking down on corruption among local village officials (Nemoto’s refusal to accept any gift may be reflective of this policy) (Hashimoto 2014, 104). These specific measures that were undertaken during Egawa’s terms may have also contributed to the locals’ veneration of Egawa as a *yonaoshi* god. For the locals, then, *yonaoshi* signified a general improvement of their community, primarily through achieving healthier financial and economic conditions and by removing harmful customs in the region. This was made possible by the virtue and conscientiousness of their ruler, or so the locals interpreted it.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to ascertain what sorts of ritual activities might have taken place surrounding this cult of Egawa as a *yonaoshi* god. Exactly in what ways did the locals worship Egawa? Did they set up a temporary shrine for him? Was there a particular center of veneration, as was the case for Sano Masakoto, whose gravesite became the focal point of worship, as discussed in Chapter 2? These questions cannot be fully answered with the resources available today. Particularly interesting, though, is the fact that the paper standards honoring Egawa were placed at local shrines and temples. Given that this occurred most likely in the beginning of the second month and coincided with the festival of the first horse, it might be reasonable to say that Egawa’s apotheosis took place in conjunction with or within the context of already-established local ritual activities.

In any case, what Egawa’s deification as a *yonaoshi* god makes clear is that the native concept of *yonaoshi* was not necessarily an anti-establishment concept. This challenges the understanding of the term *yonaoshi* that is too often associated with subversive movements. The villagers hoped that Egawa would rule over them forever, and it was not a contradiction for them to connect Egawa’s virtuous governance with the concept of *yonaoshi*. Here it is important to emphasize the versatility of the concept of *yonaoshi*. It could be invoked within the context of a
peasant uprising, with angry peasants claiming to be divine agents of yonaoshi. It could also be used, as the above example amply demonstrates, in glorifying or even deifying a particular local ruler and by extension, celebrating the rule of the Tokugawa, whom he represented.

Egawa’s Legacy Today

In September 2013, Nirayama’s reverberatory furnace was chosen as a candidate for UNESCO World Heritage Site. One of the primary arguments for its candidacy, according to a booklet prepared by Izu no Kuni City (which covers the Nirayama region), is that the furnace represents an important foundation of Japan’s modernization and industrialization in the Meiji period (Izu no Kuni Shi 2014, 1–5). The booklet also introduces Egawa Hidetatsu as the father of the Nirayama furnace and praises Egawa’s contributions to the strengthening of Japan’s defenses and briefly contextualizes the construction of the furnace within Japan’s struggle against Western imperialism. The Nirayama furnace is somewhat of a local hot spot now, with advertisements celebrating the candidacy found throughout the Izu Hakone Railway, from the nearest Izu Nagaoka Station to Mishima Station, which connects to the East Japan Railways.

Egawa’s former residence, now called Egawa Mansion (Egawa tei 江川邸), is designated as an Important Cultural Property of Japan. The entry fee is reasonable, at four hundred yen. Inside the building one can enjoy a fairly extensive display of items related to the history of the Egawa family and also Egawa Hidetatsu personally. The mansion shares the same address as the Egawa Foundation, dedicated to preserving the legacy of the Egawa family in Nirayama. The Foundation boasts a vast collection of documents and artifacts related to the Egawa family. The Foundation recently finished a decade-long project of cataloging its

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14 Visited on Feb 14, 2014. Quite a bit of guns and cannons were on display.
collection, which amounts to approximately 70,000 items (Hashimoto 2014, 15–16). Some documents are also available electronically at the National Institute of Japanese Literature.

**Suzuki Chikara: A Local Hero in Fukui**

After a short walk from the Japan Railway’s Fukui Station, one can get on a cozy trolley of the local Fukui Railway’s Fukubu Line. The third station to the south is Kidayotsuji 木田四辻. Heading west from this relatively major intersection of the auspiciously named Phoenix Road (*Fenikkusu dōri フェニックス通り *) in a region known as Minori みのり and turning left at the fifth intersection, one finds a small shrine in a quiet neighborhood. A sign attached on the *torii* gate reads “World Renewal Shrine” (*Yonaori jinja 世直神社*) (Figure 6).

![](image)

**Figure 6. World Renewal Shrine in Minori 3. Photo by the author. June 27, 2014**

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15 The shrine is located in Fukui City, Minori 3 (*Minori san chōme みのり三丁目*). I visited the shrine on June 27, 2014.

16 The characters 世直 are locally read *yonaori* and not *yonaoshi* as more commonly the case.
A wooden altar house stands at the center of this small shrine compound, and to its left erects a stone monument, which reads “Monument for the Shrine of Suzuki Shigemasa (Suzuki Shigemasa seishi no hi 鈴木重栄生祠之碑).” The Japanese word for “shrine” here is seishi, which is a technical term referring to a shrine dedicated to a particular individual while the individual is still alive. Suzuki, in other words, was enshrined as a living god or as an ikigami at this World Renewal Shrine.

Suzuki Shigemasa, or more commonly known as Suzuki Chikara, was a local samurai who served the Tokugawa government in a variety of official capacities. The original World Renewal Shrine dedicated to Suzuki dates back to the 1830s. The shrine described above in fact is not the original and was newly constructed in the early 1900s. The original shrine, also called World Renewal Shrine, is located further south of the Kidayotsuji intersection (Figure 7).

Figure 7. World Renewal Shrine in Minori 1. This is the original shrine. Photo by the author. June 27, 2014.

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17 My instinct was to read 重栄 as Shigeyoshi, but here I follow Katō 1985 and read this name as Shigemasa.
18 The original World Renewal Shrine is located in Fukui City, Minori 1 (Minori icchōme) みのり一丁目. Also visited on June 27, 2014.
In other words, there are two shrines named “World Renewal Shrine” in Fukui City today. As described below, the original World Renewal Shrine was established by a group of locals who deified Suzuki for his benevolent acts as a local government bureaucrat. First, an overview of Suzuki’s life and political career is necessary in order to contextualize his apotheosis as a yonaoshi god.

Suzuki Chikara was born as the second son of the Fukui domain samurai Kaifuku Masakata 海福正敬. As a child, Suzuki Chikara was adopted by Suzuki Nagatsune 鈴木長恒, another local samurai, for the purpose of continuing the Suzuki family’s lineage. The Suzuki family was of moderate means with a stipend of four hundred fifty koku. Suzuki Chikara was known as a very bright child and was diligent at studying the Confucian classics under the tutelage of local Confucian scholars such as Maeda Baidō 前田梅洞 and Seida Tanzō 清田丹藏.

In the eighth year of Tenpō (1837), Suzuki became the head of the household at the age of twenty-four, following the death of his father, who at the time was serving in the position of city magistrate (machibugyō 町奉行). In the thirteenth year of Tenpō (1842), Suzuki Chikara himself was appointed as city magistrate and then as Magistrate of Temples and Shrine (jishabugyō 寺社奉行). In the second month of the second year of Kōka (1845), his work as magistrate was recognized, and Suzuki was appointed as chief attendant (sobamuki tōdori 側向頭取) to the young Matsudaira Shungaku 松平春嶽, the sixteenth lord of the Fukui domain who played a central role in Bakufu affairs during the final years of the Tokugawa period and also served important bureaucratic functions in early Meiji. Suzuki was placed in charge of educating Matsudaira, who was only eighteen at the time. For the following six years, Suzuki acted as his mentor as well as disciplinarian. Suzuki maintained a close relationship with the young lord and was involved in various aspects of his life, everything from organizing his schedule for martial
arts training to making diary entries on his behalf on days he was feeling ill to arranging his marriage and wedding rites. Later in his life, Matsudaira reminisced about Suzuki as someone to whom he was deeply indebted (Takeuchi 1952, 93–96).

Suzuki, however, resigned from this post in the fourth year of Kaei (1851). Some speculate that this resignation was due to fear and jealousy among Suzuki’s colleagues that Suzuki was getting too close to the lord and was trying to monopolize power. Suzuki spent the following year away from the political world, before he was appointed again as Magistrate of Kanazu in Sakai county in the northern part of the Fukui domain. Kanazu was an important political center in the Fukui domain, a region rife with controversial disputes, and therefore, Suzuki’s experience and leadership were deemed necessary. Although he dealt with these disputes swiftly and fairly, his term as Magistrate of Kanazu was cut short in the sixth year of Kaei (1853) with the arrival of Commodore Perry in Uraga. About a month after Perry’s arrival, Suzuki resigned from his post and rushed to Edo, where Matsudaira had begun to reside. Suzuki assisted the young lord in the midst of unprecedented political turmoil and collaborated with a number of prominent representatives from domains across Japan, such as Fujita Tōko 藤田東湖 of Mito, Nagaoka Kenmotsu 長岡監物 of Kumamoto, and Tamiya Jōun 田宮如雲 of Owari.¹⁹

Suzuki and other advisors of Matsudaira argued that Japan need not surrender to the demands of the West and should prepare herself for a potential conflict. To this end, the Tokugawa Bakufu must rid itself of certain superfluous conventions such as the system of alternate attendance by regional lords in Edo (sankin kōtai 参勤交代) and allocate resources to building robust national defenses (Adachi and Nakashio 1977, 160–161).

¹⁹ Fujita Tōko studied Japanese fencing at Gekikenkan in Edo, just as Egawa Hidetatsu had done (Hashimoto 2014, 83–84). Fujita is the only potential link that I have been able to find between Suzuki and Egawa at this point.
In the first year of Ansei (1854), Suzuki was sent back to Fukui temporarily in order to straighten out domain affairs in the face of this national crisis. He cut extraneous spending, strengthened the domain’s military, and opened new schools in order to train future leaders (ibid.). It was also during this time that Suzuki recommended that the young Hashimoto Sanai 橋本左内 be promoted as an aide to Matsudaira. Hashimoto, needless to say, is one of the most illustrious figures during the Bakumatsu period to have come from the Fukui domain, known for his knowledge of Western learning and his tragic end during the Ansei Purge (Ansei no taigoku 安政の大獄), which took place from the fifth to the seventh years of Ansei (1858–1860). This purge was carried out by Great Elder Ii Naosuke 井伊直弼 as a punishment against those who questioned the Tokugawa Bakufu’s stance in its negotiation with the West. Many court nobles and domain lords, including Matsudaira, were put under house arrest, and prominent thinkers such as Hashimoto and Yoshida Shōin 吉田松陰 were executed.20 Hashimoto’s premature death notwithstanding, it was Suzuki who prepared a path for him to become a major player in the national political arena.

Suzuki returned to Edo in the tenth month of the second year of Ansei (1855). However, he fell heavily ill shortly thereafter. Although he received medical treatment at the Fukui domain’s residence in Edo, Suzuki died in the second month of the third year of Ansei (1856) at the age of forty-three. It is said that his last words were to Hashimoto: “Who else but you can fulfill my aspirations? My wish is that you dedicate yourself to the work of serving the world” (koi negawaku wa tenka no tame ni doryoku seyo 義くは天下の為に努力せよ) (Adachi and Nakashio 1977, 162). Suzuki’s remains were interred at Tenryūji 天竜寺 in Shinagawa.

20 All of these developments occurred after Suzuki’s death in the third year of Ansei (1856), as will be described below.
Hashimoto later wrote in a letter to a Fukui domain colleague, “Regarding Suzuki’s death, it is deeply regrettable. Our sorrows and frustrations are deep…That our dear friend has been taken away during this time of great need is lamentable beyond comparison” (Takeuchi 1952, 99).

Upon hearing the news of Suzuki’s death, Matsudaira arranged to have a special stipend sent to cover the cost of his funerary rites (Ishibashi 1943, 55).

**Suzuki Chikara as a Yonaoshi God**

The most reliable source in learning about Suzuki’s apotheosis as a yonaoshi god and the history of World Renewal Shrine, or more accurately the two World Renewal Shrines found today in Fukui City, is a booklet published in 1931 by Nagai Tamaki 永井環 (1865–1941). Nagai was a native of Fukui who led a successful career as a judge and who also served as mayor of Fukui City between 1926 and 1930. The booklet is titled *World Renewal Shrine and Suzuki Sensei*. In it, Nagai presents a brief biography of Suzuki, analyzes the process through which Suzuki was deified as a living god at the original World Renewal Shrine during the Tenpō period, and describes the construction of the second World Renewal Shrine in the Shōwa period (1926–1989). Nagai himself supported the building of the second shrine as mayor, and as part of his involvement, he researched the history of the original World Renewal Shrine. Prior to his involvement in the project, Nagai was already aware of the local oral tradition that the original shrine had been built in honor of Suzuki’s accomplishments as a local official. In the process of his research, Nagai collected and examined a variety of historical documents that corroborate this oral history. Nagai also introduces some of these documents in the booklet itself, including a few documents that are now lost.

The original World Renewal Shrine in Fukui City’s Minori 1 dates back to the eighth year of Tenpō (1837). In determining this date, Nagai relies on a document titled *Record of
*World Renewal* (*yonōri kirokuchō 世直記録帳*), which is dated the eighth year of Tenpō and contains important information as to why the shrine was built. The provenance and discovery of this document require some explanation. When Nagai took office in 1926 as Fukui mayor, the original World Renewal Shrine had been left in a dilapidated condition, being used as a convenient storing place for lumbers, carts, and other random objects. Around the same time, there were strange deaths and illnesses occurring among those who lived in proximity to the shrine. Some concerned locals suggested that this might be due to their neglecting the *kami* enshrined at World Renewal Shrine. The locals eventually decided to renovate the shrine and also build a new shrine in a more spacious location.

Nagai became aware of these developments around May or June of 1927, when he was approached by Fukui City congressman Mōri Yosaburō, who requested Nagai’s help in negotiating the purchase of a piece of land for the new and second World Renewal Shrine. Nagai first suggested that it would be better to expand the existing shrine compound rather than find a new location and attempted to negotiate with the owner of a property adjacent to the shrine. After this negotiation failed, Mōri negotiated with representatives of Fukui Spinning Company, who eventually agreed to donate a portion of their land for the building of the second World Renewal Shrine at a location a few kilometers away from the site of the original shrine. Nagai then organized a donation campaign and succeeded in securing funding for the construction. The second World Renewal Shrine was completed later in the same year, in today’s Fukui City, Minori 3.²¹ The renovation of the original shrine took place at a later time and was completed in December 1929.

²¹ Nagai does not make clear precisely when the second shrine was completed. Fukuiken Jinjachō 1994, however, states that the shrine was completed in 1927 (233).
Record of World Renewal, the document in question, was found during this process of construction and renovation. Shortly after the work of renovating the original shrine site began, workers on site found a wooden box hidden inside the stone base of the central shrine structure. The box, already half-rotten when found, contained an old document. This document itself had also been heavily damaged, and when the workers took it out of the box, it fell into fragments. The uninformed workers—understandably, as they were not manuscript specialists—further damaged these fragments by handling them roughly and without care. An attempt was made later to restore the document by drying the fragments and pasting them onto another paper for reinforcement. This recovered document is none other than the Record of World Renewal. It was later reported to Nagai that this document was found on October 12, 1929, and was first taken to a local elder, who attempted to read the document but soon gave up after noting its deteriorated condition. The document came into Nagai’s possession shortly thereafter, and Nagai, after much painstaking effort, was able to piece together the fragments and get a general sense of the information contained in the document, some parts of which he cites in his booklet (16–18).

Unfortunately, the original Record of World Renewal itself is lost today.\(^{22}\) However, parts of the document that Nagai cites are still accessible in his booklet. Although full of missing words and phrases due to damage sustained by the document, Nagai’s citations contain information directly relevant to the origin of the World Renewal Shrine. According to Nagai, before falling apart into pieces, the document consisted of a cover page, on which the title of the document is indicated, and most likely two to three more leaves of paper. Nagata says nothing of the size and quality of the paper, other than to say that the pages are rather thick. The cover page

\(^{22}\) This was confirmed through an email communication (July 22, 2014) with Mr. Matsumura Tomoya of Fukui City History Museum. According to Mr. Matsumura, attempts were made in the past to locate this document, but to no avail. A photographic image of the cover page, however, is presented in Nagai’s booklet.
indicates that the document was composed in the eighth year of Tenpō (1837) as already mentioned. As for the precise date and month, the date is a two-digit number with the first digit missing and ending with a four, indicating that it is either the fourteenth or the twenty-fourth day. The month is also a two-digit number, with the first digit indicating that it is a number between ten and twelve but the second number missing (i.e. 十?). Nagai’s citations from the document reveal that the document is in essence a letter of appreciation from a group of local residents in Ara Town (Aramachi 荒町) in a region known as Kida 木田, addressed to Suzuki Hikodayū 鈴木彦田夫. Kida is the old name of a region that covers today’s Fukui City Minori, and Suzuki Hikodayū is another name by which Suzuki Chikara’s adoptive father was known. What follows is a translation of the most relevant parts of Nagai’s citations:

Those of us in this town are…[missing]…during this time, the extremely high price of rice and other crops…[missing]…the fire on the fourteenth day of the fourth month…[missing]…our suffering…[missing]…[missing]…inconvenience and hardship…[missing]…made a request…[missing]…showed special mercy and compassion…[missing]…stipend for five years…[missing/meaning unclear]…are extremely indebted and grateful.

Now that we are receiving your benevolent stipend for three thousand laborers…[missing]…the wishes of those of us in Ara Town…[missing]…have been granted…[missing]…every year on the…[missing]…day of the fifth month, we shall hold a special rite (sairi tsukamatsuru beki koto 祭可仕事).

[addressed to] City Magistrate  
Sir Suzuki Hikodayū  
(Nagai 1931, 19)

Again, the citation is based on fragmentary pieces, and it is difficult to understand precisely what is going on in the document, let alone provide an accurate translation. Yet, the citations do offer enough information to indicate that in the eighth year of Tenpō, residents of Ara Town were suffering from rising costs of goods and calamities such as fire. Given this hardship, the residents
made a request to the local government to reduce their burden. This request was eventually granted, in the form of a stipend for three thousand laborers. The letter ends with a note that there will be a ritual held periodically, presumably to show the residents’ gratitude for the help the local government provided, although it is not specified in the letter to what precise entities such rites are to be dedicated. Given the fact that this letter was found at the base of World Renewal Shrine, it would be reasonable to assume that this rite took place at the shrine and also that this letter was composed at a time not too far removed from the founding of the shrine itself and was placed under the shrine structure as a kind of “origin story” (engi 縁起). Finally, and most importantly, the series of events described above was understood as “world renewal,” as yonaoshi, as indicated on the cover page.

In his booklet, Nagai introduces a few additional documents in order to fill in the gaps in Record of World Renewal, so as to provide a fuller picture of the origin of World Renewal Shrine. One such document comes from the work of the Fukui local historian Fukuda Genzaburō 福田源三郎 (1857–1921). Fukuda was born as the eldest son of the owner of a famous fan store in the Fukui domain. An avid learner of local history, Fukuda engaged in historical research and investigations even after taking over the family business in 1885. In his spare time, he travelled to villages that had formerly belonged to the Fukui domain and collected a variety of documents. In 1910, after more than twenty years of research and writing, Fukuda published his findings as Biographies of Distinguished Figures from Echizen (Echizen jinbutsu shi 越前人物誌), a magnificent collection of biographies—more than two thousand pages long—that introduces distinguished historical figures in Fukui’s history (Kanemaki 1985, 167–168). In this work, Fukuda has an entry on Suzuki Chikara. Much of the biographical information in Nagai’s booklet, in fact, most likely comes from this entry. In it, Fukuda touches upon the deification of
Suzuki as a *yonaoshi* god during the Tenpō period and also introduces a document that illuminates the origin of World Renewal Shrine.

The document is titled *Amusing Stories from a Plum Field* (*baiho shōwa* 梅圃笑話), composed by a local Buddhist monk by the name of Amazura Fukun 甘蔗普薰 (1836–1910). Amazura was head priest of Chōkeiji 長慶寺, located just north of the original World Renewal Shrine. Amazura played an important role in promoting education in the local community between the Bakumatsu and Meiji periods and also offered advice to Fukuda during the compilation of his *Biographies* (Adachi 1992, 194–196). *Amusing Stories from a Plum Garden* is a document that is now lost, and therefore it is impossible to date it precisely or to know precisely the nature of the content of the document, other than the small portion cited by Fukuda.\(^{23}\) Judging from Fukuda’s citation, however, the document appears to have consisted of a series of brief introductory entries on prominent local sites. The small portion of *Amusing Stories from a Plum Garden* cited by Fukuda is in fact a brief introduction to the original World Renewal Shrine and offers the following useful account:

**World Renewal Shrine**

This shrine enshrines Suzuki Chikara, who served as city magistrate during the Tenpō years. The origin of this shrine goes back to the practice of “transferring the rescue carrier” (*aoda o tsugitate seshi o* あをだを継立てを), which was enforced in Ara Town back then. During his term as city magistrate, Chikara decided to exempt the people from this burdensome duty after much deliberation. The shrine was established in order to commemorate our indebtedness to him and praise his good governance. In the beginning, it consisted of nothing more than a small stone house (*sekishi* 石祠), but the current shrine was built later at the site of the milestone (*ichirizuka* 一里塚). The shrine also enshrines Lord Matsudaira Shungaku together with Suzuki (Fukuda 1910, 572).

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\(^{23}\) This was confirmed also through an email communication with Mr. Matsumura of Fukui City History Museum (July 22, 2014). Much like for *Record of World Renewal*, attempts have been made to locate the document, but to no avail.
This entry clearly identifies Suzuki Chikara as the focal point of worship at World Renewal Shrine and the reason for his deification as his decision to terminate the practice of “transferring the rescue carrier,” which, according to the entry, was extremely unpopular among the locals.

Fukuda adds to this entry a much-needed explanatory commentary. The Japanese word *aoda* refers to a kind of stretcher-like vehicle used to carry the sick and injured (hence the provisional translation “rescue carrier”). According to Fukuda, the word *aoda* was used in Ara Town to refer to a duty imposed upon the locals of paying the cost of sending travelers who had been injured or stricken ill back to their home domains (ibid.). In other words, if a local Ara Town resident found a traveler who has fallen ill, the local community was held responsible for bringing the traveler to the closest station (eki 駅) on an *aoda* and also for covering the costs involved, so that arrangements could be made for the traveler to be sent home. If the traveler died before arriving at the station, the local community had to cover the cost of body inspection by the government, burial, and communication with the home domain (ibid.). Because Ara Town was located on the southern tip of the center of the Fukui domain, the need for such service arose frequently and the cost of *aoda* incurred by the local community was significant (Nagai 1931, 7).

In essence, Suzuki Chikara was enshrined as a living god for his efforts in getting rid of this heavy financial duty imposed upon the local population. Furthermore, this act of salvaging the populace from an economic difficulty was understood as a “world-renewing” act, as indicated by the name of the shrine. This goes along with the oral history with which Nagai was familiar before commencing his investigation into the history of the shrine. This account is also made credible by the fact that, although undated, it comes from the head priest of a nearby temple who was born during the Tenpō period and played an important role in the local community. One important detail in the above citation is the claim that Lord Matsudaira was
enshrined together with Suzuki (more on this later). The milestone or *ichirizuka* mentioned above refers to one of the many milestones placed throughout the Japanese archipelago during the Tokugawa period as a guide to travelers. The original shrine was built by one such marker.

This entry on World Renewal Shrine from Amazura’s work, cited in Fukuda’s *Biographies*, is cited again by Nagai. Nagai uses this entry to fill in some of the missing details in the *Record of World Renewal* quoted above. Nagai concludes that the “request” mentioned in the *Record* refers to the locals’ plea to the government to abolish the *aoda* obligation. During the particular year in which the *Record* was written, the eighth year of Tenpō (1837), the people of Ara Town were under severe financial duress, faced with a combination of rising costs of goods, a major fire, and the *aoda* duty. Their request was granted by the city magistrate, who decided to arrange a sum of money equivalent to a stipend for three thousand laborers in order to offset the cost of the *aoda* service. The *Record* also indicates that the stipend was effective for at least five years.\(^\text{24}\) The decision to exempt the townsfolk from the *aoda* duty was issued on the fourteenth day of the fifth month of that year. This date, according to Fukuda and endorsed by Nagai, is also the date on which the annual ritual mentioned in the document is held.\(^\text{25}\) World Renewal Shrine was built, once again, to praise this benevolent decision by the local government.

One correction that Nagai makes to Amazura’s entry is the statement that the shrine was built during Suzuki Chikara’s term as city magistrate. In the eighth year of Tenpō, Suzuki’s father, Suzuki Hikodayū, was still serving as city magistrate. It was only five years later, in the thirteenth year of Tenpō, that Suzuki Chikara himself was appointed city magistrate, as outlined in the previous section. Why then did people of Ara Town venerate the son and not the father?

\(^\text{24}\) There is no information as to whether the *aoda* duty was reinstituted after the five years.  
\(^\text{25}\) Fukuda 1910, 572; Nagai 1931, 8. Their assertion is based on a local oral history and their knowledge that a special rite is held at the shrine every year on this date.
Nagai, noting the fact that Suzuki’s father died in the tenth month of the eighth year of Tenpō, speculates that Suzuki Chikara performed the role of city magistrate on behalf of his ailing father in the last few months of the father’s life. Suzuki Chikara therefore also played a leading role, Nagai suggests, in deciding to terminate the aoda practice in the fifth month of the year (Nagai 1931, 14–15). Although there is no evidence to support Nagai’s view, it would explain why Suzuki Chikara is at the center of praise and veneration, as evident in the accounts of Amazura and Fukuda and also as transmitted through the local oral history. The fact that the *Record of World Renewal* is addressed to Suzuki Hikodayū and not Suzuki Chikara is also explainable, given that the decision to terminate the aoda obligation occurred during Suzuki Hikodayū’s term, although the actual decision might have been made by his son. In his booklet, Nagai proudly claims that his research rectifies the misguided local oral tradition that Suzuki Chikara was venerated as a living god during his term as city magistrate. The deification of Suzuki Chikara in fact occurred before he became city magistrate, when he was acting on behalf of his ailing father.

Another historical source that Nagai examines during the course of his research is a wooden tablet that lists the names of entities and individuals enshrined at the World Renewal Shrine. Like the *Record of World Renewal Shrine*, this wooden tablet was also found under the shrine structure at the original shrine site. On the back of the tablet is written, “the eighth year of Tenpō, on an auspicious day in the twelfth month,” suggesting that the shrine was most likely built during the twelfth month of the year. This tablet reveals that quite a few deities and other individuals were enshrined besides Suzuki Chikara. In total, thirty-five deities and individuals are listed on the tablet. It would be cumbersome to list all of the names here, so what follows is a partial list of names written on the tablet, as reproduced in Nagai’s booklet and roughly in order of appearance up to the point where the name of Suzuki Chikara is mentioned:
Great Sun Heavenly God (*Dainichi tenshi* 大日天子)
Great Moon Heavenly God (*Daigattenshi* 大月天子)
Heavenly God of the Luminous Stars (*Myōjō tenshi* 明星天子)
Myriad Heavenly Gods of Benevolence (*Shoten zenjin* 諸天善神)
Myriad Gods of the Stars (*Shosei shukuson* 諸星宿尊)
Gods of the Seven Stars and the Nine Stars (*Shichiyō kuyōson* 七星九曜尊)
Great August Deity of Seven Faces (*Shichimen daimyōjin* 七面大明神)

Sir Sakai Yozaemon 酒井與左衛門様
Sir Matsudaira Shume 松平主馬様
Sir Koma Moku 狛木工様
Sir Okabe Sazen 岡部左膳様
Sir Honda Chikugo 本多筑後様
Sir Sakai Geki 酒井外記様

City Magistrate
Sir Suzuki Hikodayū
Sir Suzuki Chikara… (Nagai 1931, 12)

The list starts with the names of a group of celestial deities. It is particularly interesting that the first three deities are Buddhist deities representing the sun, the moon, and the stars, known collectively as the Heavenly Gods of the Three Lights (*Sankō tenshi* 三光天子). After these heavenly deities, the names of high-ranking samurai of the Fukui domain are given, after which Suzuki Hikodayū and Chikara get a mention. Their names in turn are followed by the names of about a dozen more supposedly lower-ranking samurai. Presumably these represent the names of those who played a role in the termination of the *aoda* system. Or it could be that the local community wished to uphold and celebrate the rule of the Fukui government as a whole.

Although in light of Amazura’s account one would expect to see Matsudaira Shungaku’s name, it is not found on the tablet. Furthermore, despite all of these names listed, World Renewal Shrine is identified, for all intents and purposes, as Suzuki Chikara’s shrine by Amazura, Fukuda, Nagai, and the local oral history. Although the precise reason for this may not be within the reach of scholarly analysis today, it may strengthen Nagai’s argument that it was Suzuki Chikara
who played a leading role in abolishing the \textit{aoda} system, even though he was not in any official position at the time. It is safe to say in any case that, at least within the collective memory of the local community, Suzuki Chikara has undoubtedly been the focal point of veneration and worship.

Now it is possible to summarize the findings of the above examination of historical documents concerning the two World Renewal Shrines. At a fairly early point in 1837, residents of Ara Town made a request to the local government to abolish the \textit{aoda} duty. Suzuki Chikara was serving as an aide to his ailing father in the capacity of city magistrate and contributed to the abolition of the \textit{aoda} system in the fifth month of the year. In the tenth month, Suzuki Chikara’s father passed away and in the eleventh month, Suzuki Chikara became the head of his household. In the twelfth month, a shrine was constructed in honor of Suzuki and others who contributed to the abolition. A wooden tablet listing the names of enshrined deities and individuals was placed underneath the shrine, along with \textit{Record of World Renewal}, which explains the origin of this shrine.\footnote{Given that the tablet is dated the twelfth month of the year, it would also be reasonable to presume that \textit{Record of World Renewal} was also composed around the same time. This would also correspond with the incomplete number indicated on the cover page of this document.} The tablet and the document were discovered in the 1920s when the original shrine site was renovated and the new and second World Renewal Shrine was built.

One question that remains unanswered is at what point the original shrine built in 1837 came specifically to be called World Renewal Shrine. Amazura’s account identifies the shrine clearly as the World Renewal Shrine, but his account is undated. The earliest, datable account that identifies the shrine specifically as World Renewal Shrine is a booklet published by Fukuda Genzaburō in 1901. This booklet, not mentioned by Nagai, is called \textit{Quick Guide to Fukui (Fukui 26}}
junran 福井巡覧), a short introduction to a number of shrines and temples in Fukui. There is an entry on Suzuki Chikara’s shrine, although under a slightly different name.

Shrine for the August Deity of World Renewal (Yonaori myōjinsha 世直明神社)

This shrine enshrines Suzuki Chikara, who has been granted the title of Senior Fourth Rank (shōshii 正四位). Before the Restoration, it was difficult beyond comparison to fulfill all the tax and labor obligations in this town. People of the town petitioned the government several times to reduce the burden, but these requests were not heeded. Sir Suzuki, during his term as Magistrate, made a decision to annul some of these obligations. In order not to forget his virtue and benevolence, a small shrine was built, and it was named the August Deity of World Renewal (Yonaori myōjin 世直明神). Every year on the fourteenth day of the fifth month, a special ceremony is held in honor of Sir Suzuki… (Fukuda 1901, 11–12).

This entry offers information similar to was has been discussed so far. Suzuki Chikara is identified as the primary deity of the shrine, and it is explained that he was enshrined for his efforts in reducing the financial burden of the local population, although no specific information concerning the aoda duty is offered in this particular entry. If Nagai were to look at this entry, he would most certainly point out that the shrine was built not during Suzuki Chikara’s term as Magistrate but before. This entry from 1901 is still relatively late, given that the shrine was constructed in 1837. Yet, this citation represents the earliest historical reference to the current name of the shrine. It is justifiable in any case to conceptualize the deified Suzuki Chikara as a yonaoshi god because it is clear from the document Record of World Renewal that the act of saving the suffering populace was interpreted as an act of “renewing the world” and that the shrine has always been identified primarily as Suzuki Chikara’s shrine according to all available historical records.

Here it may be necessary to say a few words about the difference that some scholars emphasize between the expressions yonaoshi and yonaori. As explained in the Introduction,
yonaoshi is a nominalized form of the phrase “yo o naosu” 世を直す, which translates as “renewing the world.” The transitive verb naosu takes the direct object “world,” suggesting the presence of a subject that is performing the action of “renewing the world.” Yonaori is a nominalized form of the phrase “yo ga naoru” 世が直る, which translates as “the world renews itself” or “the world is renewing itself.” Naoru is an intransitive verb and therefore takes no direct object, the implication being that there is no subject performing the action of renewing the world. Some scholars make note of this linguistic difference and argue that yonaoshi represents a more “active” desire to change the world and that yonaori represents a more “passive” desire for the world to renew itself or a hopeful desire for some external entity to renew the world on one’s behalf. Scholars such as Miyata Noboru argue that the passive desire for a yonaori represents the ethos of the Japanese populace, that is, the Japanese populace would rather wait for the world to change rather than to try to change it more directly or actively.27 While it is important to recognize the semantic difference between these two terms, it would be far too simplistic to assume that every time the word yonaoshi is invoked it represents “active” renewal of the word and whenever yonaori is used, it denotes “passive” world renewal. Equally problematic is the tendency to characterize a whole population of people as belonging to either the active or passive category. The active-passive binary is not a clear-cut binary to begin with. In the case of Suzuki Chikara’s World Renewal Shrine, the removal of the aoda system was seen as a world-renewing event or specifically as yonaori. Yet it was a result of Ara Town residents actively requesting the aoda to be abolished. They actively sought to do something about their predicament. It would be

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27 See Miyata 1988. In this article, the distinction between yonaoshi and yonaori is made in discussing types of Maitreya belief in Japan. Perhaps Miyata is using these two terms as his own historiographical categories and is not necessarily treating them as native concepts as used by historical actors themselves.
misguided to describe the series of events exclusively as “passive” just because the townspeople decided to name the shrine Yonaori Shrine.

Rather than insisting on the tenuous active-passive binary, it would be more beneficial to see yonaoshi and yonaori as linguistic variations. It would be inappropriate to exclude the above example of Suzuki Chikara from examination of yonaoshi gods solely because the actual language used in the name of the shrine was yonaori and not yonaoshi. The semantic difference between the two terms does not warrant an absolute divide. The different is a matter of emphasis and perspective at best.

Suzuki’s Legacy Today

The two World Renewal Shrines in Fukui today are not registered as religious persons and are not under the direct supervision of the Association of Shinto Shrines (Jinja honchō 神社本庁). Although Suzuki Chikara today does not enjoy the same level of national prominence as do some of his contemporaries from Fukui such as Hashimoto Sanai and Matsudaira Shungaku, he does maintain a kind of presence locally in Fukui. Suzuki Chikara is introduced as an important local

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28 Fukuiken Sōmubu Bunsho Gakujika 1967, 1983, and 1997. These three volumes are convenient references for checking registered religious bodies in Fukui Prefecture. Unfortunately, my attempt to get in touch with Mr. Kaneoka Masakazu, who is listed as the “ritual officiant” (gūji 宮司) of the two World Renewal Shrines, was unsuccessful. Upon visiting the two shrines, I got the impression that both shrines looked quite desolate and that not too many people visited them. The newer and second shrine in Minori 3, although the larger of the two, seemed especially rundown. There was no running water at the chōzu 手水 (a water fountain-like facility usually found at shrines for washing hands and rinsing the mouth before greeting the gods); in fact, the nozzle had been removed. There was a small playground within the shrine compound, but the playing equipment was rusted and clearly not in a suitable condition for children to use. The top of the stone monument to the left of the main shrine building was cracked, although one could still make out the name of Suzuki Chikara. On my way to the shrine, I inquired of a few passers-by about the location of the shrine, but none of them knew where it was or even had heard of the shrine. In any case, more remains to be learned about the current activities centered at the two shrines, including festivals, ceremonies, and other related rituals performed, if any.
figure in *Fukui City Guide Book of Historical Figures* (*Fukuishi rekishi jinbutsu gaido bukku* 福井市歴史人物ガイドブック), a booklet intended to introduce the history of Fukui to tourists (this booklet also features a picture of the original shrine and maps indicating the location of both the original and the new shrines) (Rekishi no Mieru Machizukuri Kyōkai 1997, 30–31). Suzuki is also introduced as an exemplary role model for youths in a collection of biographies published by Fukui Prefectural Association for the Youth Education (Seishōnen Ikusei Fukui Kenmin Kaigi 1988, 1–28). Suzuki was also spoken very highly of by some of his contemporaries from outside of Fukui. Fujita Tōko of Mito is known to have once said, “In today’s world, there are only two individuals that can truly be described as ‘heroes’ (*gōketsu* 豪傑). They are Suzuki Chikara and Saigō Kichinosuke [Takamori]” (Adachi and Nakashio 1977, 161). Nagaoka Kenmotsu of Kumamoto once said, “In speaking of natural talent and genius, there is no one superior to Fujita Tōko. In speaking of knowledge and integrity, gifted with both virtue and wisdom at the same time, there is no one above Suzuki Chikara. I look to Suzuki with the deepest respect” (ibid.).

**The Many Faces of Yonaoshi Gods**

Egawa Hidetatsu and Suzuki Chikara were both loyal servants of the Tokugawa regime. Following in their fathers’ footsteps, they both served the Tokugawa government in important official capacities, and they were both well received by the people under their administration. Furthermore, both of their political lives were influenced one way or another by Japan’s contact with the West, especially after the arrival of Commodore Perry. It is an extraordinary historical coincidence that these two contemporaneous figures were also deified and worshipped as *yonaoshi* gods, both of them roughly around the same time, in the late 1830s. Although the apotheosis of Egawa and Suzuki took place under very different social and geographical
circumstances, it is still possible to observe a few important commonalities. Firstly, they both offered significant economic help to people under their rule, though in different ways. Egawa did so by cutting down extraneous spending in Tsuru Country and by instructing his men to be scrupulous in dealing with financial matters. Suzuki achieved this more directly by getting rid of a burdensome financial obligation imposed upon the populace. Secondly, neither Egawa nor Suzuki claimed to be yonaoshi gods themselves. Rather they were both deified by their subjects. Thirdly, both Egawa and Suzuki were deified as living gods. Suzuki even had a special shrine built for him while still alive. This is unlike the case of Sano Masakoto in Chapter 2, who was deified only after committing seppuku. These similarities between Egawa and Suzuki’s apotheosis despite their geographical separation are striking and are perhaps indicative of the extent to which the practice of deifying certain individuals through the framework of yonaoshi had spread through a wide region by the 1830s.

Here it is important to reflect upon the fact that, on the one hand, there were peasant insurrectionists claiming to be divine punishers of evil in the name of yonaoshi and voicing their displeasure to their respective local governments, but on the other hand, there were Tokugawa officials being deified as kami of yonaoshi (and yonaori) for their excellence in governance. This may seem contradictory, especially in thinking of the case of Egawa Hidetatsu, who, as governor, was in a position to actively suppress peasant uprisings and ensure peace in his assigned territories. However, by suspending the preconception that yonaoshi is an explicitly subversive concept, it becomes quite easy to see that in both cases, yonaoshi was about improving the lives of people primarily by rescuing them from their financial predicaments. Yonaoshi was not about toppling the government, causing a revolution, or creating a new world order. It was about redressing specific problems that brought economic hardships to particular communities. The
force that made this change or improvement possible was the superhuman authority of *yonaoshi* gods. The only difference, perhaps, is that *yonaoshi* gods in peasant uprisings sought to punish, through explicitly violent means, those whom they identified as evildoers such as greedy moneylenders, hoarding rice merchants, and corrupt officials, whereas in the case of the two Tokugawa bureaucrats, there were no such entities designated as evil. This may be because, in the context of peasant uprisings, there had to be a moral justification for causing disturbances and engaging in violent acts. Legitimizing oneself as a righteous force of *yonaoshi* while setting up some other entities in contrast as forces of evil was an effective means of obtaining this moral justification.

This study of *yonaoshi* gods has thus far analyzed a disgruntled samurai, peasant insurrectionists, and now Tokugawa bureaucrats deified as *yonaoshi* gods. This list is already enough to show that individuals of a variety of backgrounds in terms of class and social status could become *yonaoshi* gods. Egawa and Suzuki are the only examples that I have been able to locate in which Tokugawa bureaucrats were deified specifically in association with the concept of *yonaoshi*. However, the stark similarities between their deifications possibly suggest a more common practice, and perhaps there are other similar examples that remain to be studied. One regrettable reality is that due to the limitations of sources that are available today, it is extremely difficult to ascertain exactly in what ways and through what sorts of ritual actions Egawa and Suzuki were venerated. If similar examples could be found, it might become possible to gain more insight into the nature of ritual activities centered on deified Tokugawa officials.

The following chapter will illuminate yet another face of *yonaoshi* gods, and this time, it is not even a human face. The chapter will examine the “earthquake catfish” of the 1855 Ansei Earthquake in Edo as a *yonaoshi* god.
Chapter 5

Upholding a Catfish as a Yonaoshi God: The Earthquake Catfish of the 1855 Ansei Great Earthquake in Edo

On the night of the second day of the tenth month of the second year of Ansei (1855), a major earthquake struck the city of Edo. Besides being one of the most destructive earthquakes in early-modern Japan, this earthquake was unique in that the people Edo interpreted it as an instance of yonaoshi. The characterization of the 1855 earthquake as yonaoshi is most evident in a genre of woodblock prints known today as “catfish prints” (namazu e 鯰絵). Shortly after the earthquake, a large number of woodblock prints featuring a giant catfish were circulated in the city of Edo. According to these prints, a giant catfish lived beneath the Japanese archipelago and caused earthquakes by shaking its body, including the 1855 earthquake. Many of these prints understandably portray the “earthquake catfish” in a negative light, highlighting the destruction and deaths it caused. Other prints, however, celebrate the catfish as a bringer of yonaoshi.¹

Gregory Smits has identified the 1855 earthquake as the first earthquake in Japanese history to which historical actors invested social significance as an instance of yonaoshi (2013, 26). Taking this observation one step further, I argue that, through the medium of catfish prints, the people of Edo upheld the earthquake catfish as a yonaoshi god, as a superhuman force of yonaoshi. As scholars have argued, yonaoshi as articulated in catfish prints signifies a reinvigoration of the circulation of wealth in the city of Edo, made possible by a post-disaster construction boom in the city and charitable donations provided to earthquake victims by

wealthy townspeople. These prints accordingly depict the earthquake catfish as a *yonaoshi* god who brings material prosperity to the poor by restoring a healthy flow of wealth in society.

The earthquake catfish exhibits some unique characteristics as a *yonaoshi* god. First, it differs from other *yonaoshi* gods in that it serves as a central motif of social satire. Regarded by Edo residents as “caricatures” (*giga* 戯画), catfish prints were extremely popular immediately following the earthquake for satirizing the economic prosperity of construction workers and the frustration of wealthy townspeople who unwillingly had to share their wealth with the rest of society in the form of disaster-relief donations. The catfish serves as the protagonist in this satirical social drama, as a symbol of the power of the earthquake that brought these tangible changes to Edo society. Second, the earthquake catfish represents the first—and perhaps the only—example of an animal attributed with the power to realize *yonaoshi*.

Catfish prints, although largely regarded as satirical caricatures, nonetheless provide important insights on *yonaoshi* discourse in late Tokugawa Japan and the representation of a superhuman entity endowed with a mission to “renew the world.” Utilizing catfish prints as the focal point of analysis, this chapter will examine the construction of the earthquake catfish as a *yonaoshi* god and highlight its unique qualities as well as continuity with other examples of *yonaoshi* gods. The chapter first provides background information on the 1855 earthquake and catfish prints and moves on to analyze the discourse of *yonaoshi* in catfish prints before finally highlighting the authority attributed to the earthquake catfish as a *yonaoshi* god.

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The Ansei Great Earthquake of 1855

The Ansei Great Earthquake (Ansei no ōjishin 安政の大地震) was an inland earthquake (chokkagata jishin 直下型地震) with a magnitude of about 6.9 to 7.0 (no tsunami was generated). Its epicenter was located in the northern part of Edo Bay, close to the mouth of the Arakawa River (Smits 2013, 16). In outlining the damage caused by the earthquake, Kitahara’s comparative analysis of the 1855 earthquake and the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 in Tokyo is useful (2000, 40–79). According to a Bakufu report, the Ansei earthquake killed more than 4,200 people, injured more than 2,700, and destroyed over 15,000 buildings and 1,400 storehouses in Edo.\(^3\) Speaking solely of wooden buildings, the rate of collapse in the Ansei earthquake was ten percent, more than double that of the Kantō Earthquake, which was four percent.\(^4\) After the 1855 earthquake, fire started in several dozen places in Edo. However, where the majority of victims in the 1923 earthquake were killed by fire, the majority of victims in the 1855 earthquake were crushed to death underneath collapsing pillars and buildings (ibid. 42).

Fire did not cause significant damage as a whole in the 1855 earthquake. All of the fires were put out within two days, by the morning of the fourth day of the tenth month (ibid. 75). Fire did claim many lives in places with high concentrations of people. For example, as many as six hundred courtesans in the Yoshiwara red light district died from fire due to the unique structure of the brothels, which made escape difficult (ibid. 43).

Scholars disagree as to which social group the earthquake affected most. Some argue that the damage was concentrated disproportionately on the densely populated residential areas in the lower town (shitamachi 下町). Kitahara for example argues that the number of deaths in these

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\(^3\) Ibid. 46. Smits estimates the number of deaths at a slightly higher range, between eight thousand and ten thousand (2014, 55).

\(^4\) Kitahara 2000, 42. Kitahara does not specify the scope of the area on which this calculation is based.
areas was especially high due to the prominence of tenement houses (tanagari 店舗). Tenement houses were common structures in the lower town. In these houses, a large number of individuals lived in a narrow space, which increased the likelihood of death during the earthquake (Kitahara 2000, 57–78). Clancey also argues that the houses of artisans and merchants were destroyed heavily, while as major temples and shrines as well as residences of the Shogun, daimyo, and samurai were spared serious damage (2006, 123, 220). Kitahara in particular emphasizes this “class-biased” nature of the damage (higai no kaisōsei 被害の階層性) as a central theme in her analysis of the “social history” of the 1855 earthquake (Kitahara 2000, 79).

Smits, however, argues that the earthquake damage was not so neatly divided between social classes. Smits in particular looks to the soil base as the central factor that determined the pattern of the damage. There were relatively fewer deaths in highlands and areas on solid ground, while parts of Edo that were built on former wetland areas experienced the severest damage. Accordingly, residences of samurai families that were built on softer lands sustained significant damage, while commoners’ houses on a better soil base fared relatively well (ibid. 108). Smits thus complicates the rather simplistic “class bias” interpretive framework of the damage of the 1855 earthquake. Smits does acknowledge, however, that population density and type of construction were important secondary factors that influenced the extent of the damage (2013, 111).

Whatever the precise pattern of the damage, there was a widespread perception among Edo residents that the earthquake was a devastating event. Some even rumored that as many as hundred thousand people had been killed (ibid. 104). Aftershocks continued for about a month,

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5 See Smits 2013, 150 for an explanation of why a softer soil base leads to greater ground motions during an earthquake.
6 Noguchi also makes a similar argument that more attention should be paid to damage sustained by Edo’s samurai class (1997, 72)
until the beginning of the eleventh month, causing many to worry that the worst was yet to come. After the initial quake, many Edo residents lived in temporary huts erected on the streets in fear of further destruction and, for those living near the shore, a possible tsunami (ibid. 104–105). The destruction of the abovementioned Yoshiwara red light district also became a hot topic of discussion among Edo’s townspeople. The earthquake struck around 10:00 pm, when Yoshiwara was at the height of its activity. Rumors abounded about courtesans and their customers being crushed to death under falling beams, while some managed to escape naked. The earthquake also caused significant damage to the artillery batteries (daiba) in Edo Bay. As discussed in the last chapter, these artillery batteries were built following the arrival of Commodore Perry in 1853 in order to defend the city of Edo, under the supervision of the Nirayama governor Egawa Hidetatsu.8

As Kitahara explains, the 1855 earthquake was the most disastrous earthquake that struck Edo or today’s Tokyo immediately preceding the 1923 Great Kantō Earthquake (Kitahara 2000, 41). Furthermore, what makes this earthquake unique beyond simply the extent of the damage is the central place the discourse of yonaoshi occupied in the earthquake survivors’ interpretation of this earthquake. Catfish prints represent an important forum through which this post-disaster interpretive process took place.

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7 Noguchi 1997, 136–139. Speaking of the victims’ gender, more women died from the 1855 earthquake while more men were injured, according to Kitahara’s analysis of contemporaneous data. In terms of the victims’ age, there is no indication that more elderly and children were killed in comparison to other age groups, according to a report on the damage in the Kyōbashi area. In fact, prominent among the victims in this area was the death of younger people between the age of twenty and forty. Kitahara suggests that this was not necessarily a result of special care provided for the elderly and children, but simply a reflection of the demographic composition of the city of Edo at the time (2000, 76–79). 8 Noguchi 1997, 103–108; Smits 2013, 115–116. Smits argues that the artillery batteries symbolized the Bakufu’s military power and therefore the damage sustained by the batteries negatively impacted the image of the Bakufu’s military prowess (2013, 115–116).
Catfish Prints

Background

For pre-modern Japanese, there was no clear-cut separation between society (shakai 社会) and the natural world (shizen 自然) (Kitahara 2000, 186–189). Occurrences in the natural world—especially extraordinary ones with direct consequences to human society, such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and fire—were understood as having intricate connections to human thought and behavior. Tokugawa period-sources discuss these disasters through a particularly moralist discourse, often understanding them as occurring due to human corruption (ibid. 186–189). Furthermore, disasters were often thought of as divine punishments delivered by superhuman powers.

Nonetheless, by the time of the 1855 earthquake, most Tokugawa intellectuals had come to have a shared theory of why and how earthquakes occurred beyond the discourse of divine punishment. As Smits lucidly explains, this theory was based on the Chinese concepts of complementary yin and yang forces (2013, 31–32, 44–55). According to this theoretical framework, earthquakes were caused by explosive outbursts of yang energy that was trapped inside the earth. Although specific details varied, the basic understanding was that yang energy accumulated slowly inside the earth as wind and heat from the sun—both yang elements—entered the earth through cracks and holes. The earth, which is yin, thus trapped the yang energy within itself, causing pressure to build as the yang energy sought to rise and emerge from the earth. The mounting pressure between yin and yang eventually resulted in a kind of explosion, causing the ground to shake.⁹

In explaining the mechanism of earthquakes through this yin-yang paradigm, Tokugawa intellectuals relied on a number of Chinese texts. Some looked to a passage in the *Shiji* (Records of the Grand Historian, J. Shiki) that explains why earthquakes occur:

Yang is contained and cannot get out; yin presses on yang so that yang cannot rise; for this reason, an earthquake is caused (*yang fu er buneng chu yin po er buneng zheng yushi you dizhen* 陽伏而不能出 陰迫而不能 蒸於是有地震).

This passage comes from the annals of the Zhou dynasty (twelfth through third centuries BCE), in reference to an earthquake that occurred in the second year of the reign of King You (r. 782 to 771 BCE). The entry that contains this passage explains that the earthquake occurred because the yang energy had lost its proper place. The entry also explains that the misplaced yang energy caused blockage in the flow of vital water sources near the location of the earthquake. This is interpreted as a sign that Zhou will soon perish, without proper access to vital water sources.

A Chinese text particularly influential among Tokugawa intellectuals discussing earthquakes was *Tianjing huowen* (天経或問, Questions and Answers on Astronomy, J. Tenkei wakumon), composed by the Chinese author You Yi (游藝). *Tianjing huowen* began to be circulated in Japan most likely in the late seventeenth century and won a wide readership starting in the early eighteenth century after the astronomer Nishikawa Masayoshi 西川正休 provided reading marks to the original Chinese text (Yoshida 1985, 219). Although primarily a text on astronomy, *Tianjing huowen* has a short entry on earthquakes, explaining why earthquakes occur in terms of the clash of opposing forces inside the earth:

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10 Sima Qian 2013, 184. Smits also discusses the same entry in *Shiji* (2013, 45).
11 The precise date of composition is difficult to ascertain, but most likely the early to mid-seventeenth century. Not much information is available about its author either. See Watanabe 1941, Yoshida 1985, and Kume 2004.
Hot air enters [the earth], and it is restrained by cold air. Eventually, it is released, seizing the earth intensely. It is like gunpowder underneath high towers and great pagodas catching fire and exploding. Nothing escapes the shaking (wu bu bei qi zhen chong ye 無不被其震衝也).

Once again, the entry explains earthquakes in terms of a mounting pressure underneath the earth caused by an interaction of yin and yang forces. In the absence of knowledge of plate tectonics, the yin-yang paradigm served as an effective framework for explaining earthquakes and represented the prevailing theory of earthquakes among Tokugawa intellectuals.\(^\text{12}\)

This yin-yang theory notwithstanding, the city of Edo shortly after the 1855 Ansei earthquake witnessed the popularity of woodblock prints that explained that the earthquake occurred as a result of the movement of a giant catfish living underneath Japan. A wide circulation of these “catfish prints” is a defining feature of the 1855 earthquake. As will be explained in greater detail below, the association between earthquakes and catfish had a long history dating back at least to the late seventeenth century. Yet, it was only after the 1855 earthquake that there was an explosive production as well as consumption of woodblock prints featuring an earthquake-causing catfish. Tokugawa intellectuals spoke disapprovingly of the “catfish theory,” dismissing it as nonsensical. For example, the Tawara domain official Kojima Fukyū 児嶋不求 pointed out in his writing from the seventh year of Hōei (1710) that if earthquakes in Japan were caused by the fact that Japan sits on top of a giant catfish, then why do earthquakes also occur in China? The fiction writer Takai Shinga 高井哂我 also remarked sarcastically in the fourth year of Kansei (1792) that if earthquakes in Japan were caused by a catfish, then all other countries in the world including China and India must have their own giant catfish.

\(^{12}\) For more discussion of the influence of *Tianjing huowen* on Japanese intellectuals theorizing about earthquakes, see Hashimoto 1983, 14–15 and Smits 2013, 44–55.
catfish. Despite these criticisms, catfish prints took the city of Edo by storm following the 1855 disaster.

Multi-colored woodblock prints (*nishiki e* 錦絵) that are referred to as catfish prints today were described variously in contemporaneous records as “pictures of catfish” (*namazu no e* 鯰の絵), “earthquake pictures” (*jishin e* 地震絵), and “caricatures.” They were printed on large-size (*ōban* 大判) paper, approximately twenty-six centimeters by thirty-nine centimeters (Miyata and Takada 1995, 238–239). They usually contain both colored illustrations and texts that elaborate on the meaning of the illustrations. Many of these prints have survived to today, and a number of catalogues have been published to organize the extant prints. There is no unified definition for the designation “catfish prints.” Some scholars use it narrowly to refer only to prints featuring a catfish, while some use it more loosely to include prints that do not actually depict a catfish but nonetheless share or assume the underlying narrative that a catfish caused the earthquake. For the sake of clarity, I will adopt the narrow usage in this chapter but will also refer to contemporaneous prints that do not feature a catfish but are useful for analytical purposes.

The emergence of catfish prints in 1855 represents one aspect of the vibrant print culture of the Tokugawa period, in particular the tradition of news reporting through the medium of woodblock prints. Scholars often look to popular broadsides, or *kawaraban* (literally, “tile prints”), as the primary medium through which the people of Tokugawa Japan consumed

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13 A discussion in Hashimoto 1983 is especially helpful (19–20). Also see Smits’s elaboration on the same point (2013, 32–36).

14 Miyata and Takada eds. 1995 represents one of the most extensive catalogues of extant catfish prints. In addition, there are several organizations that share their collection of catfish prints online. Some of the prominent ones include National Diet Library (http://dl.ndl.go.jp/), International Research Center for Japanese Studies (http://www.nichibun.ac.jp/graphicversion/dbase/namazue.html), and University of Tokyo Library (Ishimoto Collection) (http://gazo.dl.itc.u-tokyo.ac.jp/ishimoto/index.html). Prints cited in this chapter come from websites hosted by these organizations.
newsworthy information. These broadsides reported on a variety of sensational events, such as murders, natural disasters, and at times notable political affairs (Linhart 2005, 237–243, 246–247). Tokugawa-period sources refer to these broadsides variously as “reading vending” (*yomiuri* 読売), “single-paper prints” (*ichimai zuri* 一枚刷り), and “prints with pictures” (*ezōshi* 絵草紙). The specific word *kawaraban* emerged in the late Tokugawa period, but scholars today use it to refer collectively to a variety of prints covered by the above terms (Kitahara 2000, 81–83). Although it is difficult to define the genre of *kawaraban* explicitly given its wide-ranging variety of content and style, Nakayama posits four major characteristics: *kawaraban* prints are 1) information- or news-oriented (*nyūsu sei* ニュース性); made quickly, often printed in black and white (*sokusei* 即製); published without reporting to the authorities (*mutodoke shuppan* 無届け出版); and sold for a fee (1974, a). During the Tokugawa period, the Bakufu required publishers to belong to official publishers’ guilds. *Kawaraban* publishers, however, operated outside of this approved domain of publishing activities (Linhart 2005, 234).

Scholars generally agree that *kawaraban* prints became prominent in Edo society in the 1770s, around the time of the Great Fire of Meguro Gyōinzaka in the ninth year of Meiwa (1772) (Kitahara 1995, 64–65; 2000, 83–84). From then on, *kawaraban* prints reported on an array of natural disasters, including major floods during the An’ei years (1772–1781), the eruption of Mount Asama in the third year of Tenmei (1783), and major earthquakes preceding the 1855 Ansei earthquake (Kitahara 1995, 64–65; Linhart 2005, 237–241). A large number of *kawaraban* prints also emerged after the 1855 earthquake, along with catfish prints.

Since catfish prints are multicolored woodblock prints belonging to the category of *nishiki e*, they were technically distinct from the mostly black-and-white *kawaraban* genre. Colored prints involved a more elaborate process of production—and therefore sold for more—
and were not necessarily produced with the aim of providing newsworthy information (Linhart 2005, 233). Yet, catfish prints nonetheless shared a few essential characteristics with the kawaraban genre. For example, the majority of them were published without official permission (Takada 1995, 48). Furthermore, they utilized a recent natural disaster as their base motif. Therefore, it is possible to situate catfish prints within the broad tradition of disaster-related kawaraban.

Basic Contents

Catfish prints began to circulate in the city of Edo quickly after the 1855 earthquake. One contemporaneous record by an Edo towns person reports that by the seventh day of the tenth month—five days after the occurrence of the earthquake—bookstores had begun to sell a large number of earthquake-related maps and pictures. Among them were caricatures and humorous writings (gibun 戯文). Kitahara takes this description as an indication that catfish prints had begun to circulate in the city by this time.15 Makers of individual prints remain largely unidentifiable, save for a few notable exceptions such as the satirical writer Kanagaki Robun 仮名垣魯文, the ukiyoe artist Utagawa Toyokuni 歌川豊国, and the painter Kawanabe Kyōsai 河鍋暁斎.16 In particular, catfish prints for which Kanagaki Robun provided the text were extremely popular. According to one account, one of the prints to which he contributed sold several thousand copies (Takada 1995, 37–38).

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15 Kitahara 2000, 101. Not much information is available on how much a typical catfish print would have cost. Ono’s helpful data indicate that a nishiki e print would have been priced at about twenty to fifty mon 文 and a kawaraban print at twenty five to thirty mon. The price, of course, would have depended on the size of paper as well as the number of papers used (Ono 1979, 400, 405).

16 Kitahara 2000, 126–140, 147–149. It is not certain whether this Utagawa Toyokuni is the third Toyokuni (1786–1864) or the fourth Toyokuni (1823–1880).
Scholars have thus far identified well over a hundred different types of catfish prints.\(^{17}\) Despite the variety of contents and representations, virtually all extant catfish prints share in common an underlying narrative based on a folk legend associated with a renowned shrine located to the northeast of Edo, the Kashima Shrine (Kashima jingū 鹿嶋神宮) in Hitachi Province (present-day Ibaraki Prefecture). The legend has it that a giant catfish lives underneath the Japanese archipelago and causes earthquakes by moving its body, but this catfish is usually pinned down and made immobile by the power of the *kami* enshrined at the Kashima Shrine. This *kami* is Takemikazuchi no Mikoto 武甕槌命, a warrior deity who is locally known as the Great August Deity of Kashima (Kashima daimyōjin 鹿嶋大明神).\(^{18}\) The Kashima deity suppresses the catfish through the power of a special stone known as the Foundation Stone (*kaname ishi* 要石), which is located inside the Kashima shrine grounds and is believed to be placed directly over the body of the subterranean catfish in order to suppress its movement.

Given this preventative measure taken against the earthquake catfish, why then did the 1855 earthquake occur? Many catfish prints explain that this was because the Kashima deity was absent from his home shrine on the day of the earthquake in order to attend an annual gathering of the gods in the land of Izumo in western Japan (present-day Shimane Prefecture). An ancient custom required all gods in Japan to convene at the Izumo Shrine (*Izumo taisha* 出雲大社) every

\(^{17}\) This number varies among scholars, partly because they define the category of “catfish prints” differently. Takada 1995 claims that more than two hundred sixty types of catfish prints have been discovered (48). It is possible that Takada is including in his count prints without a picture of the earthquake catfish. It is nonetheless clear that well over a hundred different types of catfish prints have been found, even when adopting the narrow sense of the category. See Tomisawa 1996, 90.

\(^{18}\) Takemikazuchi no Mikoto was born from the blood spilled by Kagutsuchi no Kami 迦具土神, the fire *kami* who caused the death of Izanami no Mikoto 伊弉冉尊 and was slain by Izanagi no Mikoto 伊邪冉尊. See Shimonaka 1986, 939–940 and Ouwehand 1964, 57–58. For the sake of convenience, I refer to Takemikazuchi no mikoto as the “Kashima deity” in this chapter.
tenth month of the year. This is why the traditional name of the lunar tenth month is the “month without gods” (kanna zuki 神無月), except in the land of Izumo, where the traditional name of the tenth month is the “month with gods” (kamiari zuki 神有月). Following this ancient custom, it was said, the Kashima deity left his shrine at the beginning of the tenth month of 1855, leaving a subordinate deity in charge of the shrine. However, his absence weakened the hold on the giant catfish and led to the occurrence of the Ansei earthquake.19

Figure 8 shows a typical catfish print reflecting this basic narrative. This title-less print shows the Kashima deity standing on a catfish and suppressing it using the Foundation Stone.

Figure 8. “The Kashima Deity and Catfish,” International Research Center for Japanese Studies. Also see Miyata and Takada 1995, 262 (Print #38)

The print depicts the Kashima deity as a fierce warrior glaring down at smaller, anthropomorphized catfish prostrate before him. In the text of the print, the smaller catfish are begging for mercy by promising the Kashima deity that they will bury themselves under the earth and never move again (suna o kabutte ugorimasenu yue goyōsha goyōsha すなをかぶってうごきませぬゆへ、ごようしや、ごようしや). As in this print, some catfish prints feature

19 Ouwehand 1964, 15–16. According to this traditional narrative framework, the Kashima deity had to attend this gathering in Izumo annually and vacate his shrine every tenth month of the year, but catfish prints generally do not address the question of why a devastating earthquake took place only in the second year of Ansei (1855).
a number of catfish. In this particular print, it is not clear whether the group of catfish collectively caused the 1855 earthquake or the individual catfish represent different earthquakes. Nonetheless, the emphasis is placed on the giant catfish suppressed by the Kashima deity. A few other prints similarly depict the Kashima deity subduing a catfish by standing on it and pinning it down with a sword.

Figure 9 is another typical example. This print shows the deity Ebisu 恵比寿, put in charge of managing the Kashima Shrine during the Kashima deity’s absence. Ebisu is a member of the “seven lucky gods” (Shichifukujin 七福神) and is traditionally identified as a deity that brings commercial luck and success.

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20 Catfish prints that feature just one catfish presumably share the assumption that there is one giant catfish underneath the Japanese archipelago and that this catfish causes all earthquakes. In this chapter, I use the designation “earthquake catfish” to refer to this catfish conceptualized as a single entity. I use catfish in the plural when discussing prints depicting multiple catfish.

21 See Miyata and Takada 1995, 260–261, No. 34 and 35. In analyzing catfish prints, it is important to keep in mind that the way in which researchers engage with extant prints today differs significantly from the way in which people bought and read these prints in 1855. Researchers’ views are inevitably conditioned by a kind of “gallery-style” viewing in which a large number of prints can be seen collectively through catalogues and websites. Nonetheless, through such a viewpoint, it is possible to extract key narrative frameworks and motifs that appear repeatedly in catfish prints.
In this print, however, Ebisu is leaning on the Foundation Stone and is dozing off, leaving the earthquake catfish unattended and free to wreak havoc. The upper half of the print shows the destruction and fire caused by the catfish. In the middle, the Kashima deity is riding on a horse and rushing to return to his shrine in order to restrain the catfish. The print also features a thunder god who is farting. The thunder god is sulking over the fact that the people of Edo only fear earthquakes lately and have forgotten about the power of thunder, dismissing it as unworthy of respect and fear—just like a fart. The print thus features earthquakes, thunder, and fire, most likely based on the popular phrase *jishin kaminari kaji oyaji* (literally, “earthquakes, thunder, fire, and fathers/old men”), which rhythmically lists things that are to be feared the most.

The popular conception that a giant catfish caused earthquakes had most likely taken root by the early 1700s. Even before the Tokugawa period, there existed an idea that a gigantic creature lived beneath the Japanese islands and caused earthquakes by moving. However, this creature was typically not a catfish, but rather a dragon (Kitani 1995b, 53–54). The shift from dragon to catfish occurred during the mid- to late 1600s. In tracing this shift, scholars often highlight Matsuo Bashō’s playful response to a poem composed by the fellow poet Konishi Jishun. In the sixth year of Enpō (1678), Jishun composed a poem describing the ascension of a dragon to heaven after an earthquake. Bashō connected a short verse to it, saying that the dragon was actually a giant catfish. This was Bashō’s humorous response to the association between earthquakes and dragon through the use of a more mundane animal (ibid. 54–55). Bashō was not the first to make the association between earthquakes and catfish, as there
were earlier examples also from the mid-seventeenth century, if not earlier. In any case, by the late 1600s, the paring of catfish and earthquakes had become a common motif in Kabuki plays and satirical and humorous poems (senryū 川柳) (ibid. 55).

The idea that the Kashima deity possesses the power to suppress earthquakes dates back at least to the early 1600s. A map of Japan dated the first year of Kan’ei (1624) and titled Illustration of Great Japan’s Earthquakes (Dainihon koku jishin no zu 大日本国地震之図) shows a mysterious creature—most likely a dragon—surrounding the Japanese islands. The map explains that the head and tail of this creature meet under the land of Kashima and that the creature is pinned down there with the power of the Foundation Stone. A short poem appears at the top of the map:

Although it may shake, the Foundation Stone will never be unearthed, as long as the kami of Kashima is there.

ゆるぐともよもやぬけじのかなめ石
かしまの神のあらんかぎりは

This map, along with the poem, signifies that by the early 1600s, there had already developed a basic narrative that the Kashima deity prevented earthquakes by immobilizing a gigantic creature underneath Japan. Some scholars also point out that the land of Kashima in Hitachi Province was traditionally viewed as the far-eastern edge of Japan and, ultimately, of this world. The Foundation Stone thus served the function of marking as well as grounding the land of Kashima as the boundary between this-worldly and otherworldly realms (Kitani 1995b, 55). Despite the long history of these discourses concerning the earthquake catfish and the Kashima deity since

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22 It is difficult to say definitively why the shift from dragon to catfish took place. Kitahara suggests that similarity in appearance between catfish and dragon was a factor in this transition (2008, 93)

23 Musha 1995, 12–13. At this point, the creature that causes earthquakes is not yet identified as a catfish, as also discussed above.
the early to mid-Tokugawa period, it was only after the 1855 earthquake that there was a massive production and circulation of woodblock prints utilizing these discourses as main motifs.\(^{24}\)

Many catfish prints understandably portray the earthquake catfish in a negative light, highlighting the damage and deaths caused by it. Accordingly, many prints show the Kashima deity suppressing the catfish and reprimanding it, as in Figure 1 above. There also are many prints depicting the people of Edo taking their frustrations out on the catfish by beating it up. The print titled *Story of a Big Catfish at Yoshiwara* (*shin Yoshiwara ōnamazu yurai* しんよし原大なまづゆらひ) is a typical example (Figure 10).

This print features numerous courtesans and their customers who were killed in the Yoshiwara red light district. The victims are beating up the catfish using a variety of tools appropriate for their occupations.\(^{25}\) Prints depicting the earthquake catfish being punished this way were extremely popular immediately after the earthquake. It is not difficult to imagine the psychology

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\(^{24}\) Also see Ouwehand 1964, 43–50 for the influence that the genre of *Ōtsu e* 大津絵, associated with Lake Biwa, had on catfish prints.

\(^{25}\) Also see Miyata and Takada 1995, 266–270 for more depictions of “mob violence” being committed against the earthquake catfish.
of Edo townspeople identifying with characters on the prints vicariously chastising the catfish (Kitahara 2000, 101).

Many prints thus capture the earthquake catfish as a symbol of the horrific power of the 1855 earthquake. In this manner of representation, the catfish is something to be abhorred, subdued, and punished. However, as Ouwehand has demonstrated, the depiction of the earthquake catfish is not monolithic. As he argues, the catfish is depicted both as a “destroyer and benefactor” (1964, 79–80). It is through the catfish’s representation as a benefactor that its aspect as a yonaoshi god becomes manifest.

**Yonaoshi in Catfish Prints**

*Yonaoshi* is a major theme in catfish prints, as Ouwehand, Kitahara, Smits, and others have already observed. These scholars have demonstrated that the expression *yonaoshi* in catfish prints signifies a reinvigoration of the circulation of wealth in society. Tokugawa-period intellectuals spoke often about the importance of maintaining a healthy flow of wealth in society. The Confucian scholar Kaibara Ekiken 貝原益軒 (1630–1714), for example, stressed that merchants gain profit by making money go around. When the circulation of wealth becomes stagnant, merchants risk losing profit (Kuriyama 1997, 134). The astronomer Nishikawa Joken 西川如見 (1648–1724), in his writing from 1719, similarly emphasizes circulation as the basis of economic activities:

> You can have saved a hundred million pieces of gold and silver, but if you leave it just piled up in the vault, then it becomes a dead treasure: being put to no special use, the gold and silver then becomes worthless to both yourself and to others.\(^{26}\)

\(^{26}\) Quoted in Kuriyama 1997, 134. As Kuriyama explains, Joken was quoting an anonymous contemporary in this particular passage.
Joken stresses that it is necessary for gold and silver to circulate and, as Kuriyama puts it, “accumulation and stagnation were contrary to nature” (ibid.). Both Ekiken and Joken discussed the importance of circulation in relation to merchants and their economic endeavors. However, catfish prints emphasize the circulation of wealth as something that benefits various members of society. Catfish prints present the rectification of the stagnant flow of wealth through the destructive power of the 1855 earthquake as a process of yonaoshi. This section in particular will highlight two central aspects of yonaoshi in relation to the 1855 earthquake: 1) a post-disaster economic boom experienced by members of certain professions, most notably construction workers, and 2) punishment delivered against the hoarding rich, forcing them to spend money for the sake of the poor.

As might be expected, carpenters, plasterers, roofers, and other related construction laborers were in high demand following the earthquake. Some of them could charge as much as seven times their usual wages (Kitahara 2000, 245–246). Unskilled workers also provided supplementary labor by carrying dirt and debris. The Bakufu issued multiple edicts banning wage increases for construction workers. After seeing that these edicts did not have much effect, the government permitted reasonable wage increases but ordered wages to be maintained within this limit. This attempt also proved futile, however, and wages kept rising (Kitahara 2000, 246). Soon laborers from many parts of Japan flocked to the city of Edo. Many domains also started to call their own workers from their home territories in order to avoid hiring expensive laborers in Edo. The influx of outside workers eventually helped to lower wages (Smits 2013, 124–125). Nonetheless, the fact remains that both skilled and unskilled laborers enjoyed windfall profits immediately after the earthquake.

27 Noguchi 1997, 203–205. Noguchi surmises that the fact that unskilled laborers could easily find jobs after the earthquake contributed to heading off social disturbances.
The prosperity of these laborers is an important motif in catfish prints, as many prints feature elated constructions workers celebrating their newly acquired wealth (some examples will be discussed in more detail below). Some prints also vividly compare and contrast how people of different occupations reacted to the earthquake. For example, the print introduced above in Figure 10 features Yoshiwara courtesans beating up the earthquake catfish. On the upper left-hand corner of this print, however, there is a small group of carpenters and construction workers rushing to the scene in order to defend the catfish. One of the workers is yelling to the courtesans, “Hey, don’t beat it [catfish] so hard!” (oi sonna ni buchinasan na おいそんなにぶちなさんな). There are more similar prints in which carpenters try to protect the earthquake catfish from a crowd of angry townspeople. For these construction workers, the earthquake catfish was not an object of hatred but rather a benefactor who provided them with unprecedented wealth.

Some catfish prints depict the process through which these laborers acquired their new wealth as one of yonaoshi. A typical example is Figure 11.

Figure 11. “Short Stories about the Earthquake,” International Research Center for Japanese Studies. Also See Miyata and Takada 1995, 254–255 (Print #27).

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28 See Miyata and Takada 1995, 266–270 for a few examples.
This print is divided into four separate panels, each of which describes an interaction between a catfish and individuals of different professions, except for one panel that features the Kashima deity. All accompanying texts on the print are dialogues between the catfish and the individual(s) in the panel. In the upper right-hand corner, two landlords are beating the catfish, one of them holding a broom and the other an abacus. Here is a portion of their dialogue:

(Landlord): Because of the recent commotion, I can no longer collect rent and all of my tenement houses have been destroyed. Good thing I’ve found you now! I am going to have to complain about you to Kashima!

(Catfish): The Kashima deity has already left for the shrine in Izumo. I don’t care. Do whatever you want.29

The “commotion” (sawagi さわぎ) refers to the earthquake. The landlord is upset that he is unable to collect rent from his properties and that many of his properties have been destroyed. The conversation between the landlord and catfish assumes that the reader is cognizant of the Kashima deity’s ability to suppress the catfish and also of the deity’s absence from his home shrine during the lunar tenth month. The landlord threatens the catfish that he intends to report its misconducts to the Kashima deity, but the catfish is nonchalant as it is aware that the Kashima deity is now in Izumo.

In the upper left-hand panel, however, the Kashima deity is reprimanding the catfish with a sword in his hand:

(Kashima Deity): While I was absent from my shrine, you were up to no good. This is atrocious. I don’t even know how I should apologize to Amaterasu Ōkami after a thing like this [the earthquake] has happened in this country of Japan.

(Catfish): Concerning this matter, I am terribly sorry. I feel mortified. With the change in season approaching, I was curious as to how things were [above ground]. I moved my head a little bit and, in an instant, the whole of Edo was

29 It should be noted that the characters in this print and in many other catfish prints are speaking in a heavy Edo dialect, which gives the impression of being forceful and emphatic.
destroyed. Regarding this matter, please exercise your merciful compassion. I beg you with all of my heart to please, please forgive me.

The catfish’s attitude here contrasts sharply with the first panel, as it is completely powerless against the Kashima deity. The catfish tries to meliorate the wrath of the deity by explaining that it had no malicious intent, that the earthquake was more or less an accident. At the same time, it is interesting to note that the Kashima deity sees the occurrence of the earthquake as a matter concerning the whole of Japan, under the presiding presence of Amaterasu. The Kashima deity interprets the catfish’s misconduct as resulting from his lack of supervision and therefore fears that he will lose the trust of Amaterasu.

In the lower right-hand panel, the catfish is trying to escape from restaurant owners, whose business the earthquake had destroyed:

(Man): You bastard, this giant catfish! Because of you, my business is bankrupt. I usually have three or four groups of geisha at my place, but because of the recent commotion, I have no customers. You even broke my dishes and bowls. It’s all messed up! A big loss!

Woman: Oh, this despicable, good-for-nothing catfish! Because of you, I can’t get tips from customers, and at night, I’m still afraid [because the earthquake occurred at night or because of after-quakes], and I can’t sleep. This is so ridiculous.

(Man): Hey, you catfish! I’ve never cooked a fish as big as you, so I was taken aback for a while. An ordinary cooking knife won’t do. I would have to go to Kashima and borrow a special knife [to cut you up]!

(Catfish): This is unbearable! Don’t you people know about this yonaoshi (kono yonaoshi shiranēnoka この世なをししらねえのか)? Oh well, it really is a pain to talk some sense into women and narrow-minded men.

Here the catfish expresses its frustration about people not understanding the significance of the earthquake as yonaoshi. Although this panel itself does not explain what this yonaoshi entailed, it is clear that the catfish feels he does not deserve to be criticized for causing the earthquake
(unlike the last panel with the Kashima deity). To the contrary, the catfish recognizes the earthquake as a positive thing, as *yonaoshi*.

The last panel at the bottom left-hand corner explains precisely what this *yonaoshi* is about. In this panel, the catfish is enjoying a drinking feast with a group of carpenters:

(Man A): Hey there, Mr. Catfish. Thanks to you, we made a lot of money this time around. I don’t know how to express our gratitude to you.

(Man B): That’s right. That’s right. We’re making a lot of money now, so we have to treat you to a lot of good food. Anything you want.

(Catfish): There is no need to thank me like that. Regarding this matter, it is tough being an object of so much hatred.

(Man C): Don’t bother with them. They don’t know what they’re talking about.

(Man D): You’re right. Even if we are made rich, we don’t ever save money, because we use it for drinking and for going to temporary brothels (*karitaku* 仮宅). This is just how money circulates in the world (*sekai no yūsū* せかいのゆうすうち). The money we have now will sooner or later depart from us and circulate.

Here the carpenters thank the catfish for the wealth they acquired as a result of the earthquake. They also sympathize with the catfish, for they also feel that it is being unjustly persecuted. The carpenters stress that they may be rich now, but they will spend all their money in no time—but that is simply how wealth is meant to circulate in society, they emphasize. The earthquake revitalized this circulation of wealth. This is *yonaoshi*, as referred to in the third panel. The renewed circulation of wealth benefits members of some occupations quite exclusively, yet this is also temporary. That money comes around and goes around represents a proper order of things, even if it means that some must suffer temporarily, as was the case for the landlords and restaurant owners in the print. This print thus highlights both destruction and blessing brought by
the earthquake. Accordingly, the catfish in this print is both an object of popular scorn as well as of praise and gratitude.

Another related point concerning the idea of *yonaoshi* as “transfer of wealth,” as Smits puts it (2013, 117), is access to what the carpenters in the panel call “temporary brothels.” As already mentioned, the earthquake devastated the Yoshiwara red light district. Soon after, brothel owners set up “temporary brothels” in various part of Edo. In general, low-class workers and carpenters were not welcome at Yoshiwara proper (Wakamizu 1991, 178–179; Kitani 1984, 56–57). At temporary brothels, however, the regulations were loosened, and many construction workers frequented the brothels, using their newly acquired wealth. As in the above print, many catfish prints focus on the theme of carpenters and other construction workers gaining access to these brothels as a result of the earthquake.\(^{30}\) A print titled *World Renewal, A Dance to Celebrate the Year of Good Harvest* (*yonaoshi hōnen odori* 世直し豊年おどり), for example, shows a group of laborers dancing euphorically in front of a temporary brothel house (Figure 12).

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\(^{30}\) For a few examples of this, see Miyata and Takada 1995, 226–227. For an extensive analysis of the significance of Yoshiwara in the 1855 earthquake, see Wakamizu 1991. Also see Smits 2013, 116–117.
They are celebrating the *yonaoshi* made possible through the recent earthquake. One of them is chanting “*yonaoshi, yonaoshi*” as he dances. One of the courtesans inside the brothel is beckoning the workers, “Make a lot of money and come here every night” (*takusan mōkete maiban kinamashi* たくさんもうけてまひはんきなまし). This print shows a sexually charged aspect of *yonaoshi*. One could argue that *yonaoshi* was a highly male-centered conception and that it entailed access to the bodies of high-class courtesans, which were beyond reach for most workers under normal circumstances.

Another important dimension of *yonaoshi* in the 1855 earthquake was the idea of forcing the rich to share their wealth with the rest of society. This sharing of wealth occurred through charitable donations that the rich were expected to make as part of disaster relief efforts. Following the earthquake, there were both Bakufu-funded and private relief efforts. The Bakufu relief project consisted mainly of distributing rice balls (*takidashi* 炊出し) to those who had temporarily lost the capacity to feed themselves, providing temporary shelters (*osukui goya* 御救小屋) to those who had lost their dwellings, and distributing raw rice (*osukui mai* 御救米) to those who had become jobless because of the earthquake (Kitahara 2000, 252–268). Private relief efforts were called the “practice of charity” (*segyō* 施行), originally a Buddhist term meaning to donate goods to monks and the poor. These were funded by wealthy townspeople in respective districts and consisted of donating money, food, clothes, and other goods necessary for daily life to temporary shelters as well as donating money and food directly to individuals in the donor’s district (ibid. 269–285). For the wealthy to provide money and goods at times of major disasters had become a common practice and in reality a requirement in urban areas by the late Tokugawa period. The Bakufu publicly announced the names of townsfolk who made significant contributions. *Kawraban* prints also reported on significant donations. These had the
effect of praising the contributors as well as pressuring other wealthy persons who had yet to contribute to the relief efforts to do so promptly (ibid. 272).

Some catfish prints describe this process of wealth redistribution from the rich to the less privileged as *yonaooshi*. These prints assume the basic idea that wealth and money should circulate in society. The earthquake punished the rich for hoarding wealth and preventing this healthy flow of wealth. The earthquake also forced the rich to open up their coffers and use their money for others. An example of this is a print titled the *Rich and Wealthy* (*mochimaru chōja* 持丸長者) (Figure 13).

In this print, a group of wealthy men are vomiting money. Their facial expressions indicate that they are in pain and that they are being forced to cough up money against their will. The money is being collected by another group of men, consisting of carpenters and construction workers. This depiction is accompanied by a poem:

Not letting money stay inside the stomach of the rich, cough it out. The disease of poverty will then be healed, and the world is renewed (*hin no yamai no korede naoru yo* ひんのやまいのこれで直る世).
The print describes poverty as a kind of social disease caused by the hoarding rich unwilling to share their wealth and keeping their wealth “inside their stomachs.” The verb naoru in Japanese here has the double meaning of “curing” the disease of poverty and also “renewing” the world. The earthquake created a unique situation in which money was forcefully taken out of the hands of the rich and distributed to the poor in various forms. Although the print shows construction workers picking up the vomited money, it also emphasizes helping the poor as a collective, as is clear from the phrase “healing the disease of poverty.” The earthquake cured the disease of poverty and by extension renewed the world.31

Finally, there also are quite a few cases in which the expression yonaoshi is used simply to refer to the 1855 earthquake. These prints do not elaborate on the meaning of the word yonaoshi but simply use it to replace the word earthquake. This suggests that the identification of the 1855 earthquake as yonaoshi was widespread and in little need of special explanation.32

The Earthquake Catfish as a Yonaoshi God

The conceptualizations of yonaoshi outlined above serve as the basis for the construction of the earthquake catfish as a divine agent of yonaoshi. In looking at some catfish prints, it becomes evident that, shortly after the earthquake, the earthquake catfish enjoyed a status as a hayarigami (literally, “gods who are in vogue”).33 For example, the print in Figure 14 shows a catfish depicted on a scroll and worshipped by a group of laborers, roofers, and merchants who made a

31 Also see Miyata and Takada eds. 1995, 298–299 for examples of prints featuring rich merchants excreting money.
32 For examples of this, see Miyata and Takada 1995, 324–325, 350–351 (especially Prints #136 and # 180).
33 See descriptions of the earthquakes catfish as a god in Ouwehand 1964, 78–79, 106–107; Kitahara 2000, 222–226; and Smits 2013, 125–126. One common way scholars have described the earthquake catfish is as a “benevolent lucky god” (fukujin 福神).
Some merchants also made significant profits through the sales of goods that were in high demand after the earthquake.

Figure 14. “The Catfish on a Scroll,” International Research Center for Japanese Studies. Also see Miyata and Takada 1995, 320 (Print #129).

Items that sold well, as indicated in some catfish prints, included lumber, slippers, and old clothes, to mention just a few. In this print, the catfish is being treated as a full-fledged deity, to whom offerings are made and flanked by a shrine priest and Buddhist priest on either side. This print makes explicit the catfish’s role as a benefactor, as least for those who made profits as a result of the earthquake, and the destructive aspect of the earthquake is largely ignored. A print titled *Ten Thousand Years of Joy, Precaution* (*manzairaku mi no yōjin* 万歳楽身の用心) is a similar example (Figure 15). The catfish is once again being deified on a scroll and is being worshipped by individuals such as carpenters, roofers, and lumber merchants. All of them are thanking the catfish for allowing their businesses to prosper. In particular, a group of construction workers is offering this prayer of gratitude:

> Ever since the great commotion, we have been very busy, receiving requests for work from all sorts of places. On top of this, people have been telling us they will pay us 50 percent more than usual. They say if that’s not enough, they’ll pay us double or even triple. This is all thanks to the earthquake. Our sake tastes better than ever, just like the heavenly dew of
the gods (kanro かんろ), and our wives are happy as well. Thank you so much. Praise, praise, praise (namu namu namu なむなむなむ).

Here it is not farfetched to characterize the economic prosperity experienced by these workers as a kind of “this-worldly benefit” granted by the catfish deity. The catfish is not simply a symbol of earthquakes, but a rather deity that brings tangible benefits through the power of earthquakes.

The print titled Various Professions, Abundance of Money (shoshoku gotakusen 諸職吾沢銭) also features a group of grateful laborers and merchants who are thanking the catfish (Figure 16). The individuals in the print are venerating the catfish as the “Great August Earthquake Deity” (jishin daimyōjin 地しん大明神). Some are making offerings of money and food and praying for more blessings to make their businesses prosper even more. A carpenter says that he has been very busy lately and requests the catfish to give him energy equivalent to that of ten people so that he can handle his intense work schedule (dōzo jūninrinki ni naru yōni mamotte kudasai yashi とふぞ十人りきになるやうに守つてくださいやし). A lumber merchant implores the catfish to make his trees grow faster because he has already cut down and

Figure 15. Ten Thousand Years of Joy, Precaution, International Research Center for Japanese Studies. Also see Miyata and Takada 1995, 285–286 (Print # 69).
sold most of his trees but new orders keep coming in. Another merchant thanks the catfish for enabling him to go to temporary brothels by saying, “Praise the Great August Earthquake Deity” (namu jishin daimyōjin sama 南無ぢじん大明神さま). A fellow merchant makes a succinct and direct prayer: “Great August Earthquake Deity, please allow me to make big money” (jishin daimyōjin ōgane o mōkesase tamae 地しん大明神大金をもうけさせ給へ). Similar to the last print, the catfish is being venerated as an earthquake deity that brings practical, commercial benefits to his adherents.

Furthermore, the text at the top of this print explains that the world has been renewed as a result of the earthquake. This text is written all in Chinese characters, a rare textual representation in catfish prints, but it is not written as Chinese and one must read it using the Japanese pronunciation of the characters:

Making a fresh start following the earthquake, the world is being renewed (yo ga naori 代賀直利). Families are enriched, people are enriched.

It is interesting here that the world is being renewed after the earthquake. This particular print seems to suggest that the process of yonaoshi does not refer to the earthquake itself but to the economic reinvigoration that occurred as a result of the earthquake. Nonetheless, similar to other prints, the renewing of the world is portrayed as a positive phenomenon that enriches families
and individuals. The print portrays the earthquake catfish as a divine agent that makes this yonaoshi possible.

Some prints also construct the earthquake catfish as a divine representative of the Kashima Shrine. In the print titled Fearing Kashima (Kashima osore 鹿島恐), the catfish is dressed in the formal ritual attire of a shrine priest, holding a ritual bell and a ritual wand (Figure 17).

Carpenters and construction workers are forming a circle around the catfish and are dancing and singing ecstatically. This scene is based on the motif of the Kashima Dance (Kashima odori 鹿島踊), which originated from the Kashima Shrine and had been popularized in Edo by the mid-Tokugawa period. Concomitant with the tradition of Kashima Dance was the “announcement of a divine message” (kotobure 事触). As Miyata explains, there was a long tradition of divinatory practice at the Kashima Shrine, centered on the Kashima deity’s predictions of the fortunes and misfortunes of the coming year (Miyata 1975, 209–215). The announcement of the

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34 The Kashima Dance was also featured as a motif in a number of theatrical plays. See Miyata 1975, 52–54.
divine message of Kashima (Kashima no kotobure 鹿島の事触) eventually expanded beyond the land of Kashima. Representatives of the Kashima Shrine travelled to various provinces to deliver their deity’s annual predictions. The messengers of Kashima typically dressed in a priest’s attire and spread the message of the Kashima deity, often accompanied by dancing and singing (ibid. 52–59). These messengers were apparently not a rare sight in many provinces, but not all of them were genuine. In the tenth year of Kanmon (1670), for example, the Kashima Shrine filed an official complaint to the authorities concerning the proliferation of the number of fake messengers (ibid. 215). The catfish in the print is nonetheless depicted as a genuine messenger of the Kashima Shrine. The picture of a rabbit on the pole indicates that the divine message the catfish brings concerns the very year in which the Ansei Great Earthquake occurred, a year of the rabbit (Noguchi 1997, 212–216). Simply based on the euphoric state of the dancing carpenters, it is clear that the catfish has brought a message of superbly good fortune.

As already explained, the Kashima Shrine was of central importance in catfish prints due to the role of the Kashima deity as the suppressor of the earthquake catfish. The catfish here, however, is not depicted as something to be suppressed. Rather, it is standing at the center of a joyous celebration. The reason for this celebration is made explicit in the text of the print, and it is also in this text that yonaoshi is discussed. There is a large body of text at the top, supplemented by shorter texts scattered throughout the print. The text at the top provides the narrative framework for the print:

Although the shaking of the ground of the great country and the destruction of buildings had caused a feeling of helplessness, people are once again enjoying the beneficence of the Kashima deity. The vitality of people’s livelihood is an extremely great blessing. The Foundation Stone is fixed ever so tightly on the ground as the kami of thunder travels across the sky. This stone is the symbol of our stable world. The earthquake of yonaoshi (yonaoshi no nae 世直しの地震) has ceased completely, and the divine message of Kashima resounds.
There is another, shorter reference to *yonaoshi* at the bottom right-hand corner of the print, where a child is dancing and singing:

*Yonaoshi*—the world is good, good, good (*yonaoshi* yo no naka yoi yoi yoi よなほし よのなか よい よい よい).

These two usages of *yonaoshi* at first appear contradictory. The first reference casts *yonaoshi* in a slightly negative light because here the fact that the “earthquake of *yonaoshi*” has stopped is portrayed as a good thing. Here the earthquake itself is clearly identified as *yonaoshi*, with the emphasis placed on its destructive power. On the other hand, in the shorter reference, *yonaoshi* is presented extremely positively, highlighting the joyous state of the world following the earthquake. Despite the two contrasting usages of *yonaoshi*, it is undeniable that the dominant tone of the print as a whole is that of joy and happiness. This is also attested by other utterances of the dancing carpenters and construction workers in the print. For example, a dancing carpenter says, “Our income has been good recently, *yoi yoi*, but the work is endless, *yoi yoi*.” The rhythmical chant “*yoi yoi* よいよい is inserted between the lines and functions as a pun for *yoi* 良い as in “good.” Perhaps the two usages of *yonaoshi* reflect both the destruction and renewal made possible by the earthquake. This process of destruction followed by prosperity is *yonaoshi*. The catfish, depicted as a Kashima priest, serves not only as the bringer of this message of *yonaoshi*, but also embodies the power of the earthquake that made this *yonaoshi* possible. This power is something to be celebrated as well as feared, as indicated by the title of the print (*Fearing Kashima*).

Another untitled print (Figure 18) also shows the catfish dressed in a priest robe. The catfish is floating above a carpet of gold coins, mimicking the traditional image of a celestial deity standing on a small cloud, and is holding a handful of gold coins.
The catfish is emanating rays of light that extend to a figure of a man. This figure is made up of numerous naked men—most likely carpenters and other related construction workers—and is also holding a package of gold coins in his hand, symbolizing the wealth the laborers acquired following the earthquake. His clothing is decorated with a number of construction tools representing the occupations of the men constituting the figure. The print is an example of an “assembled picture” (yose e 寄せ絵) in which smaller figures come together to form a greater image. This print is based on a more famous print titled _He May Look Scary, But He Is Actually a Nice Person_ (mikake wa kowai ga tonda ii hito da みかけハこハいがとんだいい人だ) by the famous woodblock print artist Utagawa Kuniyoshi 歌川国芳. The two prints look remarkably similar, but the original does not feature a deified catfish. Miyata and Takada surmise that the print with the catfish may also be a work of Utagawa, although nothing definitive can be said since the print lacks an author’s stamp (Miyata and Takada 1995, 307).

As in the earlier prints, the economic prosperity experienced by the laborers is understood in this print as a part of the process of yonaoshi. The _tanka_ poem at the top of the print reads as follows:
People gather together. This is all very amusing. They are happy that the world is being renewed (yo ga naoru tote yorokoberu nari 世が直るとてよろこべる形).

“Gathering together” here refers to the way in which individual bodies are pieced together to create a bigger figure. The completed figure thus represents the collective joyous state of those who benefited from the earthquake. What made this possible, once again, is the reinvigorated flow of wealth in society triggered by the earthquake. The catfish in turn represents the power of the earthquake. The catfish is portrayed as a deity who brings material prosperity, as made evident by the gold coins upon which it stands and the benevolent rays of light that shine upon the “assembled” man. The print, in other words, interprets the economic prosperity the workers enjoyed as a blessing granted by the catfish deity.

The earthquake catfish also plays an active role in punishing the hoarding rich by making them spend their money for the benefit of the less privileged. Figure 19 is a dynamic example of this. In this print, the catfish is strangling the wealthy by the neck and is shaking them in order to make them vomit money. The catfish says the following to the rich:

How does that feel? When shaken like this, you have no choice but to give up everything you have. Now, just spit out all the money you have saved until now, every bit of it. That will make many people happy.

As the catfish says this to the strangled man, it also has its foot on another man, causing him to excrete money instead of vomiting it. The money squeezed out of the rich is being picked up by a group of construction workers.
The print resembles the structure of a print discussed in the previous section titled the *Rich and Wealthy* (Figure 6), in which the rich similarly vomit money, which is then picked up by a group of laborers. The underlying message is the same, that the earthquake caused the rich who had hoarded wealth to use their money for the benefit of others in the form of post-disaster charitable donations. The fundamental premise, once again, is that a healthy society was a society in which wealth circulated smoothly without congestion. The only difference between the two prints is the presence of the catfish as a restorer of this healthy circulation.

The print titled *A Ship of Treasures Departing from the Rich* (*mochimaru takara no debune* 持丸たからの出船) (Figure 20) is another similar example. The basic structure of the print is almost identical to the previous print, with the catfish making a rich person vomit money, which is then picked up by construction workers. The conversation among the three parties represented in the print is illuminating. The rich person laments as follows, as he vomits money:

This is pathetic. I worked so hard to save all this money. Now I’m giving it all up by vomiting. This is ridiculous. I should have spent the money before something like this happened.

The catfish then reprimands the rich:
Mister, you suffer like this now because you always put pressure on the lower class and make them toil (kahō no mono o tsumete nangi o saseru kara 下方の者をつめてなんぎをさせるから). From now on, you should rectify your heart and perform compassionate and virtuous deeds.

Finally, one of the carpenters says the following as he picks up the coughed-up money:

I don't want to pick up and save all this money only to be made miserable by an earthquake. It is better to use this money at the temporary brothels. This way, I can let the money flow to others (shōhō e no yūzū ni naru 諸方へのゆうずうになる).

The rich man laments that he has saved his wealth in vain. The catfish identifies the cause of his suffering as his selfish attitude, making the poor suffer by hoarding his wealth. The catfish suggests that the rich person do more for the sake of others and spend his money in ways that benefit others, most likely referring to charitable donations that the wealthy of Edo were expected to give after the earthquake. The construction worker is determined not to make the mistake of hoarding money only to lose it through an earthquake and declares that he will let this money circulate by going to the brothels. This conversation further supports the discussion above.

Figure 20. Ship of Treasures Departing from the Rich, Ishimoto Collection. Also see Miyata and Takada 1995, 299–300 (Print #90).
concerning the healthy circulation of wealth. The conversation also suggests that it is immoral to prevent this healthy circulation, as is made clear by the catfish’s rebuke.35

The frequent references to the imageries of vomit and excrement in the above prints betray the basic understanding that wealth that has been hoarded is filth. Accordingly, the congested flow of wealth is presented as a kind of disease, as evident in the print the Rich and Wealthy featuring the phrase “healing the disease of poverty.” The catfish serves the role of rectifying the causes of this congestion. It was not only construction workers who benefited from the restored flow of money. Many Edo residents benefited directly from charitable donations that the rich made. However, as many catfish prints indicate, construction workers were the biggest winners in the post-disaster Edo, and it is through them that the revitalized flow of wealth is most vividly expressed in catfish prints.

Perhaps the print titled the Peaceful World of Ansei, People Prospering (yo wa Ansei tami no nigiwai 世は安政民の賑わい) highlights the aspect of punishing the hoarding rich more than any other print (Figure 21).

Figure 21. The Peaceful World of Ansei, People Prospering, National Diet Library. Also see Miyata and Takada 1995, 303–304 (Print #99).

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35 Also see Smits 2013, 23 for more discussion on the importance of economic circulation in Tokugawa Japan.
This print features an especially large catfish. Its whiskers extend to the neck of a wealthy-looking man, whose moneyboxes are scattering in front of him. Above this, there is a blind man falling over because of the shaking caused by the earthquake.\(^{36}\) A fairly extensive explanatory narrative accompanies the illustration.

(Narration): The teachings of kami and buddhas sustain the path of humanity. Yet, some have forgotten this path and have strayed to the abhorrent path of greed, which is forbidden to all regardless of social status. Because of this, in order to save the impoverished populace, kami and buddhas conferred together and made a request to the kami of Kashima. The great kami of Kashima tied the Foundation Stone onto the catfish and instructed the catfish to “rectify the imbalance between prosperity and poverty in the world” (yo no seisui o naosu beshi 世のせいすいをなおすへし). The catfish humbly received the order. On the night of the second day of the tenth month of the second year of Ansei, the catfish, as the messenger of the great kami, caused destruction in Edo and in areas within the radius of five leagues from Edo. With much intensity, the earthquake flattened buildings, split the earth, and caused fires to start.

The Rich and Wealthy (kanemochi domo 金もちども): Oh no! Oh no! This is horrible! This is horrible! Because of this earthquake, our moneyboxes are being destroyed, and fire is consuming our money. All the money we have painstakingly accumulated will be gone! Oh, what a despicable earthquake! What should we do? There is no way to escape. Ah, ah, ah…

Catfish: Hey, you rich and wealthy, listen well! … Because this floating world has become such that if one has money, one can do anything, the low and destitute are suffering all the time, and their lives do not get better at all. Those who are rich, just because they have a lot of money, act as if they were samurai, even though they are townsfolk. Using the power of money, they make others work for them; when buying rice, they proudly stack up bales of rice in their houses, as if they themselves had done the work. This is called “receiving a reward one does not deserve” (rokunusubito 禄盗人). That is why kami and buddhas are greatly upset, and I have received a strict order from them to bring peace to this world. So stop complaining. Stop whining. You rich and wealthy, you have brought this upon yourselves. This is a leveling of the world in order to

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\(^{36}\) This blind man is a zatō 座頭, a collective term referring to the blind who dressed in a Buddhist monk’s attire and engaged in such work as storytelling, massage, acupuncture, and money-lending.
bring peace to the low and destitute! Don’t make a fuss. Don’t make a fuss.

The catfish, as in other prints, is identified as the source of the destructive power of the earthquake. However, far from being an “accident” caused by the absence of the Kashima deity, the earthquake here is explained as having been commissioned by the Kashima deity himself upon a request from other kami and buddhas. This completely reverses the original Kashima legend in which the Kashima deity’s role was to suppress the catfish and prevent earthquakes. According to the text, the Kashima deity instructed the catfish to destroy Edo in order to punish the rich and wealthy, who, blinded by greed, had gone against the way of humanity as prescribed by kami and buddhas. Accordingly, the Foundation Stone, the original function of which was to make the catfish immobile, is here used instead to harness its destructive force. The text also explains that the rich and wealthy are being punished in order to save the poor and destitute. The catfish explains that the suffering of the poor derives from the misuse of money by the rich, with no compassion for the less privileged. In particular, the catfish speaks critically of the rich using the power of money to buy the fruit of someone else’s labor, while the poor and destitute have no prospect of their livelihood improving. It was only natural then that the rich and wealthy were punished for their immoral ways. They had brought this upon themselves, the print explains.

The catfish here is on a divine mission to rectify the state of inequality that has come to characterize the present world, more specifically “to rectify the imbalance between prosperity and poverty in the world.” This is a variation of yonaoshi language, for the Japanese verb used here “to rectify” (naosu) is the same as the verb “to renew.” This act is also understood as a way to save the impoverished populace and bring peace to the world. Far from being a mindless wanton destroyer, the catfish embodies the wrath of kami and buddhas and also represents the authority of the Kashima deity. Unlike the other articulations of yonaoshi catfish prints analyzed
thus far, this print does not focus exclusively on the economic prosperity of construction workers. Rather the print emphasizes saving the poor and the suffering populace by punishing the corrupt and greedy rich. The print does not explain explicitly the mechanism of how punishing the rich by destroying their wealth will lead to saving the poor, but the basic idea of revitalizing the flow of wealth in society is most likely in operation in this print as well. The money that is taken away from the hands of the rich will in turn benefit the less privileged in society. As the catfish says, its goal was to “level out” the present unjust society primarily by correcting the economic disparity between the rich and poor.

**An Animal Yonaoshi God in a Satirical Medium**

Catfish prints portray the earthquake catfish as a divine agent of *yonaoshi*, at times as a benevolent deity who brings material prosperity and at times as a wrathful representative of the Kashima deity. As in other examples of *yonaoshi* gods discussed thus far in this study, the earthquake catfish rectifies economic injustices in a particular community, or the city of Edo as a whole. The catfish saves Edo by restoring a healthy circulation of wealth in the city. Through the power of the earthquake, the catfish redresses the problem of economic congestion that hinders the flow of wealth and causes inequality and poverty.

As the protagonist in the satirical medium of catfish prints, the earthquake catfish possesses humorous qualities not seen in other *yonaoshi* gods. As evident from their contents, catfish prints served as an effective avenue for social critique, most poignant in their condemnation of the economic inequality of Edo society. The catfish took on a variety of forms in this social satire, often anthropomorphized and mingling with humans representing various occupations and social classes. The often-comical interactions between the catfish and humans enhance the prints’ satirical and humorous qualities as “caricatures.” The satirical layer of
interpretation is also important in approaching the discourse of *yonaoshi* in catfish prints, especially in those prints featuring construction workers who made windfall profits. One could read these prints as ridiculing the euphoric construction workers for selfishly indulging themselves in their newly acquired wealth and using it to frequent the temporary brothels. They even worship the earthquake catfish as a god, as if completely unaware of the fact that their current prosperity derives from the continuing suffering of many earthquake survivors. The discourse of *yonaoshi* occupies a central position in this satirical humor (Wakamizu 2007, 68–74). The social impact of catfish prints as a satirical medium was considerable, something evident from the fact that the Bakufu eventually confiscated and destroyed woodblocks used for the production of these prints (Kitani 1995b, 62).

Its satirical and humorous qualities notwithstanding, the discourse of *yonaoshi* in catfish prints connects with broader notions of *yonaoshi* identified thus far in this study. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, *yonaoshi* discourse as well as the category of *yonaoshi* god had gained countrywide currency by the mid-1850s. The increasing prevalence of *yonaoshi* discourse in Japanese society had prepared the ground for the popularity of catfish prints in 1855. Moreover, catfish prints promoted a particular understanding of *yonaoshi* by emphasizing the circulation of wealth, a theme less conspicuous in other articulations of *yonaoshi*. As such, the fact that catfish prints belonged to the genre of caricature in no way lessens their value as examples of concrete manifestations of *yonaoshi* discourse.

Similarly, representations of the earthquake catfish in catfish prints are useful for understanding human expectations toward a *yonaoshi* god. Although some catfish prints portray the earthquake catfish being deified as a *kami*, no direct evidence exists that historical actors ever actually worshiped a catfish. This sets the earthquake catfish apart from other examples of
yonaoshi gods in this study. On this point, Smits is unique in arguing that the majority of people in Tokugawa Japan understood the figure of the earthquake catfish metaphorically and did not actually believe that a giant catfish lived underneath Japan and caused earthquakes (2013, 32–35). Smits’s argument deserves attention, especially in light of his convincing exposition of the prevalence of the yin-yang paradigm among Tokugawa writers. Yet, I argue that catfish prints nonetheless provide important information about how a particular entity gains the status as a superhuman provider of yonaoshi. Human characters in catfish prints uphold the earthquake catfish as a divine catalyst of the circulation of wealth in Edo and consequently as a rectifier of poverty and social inequality in the city. The catfish shares a striking similarity with other yonaoshi gods as a savior of the impoverished state of a particular community. The earthquake catfish, in other words, reflected as well as constituted an important part of the pervasive influence of yonaoshi discourse in Japanese society in the mid-nineteenth century. Smits also admits that it is difficult to determine precisely what people believed and, based on an analysis of the writings of Tokugawa intellectuals who took the time to refute the idea that a catfish caused earthquakes, concedes that some individuals in Tokugawa Japan might have actually believed in the existence of an earthquake-causing catfish (2013, 32–36). Whatever the case, the fact that catfish prints do not portray a “real” deity does not make these prints any less valuable as historical sources for the study of yonaoshi discourse and the construction of certain entities as yonaoshi gods.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the earthquake catfish is unique as the only example of an animal renewing the world. Depicting an animal as a yonaoshi god accentuates the idea that yonaoshi is to be carried out by a force beyond human or even non-human. This point may be self-evident in a study of yonaoshi “gods,” yet it is still worth noting that what makes
It is also significant that the authority of the catfish is articulated in purely “this-worldly” terms. That is, the catfish deity brings immediate, tangible blessings by solving inequality and poverty. This characteristic, also shared among other yonaoshi gods, reflects a general trend in late Tokugawa religion that places emphasis on addressing immediate needs and concerns in people’s daily lives.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the earthquake catfish is an animal associated with a mythological narrative of a specific religious institution, the Kashima Shrine. Accordingly, yonaoshi in many prints is conceptualized within the framework of the Kashima Shrine’s earthquake legend. This is a characteristic not seen in other examples of yonaoshi gods. Of course, the original legend is one in which the Kashima deity suppresses the catfish and prevents earthquakes. Yet, as discussed above, catfish prints that utilize yonaoshi discourse add a

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37 For few examples, see Miyata and Takada eds. 1995, 274–280.
38 Ambros also highlights the complex and paradoxical aspects of pre-modern Japanese people’s attitudes toward animals. See her discussion of animals attributed with spiritual and cosmological significance (2012, 28–35).
new layer of interpretation to this narrative by highlighting positive outcomes of the 1855 earthquake. In particular, some catfish prints legitimize the earthquake by reversing the Kashima legend and interpreting the earthquake as a manifestation of the will of the Kashima deity. In such instances, the catfish serves as a conduit for the authority of the Kashima deity himself, as one responsible for harnessing the power of earthquakes in order to execute *yonaoshi*. It is difficult to judge, therefore, whether the “real” *yonaoshi* god is the Kashima deity or the earthquake catfish. Nonetheless, in catfish prints, it is almost always the catfish that is at the forefront of the divine work of *yonaoshi*. The Kashima deity is an essential part of the overall narrative and represents the ultimate source of authority, yet he mostly stays in the background, as far as *yonaoshi* is concerned.

As an animal *yonaoshi* god featured in popular satirical productions, the earthquake catfish adds a rich new dimension to this study of *yonaoshi* gods. This chapter has focused on the particular medium of catfish prints, which as a collective represent a forum in which a *yonaoshi* god emerged upon a number of conceptual layers such as disaster (earthquakes), humor, social critique, economy, and folk mythology. As such, the earthquake catfish itself is highly multivalent. However, its aspect as a *yonaoshi* god undoubtedly played a major part in making catfish prints one of the most creative and memorable genres of woodblock prints in Japanese history.
Chapter 6

A Universal Yonaoshi God from the Northeast: Ushitora no Konjin and Ōmotokyō’s Understanding of Japan’s Mission in the World

The preceding chapters have demonstrated that yonaoshi gods in the late Tokugawa and early Meiji years focused on redressing specific problems within existing social and political structures. Contrary to what many believe today, these yonaoshi gods did not claim to change the existing world in any fundamental sense or become leaders of a radically different, ideal world on earth. In the mid-Meiji period, however, a new religious movement emerged upholding a yonaoshi god who proclaimed the imminent establishment of Paradise on Earth. The new religion Ōmotokyō, founded in 1892 by Deguchi Nao, predicted an apocalyptic transformation of the world presided over by a messianic deity by the name of Ushitora no Konjin or the “Golden God of the Northeast.” Grounded in the vision of a total restructuring of the present world in a violent upheaval, Ōmotokyō’s yonaoshi was millenarian. This chapter will show how Ōmotokyō reinterpreted yonaoshi as a millenarian discourse.

The founder of Ōmotokyō, Deguchi Nao, was born in Kyoto in the twelfth month of the seventh year of Tenpō (1837), the same year that the Tokugawa official Suzuki Chikara was deified as a yonaoshi daimyōjin in Fukui. Nao lived through a tumultuous period in Japanese history, contemporaneous to the yonaoshi gods that appeared in late Tokugawa and early Meiji peasant uprisings. Despite the supposed prosperity of the era of “Civilization and Enlightenment” (bunmei kaika 文明開化) in the decades following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Nao’s life as an impoverished, illiterate peasant woman in Kyoto did not improve. Like so many others left behind by the “progress” of modern Japan, Nao continued to embody the “conventional moralities” (tsūzoku dōtoku 通俗道德) of frugality, perseverance, and diligence, even as a relentless series of economic hardships and personal misfortunes befell her.
One evening in 1892, Nao entered a state of trance. A *kami* by the name of Ushitora no Konjin had possessed her. The *kami* revealed to her that he would demolish the present world of evil and build an ideal world in which the good and innocent prosper. Ushitora no Konjin’s message of an imminent transformation of the world appealed to many, and the cult of Ushitora no Konjin soon developed around Nao. When the young and charismatic Ueda Kisaburō 上田喜三郎, later Deguchi Onisaburō (1871–1948), joined hands with Nao, this fledgling religious community developed into a religious movement proclaiming an imminent *yonaoshi* or the “Rebuilding and Reconstruction of the World” (*yo no tatekae tatenaooshi* 世の立替へ立直し).

This movement, Ōmotokyō, eventually became one of the most prominent religious movements in early twentieth-century Japan. Ōmotokyō’s social impact was immense, and the group eventually became an object of two severe government persecutions in 1921 and 1935, partially due to its message of radical world transformation.

Ōmotokyō’s Ushitora no Konjin represents a transformation of early modern *yonaoshi* kami. Ushitora no Konjin differed significantly from Tokugawa-period *yonaoshi* gods in terms of both *yonaoshi*’s content and scope. Rather than seeking to rectify specific conditions in society that negatively affected individuals in a particular community, Ushitora no Konjin proclaimed a total transformation of the entire world. In this narrative of global, millenarian *yonaoshi*, the country of Japan was to play a central role. In particular, Onisaburō argued that Japan, as the spiritual center of the world, had a divine mission to save the world. In fact, Onisaburō equated the great reconstruction of the world with Japan’s eventual unification of the world.

Scholars have already noted Ōmotokyō’s international outlook in the early twentieth century by examining the group’s involvement in a number of multinational initiatives, including
collaboration with a variety of religious movements in continental Asia. However, Ōmotokyō’s understanding of the relationship between Japan and the world as well as doctrinal discussions that informed such an understanding has not received adequate attention. In particular, in the years leading up to the first suppression in 1921, Onisaburō and other key members of Ōmotokyō engaged in a serious reflection on the relationship between Japan and the world or Japan’s mission in the world based on Nao’s teachings, known as the Ofudesaki (御筆先) (literally, the “tip of a brush”), and their own Japan-centric interpretations. I argue that the formulation of Japan’s place in the world served as the foundation for Ōmotokyō’s narrative of global yonaoshi, particularly in the mid- to late 1910s. In arguing this, I will pay particular attention to Ōmotokyō’s mythology, as outlined in the Ofudesaki, and Onisaburō’s writings that reflect on Japan’s sacred mission. In this chapter, I will first briefly outline the history of Ōmotokyō up to the first suppression in 1921 through the lives of Deguchi Nao and Onisaburō and offer a critical reflection on the nature of textual materials available for research on Ōmotokyō, particularly the Ofudesaki. I will then analyze the conceptualization of yonaoshi in Ōmotokyō as articulated in the Ofudesaki and discuss Ōmotokyō’s central mythology concerning Ushitora no Konjin, both of which will in turn inform the discussion of Onisaburō’s reflection of Japan’s divine role in worldwide yonaoshi.

Deguchi Nao and Deguchi Onisaburō

Ōmotokyō’s account of Nao’s life is inevitably hagiographical, with her suffering in life interpreted as preparations for her later career as a religious leader. The goal here is to present an outline of her life as constructed within Ōmotokyō. Nao was born Kirimura Nao in Fukuchiyama
in the northwestern part of Kyoto, in the twelfth month of the seventh year of Tenpō.¹ Nao’s father worked as a carpenter but often indulged in sake and neglected his work. By the time of Nao’s birth, the family had fallen into poverty, with Nao’s mother carrying the burden of raising four children and managing the household. When Nao was ten, her father died of an epidemic disease. From around this time until she was seventeen, Nao worked as a servant at several merchant households. She received no formal education and did not have an opportunity to learn how to read and write, but her diligence earned her a reputation as a filial child. When Nao was seventeen—the sixth year of Kaei (1853), the year of Perry’s arrival—she became an adopted daughter of her aunt Deguchi Yuri 出口ゆり and joined the Deguchi household in Ayabe, east of Fukuchiyama. When she was nineteen, or the second year of Ansei (1855), she married a man named Masagorō 政五郎, a carpenter like her father. In the same year, the Ansei Great Earthquake struck the capital city of Edo.

With Masagorō, Nao gave birth to eleven children, three of whom died at an early age. Although Masagorō was a skilled carpenter, he liked to drink and did not provide for his family, much like Nao’s father. But Nao endured without complaining. In 1873, six years after the Meiji Restoration, an uprising broke out near Ayabe, one of the many protests that characterized the early Meiji period. Although subdued fairly quickly, as many as two thousand peasants gathered together and expressed their displeasure concerning new requirements imposed by the Meiji state, such as conscription and new taxes (Yasumaru 1987, 63–64). A few landlords and merchants in the Ayabe area also took part in the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement (jiyū

¹ The date corresponds to January 1837 in the western calendar. The following account of Nao's life is based on Ōmoto Nanajūnenshi Hensankai 1964, 1:27–105, unless otherwise noted. For more in-depth treatments of Nao’s life, see Yasumaru 1987, Ooms 1993, and Murakami 1975, 113–146.
minken undō 自由民権運動) in the late 1870s and early 1880s (ibid. 64). Nao’s life, however, was quite distant from these developments in Meiji Japan. Nao raised eight children and supported the household by selling tofu and rice cakes. In 1885, however, Masagorō fell from a roof while working and became bedridden. Facing the task of caring for a bedridden husband and two young children (the older children had already left the household), Nao now did not have enough money even to make rice cakes and was reduced to rag-picking (borogai ボロ買い).

Despite Nao’s dedicated care, Masagorō died two years later in 1887, when Nao was fifty-one. Nao’s misfortune continued, however, with two of her daughters going insane in 1890 and 1891.

The following year, 1892, is identified as the year of the founding of Ōmotokyō. On the New Year’s Day of 1892, Nao was possessed by a kami named Ushitora no Konjin. Nao received a revelation from this kami concerning an imminent transformation of the world and the arrival of an ideal world on earth. The kami continued to possess Nao intermittently from this point on. In her state of spiritual possession, Nao often screamed out loud, warning those around her about the impending crisis. In 1893, Nao was deemed insane and was locked up in a cell.

While imprisoned, Nao implored Ushitora no Konjin not to make her scream. Ushitora no Konjin then instructed Nao to write down his revelations. Nao hesitated because she did not know how to write, but Ushitora no Konjin told her to let go of her doubts because he would guide her to write. When Nao picked up a nail on the ground, her hand started to move automatically, writing down words on a wooden pillar. Even after she was released from the cell, she continued to write down the teachings of the kami. This was the beginning of the Ofudesaki, automatic writings produced by Nao while being possessed by Ushitora no Konjin. Nao continued to produce the Ofudesaki for twenty-four years until her death in 1918. Soon after her release, Nao began to
attract a small group of adherents in Ayabe, with accounts of miraculous healing attributed to her and a rumor that she had predicted the Sino-Japanese War in 1894.

Around this time, Nao’s teachings to her adherents focused on the destruction of the present unjust world and the emergence of an ideal world. Nao’s religious activities in Ayabe eventually caught the attention of a local preacher of Konkōkyō 金光教, one of the officially recognized groups of Sect Shinto (kyōha shintō 教派神道), most likely because the primary deity of Konkōkyō is also Ushitora no Konjin.² For some time, Nao preached the teachings of Ushitora no Konjin as a Konkōkyō preacher, but she eventually broke off the connection with the group in 1897, not satisfied with the subordinate role assigned to her. One year after this, Nao came into contact with Deguchi Onisaburō for the first time.

Onisaburō was born Ueda Kisaburō in 1871 in a poor farming family in the Tanba region, close to Kyoto.³ Although the eldest son of the family and thus expected to inherit the household eventually, Onisaburō as a youth engaged in a wide-ranging variety of activities, from learning the Chinese classics to creating satirical paintings to selling lemon soda (ramune ラムネ).

Staring in the early 1890s, Onisaburō began to study under Nativist (Kokugaku 国学) scholar Okada Korehira 岡田惟平 (1821–1909), reading the classic mythologies and also learning Japanese poetry. A few years later, Onisaburō started a dairy business, raising cows and delivering milk. In 1897, Onisaburō’s father died, and several months after this, in February 1898, Onisaburō was involved in a violent incident with local ruffians. He was beaten severely, and he felt ashamed that this incident caused much grief to his mother and aging grandmother.

² See Murakami 1980, 55–68 for the development of Sect Shinto groups in Meiji Japan.
³ The following account of Onisaburō’s life comes from Ōmoto Nanjūnenshi Hensankai 1964, 1:106–163, unless otherwise noted. For more in-depth treatment of his biographical accounts, see Murakami 1978 and Stalker 2008, 20–44.
This incident served as a catalyst that pushed Onisaburō to pursue a spiritual path. The day after the incident he climbed nearby Mount Takakuma and spent a week there engaging in a series of austerities. According to Onisaburō, he journeyed to the realm of the Kami during this training on the mountain and became aware of his spiritual mission of world salvation. After returning from Mount Takakuma, Onisaburō abandoned his dairy business and focused exclusively on spiritual training. He began to practice healing and soon gathered a small following.

Onisaburō’s growing reputation as a spiritual worker soon caught the attention of Nagasawa Katsutate 長沢雄楯 (1858–1940), founder of Inari Kōsha 稲荷講社, a Shintoist group engaged in various spiritual activities including spirit possession via the chinkon kishin 鎮魂帰神 (literally, “pacifying the soul, returning to the divine”) technique. Nativist scholars during the Bakumatsu period had developed the basis of this chinkon kishin technique, performed in a pair consisting of a kannushi 神主 (host) and a saniwa 審神者 (interrogator). Through a series of ritual procedures, the kannushi invites a spirit to possess his/her body. The saniwa then discerns the nature of the possessing spirit, and if deemed evil or malevolent, the saniwa will expel the spirit.4 Nagasawa was a disciple of the well-known Nativist scholar Honda Chikaatsu 本田親徳 (1823–1889). In April 1898, Onisaburō received an invitation to meet Nagasawa. After accepting the offer, Onisaburō traveled to Shizuoka, where the Inari Kōsha headquarters were located. There, Onisaburō studied under Nagasawa for a brief period of time, learning the basics of the chinkon kishin technique. After returning to Tanba, Onisaburō incorporated the chinkon kishin practice into his spiritual work and gained a reputation as an adept saniwa.

4 Yasumaru 1987, 159–162. For more on the chinkon kishin technique and its interpretations in Ōmotokyō, see Staemmler 2002.
Onisaburō first came into contact with Nao’s religious community in 1898 in this capacity as a *saniwa*. According to Ōmotokyo’s account, Onisaburō received a divine message that led him to meet one of Nao’s daughters in the summer of 1898. Nao expressed an interest in Onisaburō as someone potentially qualified to evaluate the *kami* that had possessed her. The first meeting between Nao and Onisaburō took place in October 1898 in Ayabe. Although this initial meeting was brief, after further communication in the following months, Nao and Onisaburō reached an agreement to work together to further their spiritual goals (Yasumaru 1987, 156–167). Nao first requested Onisaburō to build the foundation for an independent organization. Within the same year, Onisaburō established *Kinmei Reigakkai* 金明霊学会, with Nao designated as founder. Onisaburō played a leading role in formulating doctrine, rituals, festivals, and other basic frameworks of this organization. Furthermore, in 1900, Onisaburō married Nao’s youngest daughter, Sumiko すみ子, and was adopted into the Deguchi family (he also changed his name from Kisaburō to Onisaburō around this time). The marriage secured Onisaburō’s leadership position in Ōmotokyo. Onisaburō initially encountered opposition from Nao’s early followers, some of whom viewed with contempt Onisaburō’s rapidly increasing influence. Some also objected that Onisaburō neglected to follow Nao’s teachings to avoid foreign custom, such as wearing western clothes and shoes and eating meat. Even Nao at times felt that Onisaburō’s presence compromised her spiritual authority (Stalker 2008, 38–41).

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5 It is said that Onisaburō encountered Nao’s daughter at a teashop that she helped to run. Ōmoto Nanajūnenshi Hensankai 1964, 1:165–166.
6 For the sake of convenience, I refer to the organization founded through cooperation between Nao and Onisaburō as Ōmotokyo throughout this paper. According to Ōmoto Nanajūnenshi Hensankai 1964, the organizational designation Ōmotokyo (or Ōmoto) was not used until 1913 (1:324). Both before and after this point, the organization took on various names, such as the aforementioned *Kinmei Reigakkai*, Dainihon Shūsaikai 大日本修斎会, Kōdō Ōmoto 皇道大本, and Aizen’en 愛善苑. Today the official designation of Ōmotokyo is Oomoto, adopted in 1952 (ibid. 2:960).
Nonetheless, Onisaburō’s involvement was absolutely pivotal for Nao’s religious movement to gain an independent organizational structure.

The new organization underwent a difficult phase, however, particularly after the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. As discussed below, Nao had prophesied that Japan would experience a total defeat with war against Russia, and her followers expected the apocalypse to commence soon thereafter. When Japan proved victorious, Nao’s popularity declined, and many of her adherents left her. Onisaburō himself maintained some distance from Nao at this time and engaged in his own activities, such as obtaining a certificate as a shrine official (shinshoku 神職) in Kyoto and affiliating with the Sect Shinto groups Ontakekyō 御嶽教 and Taiseikyō 大成教 (Yasumaru 1987, 226–227). Onisaburō’s activities in Ōmotokyō proper resumed around 1908, as he initiated a number of new proselytizing measures such as the formation of a new organizational structure and the publication of a monthly journal. Ōmotokyō gradually regained momentum. Its yonaoshi message, combined with Nativist teachings and spiritual practices focused on the chinkon kishin technique, attracted many to the organization. Ōmotokyō’s proselytizing activities became nationwide in the last years of Meiji and the early Taishō years.7

Ōmotokyō achieved national prominence during World War I and shortly thereafter, a time of severe social and economic turmoil. Ōmotokyō emphasized the ideals of the “Imperial Way” (kōdō 皇道), calling for the realization of a peaceful and virtuous world under the leadership of the emperor. Ōmotokyō adherents at the time called for a Taishō Restoration (Taishō ishin 大正維新), or the realization of true governance based on the way of the kami

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7 Murakami 1978, 92–106. For more on Ōmotokyō’s success in the 1910s, see Stalker 2008, especially Chapters 2 and 3.
(Murakami 1978, 110–112, 121–122). Ōmotokyō’s ideals derived from its interpretation of the Ofudesaki and understanding of Japan as a divine country, not necessarily in line with the visions of the Japanese state. Nonetheless, Onisaburō composed a number of essays during this period explaining his understanding of the divine mission of the country of Japan and ultimately Japan’s place in the world, based on his readings of the Ofudesaki.

Nao died in 1918, at the peak of Ōmotokyō’s national influence in the 1910s. The persecution of Ōmotokyō in 1921 attests to the growing impact of Ōmotokyō in Japanese society. The authorities mobilized two hundred policemen to arrest leaders of Ōmotokyō, who were accused of lèse-majesté and violation of the Newspaper Law (Ōmotokyō at this time operated its own newspaper). In particular, the authorities highlighted Ōmotokyō’s millenarian teachings and some of its doctrines that were deemed disrespectful to the emperor and the imperial household. As will be discussed below, some contents of the Ofudesaki contributed to arousing the authorities’ suspicion.

**Ofudesaki and Related Sources**

As Onisaburō began to develop the doctrinal foundation of Ōmotokyō, he undertook the task of reading and interpreting Nao’s Ofudesaki. No study of Ōmotokyō is complete without touching upon the content of the Ofudesaki in one way or another. However, the Ofudesaki as a printed text poses challenges to scholars due to the complexity of its authorship and redaction process.

Nao wrote down the teachings of Ushitora no Konjin whenever the kami possessed her,

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8 The social prominence of Ōmotokyō is also indicated by the efforts of psychologist Nakamura Kokyō 中村古峡, who, in 1920, dedicated a book to debunking the “superstitions” of Ōmotokyō (Nakamura 1920). Also see Hyōdō 2005 for an analysis of the discourse of “abnormal psychology” (hentai shinri 変態心理) deployed against Ōmotokyō.

9 For an account of the developments leading up to the first suppression and the suppression itself, see Garon 1997, 63–74 and Nadolsky 1975, 91–112.
regardless of the time of the day. She wrote these teachings mostly in hiragana, mixed with some simple kanji, such as those for numbers. Nao wrote the *Ofudesaki* with a brush on Japanese writing papers (*hanshi* 半紙). When writing the *Ofudesaki*, Nao used a lot of ink, wrote very quickly, and pressed hard on the paper. Some parts of the *Ofudesaki*, therefore, are extremely difficult to read (Yasumaru 1987, 103–104; Murakami 1979, 1:172). Yasumaru notes that the *Ofudesaki* makes frequent use of hyperbole and repetition and that the connections between subjects and their predicates are often unclear, allowing for mystical readings of the text (1987, 104). Prior to meeting Onisaburō, because Nao did not know how to read, she asked her close adherents to read for her the writings she produced in her state of possession. The adherents could not read them at first due to the idiosyncrasy of Nao’s calligraphy, but Nao insisted that understanding these writings was crucial to her spiritual work because they contained Ushitora no Konjin’s direct words. Soon, some adherents learned to read the *Ofudesaki* and understand them. Some started to copy them as well, imitating closely Nao’s calligraphic style (ibid.). Some of these copies are so meticulous that today it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between Nao’s original writing and copies made by the adherents (Murakami 1979, 1:173).

As Ōmotokyō began to expand at the national level and Onisaburō assumed the leadership role, Onisaburō started to take control of the handling of the *Ofudesaki*. When Nao produced new *Ofudesaki*, she first gave it to Onisaburō, who then read through it before giving permission to have it read aloud to members during prayer services. Nao also gave her *Ofudesaki* writing directly to some of her adherents, but only Onisaburō had the spiritual authority to organize and even modify the *Ofudesaki* by rendering it into a more readable format by converting most hiragana into kanji and streamlining the sentences (ibid.). Yasumaru even suggests the possibility that Onisaburō composed some passages himself and attributed them to
Nao (1987, 234). Onisaburō also combined phrases that appeared frequently in the *Ofudesaki* and created new passages as a kind of synthesis (ibid. 239). In any case, it was in 1917, when Onisaburō began to publish selected and modified passages of the *Ofudesaki* in the Ōmotokyō monthly journal *Shinreikai* 神霊界, that the *Ofudesaki* became widely available as printed texts.\(^{10}\)

In short, the *Ofudesaki* writings consist of two types: Nao’s original writings, written with ink and a brush on Japanese paper, and the printed edition, edited and modified by Onisaburō. Regarding the first type, many were lost due to the two suppressions. Some were also destroyed by fire. Yasumaru surmises that Ōmotokyō members themselves destroyed the original *Ofudesaki*, fearing persecution (ibid. 106). Today, this first type is preserved by Ōmotokyō and is not made available to the public. Even within Ōmotokyō, these original manuscripts are not made available for members to read (Murakami 1979, 1:175). As a result, when scholars quote the *Ofudesaki*, they inevitably refer to the second, printed type, the authorship or the voice of which is multi-layered. The original author may be Nao, but given Onisaburō’s interventions, it becomes difficult to approach the printed *Ofudesaki* as a pure reflection of Nao’s original thought. The resource that comes closest to representing Nao’s original worldview is a collection of *Ofudesaki* passages known as Ōmoto nenpyō 大本年表 (*Ōmoto Chronology*), compiled sometime around 1923 or 1924 (Ikeda 1982, 1:713–714). Ōmoto nenpyō contains *Ofudesaki* passages with the least amount of modification and editing and is therefore considered closest to

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\(^{10}\) Yasumaru 1987, 237. Short excerpts of the *Ofudesaki* had been made available before this time in Ōmotokyō’s journals, but the excerpts were extremely short and circulation was limited. Technically speaking, the printed passages of the *Ofudesaki* with kanji supplied by Onisaburō were referred to as *Shin’yu* 神諭 (literally, “admonitions of the kami”). However, for the sake of convenience, I will use the designation *Ofudesaki* to refer to all writings attributed to Nao and believed to have been produced in her state of spiritual possession. Also see Yasumaru 1999, 192–193 for a discussion on the distinction between the designations *Ofudesaki* and *Shin’yu.*
the original (ibid.). Yasumaru Yoshio has produced a compelling reconstruction of Nao’s thought and worldview based primarily on passages in Ōmoto nenpyō and a few other resources.¹¹

In this chapter, instead of attempting to extract Nao’s original voice from Onisaburō’s interventions, I will focus on printed Ofudesaki based on the fact that it represents the official voice of Ōmotokyō. After becoming widely available in the Shinreikai journal in 1917, the printed version of the Ofudesaki also represented the medium through which the vast majority of Ōmotokyō members as well as non-members who read the journal learned about the basic teachings of Ōmotokyō. After 1917, Ōmotokyō published several compilations of Ofudesaki passages at different times and in different contexts.¹² For this chapter focusing on Ōmotokyō’s conception of global yonaoshi and Japan’s relationship with the world before the 1921 suppression, I utilize a two-volume compilation of Ofudesaki passages called Ōmoto shin’yu 大本神諭 (hereafter in this chapter, when I use the word Ofudesaki, I refer specifically to passages contained in these two volumes). The two volumes of Ōmoto shin’yu consist of the Heaven Volume (ten no maki 天の巻) and the Fire Volume (hi no maki 火の巻) and represent two of the earliest Ofudesaki compilations in Ōmotokyō’s history. The Heaven Volume was published in November 1919 and the Fire Volume in July 1920.¹³ The two volumes contain all of the Ofudesaki passages originally printed in the Shinreikai journal since the 1917 February issue

¹¹ See Yasumaru 1987, 107–109 for a list of primary source materials Yasumaru used in his work. Ikeda 1982 contains numerous passages from Ōmoto Chronology. Ōmoto Chronology contains many sentences that are incomplete and not necessarily coherent, which is an indication that they are close to Nao’s original. Yet, even these passages in Ōmoto Chronology are written in kanji, not the original hiragana.
¹³ The edition used for this chapter is the Murakami edition with his commentary. In the bibliography, the first volume refers to the Heaven Volume, and the second volume refers to the Fire Volume.
The series was originally conceptualized as a four-part series, but was terminated because the authorities banned and confiscated the Fire Volume in August 1920, claiming that the book was disrespectful to the imperial house (fukei 不敬) and promoted radical thought (kageki shisō 過激思想).\textsuperscript{14}

In addition to the two Ofudesaki compilations, Onisaburō’s compositions published in the Shinrei kai journal since 1917 and other contemporaneous Ōmotokyō publications also offer helpful information for understanding Ōmotokyō’s yonaoshi message and how the leaders of Ōmotokyō interpreted the Ofudesaki. In particular, the writings of Onisaburō, the de facto leader of the organization in the 1910s, were highly influential among Ōmotokyō members. As mentioned earlier, the late 1910s were especially important for the formulation of Ōmotokyō’s view of Japan’s place in the world, as indicated by a number of essays composed by Onisaburō that address this specific issue.

\textit{Yonaoshi in Ōmotokyō}

The language of yonaoshi plays a central role in Ōmotokyō’s doctrine. The phrase \textit{yo no tatekae tatenaoshi 世の立替へ立直し}, which translates as “Rebuilding and Reconstruction of the World,” represents the core of Ōmotokyō’s world transformation teaching. The individual phrases \textit{yo no tatekae 世の立替へ} and \textit{yo no tatenaoshi 世の立直し} also appear independently in the Ofudesaki. The Japanese word \textit{tatekae} has several different nuances, depending on the characters used. It means to build something new in place of an older structure when written with the characters 建替 (literally, “build and replace”). When using the characters 立替 (literally, “make upright and replace”), \textit{tatekae} means making a payment on behalf of somebody else. The

\textsuperscript{14} Murakami 1979, 1:175. The ban occurred one year prior to the first suppression in 1921.
verb *tatekaeru* with the same characters can also mean to replace one thing with something else. The *Ofudesaki* almost always uses the latter characters 立替 for *tatekae* but with the emphasis placed on the meaning of destroying an old structure in order to build something new. One could also argue that *tatekae* here also implies “replacing” the present world with a completely new one.\(^{15}\) The word *tatenaoshi* has the similar meaning of destroying an old structure and building something new, but it also has the additional meaning of restoring something to its proper, original state.\(^{16}\) Although the phrases *yo no tatekae* and *yo no tatenaoshi* have similar, if not identical, meanings in Japanese, they function differently in Ōmotokyō, as Yasumaru has already noted. In the *Ofudesaki*, *tatekae* refers to the destruction of the present world while *tatenaoshi* refers to the reconstruction of the world following the initial phase of destruction.\(^{17}\) Of the two phrases, *yo no tatenaoshi* is closely related to the expression *yonaoshi*, given the semantic and structural similarities. Examples of the use of this *yonaoshi* language in the *Ofudesaki* are too numerous to cite exhaustively. Nonetheless, some representative ones include the following:

Everyone, correct your heart. I will reconstruct the world (*yo no tatenaoshi ita su noja 世の立直し致すのじゃ* ) (Murakami 1979, 2:21).

The world has become so chaotic that it can no longer be left as it is. Ōmoto faces many difficulties because this is a battle between the *kami* that reconstructs the world (*yo no tatenaoshi o itasu kami 世の立直しを致す神*)...and the *kami* that seek to keep things as they are now forever (ibid. 2:41).

There will be another great laundering of the world and because the *kami* will reconstruct the world from its root (根本から世を立直すから *konpon kara yo o tatenaosu kara*), the world will be shaken all at once (ibid. 1:9).

\(^{15}\) Nihon Kokugo Daijiten Dai ni han Henshū linkai 2001, 1005–1006.
\(^{16}\) Nihon Kokugo Daijiten Dai ni han Henshū linkai 2001, 1014.
\(^{17}\) Yasumaru suggests that the distinction between *tatekae* and *tatenaoshi* developed as a result of Onisaburō’s attempts to articulate a more definite program for constructing a new world after the initial phase of destruction. Both processes, Yasumaru also argues, are integral to the Ōmotokyō narrative of world transformation. See Yasumaru 1987, 210–211.
Then I will select from those souls that have been prepared to help [with my work] throughout the world, call them to Ōmoto, and give them appropriate tasks according to their spiritual level. In this way, I will reconstruct the world (yo no tatenaoshi o itasu 世の立直しを致す) (ibid. 1:103).

Ōmotokyō adherents believe that the Ofudesaki contains the direct words of Ushitora no Konjin spoken through Nao. The “I” in the above passages, therefore, stands for Ushitora no Konjin, who will in the very near future reconstruct the world. Many passages in the Ofudesaki bear a prophetic and declarative tone. They warn readers of an impending world transformation and encourage them to start preparing themselves for a great change about to take place. The above passages also describe this change as a battle between good and evil kami and indicate that Ushitora no Konjin will select individuals, presumably Ōmotokyō adherents, to help him with his divine work.

Passages in the Ofudesaki in particular emphasize three points when describing the process of world transformation. First, they stress that Ushitora no Konjin will turn the world “upside down.” The Ofudesaki characterizes the present world as a “world of beasts” (kedamono no yo 獣の世) in which the strong devour the weak and people act selfishly (wareyoshi 利己主義) without thinking of the suffering of others. The world has fallen into a degenerate state, without a remnant of the golden past when righteous kami governed the world. In other words, the world has deviated from its original, ideal state and it is now “inverted” (sakasama 逆様). Ushitora no Konjin will turn the world upside down in order to return it or rectify it to its original condition:

In all things, [I] must take this world in which everything has been turned upside down and twist it back to its original position (monogoto ga mina sakasama ni kaerite oru kono yo o moto e nejinaosaneba naranu 物事が
皆逆様に覆りて居る斯の世を、本へ捻じ直さねばならぬ (ibid. 2:192).

The time has come. Boiled beans will now sprout. Above and below will be inverted (ueshita ni kaerite 上下にかへりて). A world that will last for all eternity will be realized. The kami will manifest his power. The people will be pacified (ibid. 1:11).

What people thought was good was in fact all evil, because the world had been turned upside down (yo ga sakisama ni kaerite orita kara 世が逆様に覆りて居りたから) (ibid. 1:124).

These passages indicate that Ushitora no Konjin’s world reconstruction will involve a complete reversal of the present world. The imagery of inversion, between “above” and “below” as well as “good” and “evil,” emphasizes that the new ideal world will defy all human expectations.

Seemingly impossible things will now become possible, such as boiled beans sprouting. Echoing the language of “fixing” or “restoring” (naosu), which appears repeatedly in the Ofudesaki, the passages here employ the specific expression “twisting back” (nejinaosu). This further highlights the notion of inversion and emphasizes the direct role that Ushitora no Konjin will play in the process of world reconstruction, as in twisting the world back to its original state with his own hands. As Ooms observes, Ōmotokyō’s world transformation narrative rests on its “rejection of the present world as a completely chaotic, evil, and polluted place” (1993, 93–94). This rejection serves as the starting point for a radical and fundamental departure from the present world of evil.

Secondly, the Rebuilding and Reconstruction of the World is catastrophic. Ushitora no Konjin will eliminate all evil in the world and, for all practical purposes, bring an end to the present world. This sweeping transformation will manifest through a series of catastrophic warfare, natural disasters, and other forms of calamity, all presided over by Ushitora no Konjin (Yasumaru 1987, 199, 214–220). The Ofudesaki also describes this process as one of purification.
that will eliminate impure souls from this world (ibid. 178). The passages below illuminate the catastrophic nature of *yo no tatekae tatenaoshi*:

Japanese people first need to reform their hearts (*kaishin*). Otherwise, the people of the world will be reduced to thirty percent [of the current population] (*sekai no jinmin sanbu ni naru zoyo* 世界の人民三分になるぞよ) (ibid. 1:13).

New, eternal laws will be established from now on that prohibit those ugly souls with evil inclinations from having even an inch of space upon which to stand on the soil of this world, not to mention the soil of Japan. So even a very slight element of evil being mixed with good will be separated and punished severely (*genjū ni imashime o itasu zoyo* 厳重に戒めを致すぞよ).

Unless the people of Japan correct their hearts quickly, the suffering of the world (*sekaijū no nanjū* 世界中の難渋) will intensify, and everything will be lost (*nani mo kamo sō sokonai to naru zoyo* 何も彼も総損なひとなるぞよ) (ibid. 1:123).

The process of world reconstruction is unforgiving, tolerating absolutely no evil and potentially exterminating as much as seventy percent of the world’s population. However, the passages here also convey a slightly hopeful message that the people of Japan can help to avert the worst calamity by “reforming their hearts” and becoming aware of their special spiritual mission (discussed in more detail below). Other passages in the Ofudesaki similarly describe the process of world transformation as “a great event of the entire world” (*sekaijū no daiji* 世界中の大事) (ibid. 1:40), “a great suffering for the entire world” (*sekaijū no dainanjū* 世界中の大難渋) (ibid. 1:41), and “a great chaos for the entire world” (*sekaijū no daikonzatsu* 世界中の大混雑) (ibid. 2: 201). This cataclysmic transformation of the world will eventually result in a completely new world (*sappari saratsu no yo* 全然、新つの世) (ibid. 1:3).

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18 Ibid. 1:136. This passage can be read to mean that evil elements in a particular individual will be eliminated or that evil elements will be eliminated from the world as a whole.
Thirdly, passages in the Ofudesaki stress that the catastrophic transformation of the world will take place imminently:

Since the world is approaching [tatekai tatenaoshi] (yo ga semarite kita kara 世が迫りて来たから), there is no telling when the Rebuilding of the World is going to take place. There is no point in regretting after the Rebuilding has begun. I have been warning you for a long time, but there is no other way that I can make you aware [of this great change about to take place] (Murakami 1979, 1:13).

The world is approaching [tatekai tatenaoshi] and is facing certain destruction (zettai zetsumei de aru kara 絶対絶命であるから). There is not a moment to do anything. The kami is in a hurry (kami wa sekeru zoyo 神は急けるぞよ). (ibid. 1:123).

The time is now nearing for everything Ushitora no Konjin has been warning about since the twenty-fifth year of Meiji to burst out in the open…(ibid. 1:129).

These passages convey a definite sense of urgency. Ōmotokyō’s apocalyptic zeal reached its peak around the time of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904 and 1905. As briefly mentioned above, Nao expected this war to mark the beginning of total world transformation. She predicted that Japan would lose this war and that this defeat would initiate the catastrophic transformation of the world declared by Ushitora no Konjin. This period also coincided with the final phase of a series of symbolic austerities Nao undertook with her immediate adherents, known in Ōmotokyō as “the expedition for cultivation” (shussū 出修). Between 1900 and 1905, Nao made a series of trips to the islands Oshima 冠島 and Meshima 杢島, located in the Japan Sea off the coast of Maizuru City and to the northeast of Ayabe.¹⁹ On these two islands, Nao and her followers performed a series of austerities and offered prayers in order to allow Ushitora no Konjin to manifest himself and execute his plan of creating an ideal world on earth. Nao put more emphasis on Meshima, which she identified as the dwelling of Ushitora no Konjin. Expecting a

¹⁹ The two islands are also known as Kanmurijima and Kutsujima, respectively.
disastrous outcome for Japan from the Russo-Japanese War, Nao undertook the final expedition in May 1905. However, Nao’s prophecy failed when Japan achieved victory over Russia in the same month. This marked an important turning point in Ōmotokyō’s history. The failure of Nao’s prophecy disillusioned many, and Onisaburō’s leadership became more prominent thereafter. Nonetheless, the sense of urgency and the immediacy of *tatekae tatenaoshi* remained the same in the *Ofudesaki* even after this failure.

As Ooms and others have already demonstrated, Ōmotokyō’s vision of *yonaoshi* is fully millenarian. Predicting a complete “inversion” of the present world through a series of cataclysmic events, Ōmotokyō proclaimed an imminent establishment of Paradise on Earth by the hands of Ushitora no Konjin. The *Ofudesaki* characterizes this ideal world as a world of beauty, peace, and virtue, described variously as the World of Crystal (*suishō no yo* 水晶の世), the World of Pine (*matsu no yo* 松の世), and the World of Miroku (*Miroku no yo* みろくの世). “Crystal” stands for the purity of the souls of those who will dwell in the future ideal world, while “Pine” connotes the eternal peace and stability of the new world, just as the pine tree never loses its green color. The symbolism of Miroku or Maitreya—the future Buddha, believed to descend on earth to revive Buddhist teachings in the latter degenerate age—also served as a central motif in Ōmotokyō’s millenarianism, particularly for Onisaburō, who eventually identified himself as an incarnation of Maitreya. Using Cohn’s words, Ōmotokyō’s world transformation narrative does not represent a “mere improvement on the present,” but rather it speaks of a radically new world, “perfection itself” (Cohn 2000, 15). Once again, although the

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21 For more on the symbolism of the pine tree, see Ooms 1993, 102–103.
apocalyptic zeal of Ōmotokyō peaked around the time of the Russo-Japanese War and subsided following the failure of Nao’s prophecy, the fundamental millenarian messages in the Ofudesaki remained unchanged.\(^{23}\) Onisaburō also continued to emphasize the immediacy of the arrival of an ideal world on earth, albeit with an attenuation of its destructive dimension.\(^{24}\)

As already evident from the Ofudesaki passages introduced above, Ōmotokyō’s yonaoshi was to encompass the entire globe. Numerous passages refer to specific countries beyond Japan, to the world, and also to the entire cosmos:

Japan and China have existed separately. However, the kami [Ushitora no Konjin] will come forth and will integrate into one both China and India, establishing an eternal sacred nation (hitotsu ni marumete mango matsu1
tsu1ku shinkoku ni itasu zoyo 一つに丸めて、万古末代続く神国に致すぞよ) (Murakami 1979, 1:8).

Numerous kami will emerge throughout the world, in various places, in order to warn people about the Rebuilding of the World. All is according to Ushitora no Konjin’s plan. Ushitora no Konjin has let the world know (sekai e shirashite aruzoyo 世界へ知らして在るぞよ) (ibld. 1:5).

[Ushitora no Konjin] will return the three thousand-fold world back to its [original form of] the divine world of crystal…(sanzensekai o suishō no kamiyo ni tatenaosu 三千世界を水晶の神世に立直す) (ibid. 2:49).

The Buddhist expression “three thousand-fold world” in the Ofudesaki denotes the entire universe (ibid. 1:139). This expression appears frequently in combination with the phrase tatekae tatenaoshi as “the Rebuilding and Reconstruction of the Three Thousand-fold World” (sanzensekai no tatekae tatenaoshi 三千世界の立替え立直し) or simply as the “Reconstruction of the Three Thousand-Fold World” (sanzensekai no tatenaoshi 三千世界の立直し).

\(^{23}\) Ooms perhaps goes too far when she says, “Ōmotokyō, in the early years when Nao’s influence was strongest (1900–1905), represents the most complete manifestation of millenarian thought and action in Japanese history” (1993, 3). Yet, I agree with her assessment that Ōmotokyō’s eschatology and world transformation narrative no doubt betoken the group’s millenarian nature.

\(^{24}\) Murakami 1979, 1:166; Miyata 1988, 188–189. Also see Hardacre 1992 for an analysis of Ōmotokyō’s millenarianism from the perspective of gender.
The cosmic scale of Ōmotokyo’s yonaoshi is significant because it contrasts starkly with the conceptions of yonaoshi examined thus far in this study. Where the preceding yonaoshi gods had a specific geographical focus such as a particular local community, village, or city, Ushitora no Konjin’s yonaoshi implicates the entire universe. Furthermore, Ushitora no Konjin seeks to rectify the present world in a fundamental sense, as analyzed above, and not merely redress specific injustices that exist in a given social structure, such as the high price of rice, unreasonable tax obligations, and social inequality—as did the preceding yonaoshi gods. This universalizing discourse as well as the radical, fundamental nature of the change proposed sets Ushitora no Konjin apart from the other yonaoshi gods.

**Ushitora no Konjin’s Mythology**

An analysis of Ōmotokyo’s mythology centered on Ushitora no Konjin is indispensable for understanding the group’s conception of universal yonaoshi. Ōmotokyo’s mythology in essence tells a story of a righteous kami—Ushitora no Konjin—reinstating himself as a true ruler of the world after a long period of seclusion forced upon him by lesser, evil kami. This divine narrative puts a particular emphasis on the direction of the northeast, both as Ushitora no Konjin’s place of seclusion and also as the direction from which he will reemerge, and on the presence of evil and specifically “foreign” kami that dominate the world as a result of Ushitora no Konjin’s absence.

According to the Ofudesaki, roughly three thousand years ago in the bygone age of the gods, Ushitora no Konjin ruled over the world and implemented a very strict rule over other kami, not allowing even the slightest deviation from his standard of goodness. A group of cunning and evil kami, however, found Ushitora no Konjin’s rule overbearing. They worked together to suppress Ushitora no Konjin in the direction of northeast and succeeded in usurping his rule. As these evil kami began to rule the world, they inverted the standard of good and evil and labeled
Ushitora no Konjin as an evil *kami* now confined in the northeast. Since then, people started to avoid that direction, fearing it as inauspicious (*kimon* 鬼門). With Ushitora no Konjin exiled and with evil *kami* in power, the world became a dark place filled with corruption and chaos. After three thousand years of this evil rule, the time has come for Ushitora no Konjin, falsely branded as a malevolent *kami*, to re-emerge and save the world. Ushitora no Konjin possessed Deguchi Nao, who, like Ushitora no Konjin, had patiently endured tremendous hardships in life—thereby qualified to serve as his vessel—and proclaimed the end of the present world of evil and the revival of a righteous world under his rule.\(^{25}\)

Although Nao referred to the *kami* who possessed her simply as Ushitora no Konjin, Onisaburō identified this *kami* using a variety of names but most prominently as Kunitokotachi no Mikoto 国常立命, one of the primordial deities who appears both in the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki*. This unique interpretation most likely stemmed from Onisaburō’s knowledge of the classic mythologies (Murakami 1978, 75–76) as well as his assessment that Nao’s teachings based on her communications with Ushitora no Konjin—a *kami* also worshipped in Konkōkyō, an organization with which Nao was once affiliated—required an independent doctrinal foundation. In Ōmotokyō, Kunitokotachi no Mikoto has the status of both the root ancestral *kami* as well as the creator of the world. Technically speaking, the designation “Ushitora no Konjin” is appropriate only after the *kami*’s seclusion in the direction of northeast or *ushitora* 艮.

 Nonetheless, I use this designation throughout this chapter, following Nao and also for the sake of convenience.

Ōmotokyō interprets the history of the world through this mythological framework as a conflict between the righteous Ushitora no Konjin and evil *kami*, inflicted by Ushitora no

\(^{25}\) For more analysis of this basic mythological narrative in Ōmotokyō, see Yasumaru 1987, 127–142; Ooms 1993, 87–107; and Stalker 2008, 59–60.
Konjin’s temporary loss of power and his eventual, redemptive reinstatement as the legitimate ruler of the world. Numerous passages in the *Ofudesaki* reference this basic mythological paradigm. Some of these passages refer to the direction of the northeast simply as “north,” but it is clear that they actually imply northeast (again, evident from the *kami*’s name itself):

Because the true, original living *kami* who possessed power was sent to a northern corner (*kita no hashi ni otosarete* 北の極に落とされて), the *kami*’s light was hidden. Hence the world has been covered in darkness until now. This is why none of people’s desires could come true. (Murakami 1979, 1:18).

This time, Ushitora no Konjin will manifest from the north (*kita kara ushitora no Konjin ga arawarete* 北から艮の金神が現れて) and will turn this world into the World of Crystal. He will explicitly distinguish between good and evil and will clearly make known the rewards given to the good and the punishments given to the wicked. Ushitora no Konjin will correct the hearts of the people of the world and will create an eternal world in which goodness will serve as the sole governing principle (ibid. 1:19).

Evil *kami* (*warugami* 悪神) have been ruling over the world. They have brought chaos and confusion to this world through their unrestrained and egocentric ways. But now the time has come for the original living *kami* of the past to offer protection over the three thousand-fold world (ibid. 1:63).

These passages describe various negative consequence of the seclusion of Ushitora no Konjin, as discussed above. The imagery of the world covered in darkness due to Ushitora no Konjin’s absence echoes the classic mythology of Amaterasu’s seclusion in a cave. Accordingly, the *Ofudesaki* describes the emergence of Ushitora no Konjin as the “second opening of the rock (cave) gate” (*nidome no iwato biraki* 二度目の岩戸開き).26 Many passages also stress the idea of Ushitora no Konjin “manifesting in the world” (*yo ni arawareru* 世に現れる) or “coming to the fore” (*omote ni deru* 表に出る). According to the passages above, once the world regains the

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26 For more on the imagery of the “second opening of the cave,” see Yasumaru 1987, 144–145.
light of the righteous *kami*, it will also regain the proper standard of good and evil, as Ushitora no Konjin will reward the good and punish the wicked.\(^\text{27}\)

Furthermore, the *Ofudesaki* identifies the present degenerate world as a world dominated by evil and specifically “foreign” *kami*. Described in the *Ofudesaki* as “evil *kami* of foreign countries” (*gaikoku no warugami* 外国の悪神) (Murakami 1979, 1:114) and “guardian *kami* of foreign countries” (*gaikoku no shugojin* 外国の守護神) (1:132), these foreign *kami* have succeeded in taking control of the world, utilizing Ushitora no Konjin’s absence to their advantage. As a result, as lamented repeatedly in the *Ofudesaki*, the people of Japan feel that foreign countries are better than Japan and try to copy foreign things and foreign ways of doing things:

The way of doing things in the world has been changed to the utterly evil way of foreign countries (*gaikoku no gokuaku no yarikata* 外国の極悪のやり方), which is incompatible with Japan. The people of Japan, like the blind and the deaf, have been tricked into doing things in this foreign way without realizing. It is no wonder that they cannot understand [the teachings of Ōmotokyō] (ibid. 1: 52).

[Japanese people] were misled into thinking that foreign teachings are the best in the world (*gaikoku no oshie o sekai ichi no yoki mono to omoi mayowasarete* 外国の教を世界一の善きものと思ひ迷はされて). Their most fundamental Japanese souls have been replaced by empty souls...(ibid. 1:99).

[The people of Japan] have locked their hearts, thinking, “Foreign countries are better.” So even if you tell them the truth, they interpret everything upside down. There really is no way to save them (ibid. 1: 68).

It is impossible not to read these passages within the context of Japan’s rapid modernization and westernization since the late nineteenth century. The passages emphasize that the people of Japan are misguided in thinking of foreign or Western ways of doing things as better than the Japanese

\(^{27}\) See Franck 1975, 53–56 for a post-war interpretation of Ushitora no Konjin’s myth, as heard by author and artist Fredrick Franck during his visit to Ōmotokyō in the 1970s.
way or even compatible with Japan. Having lost their Japanese souls, the people of Japan are unable to comprehend the teachings of Ōmotokyō, and they interpret everything “upside down” (sakasama bakari ni toru逆様突に取る). Other passages in the Ofudesaki offer more explicit criticisms of the Japanese state:

The way of doing things in the world today is completely beast-like (marukiri chikushō no yarikata全部畜生の行方). The strong squeeze sweat and oil out of the weak, and they use that sweat and oil to climb up to high places. From high above, they look down on the weak while sticking out their tongue. This is called a demonic world (akuma no yo悪魔の世). With this much disparity between the high and the low in the world, it is impossible to create a world without conflict. They keep copying foreign countries and say this is the enlightened way of running the world. But what enlightenment is there [in this world] (ibid. 2:211)?

Once upon a time, people used to wear traditional formal attire (kamishimo裃), and in all things, there were propriety and harmony. But now a time has come when we live in a world where, thinking that foreign teachings are superior, even the leader of this world (konoyo no taishō現代の大将) wears western clothes and shoes. Traditional attire has been torn apart…(ibid. 2:7).

The first passage points out the increasing disparity between the rich and the poor that emerged as a result of Japan’s industrialization. Echoing numerous other passages in the Ofudesaki, it characterizes the foreign “enlightened” (hiraketa開けた) way of running the world as beastly. It is possible to read the “leader of this world” in the second passage as referring to the emperor of Japan (Murakami 1979, 2:277). An emperor who wears western clothing and shoes, this passage implies, is unable to lead Japan. The two passages introduced above both come from the second volume of Ōmoto shin’yu. They make it easy to see why the government banned this volume soon after its publication. In addition to these extremely overt criticisms of the modern Japanese state, other passages in this second volume characterize modern Japan as “a world of beasts”
(kedamono no yo 獣の世) (2:48) and describe the entire world as “filthy like mud water”
(doromizu dōyō ni yogoreteiru 泥水同様に汚れて居る) (2:63).

In sum, the world has degenerated to a hopeless point due to the seclusion of Ushitora no Konjin in the northeast and the growing influence of foreign kami. The catastrophic Rebuilding and Reconstruction of the World provides the only way of redeeming this pathetic state. As the next section will illuminate, this mythological framework served as the basis for Ōmotokyō’s formulation of Japan’s position in the world. In particular, the emphasis on the northeast as the place of Ushitora no Konjin’s seclusion and the urgent need to reassert the spiritual centrality of Japan serve as critical ingredients in conceptualizing the relationship between Japan and the world as well as Ōmotokyō’s yonaoshi narrative.

Ōmotokyō’s Conception of the Relationship Between Japan and the World

Ōmotokyō’s view of the world hinges upon the belief that Japan has a special spiritual mission to help and lead other countries during the Rebuilding and Reconstruction of the World and, ultimately, to unify the entire world. Not surprisingly, Onisaburō played a central role in formulating a systematic view on Japan’s position in the world. In doing this, Onisaburō placed particular importance on Japan’s location in the northeastern corner of the world, based on his interpretation of the Ofudesaki and Ushitora no Konjin’s mythology. He also argued that Japan served as the prototype or blueprint of the world during the time of creation and, based on this argument, “universalized” Japan as the true origin of the entire world. Being the original, spiritual center of the world, it was only natural that Japan had been endowed by the gods with the sacred mission of world unification.
In an essay published in the July 1 issue of the Shinreikai journal in 1918, Onisaburō offers his interpretation of Ushitora no Konjin’s mythology outlined in the Ofudesaki. At the beginning part of this essay, he discusses the significance of the direction of the northeast:

First, the general meanings of the direction of the northeast (ushitora) can be summarized as the “beginning” (hajime 艮め), “solidification” (katame 艮め), and “finalization” (todome 艮め). The divine country of Japan, located in the northeast or ushitora of our Earth, was the first country prepared and solidified by great kami. That is why ushitora is both beginning and solidification. This precious divine country of the rising sun in ushitora inherently possesses a heaven-endowed mission of unifying the world and protecting as well as caring for all people of the world. That is why Japan is also the country to finalize things (todome o sasubeki kuni 艮めを刺す可き國) (Deguchi 1935, 5:626).

Onisaburō’s reading of the character ushitora as hajime, katame, and todome is idiosyncratic and represents his own unique and liberal interpretation of the character, a technique he employs frequently in his writing. He uses the three readings of the character ushitora as “beginning,” “solidification,” and “finalization” to discuss the significance of Japan, a country located in the northeastern part or ushitora of the world. By explicitly identifying Japan’s location as the northeast of the world, Onisaburō links the mythology of Ushitora no Konjin’s seclusion in the northeast with the geographical location of Japan. Of course, Ushitora no Konjin’s connection to Japan would have seemed self-evident to Ōmotokyō adherents. Yet, by “mapping” Ōmotokyō’s mythology onto the world and by pointing out Japan’s relatively northeastern position, Onisaburō creates a parallel between the invisible world of mythology and world geography. This parallel helps to naturalize as well as legitimize Ushitora no Konjin’s manifestation in Japan. Using this parallel as the basis and combining it with his unique interpretation of the character of ushitora, Onisaburō characterizes Japan as both the first country that appeared on earth and as the country destined to unify the world.
As mentioned briefly above, Nao had previously identified the island of Meshima off the coast of Maizuru as the abode of Ushitora no Konjin, most likely based on the location of the island to the northeast of Ayabe. From 1900 to 1905, until the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War, Nao conducted periodic ritual activities on the Meshima and nearby Oshima islands in order to welcome Ushitora no Konjin to the outside world. As Ooms argues, the act of identifying a particular place as Ushitora no Konjin’s dwelling allowed Nao’s adherents to see in visible and concrete terms the significance of the otherwise abstract mythological account of their deity’s confinement in the northeast (1993, 59–60). In the essay above, Onisaburō makes a similar move but on a much larger, global scale. In the same essay, Onisaburō states that Nao’s teaching about the two islands of Meshima and Oshima functions as a metaphor (tatoe no yō na mono 譬へのやうなもの) (Deguchi 1935, 5:626). He acknowledges that part of Ushitora no Konjin’s spirit had resided in the two islands, but ultimately writes that he sees the two islands simply as a symbol or a miniature version of Japan (Nipponkoku no shukuzu 日本國の縮圖).\footnote{Ibid. Nao, once again, identified the island of Meshima specifically as Ushitora no Konjin’s abode.}

In other words, the two islands to the northeast of Ayabe stand for Japan, a country located in the northeastern part of the world. According to Onisaburō’s interpretation, Nao’s ritual activities on the two islands that invited Ushitora no Konjin to break out of his confinement also symbolized the beginning of Ushitora no Konjin’s emergence out of Japan and his spiritual activities at the global level.

Onisaburō thus projects the mythology of Ushitora no Konjin’s seclusion in, and re-emergence from, the direction of the northeast onto the binary paradigm between Japan (northeast) and the world. The time has come for Ushitora no Konjin to extend his influence beyond Japan (northeast) and manifest himself as the true righteous kami in the world.
Ofudesaki repeatedly stresses that the Ushitora no Konjin will soon “manifest in the world” (yo ni deru 世に出る), but the “world” here simply means the “outside world,” used in contrast to Ushitora no Konjin’s state of confinement. The “world” Onisaburō speaks of in his essay refers to the actual world with countries, as represented on the globe.

Onisaburō equates Ushitora no Konjin’s emergence in the world with Japan’s unification of the world. In more concrete terms, the unification of the world for Onisaburō means that the emperor of Japan would become the ruler of the world (Deguchi 1935, 627). This may seem to contradict the Ofudesaki passage that denounced the Japanese emperor for wearing western clothes and shoes. Yet, the emperor that Onisaburō speaks of here is a highly idealized emperor, based on his own understanding of the “Imperial Way” as the governing principle of Japan, as mentioned above (Yasumaru 1987, 221–225). Of course, his understanding of this “Imperial Way” derived from sets of unique doctrinal and mythological interpretations incompatible with the state sanctioned Shinto ideology. Furthermore, scholars generally agree that the harsh criticisms of the Japanese state, especially those denouncing the emperor or leaders of Japan as copying foreigners, reflect Nao’s sentiments and that Onisaburō held more liberal attitudes toward Western ideas and custom. In any case, Onisaburō explains in the same essay that time is now ripe for the emperor of the country of Japan, the root country of the world (sekai no konponkoku 世界の根本国) in the northeast, to become the unifier of the whole world (Deguchi 1935, 627).

Onisaburō’s assertion of the centrality of Japan echoes his closely related theory concerning Japan’s special status as the prototype for the world’s nations. He explains this theory in an unpublished manuscript dated simply as “1915.” This document, distributed to a small

29 For more on Onisaburō’s heterodox views on Shinto, see Murakami 1978, 74–76 and Stalker 2008, 59–60.
group of trusted adherents, explicates Onisaburō’s views on a wide-ranging variety of topics, including the spiritual structure of the world, the relationship among primary deities, and the organizational structure of Ōmotokyō. In it, Onisaburō explains the relationship between Japan and the world:

Truly, when one opens up a map of the world and compares the shapes of countries around the world and the shape of Japan, it is not difficult to see how similar they are and to see the remnant of the fact that they derived from the same original models (dōitsu tenkei 同一典型):

Asia and Europe are our Honshu.
North America is our Hokkaido.
South America is our Taiwan Island.
Africa is our Kyushu Island.
Australia is our Shikoku Island.

When you compare and analyze these corresponding places on a map, you can learn a lot [from their similarities] (Ikeda 1982, 2:22).

Based on the shapes of the major Japanese islands and world continents, Onisaburō suggests that Japan served as a model country when all the other countries and continents around the world were created. For Onisaburō this rather forced observation proved that the creator kami created Japan first as the “root country” or the prototype for all later creations. He also includes Taiwan—under Japanese control in 1915 and until 1945—in this framework, as the model for South America.

Only a small number of members had access to the above document, but Onisaburō shared this theory with a wider audience a few years later in 1918 in the January issue of the Shinreikai journal. In this essay, Onisaburō makes the same comparison but uses the specific word “prototype” (hinagata 雛形) to describe Japan’s special role in the world, as a country endowed with the “heaven-endowed task of ruling over the world” (sekai o suburu kamuwaza 世界統領の使命).
Just a few months later, in the May issue of the same journal, Onisaburō published yet another essay explaining the correspondences between the Japanese islands and world continents. In this essay, he acknowledges that the shapes do not correspond perfectly, but explains that the disparities come from the fact that both the Japanese islands and major continents had changed their shapes significantly since the time of creation. He goes on to offer the following explanation of the importance of the country of Japan:

Japan is number [only?] one in the world, and it is the center of the earth (chi no chūšū 地の中樞). It also serves as the highest council of all things, including literature, religion, and education. Japan is a country where one can sleep with one’s head rested on a pillow in the tropics while the legs are stretched in cold weather. All climates as well as all geological and natural traits are assembled in Japan. In other words, it is a miniature copy of all that exists in the world (sekai issai no shō shukusha 世界一切の小縮寫). No, rather, Japan is the core country among all countries in the world and the central administration in the unification of all countries (Deguchi 1935, 2:425).

Onisaburō reiterates the special status of Japan as the original prototype of the entire world, while also emphasizing that Japan also represents the conglomeration of all that exists in the world, covering anything from literature to climate. According to Onisaburō, since Japan served as a model for all other countries, it is natural that Japan contains all the features found in individual countries around the world. Onisaburō uses this viewpoint once again as the basis upon which to claim Japan’s divine role in world unification.

Asano Wasaburō 浅野和三郎 (1874–1937), a scholar of English literature who joined Ōmotokyō in 1916, made frequent use of Onisaburō’s theory in his writings and speeches. Asano played a major role in Ōmotokyō’s growth through the use of his network and literally skills. He was also instrumental in the establishment of the Shinreikai journal, through which Onisaburō

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shared many of his teachings and to which Asano himself contributed. Asano also wrote for a general readership and explained Ōmotokyō’s fundamental tenets in easy-to-access language. For example, in 1919, he published a short book for a general readership titled, The Truth of the Taishō Restoration (Taishō ishin no shinjitsu 大正維新の真実). In this publication, Asano explains Ōmotokyō’s vision of tatekae tatenaoshi and how it will lead to the realization of an ideal society based on kami-inspired principles of governance. In one section of this book, Asano introduces Onisaburō’s theory on the special role given to Japan as the prototype of the world:

Kunitokotachi no Mikoto, in preparing and solidifying this world, first created Japan in the northeastern corner of the surface of Earth specially as the boundary region (kyōiki 境域) where the great leader governing the world of kami as well as the world of human will reside. From the placement of mountains and rivers to the spacing between land and sea, [Kunitokotachi] worked on every intricate detail and perfected everything, so that there were absolutely no shortcomings. After this was completed, [Kunitokotachi] then created the world’s continents using it [Japan] as a model (hyōhon 標本). That is, he created Africa using Kyushu as its prototype (hinagata); Australia, using Shikoku as its prototype; South America, using Taiwan as its prototype; North America, using Hokkaidō as its prototype; and also the Eurasian continent, using Honshū as its prototype (Ikeda 1982, 2:158).

In this passage, Asano clearly identifies Kunitokotachi no Mikoto or Ushitora no Konjin as the creator of the world. Following Onisaburō, Asano writes that the kami first created Japan and then created the other continents by modeling them after portions of Japan. He also writes that Kunitokotachi no Mikoto prepared Japan as the “boundary region,” a residence of the leader of the world of kami and the world of human. In other words, Japan represents a special place that straddles the boundary between the realms of humans and kami. As such, Japan has a special mission in the world. In fact, immediately preceding the passage cited above, Asano writes as follows:

31 For more on Asano’s involvement in Ōmotokyō and also his engagement with the spiritualism movement in early twentieth-century Japan beyond Ōmotokyō, see Hardacre 1998.
If we were to suppose that Japan is the head, then the other countries can be seen as the limbs and torso. The people of every country have special characteristics, but the highest and most important missions are given to the Japanese (ibid.)

Much like Onisaburō, Asano accords Japan and its people a special leadership role in the world. The theory of Japan as the original country was most likely well known among Ōmotokyo members, given its frequent appearance in the group’s publications. It is also significant that Asano chose to introduce this theory in his book written for a general readership. This implies that Asano regarded the theory as a central component of Ōmotokyo’s teaching. Given Asano’s influence in Ōmotokyo at the time of the publication of this book, it is also likely that many others in Ōmotokyo shared his opinion.

Onisaburō, however, expanded the notion of Japan’s special role as the prototype of the world to its logical extreme. In 1918, in the September 1 issue of the Shinreikai journal Onisaburō writes as follows:

There are three ways of understanding the significance of the country of Japan: Small Japan (shō Nippon koku 小日本國), meaning Japan in the far east; Middle Japan (chū Nippon koku 中日本國), meaning the entire world; and Great Japan (dai Nippon koku 大日本國), meaning the entire universe. These three layers of Japan have maintained a completely integral and orderly relationship according to the ancient plans and covenants of the kami and have developed together throughout history… (Deguchi 1935, 78).

Most definitely based on his theory of Japan as the prototype of the world, Onisaburō universalizes “Japan” in this passage. He refers to the actual country of Japan as Small Japan, the entire world as Middle Japan, and the whole universe as Great Japan. He also suggests that these

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32 Also see Ikeda 1982, 2:213–214 for another example of Asano discussing this theory with the general audience. This is a record of Asano’s speech delivered to a group of university students at the University of Kyoto on December 10, 1920. The record was created by a policeman who had infiltrated into Ōmotokyo prior to the first state suppression in 1921. Also see Ikeda’s helpful commentary (2:903).
three layers or levels of “Japan” exist in a kind of symbiotic relationship, maintaining a mutually influential relationship between each other. Onisaburō makes a similar but slightly different statement in the unpublished manuscript from 1915 discussed above:

The five great continents of the world are called Great Japan (dai Nippon koku) and Japan in the Far East is called Small Japan (shō Nippon koku) (Ikeda 1982, 2:21).

This passage immediately precedes Onisaburō’s delineation of the correspondence between the shapes of the Japanese islands and the major continents examined earlier. In this passage, Onisaburō uses the term Great Japan to refer to the entire world, as opposed to Middle Japan. Although specific terminologies differ, the underlying idea remains the same. The country of Japan represents the spiritual core of the world. Not only that, it simultaneously embodies the entire world and ultimately the universe itself. Onisaburō interprets the world or the universe as a whole as an expanded version of an microcosm called “Japan.” In other words, Onisaburō sees Japan as the original and everything else as an enlarged copy or a projection.

Richard Fox Young has analyzed the universalizing discourse of Ōmotokyō based on the group’s conception of “all religions sharing the same root” (bankyō dōkon 万教同根). According to Young, Ōmotokyō universalized itself by characterizing itself as the true source of all world religions (Young 1988). Using a similar logic, Onisaburō universalized Japan as the source of all cultures, religions, and even natural elements, as discussed above. By literally “mapping” Japan onto the world, Onisaburō creates an all-encompassing framework through which to authenticate Japan’s spiritual preeminence.

Onisaburō’s discussions of Japan as the original country located in the direction of the northeast, Japan’s role as the prototype of the world, and the “universalized” notion of Japan—all of which support Japan’s unique spiritual status—echo many passages in the Ofudesaki,
especially those claiming the urgency of returning to the original Japanese way or bringing back the original Japanese essence:

First of all, I [Ushitora no Konjin] will have the people of the country of Japan return to their original Japanese spirit (yamato damashī ni tachikaerashite日本魂に立復らして) and make it distinct from the foreign spirit (Murakami 1979, 2:129).

[The people of Japan] have been tricked by the people of foreign countries, and their unrestrained ways have made a mess of the country of Japan. The country of Japan has been made completely filthy and there is no more space left. This clouded country of Japan will return to the original world of the kami and will be made a World of Crystal (ibid. 1:109).

Evil kami of foreign nations (gaikoku no warugami 外国の悪神) have been devising a scheme from the beginning of the world, when the world was still a sea of mud. Their scheme has succeeded smoothly thus far, things going their way one after another, but the rule of evil kami is transient (ibid. 1:114).

As discussed in the previous section, the Ofudesaki describes the present world as dominated by evil foreign kami. According to these passages, reinstituting the original Japanese way or Japanese spirit is tantamount to overcoming evil foreign ways. As also evident in the passages above, many Ofudesaki entries stress the idea that the people of Japan first need to renew their hearts or regain their original Japanese spirit in order to save the world:

Japan is the first country that the kami created. It is the original parent country (moto no oyaguni 元の親國). Therefore, it has the mission of protecting the entire world. The mission of the divine country cannot be accomplished unless it saves the other countries from their predicaments. First, the people of the country of Japan will be twisted back to the heart of kami (kamigokoro ni neji naoshite 神心に捩じ直して), and then foreigners must also be changed into the heart of kami, every one of them (ibid. 1:122).

If things were to be left as they are now, Japan will be taken by foreign countries, and the world will turn to a sea of mud. [Ushitora no Konjin] will shorten the Age of the Degenerate Dharma (Mappō no yo o chijimete 末法の世を縮めて) and will turn it into the World of Pine. He will let the divine nation of Japan serve as an example and have foreigners follow this
example. The divine world will last for all eternity, and Ushitora no Konjin will provide protection over the three thousand-fold world, providing peace to kami, buddhas, and humans (ibid. 1:99–100)

People of the world, correct your hearts as soon as possible. In order to make this possible, it is of utmost importance that the people of Japan correct their hearts. As long as the people of Japan correct their hearts, then the world will become a good place (ibid. 1:80).

In facing the impending Rebuilding and Reconstruction of the World, Japan, as the original, “parent” country, first needs to regain its original essence and serve as a good example for the rest of the world. Once Japan, the prototype of the world, regains its original spirit, then the rest of the world will also follow suit. These passages also resonate with Onisaburō’s basic assumption that Japan has the divine mission of protecting and saving other countries. An inherent tension exists in the Ofudesak in that overcoming of evil foreign ways simultaneously represents the only way of saving foreign countries.

This fundamental relationship between Japan and the world also directly informed Onisaburō’s views on the process of yo no tatekae tatenaoshi. In an essay summarizing Ōmotokyō’s mythology published in the February issue of the Shinreikai journal in 1918, Onisaburō explains that the principle of “Spirit over Matter” (reishu taijū 霊主体従) governed the world during Ushitora no Konjin’s reign in the golden past. Yet, due to his seclusion, the principle of “Matter over Spirit” (taishu reijū 体主霊従) has come to characterize the world, creating a world in which the strong devour the weak and winners prosper while losers suffer. Now, Ushitora no Konjin will break out of his confinement and reestablish a virtuous world by bringing back the principle of “Spirit over Matter” (Ikeda 1982, 2:597–599). Although not explained explicitly in this particular essay, Onisaburō elsewhere in his writings identifies the
principle of “Spirit over Matter” with Japan and “Matter over Spirit” with foreign countries.\textsuperscript{33} Also, in the same essay, Onisaburō identifies Ushitora no Konjin as the national ancestor (kokuso 國祖), indicating that the reinstatement of his rule is the same as the reestablishment of the original Japanese way, as stressed also in the Ofudesaki passages above. Therefore, Onisaburō himself also interpreted Ōmotokyō’s yonaoshi narrative based on Ushitora no Konjin’s mythology essentially as a process of reinstituting the original Japanese spirit in the world.

\textit{Yonaoshi, Japan, and the World}

Ōmotokyō’s formulation of the relationship between Japan and the world, grounded by the significance of Japan’s special spiritual mission, served as the foundation of Ōmotokyō’s vision of global yonaoshi. The understanding that Japan represents the true origin of the world, or even the entire universe, constituted the core of Ōmotokyo’s yonaoshi narrative, which focused on restoring the original Japanese spirit in the world by reinstituting the rule of Ushitora no Konjin. Unlike the previous renditions of yonaoshi examined in this study, Ōmotokyō’s yonaoshi was fully millenarian. Rather than claiming to redress specific forms of injustice within a particular community, Ōmotokyo expanded the scope of yonaoshi to the entire globe and predicted the imminent establishment of a completely new, ideal world. The group claimed that this world would emerge after a catastrophic end of the present world of evil, a cataclysmic change that would involve all nations and go far beyond simply correcting discrete problems. Ushitora no Konjin emerged as a universal yonaoshi god presiding over this apocalyptic transformation and as a restorer of the virtuous Japanese spirit. Ōmotokyō’s yonaoshi was global, yet fundamentally “Japanese” at the same time.

\textsuperscript{33} See, for example, Onisaburō’s essay in Deguchi 1935, 27–35, especially 29 and 35.
Onisaburō formulated his ideas about Japan’s relationship with the world through the mythological lens of Ushitora no Konjin’s redemptive emergence from the northeast. Rather than relativizing Japan with respect to the rest of the world, Onisaburō instead “universalized” Japan both as the prototype of the world and also as the leader of the future Paradise on Earth. Onisaburō’s discourse that “Japanized” the whole world is inevitably highly ethnocentric. Onisaburō very frequently utilized his explications on the privileged status given to Japan as means of legitimizing Japan’s eventual rise as the unifier of the world, as did Asano. When taken at face value, Onisaburō’s Japan-centric views seem to converge readily with the nationalistic slogans of the Japanese state in the early twentieth century, as Yasumaru notes (1987, 222–225). For example, Onisaburō’s claim that the creator kami modeled the South American continent after the “Japanese” island of Taiwan took for granted and actively legitimized the expansionist agendas of the Japanese state. Nonetheless, from the eyes of the Japanese state, Onisaburō’s view of Japan, mythology, and his “Imperial Way” were deviant, as is evident from the fact the authorities listed Ōmotokyō’s “problematic” doctrine as one of the reasons for the persecution of the group in 1921.34

Ōmotokyō’s conception of Japan’s unique role represents one example of how a religious community in the early twentieth century imagined “Japan” in the world. In the increasing prevalence of discourses on “Japan,” “the nation,” and “Japan and the world” since the mid-nineteenth century, it was perhaps natural or inevitable for the “world” of “world renewal” to gain a global perspective as well, beyond one’s immediate community. In Ōmotokyō, this global outlook combined with the group’s mythology that focused on the battle between forces of good and evil as well as the group’s ethnocentric worldview. The combination of global awareness,

34 Also see Stalker’s discussion on the difference between what she calls “popular ethnocentrism” and “statist nationalism” (2008, 73).
mythology, and ethnocentrism served as the basis of or perhaps even facilitated the reinterpretation of yonaoshi discourse in sweeping, millenarian terms.

Ōmotokyō’s conception of yonaoshi informed by the formulation of Japan’s special spiritual mission predates group’s international initiatives in the 1920s, but most likely served as the doctrinal basis of these activities. It was not particularly paradoxical or contradictory for Onisaburō to promote these multinational projects while at the same time claiming the uniqueness of Japan. For him, all countries, cultures, and religions shared the same essence and derived from the same source, that is, Japan. Precisely how Onisaburō’s Japan-centric discourse manifested in Ōmotokyō’s international endeavors in the 1920s and how such discourse functioned in relation to the fundamental message of yonaoshi, particularly in Ōmotokyō’s affiliation with religious movements abroad, must await a future study. However, the analysis in this chapter shows that Ōmotokyō engaged in a serious reflection on Japan’s place in the world through a particularly mythological as well as ethnocentric framework. This reflection directly informed Ōmotokyō’s call for global and millenarian yonaoshi in the 1910s.
Conclusion

This study has analyzed the rise and prominence of *yonaoshi* gods in Japanese society from the late eighteenth through the early twentieth centuries. Appearing in a variety of social contexts ranging from peasant uprisings to natural disasters to new religions, *yonaoshi* gods represented an important facet of Japanese history during this period. In the late Tokugawa and early Meiji years, *yonaoshi* gods served primarily as savior gods who rectified the impoverished state of particular communities by correcting specific problems. Later in the Meiji period, Ōmotokyō reinterpreted *yonaoshi* as a millenarian discourse that encompassed the entire world in an apocalyptic drama of world transformation and upheld Ushitora no Konjin as its *yonaoshi* god, a messianic deity who would rule over a future paradise on earth. The rise of *yonaoshi* gods in the late eighteenth century reflected an increasing emphasis on this-worldly salvation in Tokugawa Japan, especially in ways directly linked to people’s daily lives. Many sought deliverance from suffering here and now and interpreted rectifications of specific negative conditions in their lives through the power of divine beings as concrete forms of salvation. The Tokugawa period witnessed the increasing prevalence of what I call “oneness of salvation and daily life” or a conceptualization of salvation in ways that highlighted people’s day-to-day needs and concerns. This emphasis on immediate, this-worldly salvation was also evident in the emergence of movements such as Fujikō, Nyoraikyō, and Tenrikyō that predicted the imminent arrival of an ideal world on earth, another conspicuous development in the mid- to late Tokugawa period. The “this-worldly” turn of early modern religion has had a reverberating impact on the development of Japanese religion in the modern and contemporary periods, when many religious organizations continue to offer ways of coping with people’s immediate and worldly needs.
By emphasizing the importance of understanding *yonaoshi* as a historical concept, this study has demonstrated that *yonaoshi* in the late Tokugawa and early Meiji periods did not for the most part carry millenarian connotations. Rather *yonaoshi* referred to rectifications of specific economic conditions that adversely affected the lives of a particular community. Contrary to what many scholars have argued, the concept of *yonaoshi* was not necessarily subversive, as evident from the fact that some historical actors worshipped their local rulers as *yonaoshi* gods. Even rebellious peasants who articulated their aims in terms of *yonaoshi* took for granted the authority of the existing governing structure. Associations drawn by scholars between *yonaoshi* as a historiographical category and millenarianism have rendered the narrative of Tokugawa-Meiji transition much more dramatic. However, people who spoke of *yonaoshi* or upheld *yonaoshi* gods in the 1850s and 60s did not envision a radically different world. Nor did they have an event called the Meiji Restoration in mind. Not until later in the Meiji period, well after the shift from Tokugawa to Meiji rule, did a fully millenarian reading of *yonaoshi* emerge.

Scholars have developed the category of *yonaoshi* in ways that highlight the subversive qualities of movements and events covered by the category of *yonaoshi*. But this historiographical usage of the term *yonaoshi* should not color our understanding of the native concept of *yonaoshi* as articulated by historical actors themselves. When scholars use *yonaoshi* as a historiographical category, they must recognize it as a conceptual tool for a historiographical exercise and explain how they intend to use the term. Without this awareness, *yonaoshi* as a historical concept grounded in unique historical and social contexts becomes suppressed by the imposition of particular scholarly agendas, such as a search for manifestations of popular revolutionary consciousness or an application of the millenarian framework.
The rise of *yonaoshi* gods represents a religious current that is difficult to analyze when dictated by conventional categories such as those of formal religious institutions and traditional historiography segmented by landmark events such as the Meiji Restoration of 1868. This study has examined a variety of documents ranging from local historical records to personal diaries to popular woodblock prints in order to investigate the emergence of *yonaoshi* gods outside the purview of religious organizations and professionals. By tracing the development of the concept of *yonaoshi* between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, this study has highlighted the continuing appeal of *yonaoshi* gods beyond the convenient line of demarcation at 1868 marking the transition from Tokugawa to Meiji rule. *Yonaoshi* gods as a collective represent just one example of many developments in Japanese religion that do not conform neatly to established boundaries or classification schemes. Despite considerable progress, these phenomena remain severely understudied due to the continuing influence of the traditional modality of research focused on religious institutions and documents associated with them. This study of *yonaoshi* gods has suggested the effectiveness of a more thematic approach that examines the development of a particular concept or discourse over time.¹ Such an approach provides an alternative avenue of analysis through which to highlight trans-sectarian developments as well as to illuminate vital aspects of Japanese religion that might otherwise seem obscure, marginal or simply insignificant.

¹ Examples of other works that adopt a similar approach include Reader and Tanabe 1998, Sawada 2004, and Glassman 2012.
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