

IDENTIFICATION OF *MIKO* IN JAPAN: RELIGIOUS AND CHANGING ROLES AS A PART-TIMER EMPLOYEE

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ABSTRACT

Miko is a young woman thought to have power and function as an intermediary to connect with God. Folklorists for Japanese culture split this word into two groups: shrine-bound Miko or Kannagi Miko and shrine-not-bound Miko or Kuchiyose Miko. The shrine-bound Miko is responsible for performing kagura dance, which is the popular Shinto's rite until now. This research will identify Miko in Japan and their responsibilities in religion. Religion that describes will follow Shomin Shinko or Shinto in particular. The study employed a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis. Based on the discourses, the shrine-bound and shrine-not-bound Miko are existed until now. However, there is some shifting in the roles. Once Miko plays significant parts as a mediator in some ceremonies, modern Miko may accept roles as part-timers in the shrine to clean and sell the shrine's amulet. This research will provide the characteristics of Miko, including their duties and some history from the Nara period. The study can be used to understand the Miko roles in particular and Japanese culture.

Keywords: Miko; Miko Roles; Japan Religion; Shomin Shinko

ABSTRAK

Miko adalah sebutan bagi perempuan muda yang dipercaya memiliki kekuatan dan bertugas sebagai mediasi untuk berinteraksi dengan Tuhan. Para ahli menyebutkan bahwa istilah ini dibagi menjadi dua grup, yaitu Miko terikat kuil atau disebut juga sebagai Kannagi Miko dan Miko tidak terikat kuil atau Kuchiyose Miko. Miko terikat kuil memiliki tugas untuk membawakan tarian kagura sebagai salah satu ritual terkenal di kuil Shinto hingga saat ini. Penelitian ini akan mengidentifikasi Miko di Jepang dan tugas mereka terkait dengan kegiatan keagamaan. Keagamaan yang akan dijelaskan akan mengikuti Shomin Shinko atau khususnya adalah Shinto. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan analisis deskriptif. Berdasarkan diskursus mengenai Miko, Miko terikat kuil dan Miko tidak terikat kuil masih ada di Jepang hingga saat ini. Namun demikian, terdapat pergeseran dari tugas-tugas mereka. Dahulu, Miko memainkan peran penting sebagai mediator di sebuah upacara keagamaan, tetapi Miko saat ini (modern) memungkinkan bekerja sebagai pekerja paruh waktu di kuil untuk membersihkan kuil atau menjual jimat. Penelitian ini akan membawakan karakteristik Miko, termasuk tugas-tugas mereka dan beberapa sejarah yang ada sejak jaman Nara. Penelitian ini dapat memberikan pemahaman terhadap tugas-tugas Miko secara khusus di kebudayaan dan masyarakat Jepang.

Kata kunci: Miko; Miko Roles; Japan Religion; Shomin Shinko

INTRODUCTION

When rituals to gods are conducted as a form of appreciation for the people or as a plea for direction in life, a young lady is thought to have the power to function as an intermediary for gods to be possessed or communicate. These mediators, known as 'Miko,' were supposed to have unique, exceptional talents; thus, it was believed that gods might seize their bodies. In addition to being an intermediary, Miko is also thought to play a role as an exorcist of evil spirits. The moniker 'miko' has persisted since Queen Himiko ruled Japan. There are so many roles of Miko that emerged in Japanese culture together with the eras. However, several notable studies conveyed that the Miko and their activities were deceiving the populace, causing disturbances to emerge. Some folklorists who research Miko split them into two classes: shrine-bound Miko or Kannagi Miko and shrine-not-bound Miko or kuchiyose Miko. The roles of the two Miko are different even though people still call them 'Miko.' Even though they are lower-class employees in Shinto's clerical, the Miko who is now at shrine also acts as *Shomin Shinko* function to conduct a sacred dance called kagura (Ortolani, 1995:13).

Previous studies on religion in Japan conducted by Earhart in his books, "Religion in Japan : Unity and Diversity", Thomas (2013) re-explained his works as one of the chapters is outstanding examples to describes the Miko with Western fantasy motifs. This means Miko in Japan nowadays could get influence by Western culture. On the other hand, Gaitanidis (2014) studies presented the shifting of former shamanism by Miko to the contemporary phenomenon such as neo-shamanism, or modern (Western) shamanism. The terms also broaden to *itako*. Some of them giving advice and see more socio-cultural background as therapist. However, the Miko terms itself arise questionable to the student. This study will answer it.

As previous describes, the responsibilities of the shrine-bound Miko demonstrate that the Miko is not just employees who take care of the administration but also plays a part in Japanese society's beliefs. This study will focus on shrine-bound Miko under the auspices of a Shinto temple.

METHODS

This study is qualitative research using secondary data. The findings are given following the reading and analysis of reports or scientific publications and linked articles. Chapters of result and discussion are subdivided into five parts. Chapter one will discuss religious notions, more especially Shintoism in Japan. Chapter two defined Miko's categorization and their respective duties. Chapter three will discuss Miko's ascension in Japan, namely the Nara era and its history. The final chapter depicted contemporary Miko in Japanese culture and their evolving positions from God's mediator to young lady part-timer.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Religion Concepts and Shintoism in Japan

Miko's connection to the shrine cannot be isolated from her everyday activities conducted under the auspices of a Shinto, implying that Miko is a Shinto adherent. Japan, like other countries, has a variety of faiths, but the largest is Shinto. Shintoism, as defined by Befe and re-explained by Danandjadja (1997:164), may be classified into three different belief systems: (1) People's Shinto or Folk Shinto, also known as Rural Peasant Shinto; (2) State Shinto or Shintoism. (3) Sect Shinto. Shinto has developed into the state religion, sometimes referred to as *Kokka Shinto*. As stated in "World Religion Today" written by Esposito et.all (2012), religion derives from the Latin *Religare*, which means "to bind or unite," and the root word *Religare*, which connotes "acting prudently, describes

a sense of being “bound and united” with obligations to whatever power is believed to govern destiny—whether natural or supernatural, personal or impersonal, singular or plural; ancient peoples each had a sense of being “bound and united” with obligations to whatever power was believed to govern the destiny.

Shomin Shinko is a religious folk belief in Japan. Japanese practice a variety of faiths, including Shinto, Buddhism, and Christianity. Shintoism is the earliest and is regarded as the indigenous religion of the Japanese, in contrast to Buddhism, Confucianism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam, which emerged later in late prehistory and history (Danandjadja, 1997:164). The Japanese do not see religion as unique, as Danandjaja illustrates with the following instances:

- The same Japanese will worship gods of many religions without experiencing any competing emotions. For instance, a Japanese will worship at his home’s Buddhist altar in the morning and a Shinto shrine in the afternoon.
- There are shrines dedicated to the worship of gods from many religions. For instance, in Japan, a Buddhist temple is housed within a Shinto shrine and vice versa.
- The Japanese notion of a god may incorporate aspects from several religions.
- A priest from one faith may preside over religious rituals from another religion.

Shinto shrines presently number between 80,000 and 90,000 in Japan and are administered by the *Jinja Honcho*, a Shinto temple organization formed in February 1946. *Jinja Honcho*’s responsibilities are to:

1. direct the management of shrine members,

2. maintain traditional Shinto rites and festivals, including promoting traditional morality,
3. pray for the welfare development of Japanese society, and
4. contribute to the establishment of eternal global peace

According to *Jinja Honcho*’s obligation to maintain Shinto customs, the function of the shrine-bound Miko has a unique significance for Shinto shrines and Japanese culture.

Miko’s Classification and Roles

According to Japanese folklorists such as Taro Nakayama, defining Miko is problematic. Miko (or) are occasionally referred to as *fujō* but are more specifically referred to as shrine maidens, referring to workers who participate in Shinto rites and administer Shinto shrines. Although evidence on the origins of Miko is few, scholars believe that Miko and the function of Miko have existed since Queen Himiko ruled Japan around 18,000 years ago and have developed across Japan (Ichiro, 1968: 187). According to the Japanese Encyclopedia (Kodansha, 1993), a Miko is a female Shaman who plays a significant part during Shinto worship rites. When matsuri was held, a female shaman functioned as a mediator for the gods. This explanation gives basic information about Miko, but there is no specific information regarding how matsuri appears while Miko plays. As previously said, even Taro Nakayama may be tough to understand Miko. Meanwhile, in 1967, Fairchild (1967:57), a folklorist and anthropologist, conducted a study on Miko and defined it literally as “God” and “child,” but ultimately refers to someone who is possessed by God and acts as a “mediator” between humans and God”.

William discusses the two Chinese characters used to write the word Miko, 巫女 and 神子. He reiterated Nakayama's prior study, which

established that the two Chinese characters for Miko's have distinct meanings. To understand the actual function of Miko, we must first understand its categorization. Hori Ichiro separates Miko into shrine-bound and non-shrine-bound Miko (Ichiro, 1967: 182), but this distinction is not fully adequate due to the lack of precise dividing standards. Nakayama desired to demonstrate that he believed the origins and purposes of the two forms of Miko to be distinct.

Anwar (1992:122) explains several classes of Miko and their responsibilities as follows:

- Takusen: Make predictions when on ecstasy.
- Uranai: Uranai is a form of fortune-telling that does not include the use of ecstasy. Uranai is fortune-telling through arrows, deer bones, and turtle shells, among other methods.
- Judate: Purification with holy water that wards off evil spirits. Although this ceremony does not include ecstasy, the Miko may experience a state during or after the rite.
- Kagura: Kagura is a holy gods' dance. As Hori Ichiro stated, the three wooden branches, gohei, persons, bamboo leaves, swords, and spears that kagura performers use are emblems of gods and spirits' possession.
- Toya: Toya is the annual election of kannushi or shrine patrons. The activities are referred to as toya, and the performers are referred to as kannushi or toban.
- Yorimashi: Yorimashi is a human property used to investigate the divine will. The people chosen to be the god's voice are typically 7 or 8 years old.
- Kuchiyose: At particular times of year (new year, for example), people call Miko into their homes to do fortune-telling, communicate with deceased

relatives, and obtain knowledge about those who live far away. Miko may also perform funerals, banish evil spirits from the body and house, and serve as a one-night wife. This last function is available to Miko, who is near prostitution or brothels.

Miko shrine-not-bound confined and have expanded throughout Japan as a result of their historical growth. According to Hori Ichiro, who re-explained the Miko in Japan in his book *Religion of the Japanese*, they are not obvious (Anwar, 1992:155). This is because Hori Ichiro debated whether Miko originated from a single kind and then evolved inexorably with the times or whether there were several Miko from the start, all of which resembled one another.

The Upheaval of Society and Law Against Miko since the Nara Period

Meeks's 2011 research on Miko, describes the effect of Miko function loss, which is mainly driven by internal causes. Certain records indicate that Miko lost political authority in Japan around the seventh and eighth centuries. When the Taika reform was implemented, several Miko functions were eliminated (2011: 213). Between 614 and 669, when Nakatomi no Kametari and Prince Tenji came to power, the fight to eradicate Miko activities climaxed in 645. They established the Taika reforms, which included laws prohibiting their adherents from using spirit mediators. Later papers, such as the Yoro Law (control against mystical activities) of 718, which forbids "bewitching ordinary folk were published during the Nara era, specifically targeting Miko and other charismatic religious personalities within the *Soniryō* group (a nickname for woman monks). By the eighth century, some Miko was still conducting rites, for which they were punished. According to Wakita Haruko, whom Lori re-explained, female Miko is not awarded status under the

Yoro Law, which permits them to continue participating in activities at official shrines. Only men will be granted status (*Kanbe and Urabe*). Nonetheless, evidence indicates that Miko is shrine-bound, and their role as staff under the auspices of Shinto shrines has expanded since the Nara period.

Picture.1



Miko dancing Sato Kagura

Source: Lori Meek 2011, 234

The Engi Shiki Supplementary Law of 927, adopted in 967, placed pressure on Miko working outside the shrine, while Miko, who was shrine-bound and protected by the state, established and expanded a system within the shrine. While this system does not include female Miko roles in temples to gain governmental recognition, women are given a little more significant role in religious interactions than they would have if they were assigned household chores such as sewing (*kanmiso*) or cleaning shrines (*shin'iki*).

Although government laws at the time placed a premium on Miko, the role of Miko did not disappear. When the Edo era began, many individuals believed in Miko but not the entire community. Numerous objections are included in the 1789 article, most notably Arai Hakuga's work, which opposes the idea of the fortune-teller family as a noble character. According to him, the forecasts are not

religious. This is not Shinto or Buddhist. Miko rents a home on the street and is compensated for their theatrical performances. Miko had just delivered a speech that led a mob to gather around him, exclaiming, "That is my father!" or "That is my son!" which caused many in the audience to weep and converse joyfully as if the speaker were still alive (Groemer 2007:43). In 1871, the Japanese government also passed a proclamation separating Buddhism from Shintoism. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, or *Kyobusho*, issued a decree (Tokyo Shi Shiko 1968) on January 15, 1873, which was subsequently promulgated by the Tokyo city government four days later. Arai Hakuga's critique essentially characterized society at the time and was not directed at shrine-bound Miko. As Arai implies, the shrine-bound Miko does not dwell in a leased space.

Miko is now more commonly used to refer to high school females or college students who labor part-time at the temple when it is busy. Some people chose Miko as a vocation for an extended period, but not their whole lives. When Japan was defeated in World War II, it was branded a war criminal. The American military released many items in a memorandum against Japan. To address this and avoid instilling fear in Japanese culture, the emperor published the following five articles for the people to obey and imitate:

- The meeting will be widely initiated, and all issues will be addressed by public debate.
- The top and lower classes must have a common heart, and the government must be conducted with passion.
- Everyone should have the chance to achieve the desire that the human spirit should not feel dissatisfaction, beginning with civil and military power and extending to society.
- Ancient bad practices must be eradicated, and everything must be

founded on principles of truth and equality with nature.

- Knowledge must be disseminated across the globe; this is the only way to reinforce the foundation of royal authority.

According to a decree issued by the emperor, all bad traditions dating back to ancient times must be eradicated. This enables the practice of Miko to evolve or shifted with the times gradually.

Today's Miko and Their Role in Religion

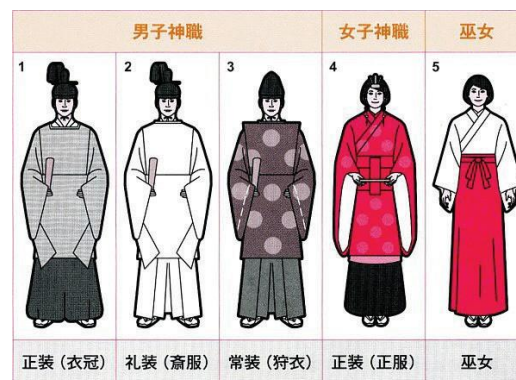
Ise Shrine is one of Japan's major shrines. Miko is referred to as maijo (舞女) or dancing girls in shrines, and their primary function is to dance and give prayers and sacrifices. In many articles such as Japan Talk (2015) they dress in bright hues such as red, orange, and pink. A complete Miko outfit typically consists of a *hakama* and a conical cap known as an *eboshi*. This argument is bolstered by Sokyo Ono (1962), a professor at Tokyo's specialized Shinto University, Kokugakuin Daigaku, who provided the following explanation on Shinto: The Kami Way as follows:

Occasionally, a holy dance (*kagura*) is performed by one or more priests, highly trained dancers, or young personnel's slaves. As with priestess robes, the young female employees at the temple wear garments that resemble ceremonial attire from the Heian era. The white kimono and pleated skirt are the most prominent features. When they do *kagura*, their hair hangs straight and is naturally or intentionally knotted with a crimson ribbon. Their feet are dressed in white socks (*tabi*). Outside, they also wear sandals with white stockings.

Miko is presently responsible for part-time Miko workers, the majority of whom are female students. There is no clear evidence on when this part-time employment first appeared in Japan. However, there are presently numerous community websites advertising

work openings as miko, particularly for new year jobs. *Miko baito* sites, which translates as "part-time miko work," is a website that provides part-time miko jobs to anybody willing. The website advertises miko employment in four main cities in Japan: Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, and Fukuoka. The hourly salary ranges between 700 and 1200 yen, or roughly 8000 and 10,000 yen per day. This is apparent because these part-time workers are not required to study miko dancing and hence are not required to perform the *kagura*. Based on picture. 2, we can see Miko's everyday attire from number 5.

Picture.2



Shinto Attire Among Clergy (Japanese Buddhist Statuary). <http://www.onmarkproductions.com/html/shinto-priesthood.html>.

This has sparked a debate over whether the miko who works part-time in the temple has a different status than the miko who performs the *kagura* dance. However, one might argue that the miko's position has altered in function due to the phenomena of part-time employees. Miko is one of the *shomin shinko*, or folk beliefs, and three distinct characteristics define it: (1) religious-magical, (2) textual-non-textual, and (3) functional-non-functional. The true embodiment of the miko's function in religion is a social celebration or ceremonial, whether periodic or *nenchugyoji*, accidental or *nin'igirei*, or during a person's life from conception to death, *tsukagirei*. For example,

the periodic kagura dance or *nenchugyoji* will be held if specific demands exist, both within Japanese culture and inside the state. Kagura dates back to the Yamato era and has been kept to this day; a shrine-bound miko long ago performed it as the carrier of a dance sacrifice to the gods.

Miko, who devote their lives to serving at a Shinto shrine, act religiously due to their devotion to a Shinto God, but when they do the kagura dance, it is beautiful. When Miko and the audience watch the dance, they rely on the dance that Miko delivers to petition the gods. Miko in *nenchugyoji* is also documented in the papers of the Oga Daimyoji temple in Kii province (now Wakayama Prefecture), founded in 1304 (Meeks, 2011:232). The Miko's role as a staff is to assist in the management of the shrine and to be accountable for its cleanliness, but when their statements are believed while providing divinations, their role becomes non-functional. Miko currently works mostly on a part-time basis and does not possess any unique abilities. The role of Miko as data in the Oga Daimyojin shrine indicates its textual purpose, but no non-textual function is discovered for Miko.

CONCLUSION

In Japan, Shomin Shinko is a Shinto religious practice. There is little discussion of Shomin Shinko, its varieties, and its function in society in this work. However, it must not be overlooked that Shomin Shinko will significantly impact Miko's status in Japan culture. While some researchers have been unable to determine when Miko initially emerged in Japan, the primary hypothesis is that she played the role of Queen Himiko, who is thought to possess extraordinary abilities. Miko was once separated into shrine-bound and non-shrine-bound Miko. Miko, who is not affiliated with the shrine, is free to pursue their interests and can serve as spirit mediators and fortune-tellers, but Miko, who is affiliated

with the shrine, will assist in religious chores concerning the shrine's function in the Shinto faith. Miko has been performing the holy kagura dance under the auspices of Shinto temples since the Nara period, but there are now so many miko working as part-time employees. According to the Miko baito website, part-time employees are not required to learn the kagura dance because the position is temporary.

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