

## The Dao of Nineteenth-Century Japanese Nativist Healing: A Chinese Herbal Supplement to Faith Healing

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People may think that traditional Japanese medicine in the nineteenth century consisted of moxibustion, cupping, acupuncture, the ingestion of herbs, and things of that nature. In other words, they may think it similar to traditional Chinese medicine. Few people would know that in the nineteenth century there were Japanese physicians who rejected those practices. For some Edo-period Japanese physicians and intellectuals, Chinese medicine had to be ideologically domesticated before it could be accepted as a legitimate alternative for the treatment of Japanese people.

The nativist scholar and Japanese physician Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤 (1776–1843) initially disparaged the practices of Chinese medicine, and only later changed his opinion about its efficacy. Few know Atsutane as a physician and fewer still are aware of his contributions to nineteenth-century Japanese medicine, yet he wrote substantial treatises discussing both faith-healing practices and physical remedies including herbal medicines. Although he continued to advocate the practice of healing rituals that relied on *kami* summoned by sorcery or magic,<sup>1</sup> he was eventually persuaded to consider herbal remedies a legitimate form of Japanese medicine. In this article I show how Chinese medicine, once anathema to certain nineteenth-century nativists, was re-envisioned as native practice.

### Hirata Atsutane's Written Contributions to Japanese Medicine

After an initial overview of Atsutane's writings on medical practices this article traces a select course through those writings with the

<sup>1</sup> By "sorcery" and "magic" I mean the mechanisms by which humans induce spiritual beings to effect change on the world.

broad purpose of supporting the assertion that traditional Japanese medicine has not always been just a subset of Chinese medicine. In particular, this article seeks to suggest in detail how Chinese medical practices became acceptable to the nineteenth-century nativist Hirata Atsutane, whose extreme anti-Chinese bias made such acceptance highly problematic. A related goal is to introduce the little-known medical contributions of Atsutane, who has formerly been seen only as a nationalist pedagogue. This short examination of his writings on medicine attempts to illuminate nineteenth-century opinions concerning what we today would identify as faith healing and traditional Chinese herbal medical practices. A more specific goal is to pinpoint exactly what happened in the years between Atsutane's early medical text *Shizu no iwaya* 志都能岩屋, *The Peaceful Stone Hut* (1810), and the later work *Isō Chūkeikō* 醫宗仲景考, *Thoughts on the Medical Lineage of Zhongjing* (1827), that reversed his opinion on herbal medicine. Also between those two works, Daoist origins became so attractive to him that he was inspired to discover new strategies to claim that all effective Daoist practice originated in Japan at the hands of Japanese *kami*.

Atsutane's *Shizu no iwaya* shows that his medical theory, despite receiving early training based on Chinese pharmacopeias, was highly dependent upon Japanese mythology. His reading of this mythology strengthened his conviction that healing depended on faith in the native Japanese *kami* and the magical power of ritual. According to Atsutane in 1810, Chinese medicine was a collection of defective, second-class healing techniques – a corrupt medical practice for fools.

Atsutane's teacher Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730–1801) also swore by medical technique based on belief in Japanese *kami*, and early in his career Atsutane was not of a mind to break with him on this particular point of faith. Scholars view Norinaga as the most influential nativist of the Edo period and also recognize a virulent strain of xenophobia in his writings. He showered China with stinging criticisms, and nativists followed his lead in classifying Chinese culture as inferior to Japanese culture in all ways. There-

fore, it should have been a betrayal of nativist principles for Atsutane to approve of practices, such as herbal medicine, that are clearly products of Chinese civilization.

In 1827 Atsutane wrote another work on medicine titled *Isō Chūkeikō* in which he re-evaluated Chinese herbal medicine. In this work he introduced a new argument that the Eastern Han physician Zhang Zhongjing 張仲景 (150–219), whose well-known work on pharmacology *Shang Han Za Bing Lun* 傷寒難病論, *On Cold Damage and Miscellaneous Diseases*, was held in high esteem by most Japanese physicians, was actually the Daoist master Ge Xuan 葛玄 (164–244). Ge Xuan was the grand-uncle of the better-known Ge Hong 葛洪 (284–364), and both were reputed to have become immortals with great power. The association of herbal medicine with Ge Hong's Daoist immortal practice was essential to Atsutane's plan for appropriating Chinese medical techniques for Japanese physicians.

In *Isō Chūkeikō* in 1827, Atsutane revisited the subject of the relative merits of magical healing ritual and herbal medicine and this time pronounced them to be “two wheels of the same cart;”<sup>2</sup> that is, essentially equal. His final words from this text are an admission that the practice of herbal medicine should be considered a proper addition to other *shinsen* 神仙 practices, that is, Daoist immortal practices he had earlier declared to be Japanese, but he added the caveat that herbal medicine without *kami* worship would be a heretical practice.

Fortunately, there is textual evidence from the time period between his first stance and subsequent reversal that shows what may have moved him to revalue medicine formerly considered Chinese in origin. Without this textual evidence it would be nearly impossible to offer any explanation as to how a rabid xenophobe such as Atsutane, who had started his

<sup>2</sup> Hirata Atsutane, “Isō Chūkeikō,” in *Shinshū Hirata Atsutane zenshū* (Meichō shuppan, 1978) [from hereon *SHAZ*], vol.14, p. 548. All translations of Atsutane's work in this article are my own.

career attacking all things Chinese,<sup>3</sup> could in his maturity make an abrupt about face and embrace Daoism and Chinese herbal medicine as valuable fields of study for nativists. The textual evidence also shows that while his faith in the nativist principle of Japanese superiority never wavered, his historical narrative was malleable.

This textual evidence suggests that a personal relationship with a certain strange but talented Edo street urchin named Torakichi<sup>4</sup> may have been the catalyst leading to this intellectual reversal, and so we must examine a certain text Atsutane wrote about this boy titled *Senkyō ibun* 仙境異聞, *Strange Tales from the Realm of Immortals*, written in 1822. A further compelling reason to delve into *Senkyō ibun* is that it also functions as a medical text. In fact, it contains scores of pages detailing nineteenth-century Japanese medical theory and technique. Furthermore, it occupies a pivotal position among Atsutane's medical writings, and foreshadows an impending change in his thought. Therefore before examining *Senkyō ibun* we

<sup>3</sup> Atsutane's “writing sample” sent to nativist academies in 1803 when applying for membership was a vitriolic diatribe titled *Kamōsho*, 呵妄書, *A Criticism of Deceitful Writings* in *SHAZ*, vol. 10. This was a direct criticism of certain people he thought were too enamored of Chinese culture.

<sup>4</sup> The real life story of an uneducated teenage boy rising out of poverty on the streets of Edo and making a name for himself as Tengu Kozō Torakichi, claiming to have been abducted and raised by *tengu* in the mountains, is the subject for a fascinating biography just waiting for a biographer. The Japanese scholars mentioned in note 12 have written extensively on him as have some Western scholars including myself. What we know of his life story is too complex to explain in this venue. As a teaser I will reveal that he could channel spirits, see the future, and on one occasion he made it rain. For further details please see Wilburn Hansen, *When Tengu Talk: Hirata Atsutane's Ethnography of the Other World* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009).

should know more about Atsutane's pre-Torakichi medical thought.

#### Atsutane's Pre-Senkyō Iibun Medical Theories

Atsutane began to study herbal medicine at age eleven from his uncle, and as an adult he was employed as a physician at the same time as he worked as a Shinto lecturer and master of his own academy. In 1810 Atsutane drafted the medical text *Shizu no iwaya*, also known as *Idō taii* 醫道大意, *The Essence of the Way of Healing*. This comprehensive draft of his theory of healing was completed ten years before Atsutane met the boy Torakichi, and it is a document that shows disillusionment with Chinese herbal medicine created by his fervent belief in Japanese nativist theories.

In *Shizu no iwaya* Atsutane claimed that the source of all healing practices and remedies was the *kami* of Japan: namely, Onamuchi and Sukunabiko. Atsutane understood disease to be caused by the inhabitants of the Other World, and therefore sought metaphysical solutions to problems caused by metaphysical beings. He explained that although all divine healing knowledge was originally imparted to the ancient Japanese, much of it had been lost by their descendants in the time since the Age of the Kami. However, the true healing knowledge imparted by the two *kami* of healing was not irretrievably lost. Some of this had been spread to other lands as the *kami* traveled, allowing the divine knowledge to diffuse to foreign shores. Fortunately, there were some wise foreigners who managed to preserve parts of the healing traditions, most notably in China. In other words, the Chinese received all of their correct knowledge of healing from Japanese *kami*.

One of the Chinese Atsutane praised for preserving the ancient *kami* tradition of healing overseas was Ge Hong,<sup>5</sup> who was relatively well-known in Japan in Atsutane's time for his

<sup>5</sup> Atsutane was not always in agreement with Ge Hong on specifics. For example, Ge Hong felt that the most important practice in becoming an immortal was the drinking of mineral and metal elixirs while Atsutane seemed much more interested in internal qi refinement and circulation practices.

*shinsen* teachings and practices. A traditional power credited to the legendary Chinese immortals was the power of healing, and Ge Hong wrote in great detail about those healing arts of the immortals. In essence, Atsutane's theory of magical faith healing was very similar to, and most likely dependent upon, ideas from Chinese magical medicine, which developed during the early stages of the growth of the Daoist religion in China.<sup>6</sup> However, Atsutane's one major departure from Ge Hong's methods was that in 1810 his medical theory had no room for Ge Hong's herbal healing techniques.

Atsutane accepted a theory of disease that agreed with certain Daoist teachings. Many Daoists believed that one cause of illness was a soul influenced by evil beings into corrupting the very body it inhabited, leading to sickness, death or demonic transformation. They believed the certain method for fighting off these evil beings was to name them and command them to leave or surrender, either orally or in written form on a talisman. In other words, they believed that evil beings followed a code of conduct.<sup>7</sup> Years after the writing of *Shizu no iwaya*, at one juncture in his conversations with the self-styled *tengu* apprentice Torakichi, Atsutane confirmed his continuing belief in this spiritual code of conduct:

It seems that even in the case of *sanjin* or

<sup>6</sup> See Michel Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, ed. Bernard Faure (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), particularly Chapter One on "Disease and Taoist Law". Strickmann's ideas are echoed by Edward L. Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001). In brief, illness was considered to be a spiritual matter caused usually by some moral failing on the part of the sufferer or some part of his/her very extended family.

<sup>7</sup> Again the above mentioned works by Strickmann and Davis expound on the belief that illness-causing demons obey their superiors, and for further study of the bureaucratic model in Daoism see also Robert Hymes, *Way and Byway: Taoism, Local Religion, and Models of Divinity in Sung and Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

*tengu* abduction, the words of the tutelary *kami* cannot be resisted. Furthermore, when it comes to ghosts, they cannot harm anyone who is protected by his tutelary *kami*.<sup>8</sup>

### Reading *Senkyō Ibum* for Medical Information: A New Approach

*Senkyō ibun* reveals Atsutane attempting to establish a new discourse on Japan that includes information on supernatural healers. It contains detailed descriptions given by the boy Tengu Kozō Torakichi 天狗小僧寅吉 of the world of the supernatural in which he claimed to have been raised. Some of these descriptions are of the activities of a new type of supernatural being inhabiting this newly discovered world: *sanjin* 山人, who disguise themselves as *tengu* 天狗, but are actually benevolent, wise, powerful, and devoted servants of the native Japanese *kami*.<sup>9</sup>

The only in-depth treatment of *Senkyō ibun* in English, previous to my work, is a lengthy article from 1967, in which Carmen Blacker<sup>10</sup> translated several passages and provided a folklorist's description and assessment of this text.

<sup>8</sup> Hirata Atsutane, "Senkyō ibun" in *Hirata Atsutane zenshū* [from hereon *HAZ*], ed. Muromatsu Iwao (Itchido, 1911–1918), vol. 3, p. 94.

<sup>9</sup> I have argued elsewhere that to read *Senkyō ibun* and undervalue or ignore the thick description of this new nativist champion and religious virtuoso, whom Torakichi and Atsutane collaboratively dubbed *sanjin* 山人, is to miss Atsutane's attempt to create a new nativist discourse first seen in the *Senkyō ibun* text. Moreover, what is usually overlooked or missed in analyses of *Senkyō ibun* is that there is more than enough evidence to conclude that Atsutane manipulated Torakichi's testimony in order to spread his own nativist message. However, it should also be made clear that Torakichi soon learned his role and participated actively in the joint creation of a public spectacle in Edo salon society that attempted to give birth to a new Japanese religious hero, the *sanjin*.

<sup>10</sup> Carmen Blacker, "Supernatural Abductions in Japanese Folklore," *Asian Folklore Studies*, XXVI-2 (1967): 111–147.

Blacker categorized *Senkyō ibun*'s tales of Tengu Kozō Torakichi as an example of a folklore pattern involving the supernatural abduction of children. Her work on *Senkyō ibun* is thought-provoking and informative. However, the abduction I focus on in my studies of *Senkyō ibun* is Atsutane's abduction of Torakichi's stories of the Japanese Other World, using them to gain support for his own nativist assertions concerning Japanese identity and capability.<sup>11</sup> For this article I concentrate on medical examples only.

Japanese scholars know *Senkyō ibun* as an example of Atsutane's supernatural research and not as a medical text. As a result, these scholars have not made any serious commentary on this particular facet of this multi-faceted text.<sup>12</sup> The medical information is impossible to miss, and there is no particular reason for this omission by those scholars other than lack of interest.

### Senkyō Ibum as a Turning Point in Atsutane's Medical Thinking

In *Senkyō ibun* we are told the story of how Atsutane met, befriended, and took in a young

<sup>11</sup> For my previous writings concerning Atsutane and Torakichi see Hansen, *When Tengu Talk*, and Wilburn Hansen, "The Medium is the Message: Hirata Atsutane's Ethnography of the World Beyond," *History of Religions* 45.4 (2006): 339–372.

<sup>12</sup> Kamata Tōji 鎌田東二 published the most recent in-depth treatment of the relationship between Atsutane and Torakichi in Japanese in 2002. See Kamata Tōji, *Hirata Atsutane no shinkai firudowaaku* (Sakuhinsha, 2002). Koyasu Nobukuni 子安宣邦 added to the commentary on Atsutane and Torakichi in 2001. See Koyasu Nobukuni, *Hirata Atsutane no sekai* (Perikansha, 2001). Haga Noboru's 芳賀登 fairly recent works have on occasion included important insights into this relationship. In fact, there is also a long history of prewar Japanese scholarship on the *Senkyō ibun* text and the relationship between Atsutane and Torakichi, which includes commentary by Muraoka Tsunetsugu 村岡典嗣, Watanabe Kinzō 渡辺金造, and Origuchi Shinobu 折口信夫. See Hansen, *When Tengu Talk*, pp. 6–9.

Edo street urchin who had already convinced certain pockets of Edo intellectual society that he had been raised by *tengu* in the mountains of Japan. *Senkyō ibun* is rare among Atsutane's works because it is not meant to be a straightforward explanation of his nativist theories as most of his other works are. This work is more like a diary or at least a running record of interactions with Torakichi that took place over a period of several months. I have argued elsewhere in great detail that this work is reminiscent of ethnographic studies conducted by nineteenth- and twentieth-century anthropologists, complete with the problems and shortcomings accompanying that genre of writing and investigation.<sup>13</sup>

Among the many fantastic tales and fascinating facts about the Other World<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> See James Clifford, "Introduction: Partial Truths," in *Writing Culture, The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (London: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 23–24, as well as the works referenced in note 7.

<sup>14</sup> Atsutane had long suspected, believed in, and theorized about the existence of this Other World. H.D. Harootunian, in *Things Seen and Unseen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 153, wrote about this as follows:

Atsutane posited that there was another world within the tangible and visible world in which humans normally lived. His faith in the verity of certain stories from the most ancient Japanese texts suggested to him that such a world did exist.

For Hirata [Atsutane], *kamigoto* [affairs of the *kami*] represented an unseen reality. An invisible domain where the gods carried out their affairs, it concerned the creation of heaven and earth as well as the sacred affairs of the world of darkness and concealment. Elevation of this realm to equivalence with the world of the living provided authority to his argument concerning consolation. "It is difficult to accept the old explanations that dead spirits migrate to the land of Yomi. But where do the spirits of people who have died in this country go?" If this question were not clarified there would be no chance for

revealed by Torakichi are serious and detailed instructions for healing a number of troubling human ailments. These records of Torakichi's information concerning healing practices in the Other World signal a change in the direction of Atsutane's research interests. In *Senkyō ibun* Atsutane began directing his inquiries toward stories of Daoist immortal, or *shinsen*, practice in the mountains of Japan.

Although Atsutane at first disagreed with Torakichi on medical theory, his interactions with Torakichi could be understood as the stimulus that aroused his interest in the possible existence of native Japanese *shinsen* practices related to Torakichi's medical anecdotes. However, even though Atsutane recorded his stance that herbal remedies such as Torakichi's were inferior in quality, the text also shows Atsutane seeking some rationale that could include them as valuable knowledge acceptable to a nativist. After meeting Torakichi, Atsutane's own attitudes toward health and healing shifted concretely toward a Daoist understanding of longevity and disease prevention. The sheer number of texts Atsutane authored on Daoism in the decade subsequent to his daily interactions with Torakichi<sup>15</sup> stand as evidence of this shift. These works strongly suggest that in the 1820's Atsutane's brand of Japanese nativist health and healing theory was expanding to include herbal medicine verified by Japanese mythology.

### Torakichi's Medical Knowledge in *Senkyō ibun*

Atsutane's *sanjin* were actually the Japanese equivalent of the Chinese immortals and as such medical practices were also essential to their identities.<sup>16</sup> In *Senkyō ibun* recorded in 1822, Torakichi claimed that his master who had

achieving genuine happiness. The question was rhetorical, since Hirata had already established the coexistence of a realm that remained unseen and hidden to all but the departed spirits and a visible world inhabited by the living.

<sup>15</sup> See Hansen, *When Tengu Talk*, pp. 110–111.

<sup>16</sup> See Benjamin Penny, "Immortality and Transcendence," in *Daoism Handbook*, ed. Livia Kohn. (Leiden: EJ Brill, 2000), pp. 125–126.

trained him in the medical arts was a *kami*-worshipping *sanjin*, a practitioner of the *shinsen* arts in the mountains. Torakichi's *sanjin* master was to become the model for Atsutane's new nativist culture hero, and this new hero was a healer. In fact, this *sanjin*'s first appearance in *Senkyō ibun* was in a medical role when Torakichi first spotted his master-to-be selling pills on the street.

Torakichi's explanation of his meeting with his Japanese immortal master shows his indebtedness to the tradition of Daoist immortals and their medical associations. Torakichi said that one day while playing by a temple he saw a man who had been selling medicines roll up his rug and put himself and all his wares into a very small jar which then levitated and flew away. His story of his first sighting of his future *sanjin* master is taken directly from Daoist literature. The precursor to his story can be found in *Gokansho*, 後漢書, *Later Han Writings*, from fifth century China, which contains the story of the Daoist student named Fei Changfang who saw Sire Gourd, an exiled immortal, selling medicines and later climbing into his gourd. Sire Gourd then invited Fei Changfang to join him in the gourd, which contained a Chinese immortal's heaven.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> The story of Sire Gourd and the Immortal's Heaven found in his gourd seems to have been well-known in Edo Japan. Drawings of this kind of tale decorated gourds, silks, and even game pieces in this era of the nineteenth century. It is likely that Torakichi heard the story somewhere or saw it, or both. See Chigiri Kōsai, *Sennin no kenkyū* (Tairiku Shobō, 1976), p. 520. The name of this legendary character was mentioned once as a topic of conversation in *Senkyō ibun*, but there was no elaboration. In addition, in his work *Kassenōden* 葛僊翁伝, *Biography of the Immortal Master Ge*, Atsutane mentioned Fei Changfang, who also appears in Ge Hong's *Shinsen*, 神仙伝, *Biographies of Immortals*. Still, this imitation never seemed to have been a reason to doubt Torakichi; rather, it seemed to be held in his favor. For more on gourd heavens see Rolf Stein, *The World in Miniature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), or Robert Ford

Fourteen-year-old Torakichi himself was a healer. On the very day that Atsutane had Torakichi dragged into his house,<sup>18</sup> Atsutane found he had come down with a fever, which relegated him to his bed. He recorded that Torakichi came to his bedside and administered a cooling spell that quickly made the fever go away.

On the several occasions when the visitors to Atsutane's salon asked Torakichi about the medicine practiced in the Other World, he was always ready with recipes and regimens used to cure all sorts of complaints and diseases.

Kunitomo Yoshimasa put a question to Torakichi saying, "A certain person asked me...Isn't there some kind of medicine that can cure the sicknesses which the medical treatises label to be incurable, such as, paralysis, tuberculosis, stomach ailments, and leprosy? What about that?"

Torakichi said, "For paralysis eat blackened toadstools that grow on plum trees. For tuberculosis blacken both female and male geckos and without letting the sick person know, slip them in to whatever you feed him, and get him to eat it somehow or other. For stomach ailments the fresh liver of a crane is effective. For leprosy take a piece of cotton soaked in *shōchū*, light it and while it is burning pat it down over and over [on the afflicted areas]."

Somebody asked, "I know someone who suffers from gout, isn't there some treatment for that? Also, do you know any medicine for burns or hemorrhoids, and do you know any methods to stop bleeding?"

Torakichi said, "For gout, scorch flat moss from a plum tree, knead it with rice

Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth: A Translation and Study of Ge Hong's Traditions of Divine Transcendents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> Torakichi at first stayed at a rival academic's house. Atsutane had already met with him on a couple of occasions, but was unsatisfied with the restricted access to the boy, that is, until the day Atsutane's students brought him over kicking and screaming.

starch and smear it on. This has a potent effect. For burns, grind young Japanese cedar leaves and cold rice together and smear this on. If you do this over and over, the heat will be drawn out of the afflicted area, the pain will go away, and it will heal without leaving a scar. For hemorrhoids, first dry out clumps of algae that have washed up on the seashore, and then scorch them before applying them. To stop bleeding a Kumano fire starter<sup>19</sup> is very effective....”

Someone asked, “For years I have suffered from colic and spasms, do you know of any medicine for those things?”

Torakichi said, “For colic, scorch some silver vine powder and bitter oranges, combine equal portions, and drink the mixture frequently. For spasms, pickle a *kangarasu*<sup>20</sup> in a chamber pot for thirty days. Wash it and blacken it without gutting it. Eat that mixed with an equal part of the powder of the fried shell of the red conch. These cures are effective for gas, heartburn, and all other stomach ailments.”

An example of the extraordinary range of complaints which could be cured by the *sanjin* came up when Torakichi was told a story of a woman who went to sleep during the middle of the day only to find that a snake had crawled into her vagina. The woman subsequently died, but Torakichi claimed that *sanjin* medical knowledge could have saved her.

Torakichi said, “When a snake enters the vagina or the rectum and does not come out, one should take five *shaku* of sake mixed with one *go* of tooth dye, heat it, and drink it and the snake will come out. However, it is quite rare that a snake would enter anyone like that.”<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> This is a type of ignition device made of cattails, used in this case to cauterize.

<sup>20</sup> This is a type of crow with a white patch on its back.

<sup>21</sup> Hirata Atsutane, “Senkyō ibun,” in *HAZ*, vol. 3, pp. 68–69.

Torakichi answered questions that sprung from Atsutane’s theory of demonic causes of disease, yet Torakichi’s answers in no way recognized evil beings as the source of all illness. He only recognized them as an overall source of calamity and did not relate them specifically to diseases. Torakichi’s medical theory was based on the idea of poisons (or reptiles), which could be physically located and expelled.

Torakichi’s inventory of herbal medicines listed in *Senkyō ibun* could easily have come from traditional Chinese pharmacopeias. Knowledge of herbal medicine had been collected in several famous pharmacopeias in China, which had been transmitted to Japan centuries earlier. However, Torakichi claimed that the cures that filled those volumes were also well known in the mountains of Japan. According to Torakichi, the Japanese *sanjin* like the Chinese immortal had the technical know-how to cure all diseases without consulting Chinese medical books.

### Difference of Medical Opinions

Medicine was one of the few subjects where Torakichi’s opinion seemed to differ radically from Atsutane’s. Atsutane had been affecting and manipulating Torakichi’s responses in many other fields of knowledge throughout the period of their collaboration, but he did not do so at all times, and only occasionally in a heavy-handed manner.<sup>22</sup> Torakichi stood firm in his claim that

<sup>22</sup> An important question to ask about the relationship between Atsutane and Torakichi is just who was influencing whom. In my previous work concerning this relationship I detail various scholars’ opinions about the power relationship between Atsutane and Torakichi. I conclude that Atsutane was using Torakichi to give spiritual verification to theories Atsutane truly believed in. In other words Atsutane was not duped by Torakichi, but rather found him useful. For example, in this case Atsutane was using Torakichi’s stories as evidence to argue for the nativist appropriation of *shinsen* practices. Some Japanese scholars do suggest that Atsutane was taken in by Torakichi, a suggestion which smells a bit like an apology for some of Atsutane’s more irrational and outrageous claims. Other scholars see differing levels of cooperation

there was nothing as effective for illness as herbal medicine and that it was foolish to perform any spell or chant incantations without trying medicines first. He did state that one should pray to the *kami*, but only after medicines had been administered.

Torakichi made his position on herbal medicine clear when Atsutane asked him why he seemed reluctant to perform magical healing rituals comprised of chanting spells and drawing apotropaic symbols.

Torakichi said, "The common people seem to be enamored of mystical spells, but personally I'm not much in support of them. But sometimes I like to do them just in fun...."

Besides that, I think it is foolish to perform mystical spells first when the best course of action is to take medicine appropriate for the illness. Once you have been seen by a good physician and have taken his herbal medicine as the first course of action, then you should pray to the *kami*. People think that the constant evidence of effect of the mystical spells is due to the concentration of the ritualist and the faith of the patient, but that's not the case.<sup>23</sup>

This statement was directly opposed to Atsutane's firm belief in the power of faith-dependent magical healing rituals and he immediately countered Torakichi's argument.

You [Torakichi] have said that the [medical] incantations and spells do not seem to be effective... and on top of that, you claim results from taking herbal medicine. You are right when you say prayer to the *kami* works, but I am not at all satisfied with your answer. It must be common knowledge in the Other World, just as we know it here from reading the texts concerning the Age of the Kami, that both spells and medicines come from Onamuchi no mikoto and Sukunabikona no

mikoto. Furthermore, in the most ancient of times, spells came first. After that, all the spells got mixed together with Buddhist methods. If we could take those Buddhist methods out and get rid of them, figure out the true spells from ancient times, then the spells would surely come first, with medicines coming second. I am convinced that that would be the best and right way.<sup>24</sup>

The position that Atsutane was advancing in his dialogue with Torakichi was extensively explained years earlier in *Shizu no Iwaya*.

Because of the ancient legends we know that the *kami* Onamuchi and Sukunabiko established the magical techniques. Even though the physicians we have now do not use it, magic was used for most illnesses long ago in ancient Japan and even in foreign lands. Even in Chinese medical practices, people first started healing by means of magical shamanic incantations.<sup>25</sup>

Atsutane went on to document in *Shizu no Iwaya* that ancient Chinese sources prove this assertion and also cited sources that show a gradual development of medicinal treatments secondary to the development of magical treatments. Although such documentary evidence was not available for Japan, he claimed that the development must have followed the same path, and Japanese physicians were ignorant of the history of medical treatment. He backed up this claim for the priority of magical treatments by explaining his etiology of disease.

All illness is caused by the actions of the *kami* of calamity. Therefore whether you use medicine or spells, only the spirit of the *kami* of recovery cures illnesses. When the suffering person believes in this spirit and receives it, then this *kami* of treatment

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between the two, and yet others see Atsutane as a scheming manipulator who would lie if it brought him some advantage.

<sup>23</sup> Hirata Atsutane, "Senkyō ibun," in *HAZ*, vol. 3, p. 181.

<sup>24</sup> Hirata Atsutane, "Senkyō ibun," in *HAZ*, vol. 3, p. 182.

<sup>25</sup> Hirata Atsutane, "Shizu no Iwaya," in *SHAZ*, vol. 14, p. 450.



responds to this belief. This is a certain cure for illness.<sup>26</sup>

Atsutane did not absolutely deny claims of effectiveness for all herbal medicine treatments, but he explained that it was not the herbal medicine itself that had salubrious effect. In Atsutane's theory of healing, herbal medicines were taken by those who were spiritually impaired. They were tools employed by the weak, and as such he did recognize their merits but not without adding his lamentations and even contempt for a world replete with weaklings who needed such things to nurture them.

Therefore, if people had faith in spells there would be no need for herbal medicines. If both are effective, what is the difference between them? Compare the situation to the pacification of an enemy. It is like the difference between conquering with words or weapons...you can directly strike and destroy the various areas of illness or aid the patient's own divine *qi* in driving off the malevolent *qi*. The latter is similar to crushing the foe using weapons. To continue the metaphor, you first make the patient take aggressive herbal medicines like *daiō* or *hazu*.<sup>27</sup> Then you let them take soothing herbal medicine and then follow it with something like rice gruel. It is the same as after having subdued the enemy with arms, and then comforting them by providing compassion and benevolence...Even though illnesses were cured by spells in ancient times, over the generations the hearts of the people were perverted and they lost their belief in spells. When there was no faith in them they became ineffective, and so gradually the practice died out. That is how we ended up where we are now curing illness by means of

herbal medicines.<sup>28</sup>

Atsutane had a textual source that laid the blame for the start of herbal medical practice in Japan at the feet of foreigners.

The first herbal medicine ever taken internally in Japan seems to have been brought over from foreign shores. According to the *Kojiki* this happened in the reign of Oasazumawaku no Sukune, the twentieth emperor following Emperor Jimmu, later known as Ingyō Tennō. It is said that a person named Komuhachimu Kamukimu cured Emperor Ingyō's lingering illness. Even though that passage does not clearly indicate that he ingested something, all indications point to this probably being the first case of drinking medication. When we wonder why we do not see people drinking medicine in ancient times, the answer is truly due to the precious nature of Japan, which provided an ancient past devoid of any illness...This explains how from early on foreign lands had numerous illnesses owing to weakness in their national [ethnic] make-up, and therefore turned their attention to Sukunabiko no mikoto, and developed extensive medical treatments relying on his august spirit. These arts were then quickly refined. That is the reason that within the medical treatises that have come over from foreign countries there are so many entries for cures never seen nor heard of in this country.<sup>29</sup>

In summation of this section concerning Atsutane's opposition to Torakichi's medical beliefs before his forthcoming "Daoist epiphany," it should be noted that in 1822 in Atsutane's first year of association with Torakichi he takes virtually the same stance on the efficacy of herbal medicine in comparison with magical healing practices as he had in 1810's *Shizu no iwaya*. That is, faith-based magical healing is qualitatively different, and has greater divine legitimacy

<sup>26</sup> Hirata Atsutane, "Shizu no iwaya," in *SHAZ*, vol.14, p. 452.

<sup>27</sup> Both of these are plants used for their powerful laxative effects.

<sup>28</sup> Hirata Atsutane, "Shizu no iwaya," in *SHAZ*, vol.14, pp. 453–454.

<sup>29</sup> Hirata Atsutane, "Shizu no iwaya," in *SHAZ*, vol.14, p. 456.

than herbal practices, which to their detriment have an unfortunate association with Chinese culture. It should also be noted that Atsutane had already admitted that there were examples, which he brought up himself, that verified the undeniable efficacy of some of the practices of Chinese herbal medicine.

### Atsutane's Daoist Epiphany

In *Senkyō ibun* as well as earlier writing we see that Atsutane was pre-occupied with prescriptions for preventing illness and living a long and healthy life, perhaps this was the tendency that made him susceptible to Torakichi's "Daoist" influence. In his work *Kassenōden* written in 1825 a few years after he met Torakichi, he introduced and critiqued, usually quite favorably, the Daoist alchemist Ge Hong's writings on the practices of immortality and longevity. In this text Atsutane exhibited his admiration of and adherence to many Daoist beliefs and practices.

Although Atsutane wrote in *Kassenōden* that in the previous years, the early 1820's, he had learned of certain *qi* circulation techniques that would allow people living in the unnatural environment of the city to live for two hundred years or longer, these longevity techniques were not attributed to Torakichi. Even if they had been, we know from the following quote that Atsutane's belief in the benefits of a hybrid form of *qi* circulation can be traced back to *Shizu no iwaya*, which was written long before he met Torakichi.

The most important part of medical treatises and the fundamental reason for having medical treatises, no matter your occupation or your Way of practice, is to enlighten us on how to compress and store up our *qi*. This was studied in India long before Shaka's time. Even in the Brahman practices they had something called the cultivation of mind. That thing which might be referred to as the goal of tranquility in which all religions alike take refuge is nothing other than this. This is also what has been handed down as the Way of the Sacred Immortals from China. This is also what the Daoists strive to achieve. They know that if they can accumulate and keep all their *qi*, they will not get sick. Not getting sick serves to sustain longevity. These are

what are called the unaging and undying techniques. The lower entryway to your reservoir of *qi* is called the *tanden*. It seems to be called that because it is the *den* [field] that stores your medicinal tan [cinnabar elixir of life].

Among the various practices for cultivating and storing the *qi* below your navel, there is one that is quite simple. My father lived to be eighty-four years old and when I was young he got sick quite often, far more than usual; that is, until he learned a technique from a certain elderly man. For over thirty years he practiced this technique unfailingly and never got sick again in all that time. If others learn this and become accustomed to it they will not doubt the miraculous effect when they are living long lives without illness.<sup>30</sup>

Obviously, Torakichi did not introduce Atsutane to longevity practices of *qi* circulations, which Atsutane himself described as foreign in origin; however, meeting Torakichi encouraged him to embrace the Chinese Daoist connection rather than water it down with the first attribution to Brahmanical Indian practice as we see he did in 1810. Torakichi's stories of Japanese immortal *sanjin* from 1822 gave Atsutane the opportunity and rationale to claim *shinsen* practices clearly rooted in Chinese Daoism as originally Japanese. Furthermore, after meeting Torakichi, Atsutane's father's lifespan of eighty-four years was no longer as impressive to him when he learned certain people such as Torakichi's mountain master could aim for thousands.

Atsutane's expanded interest in *shinsen* research led him further into Daoist studies as can be seen by another *qi* circulation ritual recorded after meeting Torakichi.

#### Instructions for Technique Number Five Qi Circulation

From the two openings behind the area of the lower *tanden* and following the vessels along the spine ascending to the *niwan*,<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Hirata Atsutane, "Shizu no iwaya," in *SHAZ*, vol. 14, pp. 504–505.

<sup>31</sup> The spiritual center at the crown of the head.

which is the spiritual name of the brain palace.<sup>32</sup> Three consecutive inhalations promote the release of the inner original *qi* retained in the lower *tanden*. The intent is to force it out and into the two openings. Visualize the two lines of white *qi* rising up in tandem along the spine drawn directly into the *niwan*. The fragrance infiltrates all the palaces radiating luxuriantly downward through everything, the hair, face, head, neck, both arms, and down through the fingers. Then it goes down into the stomach and into the central *tanden*, reaching the *kami* of the heart palace. Then it is forced through the five organs circulating back into the lower *tanden* and even lower through the three vital points in the lower limbs running down all through the thigh and knees pooling up into a bubbling spring.<sup>33</sup>

This is just part of one of many *qi*-related practices which Atsutane recorded, praised, and attributed to Ge Hong. His knowledge and his passion for these longevity practices increased as evidenced by his Daoist related writings from the decade of the 1820s and the fact that he expresses no distaste for using Daoist terminology in describing *qi* circulation. Yet, as Chinese and Daoist as his textual production became during the 1820's, and even though he seriously adopted the Daoist terminology, he never abandoned his fundamental religious article of faith that any technique that works owes its efficacy to the *kami* of Japan.

Atsutane's own writing strongly suggests that his talks with Torakichi inspired him to attempt to appropriate Daoist immortal (*shinsen*) practices as original Japanese practices, which can be seen in the following direct quote from Atsutane's 1825 *Kassenōden*, his study of Ge Hong.

An explanation concerning the realm of the immortals appears elsewhere in a work called *Senkyō ibun*, which is a secret record chronicling my investigations of it. The time

will come for it to be released to the public, for they should read about this. Anyway, [Ge Hong's] teachings concerning the realm of the immortals, about which I was just writing, were perfected and practiced by the original practitioners of the Way of the Kami. The traditions of celestial immortals and terrestrial immortals can be seen in classical sources on the *kami*.<sup>34</sup>

This quote specifically cites Atsutane's conversations with Torakichi; that is, *Senkyō ibun*, as an authoritative source on Japanese *shinsen* practices, which he equates with ancient practices created by the original practitioners of the Way of the Kami. He further claims that this assertion can be backed up with textual evidence, "classical sources." Atsutane is claiming that there is a historical trail of evidence that proves that the traditions attributed to Ge Hong are Japanese in origin, worthy of nativist adoption. Two years later in *Isō Chūkeikō* Atsutane would claim that the famous Chinese herbalist Zhang Zhongjing was Ge Hong's ancestor the Daoist immortal master Ge Xuan, wrapping up a genealogical lineage of Japanese medicine that includes herbal healing.

### Conclusion

This article locates the textual sources from nineteenth-century Japan that reveal Atsutane's changing thought processes concerning the value of Chinese medicine. These sources document Atsutane embracing first one historical position asserting the deep connection between the failings of herbal medicine and the influence of Chinese culture, and then a decade or so later reversing his stance with as much intensity as he had embraced his earlier position. The reversal is clearly illustrated in the medical text from 1827 *Isō Chūkeikō* wherein he announced his approval of a famous ancient Chinese text on herbal medicine.

In the preface of *Shang Han Lun* it is written, "When *kami* resides in the herbal medicine, its essence seeks to fulfill the

<sup>32</sup> A dwelling of one of the many gods inhabiting the human body in Daoist thought.

<sup>33</sup> Hirata Atsutane, "Shinsen shiyōhō," in *SHAZ*, Shinshu hoi 4, p. 558.

<sup>34</sup> Hirata Atsutane, "Kassenōden," in *SHAZ*, vol. 14, p. 411.

magical ritual.” This should make us aware that this work has its origins in the Ancient Way [of Japan]. Therefore, the person who practices medicine must first thoroughly study the Way of the Sacred Immortals [Daoism]. He must learn the magic rituals to control potential illnesses as well as the herbal medicines to control manifest illnesses. Potential illnesses are eternal while manifest illnesses are contingent. How does he who does not know how to control the eternal then know how to control the contingent? Thus to depend carelessly on the measuring spoon after learning only about herbal medicine is to steal the title of physician for a gang of idiots who only busy themselves calculating their own profits. How can this be called a humane and benevolent profession when those kinds of people pursue an occupation with the power over life and death and have no qualms about recommending those herbs to their fathers and their Lords?<sup>35</sup>

This is not a ringing endorsement of the practice of herbal medicine in Atsutane’s Japan; however, it does show an important adjustment in Atsutane’s attitude concerning the effectiveness of these techniques. Instead of herbal medicine being the inferior and sometimes dangerous techniques of the depraved Chinese healer, it is being revalued and redeemed by the insertion of Japanese spiritual power, and given the nativist seal of approval based on the claim of a textually traceable Japanese origin for the practice. If not for Torakichi and *Senkyō ibun*, Atsutane’s reversal would be an act bewildering to all who are familiar with his former medical theory and his standard and consistent line of xenophobic argumentation.

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<sup>35</sup> Hirata Atsutane, “Kassenōden,” in *SHAZ*, vol. 14, p. 411. Hirata Atsutane, “Isō Chūkeikō,” in *SHAZ*, vol.14, p. 548.