

Susanoo no mikoto, Endemics, Epidemics, and Pandemics

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Abstract

Susanoo no mikoto スサノオノミコト is the most paradoxical, mysterious, dramatic, and widely worshipped of Izumo's deities. The aim of this paper is to elucidate the nature of Susanoo no mikoto in the Izumo region and to demonstrate how worship of him spread throughout the archipelago. It will argue that the representation of Susanoo no mikoto in the *Kojiki* (712) and *Nihon shoki* (720) bears little resemblance to the local portrayal of the god in the *Izumo no kuni fudoki* (733), and it will show that a key to understanding the deity is his relation to endemics, epidemics and pandemics.

Keywords

Susanoo, Izumo, endemic, epidemic, pandemic, *ekijin*

Susanoo in Eighth Century Texts

Of the textual accounts of the origin of Susanoo no mikoto, the most historically reliable is contained in the *Izumo no kuni fudoki* 出雲国風土記 (Chronicle of the Customs and Geography of Izumo, 733, henceforth *Izumo fudoki*). As Takioto Yoshiyuki 瀧音能之 has written, “Legends concerning Susanoo and his descendants in the *Izumo no kuni fudoki*, both their distribution and content, were probably passed down locally and can be recognized as having historical value.”¹ By this he means that the *Izumo fudoki* describes a real deity actually believed in and worshipped by kinship groups in Izumo.

On the other hand, as Yamaguchi Hiroshi 山口博 has written, “The *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* compiled in the center have detailed and vivid descriptions of Susanoo, but it is clear that in the locally produced *Izumo no kuni fudoki* or *Amabe-shi keizu* 海部氏系図 [ca. 871-877], Susanoo was merely a minor, undistinguished deity. Susanoo was simply a god of agriculture in mountain communities.”² He concludes that Susanoo was a deity created by the imperial polity. Similarly, Tsuda Sōkichi 津田左右吉 as early as 1924 wrote, “Susanoo was nothing more than the creation of the minds of the authors of mythic history. . . .”³ Maeshiro Naoko 前城直子 argues that the creation of a direct line of descent from Susanoo to Ōkuninushi was a crucial element of the imperial mythology created in an attempt to unify the country and its gods under central leadership. Susanoo, a heavenly deity, commands his descendant, Ōkuninushi, to create the terrestrial realm. Ōkuninushi thus becomes the representative deity of all terrestrial deities, and this legitimized his later surrender of the terrestrial realm (*kuniyuzuri* 国譲り) to the heavenly deities.⁴ From what can be inferred from the *Engishiki:Jinmyō-chō*, at the beginning of the tenth century, Susanoo no mikoto was worshipped at only four identifiable shrines: two in Izumo, the Susa Shrine 須佐神社 and the Susanoo Shrine, a sub-shrine of Asuki Shrine 阿須伎神社内の須佐袁神社, a Susanoo Shrine in the province of Bingo 備後, and a Susa Shrine in the province of Kii 紀伊.⁵

I have dealt with the Yamato polity’s fictional elevation of Susanoo to be the chief god of Izumo elsewhere and need not repeat that argument here.⁶ The present paper seeks to partially explain how, as of 1995, Susanoo came to be worshipped at 13,541 shrines and sub-shrines.⁷ Ironically, Susanoo, portrayed as a violent, criminal deity associated with the enemy Silla and

¹ Takioto, *Izumo kodaishi ronkō*, p. 148.

² Yamaguchi, *Tsukurareta Susanoo shinwa*, p. 46. The *Amabe-shi kanchū keizu* 海部氏勘注系図 (859-77) section of the *Amabe-shi keizu* has it that the ancestor deity of the Amabe was the heavenly deity Hoakari no mikoto 火明命 who wed Ōnamuchi no kami’s daughter Ama no michi hime no mikoto 天道日女命. The twelfth generation descendant of this union was Takeinadane no mikoto 建稻種命, who has the alternate name Susanoo no mikoto 須佐之男命 (*Amabe-shi keizu*, pp. 24-25 and 39).

³ Tsuda, *Jindaishi no kenkyū*, p. 421.

⁴ Maeshiro, “Ōkuninushi no kami to nezumi no shisōsei: Ōkuninushi shinwa no kōzō bunseki,” pp. 4-7.

⁵ *Engishiki* 1, pp. 673, 675, 691, and 699.

⁶ Torrance, “Ōnamochi: The Great God who Created All Under Heaven,” pp. 278-317.

⁷ Motegi, “Susanoo no mikoto shinkō no tenkai—Jinja Honchō *Heisei ‘Matsuri’ dētā* no bunseki o chūshin,” p. 57.

the realm of death, Izumo, became one of the most widely worshipped of the Japanese deities. An important reason for this popularity has to do with the association of Susanoo with epidemics.

Chi no wa 茅の輪

In the context of “medieval myth,” a manifestation of the Susanoo myth was his identification with foreign gods. This appears to have come about after the Heian period, perhaps in the thirteenth century.⁸ Urabe Kanebumi and Kanekata were influential in establishing this association. The *Shaku Nihongi* has the following account. The *Bingo no kuni fudoki* 備後国風土記 cites a document from the Enokuma no kunitsuyashiro 疫隅の国つ社 to the effect that in olden times Mutō no kami from across the North Sea 北の海の武塔の神 travelled to woe the daughter of the god of the Southern Sea. On the way, as darkness fell, Mutō no kami sought lodging. Two brothers named Somin Shōrai 蘇民将来 lived in that place. The younger brother was wealthy and refused Mutō shelter. The older brother was very poor, but provided the god with lodging and a meal of millet. Some years later, Mutō no kami and his Eight Sons 八王子 (Hachiōji) returned with the intent of thanking the elder brother. The god inquired if the elder brother had relations living with him, and he replied that he had a wife and daughter. Mutō no kami instructed that a wreath of miscanthus 茅の輪 (*chi no wa*) should be fashioned and worn around their waists. The family did as they were told. That night, Mutō no kami and his Eight Sons killed everyone in the village except the older brother and the two women. Mutō no kami announced, “I am Haya-Susanoo no kami. The next time there is a severe epidemic, state that you are the descendants of Somin Shōrai and wear the miscanthus wreath around your waists, and you will be saved.”⁹

Kanebumi asserts that this passage from the *Bingo no kuni fudoki* is the foundational history of the Gion-sha. Ichijō Sanetsune, in attendance at this lecture, questioned which three gods were worshipped at Gion-sha. Kanebumi replies that *Bingo no kuni fudoki* states that Mutō no kami was Susanoo. He surmises that Shōshōi 少将井 is Kishinada hime, and Imagozen 今御前 is the Goddess of the Southern Sea 南海神の女子 whom Mutō no kami traveled to woe. Sanetsune next expresses his belief that the gods of Gion-sha 祇園社 are all foreign gods. Kanebumi asserts that after being expelled from heaven, Susanoo travelled to Silla before coming to Japan. This is probably why he is regarded as a foreign god.¹⁰

The *Bingo no kuni fudoki* has been lost, and its citation by Kanebumi/Kanekata would mean that Susanoo was worshipped as a god of epidemics 疫神 (*ekijin*) from the early eighth century and was a main god of the Gion-sha from the time of the *goryō'e* 御霊会 ceremonies in the early ninth century. However there is substantial evidence that this excerpt from the *Bingo no kuni fudoki* was an invention during the Kamakura period by the Urabe family, which held the hereditary position of diviners in the Department of Divinities 神祇官 *Jingikan*.¹¹ Even Ichijō Sanetsune seems to express skepticism at Urabe Kanebumi’s assertion that Susanoo is a

⁸ Kuon Tonu, *Susanoo no henbō: kodai kara chūsei*, p.262.

⁹ *Shaku Nihongi*, in *Kokushi taikei*, v. 7, pp. 610-611.

¹⁰ *Shaku Nihongi*, in *Kokushi taikei*, v. 7, p. 611.

¹¹ Kuon, p. 244; Saitō, *Araburu Susanoo, shichi henka: chūsei shinwa no sekai*, pp. 138-141.

manifestation of the foreign god Mutō no kami. In Saitō Hideki's formulation, "The exchange of questions and answers between Ichijō Sanetsune and Urabe Kanebumi is the very site where Susanoo was transformed into the Gion-sha's central god. It allows a glimpse into the inner mysteries of the myth's creation."¹²

The reinvention of Susanoo as an *ekijin* (disease inducing god) worshipped at the Gion-sha (present-day Yasaka Shrine 八坂神社), probably in the thirteenth century, is crucial to the further spread of the Susanoo cult, and so it calls for a brief digression concerning the origins of the Gion-sha. The first of the *goryō'e* (departed spirits rituals) was recorded in 863 and was intended to appease the aggrieved spirits of public figures who had met tragic ends due to political infighting.¹³ These spirits were thought to bring about epidemics and other disasters in their anger. The initial figures to be pacified were Prince Sawara 早良親王, Prince Iyo 伊予親王, Fujiwara no Nakanari 藤原仲成, Tachibana no Hayanari 橘逸勢, Funya no Miyatamaro 文室宮田麻呂, and Mononobe no Moriya 物部守屋. Later the spirits of Kibi no Makibi 吉備真備, Sugawara no Michizane 菅原道真, and others were propitiated. In addition, foreign gods were thought to bring epidemics from abroad and also came to be propitiated. Until the late Heian period, the specific foreign gods worshipped at Gion-sha appear to have been in flux. By 1070, among other foreign gods, Gozu Tennō 牛頭天王 (ox-head heavenly king) gained prominence. One theory has it that because "Gion" is said to be a translation of India's Jeta Grove, the location of a monastery where the historical Buddha often taught, and its protective deity was Gavagriva. This Gavagriva went through various transformations and became the disease-inducing/disease-curing Gozu Tennō in Japan. In any case, the first mention of Mutō no kami, believed to be a Korean deity, as a manifestation of Gozu Tennō appears in the early Kamakura period.¹⁴ And we have seen the site where Susanoo became a manifestation of Mutō no kami.

Why Susanoo? The Urabe family was known as the "House of the *Nihongi*." The extended clan was invested in Japan's native gods and, as will be demonstrated below, worked to enhance them from the late Heian period on. Susanoo was similar enough to the foreign gods of epidemic disease to be their embodiment. First, Susanoo was also a god who wreaked havoc but also benefitted humankind. Second, Susanoo was exiled from heaven, and as did Mutō no kami, he begged for food. Third, Susanoo was strongly colored by Silla influence. Finally Susanoo, as the ruler of the netherworld, was the source of all calamities and can thus also be regarded as the ruler of the origin of epidemics.

Yoshida Kanetomo 吉田兼俱 (1435-1511), descended from the Yoshida branch of the Urabe family, was a major religious thinker and religious entrepreneur during the fifteenth century. He advanced to the posts of Imperial Chamberlain 侍從 (*jijū*) and Senior Assistant Director of Divinities 神祇大輔 (*jingi taifu*) and gave himself the title of Head of Shinto 神道長上 (*shintō chōjō*), even attempting to take control of the Ise Shrine. Kanetomo was an advocate of the idea

¹² Saitō, p. 157.

¹³ For a detailed discussion of the Gion-sha, see Neil McMullin, "On Placating the Gods and Pacifying the Populace: The Case of the Gion 'Goryō' Cult," pp. 270-293.

¹⁴ Kuon, p. 249.

that it was Japanese gods who created the universe, and it was foreign gods and Buddhist divinities who owed their existence to native Japanese gods. Kanetomo advocated an “inversion” of *shinbutsu shūgō* and *honji suijaku*, a reversal that defined the Japanese kami as primary and Buddhism as adherent 神主仏従 (*shinshu butsujiū*) and Japan as seminal root: China was the branches and leaves, India the flower and fruit 根葉花実.¹⁵ Following from this, Susanoo functioned as the godhead and foreign gods as avatars. According to Kanetomo, in addition to Gozu Tennō and Mutō no kami, China’s god of creation Pangu was Susanoo, as were India’s Konpirashin 金比羅神 and Matarajin 摩多羅神, China’s Sekizan Gongen 赤山権現, Silla’s Shinra Myōjin 新羅明神, and others.¹⁶

Following the example of the Gion-sha, numerous shrines/temples and their franchises moved to propitiate disease/calamity producing gods from abroad and their manifestation Susanoo. The majority incorporated a diversity of nativist and Buddhist elements. However, almost as soon as it came into existence, the Meiji state issued a series of orders aimed at the separation of Shinto and Buddhism, the so-called *shinbutsu bunri* 神仏分離 policy. Shrine Buddhist priests were ordered to reconvert as purely shrine priests. Symbols of Buddhism were ordered removed from shrines. Names of shrines were ordered changed to excise Buddhist influence. Thus, the name of Gion-sha was changed to Yasaka Shrine, still the home shrine of the Gion Festival. And shrines where Gozu Tennō or a Bodhisattva or avatars of the Buddhas were worshipped were forced to banish these deities and adopt Japanese kami. This was the state’s official interdiction of the concept of syncretism of kami and Buddhist and foreign divinities. It was the beginning of modern Shinto. Of course, the logical choice as a replacement for many of these foreign deities was Susanoo. Of six to seven thousand shrines dedicated to the worship of Susanoo in the present, at least half were previously dedicated to the worship of Gozu Tennō.¹⁷ Motegi Sadasumi has provided a breakdown according to region of the Shinto franchises that came to enshrine Susanoo. These are the Yasaka Shrines 八坂神社, Yakumo Shrines 八雲神社, Susanoo Shrines 素戔鳴神社, Tsushima Shrines 津島神社, and Hikawa Shrines 氷川神社.

	Number of Susanoo shrines	Yasaka Shrines		Yakumo Shrines		Suga Shrines		Susanoo Shrines		Tsushima Shrines		Hikawa Shrines	
		A ¹⁸	B ¹⁹	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
Tokyo	256	14	24	15	36	6	13	1	0	0	4	69	2
Kanagawa	214	25	33	10	9	11	1	0	0	1	4	2	1
Saitama	865	38	310	17	54	3	11	1	0	0	6	162	4
Gunma	419	23	102	1	0	1	6	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chiba	409	129	62	28	17	20	3	0	1	0	0	1	0
Ibaraki	437	86	128	3	8	13	15	0	1	0	0	2	0

¹⁵ Saitō, pp. 169-170.

¹⁶ Saitō, pp. 166-169; Kuon, pp. 276-279.

¹⁷ Saitō, p. 211.

¹⁸ Main shrines dedicated to Susanoo.

¹⁹ Sub-shrines devoted to Susanoo.

Tochigi	373	56	158	14	6	5	7	0	0	1	3	2	0
Yamanashi	113	5	3	5	1	0	0	1	0	4	7	2	0
Hokkaido	20	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Miyagi	148	14	4	34	5	10	2	0	0	3	0	0	0
Fukushima	294	80	53	35	19	3	2	0	0	7	4	5	1
Iwate	116	31	23	11	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Aomori	21	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Yamagata	134	21	16	3	1	1	0	0	0	2	2	0	0
Akita	85	9	5	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mie	505	3	1	11	3	7	6	1	0	2	4	0	0
Aichi	947	10	4	1	0	5	1	88	24	87	306	0	1
Shizuoka	704	39	11	13	2	14	5	5	2	50	151	0	0
Gifu	477	14	4	3	0	8	2	14	5	93	131	0	0
Nagano	260	9	29	0	0	1	0	2	0	21	47	0	0
Niigata	225	20	3	1	1	12	4	3	1	2	1	0	1
Fukui	121	18	3	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	18	3
Ishikawa	84	13	4	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0
Toyama	98	19	2	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0
Kyoto	193	21	10	0	0	4	2	4	1	0	0	0	0
Osaka	201	20	8	1	0	1	0	15	4	1	0	0	0
Hyōgo	695	100	41	6	1	53	17	37	10	0	0	0	0
Nara	203	47	18	1	0	3	0	27	5	1	3	0	0
Shiga	222	36	23	1	1	2	1	1	1	5	23	0	1
Wakayama	121	5	15	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	1
Tottori	421	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shimane	489	4	19	0	2	4	10	0	0	0	0	2	0
Okayama	516	3	4	0	0	0	0	19	15	0	0	0	0
Hiroshima	538	11	7	1	1	1	1	13	0	0	0	0	0
Yamaguchi	213	9	13	1	0	6	15	0	0	0	0	0	1
Tokushima	266	74	54	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Kagawa	162	17	15	1	4	3	5	1	0	0	0	0	0
Ehime	359	20	15	2	1	13	7	0	2	0	1	0	0
Kochi	193	58	37	0	0	27	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nagasaki	200	12	23	2	0	0	0	6	2	0	0	1	0
Fukuoka	604	15	11	1	2	64	67	9	16	0	0	0	0
Ōita	89	67	25	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Saga	110	26	14	0	0	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
Kumamoto	147	8	45	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Miyazaki	252	13	11	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Kagoshima	55	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Okinawa	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	13542	3251	1420	230	180	307	214	259	93	281	707	268	17
		4,671		410		521		352		988		285	

At the Yasaka Shrine, in Kyoto, formerly Gion-sha, the deities Susanoo, Kishinada hime and the Eight Princes (Hachiōji) are worshipped today. The Gion-sha related shrines followed suit. For example, the Gion-sha in Hiroshima was renamed Susa Shrine. The Gozu Tennō-sha in Suita City was renamed Susanoo no Mikoto Shrine. Gozu Tennō Shrine in Takarazuka City became Susanoo Shrine.²⁰ With the exceptions of Hokkaido and Okinawa, Yasaka Shrines are located throughout the country, but most of the main shrines are distributed in the Kinki region and central Honshū, while from the Kantō region north, most Yasaka shrines are sub-shrines. Suga

²⁰ Motegi, pp. 56-57.

Shrines are spread throughout the country but are concentrated in Hyōgo and Fukuoka prefectures. There is no direct connection between Gion and the Tsushima Shrines. However, during the medieval and early modern periods, they were known as Tsushima Gozu Tennō Shrines, and according to legend, when Susanoo returned from Korea, he left his violent spirit 荒魂 in Izumo and his gentle spirit 和魂 in Tsushima. Emperor Kinmei 欽明天皇 had the gentle spirit transferred to the province of Owari and enshrined it there. The Tsushima Shrine network consists of over 3,000 shrines and about one third of these are dedicated to Susanoo. Hikawa Shrines are by and large located in Tokyo, Saitama, and Fukui. Today, Susanoo is the chief god at most of these shrines, but they were probably dedicated to Ōkuninushi in a previous age and converted to Susanoo as his cult spread.²¹ In addition, and not surprisingly, Susanoo was often defined as a manifestation of Enma-Ō 閻魔王 (King Yama, Ruler of Hell), the dispenser of justice to the dead.²²

By the mid-Muromachi period, the most widely recognized manifestation of Susanoo was as a god who bore little resemblance to the Susanoo of the early eighth century *Kojiki*, *Nihon shoki*, and *Izumo fudoki*. Perhaps following the idea of non-duality advocated by Tendai Buddhism, aristocratic and Buddhist literary aestheticians in their explications of waka ameliorated the conflict between Amaterasu and Susanoo, in part to stress the “harmony” and miraculous power to heal of poetry. Thus, the originator of Japanese poetry could not be seen as the embodiment of sin. In works of poetic exegesis, theory, and history, Susanoo is widely recognized as the originator of Japanese poetry (31 syllable waka). By the late Edo period, we see his “sins” absolved by his good works and the Buddha of Eternal Life. He came to be referred to as one of three gods of Japanese poetry.²³

The following are lines from the Muromachi-era nō play *Sōshi Arai Komachi* 草紙洗小町:

The Emperor presides over a thousand, eight thousand generations of a land of prosperity. Within the four seas, within all the provinces of the land, the people need not lock their doors at night. Such a peaceful realm has not been known since the reigns of the Emperors Yao and Shun. The originator of Japanese poetry (waka) in our world is Susanoo. How grateful we should be for our poetry on this gentle spring day in our capital with flowers everywhere, on this gentle spring day in this land of the gods protected by Susanoo, the god of poetry.”²⁴

In the new mythology of the medieval period, Susanoo became Amaterasu’s child, younger sister, older brother, father, and adopted son.²⁵ According to the *Kokin wakashū jo kikigaki*

²¹ Motegi, pp. 56-64.

²² Saitō, p. 122.

²³ See, for example, Fujiwara no Toshinari, *Korai fūtaishō* (1201) in Sasaki Nobutsuna, ed., *Nihon kagaku taikei*, v. 2, p. 305; *Iwami joseki*, (mid-Kamakura period) in Sasaki Nobutsuna, ed., *Nihon kagaku taikei*, v. 1, p. 32; Tomobayashi Mitsuhira, *Sono no ikemizu* (1859), in Sasaki Nobutsuna, ed., *Nihon kagaku taikei*, v. 9, p. 425.

²⁴ Sanari Kentarō, *Yōkyoku taikan*, v. 2, p. 1420.

²⁵ Inoue Hiroshi, “Izumo shinwa ni okeru kodai to chūsei: Susanoo-ron o chūshin ni,” pp. 5-7; Saitō, pp. 75-76. For a reference to Susanoo as Amaterasu’s younger sister and older brother, depending on the variant text referred to,

sanryūshō 古今和歌集序聞書三流抄 (ca. 1286), Susanoo attempted to wrest control of the terrestrial realm from Amaterasu. In order to pacify him, Amaterasu adopted him as her son and gave him rule over the provinces of Iwami and Izumo for the whole of the Tenth Month. For this reason, all the terrestrial gods of Japan gather in Izumo in the Tenth Month 神在月 (*Kamiarizuki*), and the gods of the rest of the land are absent during this month 神無月 (*Kannazuki*).²⁶

One of the first textual mentions of gods gathering in Izumo in the Tenth Month is in *Ōgishō* 奥義抄 (Observations on Deepest Principles; ca. 1135–1144) by Fujiwara no Kiyosuke 藤原清輔. He writes: “As for the god-less month in reference to the Tenth Month, this means that the myriad gods under heaven gather in Izumo in the Tenth Month. It is an error to ascribe the Tenth Month to a god-less month in Izumo.”²⁷ This conception of Izumo as a central gathering point for earthly deities to be in attendance on the ancestor of the earthly deities, Susanoo, probably predated their first textual recordings, but the transformation of Susanoo into an essentially benevolent god in the popular imagination took place over four or five centuries.

What these theories share is the reduction of a complex mythical figure, Susanoo, to a single characteristic: the god of storms, the god of rain, the god of epidemics, “Susa-no-o: a culture hero from Korea,” or the god of poetry. In many ways, new Susanoo myths continue to be created in the twentieth century.²⁸ In the end, Susanoo was a blank screen against which the concerns of the day were cast. Fears of Silla and Izumo were projected on the screen. The terrors of epidemics were projected as well as the desire for a cure. A solution was sought for naturalizing foreign gods and Susanoo appeared as the logical choice. Buddhist concepts of good and evil were personified as one in the god Susanoo, since he represented both aspects. Literary theorists and aestheticians sought the origins of Japanese poetry and cast Susanoo in the role. And so on. In the end, it was Susanoo’s mutability in response to changing intellectual and historical conditions that resulted in his enduring appeal.

Conclusion

For much of Japanese history, epidemics were often regarded as pandemics. This is because it was believed that many diseases were brought to Japan by fearsome deities from the Asian continent, the entire outside world. A primary means to prevent epidemics was to propitiate the fearsome deity in hopes of having him or her bring an end to the outbreak. The deities in question thus came to have a threatening aspect and a benevolent aspect. As we have seen, in the case of Susanoo, over time, the benevolent aspect came to the fore.

Jannetta Bowman argues that epidemics and pandemics in pre-Meiji Japan were less severe than in other parts of the world with large populations living in close proximity, and she attributes this to Japan’s isolation. There were a number of infectious diseases that never made it to Japan to any remarkable degree until the 1850s: plague, typhus, diphtheria, and scarlet fever.

see *Tameie kokin joshō* (1264, attributed to Fujiwara no Tameie 1198-1275), in Katagiri Yōichi, *Chūsei Kokinshū chūshakusho kaidai*, v. 1, pp. 135 and 171.

²⁶ *Kokin wakashū jo kiki-gaki sanryūshō*, in Katagiri Yōichi, *Chūsei Kokinshū chūshakusho kaidai*, v. 2, p. 245.

²⁷ Fujiwara no Kiyosuke, *Ōgishō*, in Sasaki Nobutsuna, ed., *Nihon kagaku taikei*, v. 1, p. 252.

²⁸ Saitō, pp. 171-172.

The first severe cholera epidemic to sweep the entire country was not until 1858.²⁹ Bowman concludes that “Japan’s adaptation to infectious disease was largely a successful one.”³⁰

That said, Bowman also documents the devastating effects of epidemics over the centuries in Japan. Smallpox was endemic and was the great killer of children. In the fifty years before the enforcement of mass vaccinations perhaps 20 percent of children were killed by smallpox.³¹ Smallpox, measles, influenza, chicken pox, rubella, dysentery, cholera—from 1601 to 1867, ninety-three lethal epidemic outbreaks were recorded in the historical literature.³²

As recent experience has taught us, endemics, epidemics, and pandemics are terrifying. They bring death and chaos to almost all social interactions, and there is little one can do to predict their onset or when they will subside. The response of pre-modern Japanese populations was to pray for divine intervention. Those prayers were negotiations with the harmful deities that were believed to be the cause of epidemics. The sheer number of shrines dedicated in part to the elimination of epidemics is proof of how terrible and terrifying were these epidemic deities (*ekijin* 疫神) for pre-modern populations. *Chi no wa* ceremonies continue to be practiced in some regions of Japan, though they have mostly lost their particular reference to epidemics, at least until recently. It was announced on the news that Fukushima prefecture’s Iasumi Shrine 伊佐須美神社 has revived a ceremony to pacify the deity who brought about the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a revival of a ritual that was banned at the same shrine by the young Meiji state in 1872

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²⁹ Jannetta Ann Bowman, *Epidemics and Mortality in Early Modern Japan*, p.165.

³⁰ Bowman, *Epidemics and Mortality in Early Modern Japan*, p.207.

³¹ Jannetta Ann Bowman, *The Vaccinators: smallpox, medical knowledge, and the “opening” of Japan*, p.182

³² Bowman, *Epidemics and Mortality in Early Modern Japan*, pp. 48-49.

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