

***Daimokutate*: Ritual Placatory Performance of the Genpei War**

[*eCompanion at www.oraltradition.org¹]

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Introduction

The Japanese performance art known as *Daimokutate*² articulates one of Japan's most important historical narratives. A coming-of-age ritual once practiced in numerous rural villages in central Japan, *Daimokutate* involves a group of young men taking the roles of characters from the *Heike monogatari* (*Tale of the Heike*), Japan's epic war tale chronicling the Genpei War (1180-85), a conflict that brought the warrior class to power both politically and socially. In *Daimokutate*, the participants take turns recounting one of several felicitous narratives derived from the *Heike* as a dedicatory ritual before the god of their local shrine. Performances occur annually at the end of the harvest season.

As a vestige of local ritual practice reaching back at least to the late medieval period,³ *Daimokutate* is of inherent interest to anthropologists and scholars of folklore and the performing arts. Its reliance on stories from the *Heike* also places *Daimokutate* in the constellation of narrative and dramatic genres that interpreted episodes from the *Heike* during the medieval and

¹ To watch an example of *Daimokutate*, visit this article's eCompanion at www.oraltradition.org.

² Literally, "Presentation of a Theme." The term *Daimoku* more familiarly refers to the recitation of the title of the Lotus Sutra, a practice common in the Nichiren sect; there is no evident connection between it and the *Daimokutate* considered in this paper.

³ Broadly defined, Japan's medieval period lasted from the thirteenth through the sixteenth centuries. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, after central power had begun to disintegrate and there was widespread civil unrest, represent the segment of this period most analogous to European mediocrity.

early modern ages: the *nō* theater; the ballad-drama *kōwakamai*; ⁴ the *kabuki* theater; and *otogizōshi*, a narrative genre embracing both fictional and historical tales.

The material shared across these genres comprises much of what Barbara Ruch (1977:294-307) has termed Japan's "national literature": a body of stories and characters spread across the realm and to broad segments of the population primarily by peripatetic storytellers and performers. Because these tales were told and retold in numerous genres, they reached audiences far more socially and geographically diverse than any earlier works, and they continue to be considered some of the most beloved and culturally defining narratives in Japan. Stories of the Genpei War, and particularly those based on events and characters found in the *Heike*, constitute an important segment of this "national literature."

One hallmark of this corpus is the inclusion of verbatim segments of specific narratives across the various generic and textual interpretations of a story, a practice that suggests something other than conventional allusive textual relationships between these variants. Together, the trans-generic variants of a story act as a work-in-progress experienced by diverse audiences, where each version or performance reshapes and contextualizes a fundamental story underlying them all. The global, shared narrative engendered by their multiple incarnations supersedes the authority of an original text to form the ultimate referential network for an audience of any performance (and in fact the reader of any textual version). When looking at relationships among variants, therefore, we benefit from acknowledging the importance of what John Miles Foley defines as "traditional referentiality" (1991:45): "All members of an audience interpret the text according to a shared body of knowledge." This knowledge acts as "the equivalent of a critical methodology, evolved and practiced by a 'school' or 'interpretive community' unified by the act of (re-)making and (re-)reading' traditional verbal art" (*idem*).⁵

The relationship between Daimokutate and the general narrative originating in the *Heike* is the focus of this essay. How are parts of the *Heike*

⁴ This term was coined by James T. Araki (1964) in his study of *kōwakamamai*, the only monograph-length study of the genre to date.

⁵ The idea of "interpretive community" used here is articulated by Brian Stock (1990:30-52) in his discussion of "textual communities." Stock addresses cultural contexts like that of Daimokutate, where both writing and performance were important factors in the creation of meaning for such interpretive communities. For descriptions of the Japanese context in which multiply-told tales represented the "text" for the interpretive community, see Ruch 1977 and Oyler 2006.

narrative articulated in Daimokutate? In what ways does Daimokutate as a genre mold that narrative to make it function in a ritual context? And how does this version of an important historical narrative contribute to further reinterpretation of the better-known source narrative, particularly in the isolated, rural areas in which Daimokutate was performed? After a brief explanation of the Genpei War, the *Tale of the Heike*, and the cultural context generating Daimokutate, I will introduce the genre of Daimokutate, then move on to an analysis of *Itsukushima*, one of the three pieces of the extant repertoire. The performance upon which this analysis is based occurred in the village of Kamifukawa, Nara Prefecture, on October 12, 2002.

The Genpei War and the *Heike monogatari*

The Daimokutate repertoire consists of narratives describing events connected to the Genpei War. A clash that came to be seen as the turning point between Japan's classical period and its age of warriors, the war set the stage for institutionalizing the office of *shōgun* and the rise of the warrior class both politically and culturally. The war was also the first protracted conflict to affect the capital, Heian-kyō (modern-day Kyoto), since its establishment in 794.

The Genpei War was waged between partisans of two clans: the Taira and the Minamoto.⁶ The Taira, originally a provincial military house, had risen to a point of such power that Kiyomori, the scion of the clan, was able to marry his daughter to the reigning sovereign, Takakura (r. 1168-80).⁷ The birth of a son to this daughter made Kiyomori the grandfather of a crown

⁶ The Taira clan (also known as the “Heike,” an alternative reading of the characters for “Taira family”) descended from a prince who had been reduced to commoner status in the practice of dynastic shedding common throughout Japan's classical age. In this case, the prince was a son of the Sovereign Kanmu (r. 781-806), and he was given the surname “Taira”; his descendants are referred to as the Kanmu Heike. The Minamoto (also known as the “Genji,” an alternative reading of the characters for “Minamoto clan”) similarly originated with the son of a sovereign—in this case Sovereign Seiwa (r. 858-76). They are known consequently as the “Seiwa Genji.” In both cases, the sloughed-off princes were given provincial holdings, in effect removing them from the upper aristocracy that held central governmental positions in the capital. That the Taira managed to rise to heights allowing them to marry into the royal family was unprecedented and became the source of resentment within the established nobility.

⁷ The rise of the Taira was due in large part to the patronage of Kiyomori's father, Tadamori, by the royal house, and particularly the retired sovereign, Toba (r. 1107-23).

prince. The child was appointed sovereign at the age of a little over one year upon the abdication of his father. As de facto regent, Kiyomori was in a position to control political affairs. He began to exercise his authority autocratically, banishing or executing members of the highest aristocracy who threatened his power.

Disgruntled aristocrats and members of the royal family whom Kiyomori had disenfranchised gave tacit approval for the Minamoto, another military house, to punish the Taira. The Minamoto had suffered a debilitating defeat 20 years earlier at the hands of Kiyomori,⁸ and, according to the narrative record, had been awaiting the opportunity for vengeance. The resulting struggle, what we know as the Genpei War, ensued sporadically for six years. Although not as divisive as a full-fledged civil war, it rent much of the symbolic infrastructure underlying the realm's stability: the child sovereign was removed from the capital by his maternal relatives as they fled the Minamoto, as were the three sacred regalia justifying his rule. A new sovereign was appointed in the capital, which meant that two sovereigns in essence were claiming legitimacy simultaneously. The capital was overrun by provincial warriors, who were given heretofore unheard of prerogatives from the retired sovereign, paternal grandfather of both sovereigns.⁹ In the final battle of the war, one of the sacred regalia—a sword—was irretrievably lost at sea. Following the war, the victors established the new political office of *shōgun*, which attenuated royal authority permanently. Authority of the Japanese royal family (which has ruled unbroken throughout history) is predicated on their possession of the three sacred regalia bequeathed on the first human sovereign by their mythical ancestor, the sun goddess Amaterasu. The loss of the sacred sword at this moment of chaos and redefinition of power relationships thus represented a significant symbolic crisis.

The rupturing of paradigms represented by the loss of the sacred sword and the resulting shift in power to the Minamoto clan contributed significantly to the need to articulate a coherent story about the war.

⁸ During the Heiji Uprising, an extremely short and ill-fated rebellion in 1159-60 that decimated the Minamoto. Minamoto Yoshitomo, head of the clan, as well as all of his adult sons, was killed during or after the uprising. Those of his sons who were still children at the time of the conflict were spared; they were the Minamoto who rose to arms against the Taira in 1180.

⁹ Go-Shirakawa (r. 1155-58). He was the father of Takakura, who fathered both Antoku (r. 1180-83), Taira Kiyomori's grandson, and Go-Toba (r. 1183-98), who was elevated to sovereign when Antoku was taken from the capital by the Taira as they fled. Takakura died in 1180, shortly after having abdicated in favor of Antoku.

Narratives explaining the loss of the sword in particular are very common in medieval Japan.¹⁰ From almost immediately after its conclusion, archivists of the newly prominent warrior class needed to define the war in terms that justified their rule. But perhaps more importantly, members of the Buddhist clergy and others responsible for ritual placation also were called upon to perform memorial services for the war dead. On the most superficial level, memorializers were concerned about the victims of the war. Death on the battlefield was cause for resentment in the afterlife, and the unquiet dead were a potential source of misfortune in a here-and-now already destabilized by the general effects of the conflict.

Such worry about restless spirits was a commonplace in early Japan. Large-scale misfortunes including fires, droughts, or earthquakes were thought to be caused by the resentful or angry dead, and memorial services and other techniques—posthumous elevation in court rank, for example, or, in extreme cases, apotheosis—were routinely practiced in aristocratic society. Memorialization of this sort necessarily involved recasting stories about the dead in a context so as to neutralize their destructive potential. We find, for example, enemies of the court eulogized for their valor as warriors and commanders, the loss of whom was lamentable; their rebelliousness becomes a secondary concern. *Itsukushima*, as we shall see, represents one particularly powerful example of how the process works.

The intimate connection to recounting past events and the placation of spirits gave rise to the great narrative of the period, the *Heike monogatari*. The *Heike* actually refers to approximately 80 variant texts of divergent styles and practical uses. In addition to those performance variants connected to or derived from ritual placatory practice, there are also many versions designed specifically as written records; they all, however, share enough material to be considered variants rather than unique texts. The popularity and spread of the *Heike* narrative depended most vitally on the performative variants, which, like the *nō* drama, derived from, and maintained strong connections to, formal placatory ritual practice.¹¹ Today, most people think of the *Heike* as a textual version of a performance art,

¹⁰ The significance of compensatory narratives about the sword is an important topic in historical, cultural, and literary studies about the Genpei War and its effects on medieval culture. See, for example, Abe 1985:38-45; Bialock 2002-03:270-81; Tomikura 1967: 544-45.

¹¹ The placatory function of *Heike* recitation and its relation to narrative in the medieval context is discussed in Bialock 2002-03:293-308 (which includes as well a consideration of the Dragon King's daughter discussed below); Mizuhara 1971:144-63; and Yamashita 2003:41.

originally created and transmitted by religious or pseudo-religious men who sang the narrative and accompanied themselves on the *biwa* lute.¹² Canonically, these men, referred to generically as *biwa hōshi* (“biwa priests”), were blind, although there is no evidence that the original performers were.¹³

The *Heike* narrative proved to be both portable and malleable: its episodes became the basis for many other works, including, prominently, plays of the *nō* theater and the *kōwakamai*. The proliferation of scenes and characters from the *Heike* is characteristic of the general medieval trend toward the repetition and reinterpretation of favorite stories making up the “national literature,” but repeated *Heike* episodes are particularly significant because of their historical dimension: they describe a divisive and defining actual event. Because performance was the primary means for circulating stories of the Genpei War, however, new stories about the war were conditioned strongly by the generic restrictions of ritual performance. Historical events, in other words, entered the vernacular via performance traditions with strong ritual dimensions, and these popular versions were in turn validated because they appeared in historical records as well. The interplay of the historical and the ritual, therefore, is vital in creating the referential web underlying all tellings of the Genpei War narrative, including *Itsukushima*, which addresses the specific issues of the rise of the warriors and the loss of the sacred sword within the context of ritualized performance.

¹² Modern scholars divide the variants generally into two lineages, the “recited (performance) lineage” or *kataribonkei*, and the “read lineage” or *yomihonkei*. Although there is considerable overlap between the two, the recited lineage texts tend to be less linear, more colloquial in style, and more concerned with lament and placation, whereas the read lineage texts are more linear, cast in Chinese terms and grammatical structures (hence more “literate”), and concerned with authoring, and authorizing, a specific history of the period.

¹³ During the Tokugawa period (1600-1868), Japan’s “early modern” age, the practice of reciting the *Heike* was legally placed in the custodianship of the blind guild (*tōdōza*), through which transmission of the work—a text, originally written in the fourteenth century—as well as licensing of performers and arrangement of performances was regulated. It is safe to assume, therefore, that the connection between blind performers and the *Heike* originates well before that time.

Daimokutate

Performed today by 17-year-old males as a coming-of-age rite, Daimokutate is a vestige of a ritual performance tradition originating in the medieval period. The earliest reference to Daimokutate appears in an entry from the Priest Eishun's *Mugenki* (*Record of Dreams and Reality*).¹⁴ The account, dated 1534, relates the following under an entry dated at 1516, which discusses a Daimokutate performance: "Daimokutate was performed when a new building was constructed at a shrine in the countryside. [The performers] presented themselves as heroes of old, following a book written in *katakana*¹⁵ of old" (Kanai 1985:89).¹⁶ At this time, therefore, the art was prominent enough to catch the attention of a high-ranking clergyman, and performance utilized a libretto written in the simplest available writing system. From this we can surmise that the performers were only nominally literate, as those members of the educated elite read and wrote using Chinese characters (*kanji*). In other words, Eishun's diary strongly implies that even during his time the performers were not from among the elite classes.

Daimokutate seems to have flourished as a ritual performance associated with construction or relocation of a shrine building in numerous locales in the Yamato region (modern-day Nara Prefecture) during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,¹⁷ after which it was gradually

¹⁴ Included as Book 43 of the *Tamon'in nikki* (*Record of the Tamon Cloister [of Kōfukuji Temple]*).

¹⁵ *Katakana* is one of the two Japanese syllabaries. The text referred to here was written in *katakana* (rather than *kanji*, or Chinese characters). Mastery of Chinese characters was limited to the highly educated.

¹⁶ The original can be found in Takeuchi 1994. Eishun's *Mugenki* is found in vol. 42, 39-48. In this citation (Takeuchi 1994:44), Eishun is talking generally about pronunciation in recitation. He quotes the beginning of one Daimokutate piece as an illustration. The particular line he quotes identifies the character speaking as Minamoto Yoshitsune (the general credited with the Minamoto victory and one of Japan's favorite heroes), who does not figure in any of the three pieces of the current repertoire, which leads to the conclusion that the repertoire was once larger. The similarity of this name-announcing passage to those in extant pieces suggests that the content of the lost works resembled those that remain.

¹⁷ Ichiko 1984:vol. 4, 119. Local records from the Nara region suggest that this practice was relatively widespread between at least 1575 and the early 1700s. In Kamifukawa, records show that such performances regularly took place there between 1634 and 1733. After that, it is thought to have shifted toward its current form as a coming-of-age ritual. See also Kanai 1988:111.

transformed into a coming-of-age ritual. It currently survives only at the Habashira Shrine in Kamifukawa, a hamlet in the mountainous region east of Tenri city in Nara Prefecture, where it is performed on the remnants of the Ganyakuji Temple within the shrine's precincts (Kanai 1988:112).

Daimokutate is performed annually every October twelfth. Although the original repertoire seems to have been larger, libretti for only three pieces remain: *Ishibashiyama*, which narrates the early Genpei War battle between Minamoto Yoritomo¹⁸ and the Taira; *Itsukushima*, which describes a pilgrimage made by Taira Kiyomori and other members of his clan to their tutelary shrine, Itsukushima; and *Daibutsu kuyō*, which details Yoritomo's dedication of the Buddhist image at Tōdaiji temple to replace the one destroyed by the Taira shortly before the war (Kanai 1988:111-12).¹⁹

The structure of the three extant Daimokutate pieces is fairly similar. Each piece opens with the "leading along the road" (*michihiki*), in which the actors follow an elder (*chōrō*) from the green room (an outbuilding on the shrine grounds) to the stage. They then take up positions along its edges, facing inward. The elder announces each "act" (*shōdan*) and the identity of the character who will speak. Only one speaker performs in each act. When first summoned, the character identifies himself and then recites a substantial amount of narrative. He is called upon in later acts to deliver lines of similar or shorter length. One actor takes the role of a deity; this actor does not perform until the end of the piece. The play culminates with a dance referred to as *fusho*, which is accompanied by song. The actors then recite a final speech (*iriku*) in unison, and are finally led from the stage. *Itsukushima* consists of 26 acts, the *fusho* dance, and the *iriku*.

The extant Daimokutate libretti (*banchō*) were first collected and published by the folklorist Hosen Jungo in 1953-55. Hosen's timely work brought Daimokutate the necessary prominence to be designated as a Prefectural Intangible Cultural Property in 1954 (Kanai 1985:88). Since

¹⁸ Yoritomo was heir to Minamoto Yoshitomo, scion of the Minamoto killed following the Heiji Uprising. Yoritomo went on to become the first *shōgun* of Japan in 1192, establishing his headquarters in Kamakura, a seaside village far from the capital Heian (present-day Kyoto). This attenuated political control by the aristocracy.

¹⁹ The destruction of the Nara temples, including Tōdaiji, is blamed on Taira Shigehira, one of Kiyomori's sons. The temples were burned as the Taira sought to punish Prince Mochihito, a disenfranchised member of the royal family who was goaded by members of the Minamoto clan to confront the Taira. Mochihito was killed in the ensuing battle, but it is the destruction of the oldest and most venerable Buddhist temples (and the deaths of the many clergy and local peasants who had taken shelter there) that is seen as the more ominous sin.

then, Daimokutate has received limited scholarly study, most of it by Kanai Kiyomitsu, who compiled and comprehensively annotated editions of the libretti for all three pieces in *Chūsei geinō: Daimokutate shōkai (The Annotated Daimokutate: Medieval Performing Art, 1986)*.

In a regular three-year rotation, *Itsukushima* is performed twice and *Daibutsu kuyō* once. However, when a building is reconstructed or rededicated, *Itsukushima* is performed for three years running (Kanai 1985: 89). That remodeling would trigger this shift is probably a remnant of Daimokutate's original function of marking renewal and dedication of sacred space. *Ishibashiyama* is excluded from the current repertoire most likely because of its length (it is approximately twice as long as the other two).

Habashira Shrine is small and of primarily local significance. Located in the rugged terrain of rural Nara Prefecture at the edge of a little basin in the valley holding the village of Kamifukawa, it is tucked into the foot of one of the surrounding mountains. The entrance to the shrine is off the road passing through the valley, and most of the main working buildings (and the performance space) are up a short set of steps from the entrance, on a piece of level ground abutting the side of the mountain. The deity is enshrined on a little ledge further up the hill, at the top of a steep moss-covered stone stair lined with lanterns.

In a shrine of this size, it is probably not surprising that the performance space is not actually a stage, but a square area of earth marked off by a bamboo rail on three sides and backing against the mountain on the fourth. The audience stands outside the bamboo borders of all three open sides of the performance space, as well as on the narrow ledge above the wall forming the stage's fourth side.

Much of the Daimokutate script is comprised of lines that take more than five minutes each to perform, so the memorization requirements for the actors are not insubstantial; Kanai sees the fluent performance of each role as the heart of Daimokutate as coming-of-age ritual. He emphasizes in particular the importance of the *nanori*, or name-announcing.²⁰ In *Itsukushima*, the boys presenting themselves as individual Taira noblemen before the Itsukushima Deity metaphorically also present themselves as new adults to the Habashira deity (Kanai 1985:89). For Kanai, this is the most important aspect of the ritual; he relegates the narrative content of the

²⁰ *Nanori* refers to calling out one's name in a variety of contexts. Name-announcing is particularly prominent in the *Heike* and other war tales, in which warriors conventionally announce their names, lineage, and province of origin before engaging in battle.

recitations to a secondary concern (1979:38). In this study, I will give that content its due, demonstrating its fundamental significance for the meaning of the ritual and adding a more nuanced appreciation of the mutual workings of story and performance.

Itsukushima

Itsukushima articulates a narrative about the passing of the Sword of Commission (*settō*)—a symbolic blade bequeathed by a sovereign to a military commander—to Taira Kiyomori by his tutelary deity.²¹ The appearance of the deity and the transfer of the sword are elicited by repeated ritual performances of *bugaku* and *kagura*²² at Itsukushima Shrine, situated on an island in modern-day Hiroshima Bay. *Itsukushima* is celebratory piece about the scion of the Taira house set at a time when his fortunes were rising.

Itsukushima Shrine lies within the pre-modern province of Aki,²³ over which Kiyomori was granted the governorship in 1146, a position held almost continuously by Taira clansmen until the early 1180s. The Taira became well known for sea trade based in Aki, and the province consequently held an important position for Kiyomori and his heirs economically, politically, and spiritually. In both fictionalized and basically factual accounts, Kiyomori's devotion to the shrine housing the clan's tutelary deity is prominently recognized. The gorgeously ornamented *Heike*

²¹ In ancient Japan, a reigning sovereign gave the Sword of Commission to a general setting forth on a military campaign. By the time of the Genpei War, this practice had been abandoned. Only in an otherworldly context such as direct communication with a deity could a transaction of this sort be imagined for Kiyomori and his contemporaries.

²² *Bugaku* and *kagura* are traditional ritual art forms reaching back to Japan's earliest times. *Kagura* consists of musical performances, sometimes accompanied by dance, performed by a group of three to four musicians. *Bugaku* refers to several continental styles of dance imported during the Nara Period (710-94), usually performed to the accompaniment of a larger group of musicians playing strings and woodwinds. These could be performed at religious sites or on special occasions at the royal palace or homes of the nobility during Japan's classical age.

²³ Present-day Hyōgo prefecture. The island on which it is situated, Miyajima, sits in the bay facing Hiroshima. Itsukushima is famous for the large, often-photographed vermilion shrine gate (*torii*) built in water in front of the shrine. For images of the *torii*, the shrine, and *kagura* and *bugaku* performances held there, see Sightseeing Section, Miyajima-cho 1996.

nōkyō, a copy of the Lotus Sutra dedicated by Kiyomori together with 31 other members of his clan in 1164, stands as a testament to the importance of this connection for the Taira.²⁴ The pilgrimage enacted in the *Daimokutate* almost certainly refers to the rituals associated with the presentation of the *Heike nōkyō*, although the focus of the *Daimokutate* is not the sutra, but rather the ritual performances that would have accompanied its dedication.

The Itsukushima Deity is identified in the play as Benzaiten. In the Heian Period (794-1185), the native deities of Itsukushima Shrine, identified as Ichikishimahimenomikoto, Tagorihimenomikoto, and Tagitsuhiomenomikoto, were reconfigured as the conventional Buddhist triad of Kannon, Dainichi (Skt. Mahavairocana), and Bishamon; overlaying indigenous deities with Buddhas and bodhisattvas in this manner was a common practice in early Japan. The main deity, Dainichi, is among the most revered Buddhas in Japanese context; devotion to Dainichi was thought to enable “attainment of Buddhahood in one’s own body” (*sokushin jōbutsu*), an extremely popular belief in the medieval period.

Sometime during the medieval period, Itsukushima’s Dainichi also became conflated with Benzaiten, originally one of the seven gods of fortune and the patron deity of performers. Although many medieval accounts of Kiyomori’s relationship to the shrine identify Benzaiten with the Itsukushima Deity, this attribution is probably somewhat anachronous. But, as is the case with *Itsukushima*, it became a vital element in medieval narratives of the Taira’s rise and fall. The merging of Dainichi with Benzaiten was not unusual, nor was the identification of the main deities of island shrines (including Itsukushima, Enoshima, and Chikubushima) as Benzaiten, for reasons that will become evident below.

The characters in *Itsukushima* include Kiyomori; his sons Shigemori, Munemori, and Shigehira; his brother Tsunemori; a Retainer (*kurōdo*); the Shrine Priest (*kannushi*); and Benzaiten. As in the other plays, the costumes are simple. The performers wear robes and *tate-eboshi* hats to indicate their status as classical aristocrats. The deity Benzaiten wears a gold headdress identifying her as a god. The robe worn by the performer depicting Kiyomori has a different pattern than that of the other youths, but this is the only distinction in costume.

²⁴ The *Heike nōkyō* contains the 28 chapters of the Lotus Sutra (*Hokekyō*), plus four other one-chapter sutras, each copied out by one Taira noble. It was dedicated by the Taira as a prayer for their success; its elaborate and luxurious decorations reveal the wealth financing its production. For images of the *Heike nōkyō*, see Nara National Museum 2004.

All of the members of Kiyomori's party except Kiyomori carry bows, which both mark their status as members of a warrior household and suggest the catalpa bows conventionally used to summon the gods (Kanai 1986: 96).²⁵ Kiyomori is empty-handed at the beginning of the play, but by the end, he has been given the Sword of Commission by Benzaiten, who originally carried it (*idem*). The Shrine Priest holds the ritual *heihaku*,²⁶ which he utilizes in his enactment of prayers. Note that in all cases, the accoutrements carried by the actors enable communication between this realm and the world beyond.

The Daimokutate performance begins shortly after sundown, when the actors follow the elder from the greenroom to the stage. They position themselves within its bamboo borders, and the Itsukushima Deity sits in a bamboo-woven hut backing against the wall. Kiyomori stands directly opposite her, with the Shrine Priest at his left and Shigemori (Kiyomori's heir) to his right. The other Taira clansmen and retainer are arrayed facing each other along the other two edges.

The elder sits with several other older men on the verandah of a multi-use building behind Kiyomori. The performers deliver their lines as they are called by the elder; the pattern in which they recite generally moves the speaking voice from one side of the square to another and then to the third and back again. This movement among the three sides of human characters throughout the first two-thirds of the performance emphasizes the silence of the deity, who does not emerge until later.

Although Daimokutate is a performance art, it is, like *kōwakamai* and to a lesser extent *nō*, primarily dependent on narrative recitation. The performers *tell* rather than *act*: in libretti and commentary, the verb used to describe the articulation of each passage is *ifu*, "to say." This contrasts with other medieval arts, in which voicing is usually described in terms of singing (*utafu*) or recounting (*kataru*) (Kanai 1985:90). What interests us is the connection between this narrative dimension, *Itsukushima's* ritual content, and Daimokutate's general ritual form.

²⁵ Catalpa bows were twanged in ritual contexts to summon a deity or spirit to possess a *miko* ("shamaness").

²⁶ An implement used in performing various rituals. It consists of a rod to which white strips of paper, cut in a zig-zag pattern resembling a lightning bolt, are attached.

Enacting and Re-enacting Ritual

One can work in the subjunctive mood as seriously as in the indicative—making worlds that never were on land or sea but that might be, could be, may be, and bringing in all the tropes, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, etc., to endow these alternative worlds with magical, festive, or sacred power, suspending disbelief and remodeling the terms of belief.

Victor Turner (1988:26-27)

From a structural point of view, *Itsukushima* is a ritual performance comprised of a narrative about ritual performance: the actors describe (but do not enact) ritual, and their description of a ritual performance becomes the content of the Daimokutate ritual. In this section, I trace the various levels at which these narrative imaginings occur, drawing attention to places where *Itsukushima* invites the spectator to conflate performances and performance spaces in ways that provocatively recontextualize an important *Heike* narrative. In particular, I focus on the ways in which the themes of doubling and mirroring are introduced and, within the context of ritual performance, revealed to enable a re-envisioning of the source narrative. I call attention to these themes as they develop from act to act in order to emphasize the effects of repetition, layering, and conflation of places and performances on the story underlying the coming-of-age ritual.

Similar to many plays from the *nō* repertoire, *Itsukushima* begins with a journey to a site that, either inherently or through exposition in the performance, is imbued with otherworldly significance. In the *michihiki*, the actors are led onto the stage, with its clearly demarcated (if permeable) boundaries. Their movement is reflected in the development of the narrative as well: the imagined space of (the actual locale) Itsukushima is cited as the destination of the journey described in the *michihiki* and first act. Notably, the Taira clan's journey that comprises the *michihiki* is the only physical movement occurring in the piece until the emergence of the deity, and it is conceptualized explicitly as pilgrimage. As such, it emphasizes the destination (both the stage and Itsukushima) as, first, a goal (upon which attention should be focused) and, second, a sacred site (where something special will happen). This sort of conscious imagining, of transforming one space (an almost empty stage) into another (Itsukushima), introduces a fundamental theme that will be expanded as the play progresses.

In the first act, Kiyomori recites the Taira lineage, stretching from his royal ancestor Prince Katsurawara, second son of the Sovereign Kanmu, to the years just before the Genpei War. Importantly, this act establishes the connections between the Taira and Itsukushima Shrine. Kiyomori states:

“Because of [my] victories in the battles in Hōgen and Heiji, I was promoted to Chancellor; this is all because of the blessings of the deity of Itsukushima in Aki.... And so it is that I decided to travel to Itsukushima to perform this dedication” (Kanai 1986:59).²⁷ By mentioning his rise to power following his victories in the Hōgen and Heiji Uprisings, Kiyomori alludes to the opening episodes of the *Heike*, thus situating *Itsukushima* in relation to this source narrative.

In the second act, however, the narrative begins to overlay Itsukushima with several other spaces, all of them mythical. Shigemori first describes the descent of the deity Amaterasu (mythic progenitor of the royal house) from the inner palace of the Tusita heaven²⁸ to “our realm,” from which, after building dwellings at the headwaters of the Minosuso River, the myriad deities set forth to subdue other lands.

The narrative of the descent of Amaterasu mirrors the movement in the preceding act, in which Kiyomori describes the pilgrimage from the capital to Itsukushima: both move out from a center (the Tusita heaven; the earthly center of Heian-kyō). Shigemori continues, characterizing the destination of his clan’s pilgrimage (Kanai 1986:79-80):

Itsukushima is the island prized as an ages-old treasure. It is just like the Dragon Palace. The Palace of Eternal Youth also belongs to the deity of this place. Itsukushima is written with the characters meaning “prized” and “island.” Those who step but once upon it and worship by brushing even one character of the [Lotus] Sutra have their desires filled in both this life and the next. It is truly a blessed, sacred place.

This passage emphasizes the theme of layering mythical locales, which will activate an important narrative shift later in the piece.

The Dragon Palace, submarine home of the Dragon King, and the Palace of Eternal Youth are both mythical realms famed in classical literature, art, and culture.²⁹ Itsukushima thus represents a sort of middle

²⁷ All translations from the Japanese are my own.

²⁸ A Buddhist geographical term frequently mapped on the Plain of Heaven from which pre-Buddhist narratives describe her descent.

²⁹ The Dragon Palace is alleged to lie at the bottom of the sea. It is the destination of the journey of the legendary Urashimatarō, among others. The Devadatta Chapter of the Lotus Sutra recounts that one of the Dragon King’s daughters studied so devotedly that she became enlightened at the age of eight when she presented a jewel to the Buddha. One manifestation of Benzaiten we will encounter here casts her as this daughter. The Palace of Eternal Youth, a mythic locale of Chinese legendary provenance,

(liminal) ground—it parallels the Daimokutate stage in creating a site where intercourse between this world and the other (or several others) will occur, as the final line of this act suggests.

Notably, both the Dragon Palace and the Palace of Eternal Youth are depicted as destinations of arduous travel: they are places to which people undertake difficult journeys in order to receive magical reward. Their miraculous character is mirrored by Itsukushima, whose specialness is described in terms of its power to amplify: by simply stepping on its grounds and brushing one Chinese character of the sutra, Shigemori states, the efficacy of the entire Lotus Sutra is enabled. The belief that reduced forms (one character) could activate full forms (the Lotus Sutra) was common in pre-modern Japan and will reappear later in this piece as well.

In the third act, the doubling of spaces we have already encountered is replicated in a conflation of the identities of Itsukushima's deity. Munemori states (Kanai 1986:103-04):

They built the *torii* [gate] in the ocean, and we worship our clan's god here. This place where our clan's god is worshipped: graciously, Benzaiten of the Matrix-store realm, avatar of Dainichi and third daughter of the Dragon King Sâgara, manifests herself. In her six arms she holds the six virtues. Grasping a bow and carrying a halberd, she protects heaven and earth. The Itsukushima Deity is the reason for all our blessings.

The daughter of the Dragon King was alleged to have attained enlightenment at the age of eight despite the obstacles represented by her female sex and her beastly form. As mentioned above, the particular conflation of Benzaiten with Dainichi was popular in medieval Japan, as is her merging with the daughter of the Dragon King. This relationship will be explicated more fully as the piece progresses, but at this juncture it is noteworthy because it contributes to the general theme of merged identities initiated in the second act.

was also the destination of (Chinese) arduous journeys and very much part of the medieval Japanese imaginary landscape. For a discussion of the Dragon King's daughter in the Lotus Sutra, see Yoshida 2002; in connection to the *Heike* narrative, see Bialock 2002-03:293-308. Both share with Itsukushima a connection to the sea: the Dragon Palace lies in its depths, and the Palace of Eternal Youth is usually described, like Itsukushima, as an island. Further, the Palace of Eternal Youth is frequently associated with or compared to other islands and mountains in premodern Japanese narratives and geographies; among these the most salient for this study is Enoshima, also an island sanctuary associated with Benzaiten, to which it is compared in the *kôwakamai Hamade*. For a discussion of the relationship between Daimokutate and *kôwakamai*, see Tokue 1980:32-58.

In the sixth act the narrative returns to the particulars of the Taira visit to the Itsukushima, and, through the fifteenth act, *Itsukushima* devotes full attention to performances held at the shrine on the occasion of the Taira pilgrimage (Kanai 1986:135):

[Tsunemori speaking] The *bugaku* musicians and the dancing youths are at ready; the banners, the ceremonial vases, and the Dragon's Heads are aligned at the Buddha's seat and the high priest's seat. The figured silks and embroidered brocade are spread on the stage. The monks who perform the rituals at this shrine number 120.

A paean to the grandeur of the occasion, this section invites the viewer of the Daimokutate to visualize offerings at Itsukushima Shrine. Importantly, the dedication is presented in terms of spectacle, and the images of ritual objects (banners, vases, dragon's heads) and offerings (silks and brocades) are lavish and concrete, attesting to the wealth of the clan, a theme amplified in the description by the Shrine Priest in the seventh act (Kanai 1986:153):

I am the Shrine Priest who serves the Itsukushima Deity. Because the Taira have reached such heights, we have been well blessed. Now they come to perform prayers at our shrine. All the shrine's personnel are arrayed here; the offerings for the god are displayed. The paper offerings are in front of the sanctuary, eight maidens swing the bells, and the sound of the *kagura* dance reverberates in the shrine's fence. It will surely wake the god.

Although the narrative describes a dedicatory performance designed specifically to please the god, we should note that it simultaneously provides a spectacle for the Taira party. They have come to witness the presentation and to benefit from the rituals associated with the dedication. There are, in effect, two audiences: the divine and the human. This doubling of audience is then mirrored by the Daimokutate performance, itself performed before the god as well as human spectators.³⁰ On a number of levels, therefore, this scene explicitly sets the stage for a performance, which begins with *kagura*. The reverberation (*hibiki*) of the music makes the fence at the shrine's border quiver, in effect disrupting that boundary and arousing the god.

³⁰ Since its designation as an Intangible Cultural Property, the audience of human spectators is further enlarged and variously interested; Daimokutate in its current incarnation is perhaps even more significant for scholars than locals. It is not presently the object of considerable tourism, although its potential tourist value was certainly a factor in its promotion and recording in the 1950s.

Communication between this world and the realm beyond is visually and aurally manifest within the narrative (and narratively manifest within the Daimokutate performance) in the (musically facilitated) vacillation of the boundary between the god and its audience.

In the ninth act, the ornately costumed dancers whirl in a confusion of fabric and ornamentation: “[Shrine Priest speaking] ‘And now the prayers are over, the dancing youths are in line, they have cut sprays of flowers; their jewel-bedecked caps, the jeweled decorations; they raise high the halberd with its banner unfurled, and on the stage they whirl in their dance’” (Kanai 1986: 169).

In the tenth act, the day draws to a close, pulling the audience into the twilight realm so often the setting for ritual performance (Kanai 1986: 174):³¹

[Tsunemori speaking] First come the congratulatory dances, then the “Dance of the Ryo King” which keeps the sun from setting. When the “Hatō Dance” is completed and the day has sunk into evening, they dance the “Taiheigaku.” The number of dances totals 120. It is said that to dance them all, even the secret pieces, takes 21 days.

The lavishness of this performance is not enacted on the Daimokutate stage, but rather narratively described, as were the imagined landscapes of the Dragon Palace, the Palace of Eternal Youth, the Matrix Store Realm, and indeed Itsukushima: nothing on the bare Daimokutate stage itself evokes the vistas the actors describe. These scenes are early indicators of the blurring of boundaries at the formal level that underscores those described in the piece: performance of the Daimokutate *is* narration, yet the sole focus of that narration is evoking performances; the imagined performances functionally mirror that of the Daimokutate as dedicatory acts performed before a god.

At this pivotal moment, the Taira, who have until now provided one audience for the imagined performances, reemerge as central actors. First, Kiyomori bestows gifts (Kanai 1986:183): “I, Kiyomori, in veneration of the deity [am unmatched]. First, I present tall piles of figured silk and embroidered brocade to the dancers’.” The luxury of the gifts here matches the splendor of the occasion, and the giver, by association, is equal to the role.

In the twelfth act, the retainer speaks: “And then all the members of the Taira clan, so gifted at woodwinds and stringed instruments, perform

³¹ The dances listed here are all conventional *bugaku* pieces that would be performed on such occasions.

together from their seats in the audience. They play everything, even all the secret pieces, upon the *biwa*, *koto*, *wagon*, and *shō*” (Kanai 1986:186).³²

The Taira now become performers, demonstrating their ability to play even the repertoire’s “secret pieces”; in other words, they have mastered the entire repertoire. They are described here as in the *Heike*: elite courtiers, skilled at music, a characteristic well-matched to the current task of pleasing the god.

In the thirteenth act, the music builds (Kanai 1986:200-01):

[Shrine Priest speaking] Ah, what appealing music! The voice of the *shō* is like the sound of the pine wind reverberating through the three realms. The flute resembles the voice of the phoenix, the *taiko* [drum] the beating of the waves. The rhythm of such music will stop the voice of the wind blowing in the pines, cause the birds soaring in the air to return to earth and fold their wings, and quiet the waves of the four seas. The enormity of it is unending.

The performance rises to a climax with these musical images. The instruments take on characteristics of natural and ethereal phenomena: the *shō* is the pine wind, the flute the voice of the phoenix, and the *taiko* the waves. Each instrument is so well harmonized with these natural sounds, in fact, that it can still them: performance by these talented Taira noblemen brings harmony and peace. Reverberation (*hihiki*) once more marks this point at which divine communication takes place—it is the physical (both aural and visual) manifestation of the efficacy of the music. The attribution of such power to music here echoes the famous statement made by Ki no Tsurayuki, Japan’s most famous early poet and critic, about the value of well-wrought Japanese poetry, which soothes disruptive forces and brings harmony to the world.³³

³² The *biwa* is a four-stringed Japanese lute, the *shō* a mouth organ with a wooden base, bamboo pipes, and metal reeds, and the *koto* and *wagon* thirteen- and six- or seven-stringed zithers, respectively. Stringed instruments are conventionally thought to facilitate communication with the gods, and all four instruments play in *bugaku* pieces. For detailed descriptions and photographs of these instruments, see de Ferranti 2000. The Taira clan was famed for its musical skill, as described in various episodes from the *Heike*. For several examples see McCullough 1988:226-27, 246-50.

³³ Tsurayuki’s famous preface to the *Kokinshū* (c. 905), the first poetry collection officially sanctioned by the sovereign, challenges the superiority of Chinese by asserting the beauty and power of poetry written in the native Japanese language. Both his preface and the collection itself proved greatly influential on the development of poetry and prose in Japanese.

The power of performance here resonates on several important levels. For the performers of the Daimokutate, it asserts the significance of their own performance, inasmuch as that performance mirrors that described in the narrative. Additionally, however, it affirms the power of this *specific* narrative: by reanimating the spirits of these dead Taira in this context, the Daimokutate performers enable communication between the scions of that house and their tutelary god. Their role here is much like that of the *Heike* performer, who similarly reanimates precisely these Taira nobles to assuage their spirits.

With the fourteenth act, the performance is brought to a conclusion (Kanai 1986:208):

[Shrine Priest speaking] The dances of the youths have run their course and the audience listens attentively to the pine wind that scatters the blossoms. They soak their sleeves with tears sprung from deep emotion, and the god receives their offerings. The rattan blinds of the sanctuary rustle wondrously, and 15 young pages, each with hands laden with treasure, emerge from the sanctuary.

The wonder of the music has been wrought, and all human hearts are inclined to the pine wind as it carries off the last strains of the performance. The Taira are moved to tears, and the blinds separating the god from her audience rustle, again marking a moment of weakening of the border between her realm and that of the audience: music (and more generally, perhaps, performance) activates communication (Kanai 1986:216, Act 15): “[Munemori speaking] ‘How could the beauty of the vermilion shrine gate glinting on the waves possibly be surpassed by even the Zenbōdō in Tenjiku with its 13,000 Buddhas aligned on lotus seats surrounded by music?’”

We return here to the theme of spatial layering, as Itsukushima is compared to yet another sacred space: the Zenbōdō on Mt. Sumeru, mythic home of the 33 deities who live constantly surrounded by music.³⁴ Again, the musical performance enables the intermingling of the spaces of Itsukushima and the Zenbōdō.

Next, the scene of the *torii* shrine gate reflected in the water gives way to another imagined vista, this one seeming to arise from the sea itself (Kanai 1986:221, Act 16):

³⁴ Note the congruence between islands and mountain peaks, both of which rise from the depths and stretch upward from apparent boundaries (the water, the clouds). As with the Palace of Eternal Youth, the Zenbōdō is mapped on both types of landscape in medieval Japan.

[Shigehira speaking] Ah, look there! On the surface of the sea in front of the shrine, five hundred boats are rowing along. There are gangplanks placed across the tops of the boats; many seats are arrayed on them, and they have set up rattan blinds. The boat of the retired sovereign and that of the retired consort stand out from the rest. The tops of the boats are decked with figured silks; figured silks and embroidered brocades are all about, and the banner on the halberd, unfurled by the wind, is dyed crimson as it glistens in the setting sun. There is nothing with which to compare the wonder of this sight!

The “retired sovereign” and the “retired consort” in this passage are otherwise unidentified; the spectacle they create, however, is a stunning visual image, again lavish with silks and brocades. The unfurled banner on the halberd doubles that from the original musical performance described in the piece, and the crimson of the setting sun mirrors the vermilion of the *torii* gate reflected on the water.³⁵ The images developed earlier now seem to have created never-ending reflection and refraction; they repeat in constantly expanding circles, summoning forth parallel realms and performances. At this point, yet another musical performance begins (Kanai 1986:226-27, Act 17): “[Retainer speaking] ‘And then from the boat of the retired consort a musical performance begins and from all the other boats, reeds and strings are poised; thinking to please the god, each strives to be best, and on land and sea the reverberations spread; the awesomeness is incomparable’.” The performance of winds and strings by the Taira nobles before the god has inspired an otherworldly performance, and this duplication causes (again) reverberations on land and sea.

This sort of doubling and cosmological patterning we have seen throughout *Itsukushima* articulates the kind of otherworldly power held, in pre-modern contexts, by performance—be it poetry recitation, calligraphy, or music. More importantly, however, this patterning occurs against the backdrop of the reduplicated spaces manifest on *Itsukushima* (and, of course, the *Daimokutate* stage). The site is, in fact, rendered within the performed narrative in a form evocative of a *mandala*, a pictorial representation of the unity-in-multiplicity of the Buddhist cosmos used for meditation practice. The most famous *mandala* in Japan are the Diamond and Matrix-Store *mandala*, both associated with meditation on Dainichi (one manifestation of the *Itsukushima* Deity), who is usually portrayed in the

³⁵ The color red is further associated with the Taira clan: battle scenes in the *Heike* are coded with the Taira in red versus the Minamoto in white.

center of the *mandala*, surrounded by parallel heavens inhabited by parallel deities.³⁶

In *Itsukushima*, this unity of existence is mirrored in the overlapping of superficially discrete sacred spaces and performances. The vocal narrative enactment of the various levels of ritual musical performance, like meditation on a *mandala*, creates rifts in the usual spatial and temporal alignments that reveal the unity in the apparent multiplicity of those locales. Here *bugaku* performance, enabled by Daimokutate narration, evokes this sort of patterning. As in meditation, successful performance is rewarded by the revelation of the deity: Benzaiten, holding in one hand a bow and in the other the Sword of Commission, now appears.

Kiyomori, the Sword of Commission, Ritual, and Genpei Narrative

The final several acts of *Itsukushima* return specific attention to the Taira, emphasizing Kiyomori's status as scion of that house. In the eighteenth act, Kiyomori asks to see two precious objects that the Itsukushima Shrine is alleged to possess: a fan and the Sword of Commission (which in the Daimokutate is in fact a *naginata* or halberd). In the nineteenth act, the Shrine Priest describes the sword in the context of doubled spaces (Kanai 1986:234): "They say Itsukushima is just like the Dragon Palace. The sword kept in the Dragon Palace is also that kept at this shrine. These mysteries of the gods . . . are in accordance with the promises of the gods'." The identification between the Sword of Commission at Itsukushima and that kept at the Dragon Palace is of great significance within the context of narrative traditions concerning the Genpei War, as we shall see. Most important for the progress of *Itsukushima*, however, is a thematic turn toward the awesomeness of the gods, heightening the audience's anticipation of the appearance of Benzaiten, which occurs in the twenty-second act.

In performance, Benzaiten's emergence is a climactic moment. The actor portraying the god has remained within the bamboo shelter until this point, as the narrative circulated among the other performers. Now the deity emerges, her headdress glittering, enlivening the narrative through her physical presence after long anticipation (approximately an hour and one-half).

³⁶ Images of the Matrix-Store ("Womb" or *Taizōkai*) and Diamond ("Vajradhatu" or *Kongōkai*) *mandala* can be found at Sjoquist 1999.

Benzaiten is significant here as patron deity of both the Taira clan and, more generally, performers. Although her relation to the performing arts does not become an explicit object of narrative in this piece, the ability of musical performance to rouse the god described repeatedly in *Itsukushima* clearly resonates within the general context of medieval musical performance, including, importantly, performed *Heike*. Within the performed *Heike* tradition, the connection between Benzaiten and *Heike* performers is most commonly suggested by episodes referring to her patronage of musical performance, particularly *biwa* playing.³⁷ In many of these, the musician is a Taira clansman, as we see in the “The Visit to Chikubushima” (McCullough 1988:226-27); Taira Tsunemasa (son of Tsunemori) plays the *biwa* so beautifully at another island sanctuary dedicated to Benzaiten that the deity manifests herself in the form of a white dragon. The complex of relationships implied here is an essential link between the *Heike* and the Daimokutate: the *Heike* performer identifies his art with the Taira via the patronage of Benzaiten, and we find again the common medieval association between Benzaiten and dragons, an allusion to her manifestation as the Dragon King’s daughter. Thus, although the Itsukushima pilgrimage central to the Daimokutate is only peripheral to the *Heike*, the relationship between the clan, the shrine, and Benzaiten is vital in the *Heike* narrative, as is a metatextual affinity between performers and Taira nobles (and particularly musicians).

The deity expresses her delight with Kiyomori’s many gifts to the shrine and promises (Kanai 1986:245): “I am truly Kiyomori’s guardian deity. I bestow the *naginata* known as the Sword of Commission upon Kiyomori; I give it to Kiyomori’.”

Kiyomori kneels to receive the sword in both hands, and in the twenty-third act bows in obeisance—one of the few physical actions within this narrative performance—as he receives the sword from the god. In the twenty-fourth act, Benzaiten speaks again (Kanai 1986:258-59):

Now, Kiyomori, listen well: I am at an assembly of the gods. Amaterasu asks that her clan be given control of the world. The Kasuga Deity asks that its clan be given control of the world. And Hachiman asks that the Minamoto be given control of the world. Among all these requests of the gods, I declare that at this moment the control of the world shall go to Kiyomori. By giving you this sword to pacify the realm, I insure that there will be no cause for concern in the world.

³⁷ Benzaiten is classically depicted in painting and sculpture holding a *biwa*; the special connection between *biwa* players and Benzaiten stems in large part from this portrayal of the deity.

In the twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth acts, the Taira party dances in gratitude and celebration, culminating in the *fusho* dance.

The introduction of this assembly of the gods arguing over the Sword of Commission concretely returns the Daimokutate to the *Heike* narrative. The assembly described in the twenty-fourth act derives from an episode entitled “The Young Samurai’s Dream” found in most recitational *Heike* variants.³⁸ In the *Heike* passage, a samurai in service to one of Kiyomori’s retainers dreams that he sees a meeting of the gods resembling the one described by Benzaiten in the Daimokutate: the Kasuga Deity, Hachiman, and the Itsukushima Deity all claim the sword for their favored clans. The Kasuga Deity supports the Fujiwara, an aristocratic family that had, until the rise of the Taira, monopolized top governmental positions. Hachiman, god of war and patron of the Minamoto, asks that it be given to Minamoto Yoritomo, currently living in exile. The Itsukushima Deity wishes it to remain with the Taira. The presiding god (Amaterasu, in most variants) declares that it shall be passed to Yoritomo.

In the *Heike*, the samurai’s dream account is included shortly before the onset of the Genpei War, in an episode describing numerous inauspicious signs that predict the imminent downfall of the house of Kiyomori, now a despotic ruler. The implied cause of the disagreement among the gods in the samurai’s dream is Kiyomori’s failure to wield authority justly. A similar permutation of the dream-interpretation episode appears in the *Genpei jōsuiki*, and an oblique reference is also made in a dream-interpretation sequence in the *Heiji monogatari*.³⁹ Significantly, the meeting of gods detailed in the Daimokutate seems to predate that of the dream sequence of the *Heike* variants; here the sword is first given to Kiyomori.

What, then, is the significance of this *Heike* narrative as the frame (within the frame) for the ritual performance in *Itsukushima*? Most centrally, it points to Daimokutate’s engagement with an important *Heike* preoccupation: the loss of the sword Kusanagi, one of the three sacred regalia, in the Battle of Dan-no-ura. Although the general tenor of most

³⁸ The “Strange Occurrences” sequence of portentous dreams immediately precedes the beginning of the end for Kiyomori and, after his death, his descendants. In English, see McCullough 1988:171-73.

³⁹ The *Genpei jōsuiki* is a much longer variant of the *Heike* thought to have been composed in the Muromachi period (c. 1333-1567). The *Heiji monogatari* recounts the Heiji Uprising of 1159/60 in which the Minamoto were defeated by the Taira under Kiyomori.

Heike variants leans either toward lament for and placation of the losing side or celebration of the victors, all are confronted with the task of explaining cracks in the political, social, and symbolic infrastructures caused by the war. And the most difficult from a cosmological point of view was the loss of the sword bequeathed on the royal family by their mythological ancestor, the sun goddess Amaterasu.

Compensatory narratives about the sword abound in both *Heike* variants and other medieval works. Most texts include a sequence relating that, after the war, diviners learned that the eight-year-old sovereign Antoku was in fact the reincarnation of an eight-headed serpent who in the legendary past had been killed by the god Susano-o. As Susano-o cut through one of the beast's tails, the story goes, he found Kusanagi, which he later presented to Amaterasu, his sister. It then was entrusted to the royal family as a marker of the goddess' sanction. Medieval accounts state that after Kusanagi's loss it was revealed that the serpent was in fact the Dragon King, and by jumping into the sea with the sword Antoku was restoring it to the Dragon Palace, its original home.⁴⁰ In addition to the *Heike*, this story is overtly or obliquely mentioned in numerous dramatic and narrative works, including the *Taiheiki*, a war tale concerning a conflict in the thirteenth century between the Kamakura government and the royal house. The prominence during the medieval period of the *Nihon shoki* (c. 720), an ancient record of the mythological origins of the realm, derives in large part from its inclusion of the story of Susano-o, the necessary antecedent for the narrative of the serpent's return as Sovereign Antoku to reclaim the sword (Bialock 2002-03:276-81).

Although the Sword of Commission in the *Daimokutate* is not specifically identified as Kusanagi, a slippage enabling a partial conflation is suggested in the play by the overlaying of Itsukushima Shrine with the Dragon Palace and the revelation that the Sword of Commission resides in both. Itsukushima is the Dragon Palace, and Antoku resides there: by the same sort of metonymic relationship employed throughout the *Daimokutate*, the holder of Kusanagi thus becomes the holder of the Sword of Commission as well.⁴¹ By pointing to the well-known *Heike* narrative, the *Daimokutate* engages the same problematic puzzle at the core of the *Heike*:

⁴⁰ For the *Heike* episode, see "Swords" in McCullough 1988:383-86.

⁴¹ Although Antoku is generally identified as the Dragon King, there is another potential slippage here between Antoku and the Dragon King's daughter: both are identified as eight-year-olds and both are residents of the Dragon Palace.

what is the meaning of the royal seat bereft of one of its divine markers? And what does it mean that the sovereign removed it?

As a ritual performance art, *Itsukushima* contextualizes these questions in a framework that defies the conventions of narrative: the piece is a continuous evocation of parallel places and performances, a *mandala*-like visual and aural depiction of a universe of repetition, where each manifestation resonates and is endlessly refracted by others. Until the appearance of Benzaiten, the reduplications model space: Itsukushima is an incarnation of heavenly realms; music at Itsukushima is that of those realms. At this point, however, the existence of the sword at both Itsukushima during a pilgrimage by the Taira at the height of their power and at the Dragon Palace, where Kusanagi resided after their fall, also suggests a negation of the temporal dimension. And without time as its vehicle, narrative, too, collapses.

The effect of using the same *mandala*-like patterning to order time as well as space is profound. Without a progression of actions through a teleological narrative, troubling questions about causality, responsibility, and loss, so central to the narrativization of the Genpei War, are rendered meaningless. The ritual performance, then, is very much Turner's "magic mirror," which refracts as well as reflects. It absorbs the various narratives contained in *Itsukushima*—the Taira pilgrimage, the ritual performances, the spaces in which they are performed—into a representation that resists plot development toward resolution. Instead, *Itsukushima* focuses on the timeless and omnipresent reality that contains all truths simultaneously. And it relies on the efficaciousness of music to reveal their underlying harmony.

The *iriku* that ends the piece articulates this perspective (Kanai 1986: 303):

And so peace has been brought to the earth. The good fortune of those who prayed to the god is like the green of the pine that lives for a thousand years. The rains of the four seasons fall in their time; the winds that blow five times a year do not rustle the branches of the trees. Rain dampens the soil of the land, and there is no end to prosperity. The blessing of this shrine is ultimate.

This is one more a manifestation of the only causal relationship within the narrative: beautiful patterning of ritual music (and performance) brings about a harmonious realm. All other narrative movement is toward demonstrating this truth and negating a sense of temporal and spatial distinction, toward a representation of reality in which spaces and times are not contiguous but piled upon each other, a reality evoked in a *mandala*-in-performance rather than a tale.

The sword, indicative of ritual, military, and political power, becomes the instrument for the refiguring of the compensatory *Heike* narrative within the Daimokutate. In this context, it comes to stand symbolically and metonymically for all of the processes enacted in the play: the creation of the land, the representation of imperial authority, the representation of military authority, the glory of the Taira house upon which it is bestowed, and the grandeur of the ritual dances and music that summon forth the god and reveal the ultimate unity in multiplicity of the sword and of reality. It prefigures the loss of Kusanagi, and also the end of the Taira line, when the gods decide to pass it on to Yoritomo; and that transfer of power is, ultimately, the unspoken narrative underlying this piece.

What significance, then, does Daimokutate have in the development of Genpei narrative? Daimokutate, like the *nō* drama, is a genre in which time and space are collapsed. But here this collapsing is enacted upon the historically difficult narratives of the fall of Kiyomori and the loss of Kusanagi, traumatic episodes of a sort that also seem to generate *kōwakamai* and other narrative interpretations of other Genpei episodes. In Daimokutate, episodes are taken up and treated as worthy of repetition and reinterpretation by performers not only in society's upper echelons, but also in local communities as part of their annual ritual practices by the Tokugawa period. Even by Eishun's time, it is evident that performers were locals, probably only nominally educated if at all. The profound cultural significance of these events to the newly empowered warrior class is self-evident; that some of the thorniest concerns from the *Heike* had spread to local communities attests to the growing awareness at all levels of society of a shared cultural (and perhaps even proto-national) history that centered on that warrior class.

This choice of subject matter thus points toward the import of this initiatory performance as something beyond imprinting familiar historical (warrior) identities onto youths as they ritually enact their fitness as men. Daimokutate is also intricately involved in the narrative dilemma shared by other Genpei narrative from this period: how do you explain the difficult or inexplicable past to link it to a viable present? Through the re-contextualization of this episode in the non-narrative realm of ritual, Daimokutate offers one somewhat unique approach: it negates the very validity of the questions narrative usually seeks to answer. Like the performance itself, this proper patterning evokes a cosmic harmony, one that puts the realm at rest and calms fierce warriors—a significant claim to make in the local communities that were increasingly burdened by the needs of the dominant warrior class through the age of warring states (c. 1450-1600) and the Tokugawa period. More than a coming-of-age ritual, then, Daimokutate

is also a placatory performance, aimed not only at the god but also the spirits of the warriors restless in the other world and, most importantly, the members of the society created in the wake of the Genpei War as they tried to make sense of their present. It is through the ritualization of the narration of ritual that, ultimately, a workable cosmology is created for the chaotic and unpredictable medieval world from which Daimokutate emerged.⁴²

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