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Cover photograph  Dolmen in Hwanghae-do Unyul-gun (Chōsen Sōtokufu, Chōsen koseki zufu [Album of ancient Korean sites and monuments], vol.2 [Keijō, 1915])
KOREAN ECHOES IN THE NÔ PLAY FURU

Royall Tyler

During Japan's medieval period (1185–1600), the Japanese saw their land's relationship with continental Asia in varying ways. China retained authority for its religious, philosophical, and artistic achievement, while commodity trade with it was significant both culturally and economically. Meanwhile, a devout Buddhist, revering India as the homeland of his faith, might yearn to visit the places where the Buddha had lived and taught. There were some for whom the prestige of the continent therefore loomed very large. For most Japanese, however, the continent was the far away scene of exemplary lives and events, more or less relevant to their own concerns and more or less fancifully imagined. In fact, there arose a tendency to recall the continent's glory only to treat it as puny in relation to Japan's own excellence. For example, in a serious mood, the Buddhist leader Nichiren (1222–82) affirmed that Japan, not India, was now the Buddhist holy land; while, more playfully, people told stories of self-important Chinese goblins (tengu) coming to challenge Japanese goblins and being soundly beaten.1

Plays that affirm Japan's centrality vis-à-vis the continent occur in the nô theatre, which reached its classic form in the fifteenth century. Nô texts constitute a sort of informal museum of medieval Japanese lore (well over 200 plays are still performed, while many others survive only as scripts), providing material on folklore, religious practices and beliefs, received wisdom of all kinds, aesthetic or intellectual ideals, literary conventions, and so on. On the present theme, Hakurakuten白楽天,2 for example, tells how the T'ang poet Po Chü-i白居易(772–846) visited Japan only to lose a poetry contest to the Sumiyoshi 住吉 deity, the patron of Japanese verse.

A group of such plays is associated with Nara 奈良, the imperial seat in the eighth century, and in the medieval period the site of several temporally powerful religious institutions. Kasuga Ryūjin春日龍神 claims that the Buddha's presence is to be sought not in India but on Mikasa-yama 三笠山.

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1 See, for example, the tale collection Konjaku monogatari shū 今昔物語集 (ca.1100), kan 20, no.2.
2 Translated by Arthur Waley, The Nô plays of Japan (London: Allen & Unwin, 1921 [and subsequent reprints]).
Figure 1
A modern signboard map for visitors to the Isonokami area, showing the Shrine in the upper left-hand corner

Although Furu is probably by Zeami 世阿弥 (1363–1443), the classic genius of the no theatre, it has never belonged to the repertoire of plays normally performed by no actors (genkōkyoku 現行曲). To investigate its background is to be reminded of the disruption caused by the wars that began with the Ōnin War of 1467–77 and ended only with establishment of the Tokugawa shogunal regime in the early 1600s; for all the records of the sacred hill associated with Kōfukuji 興福寺 and the Kasuga Shrine 春日社; while the legend behind Ama 海士 tells how the T'ang dynastic founders sought in marriage the daughter of the most powerful noble of the Nara court, and in return offered a priceless Buddhist treasure to that noble's clan temple—Kōfukuji again. Another of this group, and the subject of this paper, is entitled Furu 布留. Furu concerns the Isonokami 石上 Shrine, not far from Nara. Its affirmation of Japanese centrality involves Korea, and it speaks not of Buddhism but of the dignity of the Japanese sovereign. I will analyze its major themes in order to bring out their Korean background and the statement they make about Japan's standing with respect to Korea.

3 Both plays are analyzed from this standpoint and translated in Royall Tyler, Japanese no dramas (London: Penguin, 1992). On the idea that Mikasa-yama was Vulture Peak, and on the theme of Japan as a divine land, see for example ibid., The miracles of the Kasuga deity (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp.104–8 and 269–84.


5 In an attempt to grasp the political context of certain no plays, some writers have proposed that the identity of the “sovereign” or “emperor” whom these plays celebrate includes not only that of the emperor but of the Ashikaga shogun, especially Yoshimitsu 宇喜多宗全 (1358–1408). (See for example Kanai Kiyomitsu 金井清光, “Takasago” 高砂, in Kanai’s Nō no kenchū 風の研究 [Tokyo: Ōfūsha, 1969], pp.290–308; or Ochi Reiko, “Buddhism and poetic theory: an analysis of Zeami’s ‘Higaki’ and ‘Takasago’” [PhD diss., Cornell University, 1984], pp.352–6.) Indeed, Yoshimitsu’s imperial pretensions are well known. (Imatani Akira 今谷則知 and Kato Shūichi 加藤周一, eds, Zeami, Zen'eki 世阿弥 神楽 [Tokyo: Iwanami, 1974], p.209.) Kanai’s analysis is consonant with a recent scholarly trend to withdraw the earlier attribution of many plays to Kan’ami.

6 Several other plays by Zeami, even though worthy in themselves, have for various reasons shared the same fate. In current terminology, such plays are described as baikyoku 魔曲, “discarded plays”, or bangaikyoku 番外曲, “plays outside the repertoire”.

7 The writers of several seventeenth-century shrine documents, the earliest extant, mentioned this loss and described their own work as an attempt to recover the past. Major shrine documents have been published in Shinō Taikei 唐招提寺関之大系編纂会, ed., Shinō taikei, jinjā-ben 唐招提寺関之神社本, vol. 12, Isonokami, Miwa 石上・三輪 (Tokyo: Shinō Taikei Hensankai, 1989).

8 Kanai Kiyomitsu, “Furu 布留, in Nō no kenchū, p.309. The document in question (Nibon sakusba chūmon 能本作者注文) does no more than mention the title of the play.

9 In his study of the play, Kanai Kiyomitsu (Kanai, “Furu”) concluded that Furu is definitely by Zeami, despite (or rather because of) Zeami’s remark in his treatise Go on 五音 that the passage batsu mi-yuki furu no takabashi niwataseba is “by my father” (Omote Akira 表章 and Kato Shūichi 加藤周一, eds, Zeami, Zen'eki 世阿弥 神楽 [Tokyo: Iwanami, 1974], p.209). Kanai’s analysis is consonant with a recent scholarly trend to withdraw the earlier attribution of many plays to Kan’ami.
Isonokami Shrine were destroyed by war in the Eiroku 永禄 era (1558-70). The play itself survives in Zeami's own manuscript, dated 1428, where it is entitled *Furu no nō 布留乃能*; and a mention in a document dated 1524 suggests that it may have been performed in that year. Otherwise, the play has no performance history, although it was revived at the Isonokami Shrine in 1984 and in Tokyo in 1989 and 1995. Zeami's critical writings indicate that it incorporates at least one passage by his father, Kan'ami 観阿弥 (1333-84) and suggest that he may have rewritten another section, too, from an earlier text. However, the play as it stands should be considered his.

*Furu* is normal in musical form and follows the 'dream-vision' (mugen 夢幻能) pattern typical of Zeami: in part one, the central figure (shite 仕手) appears as a nameless woman, then in part two reveals herself, in a vision or dream, as the divinity she really is. In mood it is therefore a 'god play' (waki 神能), a congratulatory play of which the central figure is a divine being. However, the defining criteria for a god play seem to have been settled upon only in the seventeenth century, long after *Furu* was written, and the play lacks several of them. It is set in autumn, not spring; the central figure is female, not male; and the secondary figure (waki 賛), who dreams the climactic scene of the play, is a Buddhist monk. As a result, *Furu* is unacceptable as a god play today and in fact does not fit any of the five categories into which the repertoire is now divided.

**A Summary of Furu**

The monk in *Furu* is a 'practitioner' (gyōnin 行人, a mountain ascetic) from Mt. Hiko 彦の山, a sacred mountain in Kyushu. He is on his way to the equally sacred ranges of Yoshino 吉野 and Kumano 熊野 in central Honshu, south of the Yamato plain. On passing the Isonokami Shrine, he hastens to pay his respects. The woman then enters, carrying a length of cloth, and describes an early winter scene with light snow on the hills, a cold wind carrying the noise of rapids, and a clear river flowing past. Next, she says, “Come, come, I shall wash the cloth.”

The monk sees her and asks her why she is doing so, since she clearly is no servant girl. She answers that she serves the priests of the shrine and that this “cloth” is the deity's robe. She is washing it because *Furu*, the name of the spot where the Isonokami Shrine stands, means “stops [fu 布] in the cloth [fu 布].” She then names for him the sights of Isonokami, but he, after thanking her, questions her again about this mysterious “cloth.”

The deity of the shrine, she explains, is the sword with which the deity Susanoo 素戔鳴 slew an eight-
Figure 3
A passage from Zeami’s manuscript of Furu, which is written almost entirely in katakana. Here, the woman begins to explain the legend of the sword and cloth. (From Kawase Kazuma 川瀬一馬, ed., Zeami jihitsu nohon juichiban-sho 世阿弥自筆能本十一番集 [Tokyo: Wanya Shoten, 1994], p.126)

headed serpent in Izumo出雲, and with which Jinmu 神武 (the founder of the imperial line) quelled evil deities during his victorious march from Kyushu to the Yamato 大和 region. This sword protects the realm and destroys all enemies. It is called the “Sword of Furu” because, of old, a maiden was washing cloth of hemp (asa 麻) at this spot in the river when it came rushing down the stream and stopped in her cloth. It is therefore called also the “Deity of Furu.”

And is it now possible, the monk asks, for anyone reverently to behold this sword? Oh no, the woman replies, although it may manifest itself in response to a pilgrim’s exceptional spiritual aspiration. Long ago, after all, the sword of Atsuta 熱田, “attracted by the spiritual accomplishment” of the monk Dōgyō 道行, manifested itself to Dōgyō in Kyushu.13 The monk observes that Dōgyō, being foreign, must have had special power, but the woman assures him that there is no distinction in that regard between Japanese or foreign, just as there is no valid distinction between native deities (kami 神) and buddhas. Whether or not one has a vision of the sword depends entirely on one’s faith. Then, having finished speaking, the woman vanishes within the shrine fence.

In part two of the play, the monk, having resolved to remain for seven days on retreat at the shrine, sees the woman reappear as a divinity in glory. She is holding both cloth and sword so as to display (according to explicit instructions written by Zeami into his manuscript of the play) the moment when the sword lodged in the cloth.14 The sword is blazing with light. “Somehow,” she says, “the Treasure-Sword of Atsuta in Owari Province was drawn by Dōgyō’s spiritual presence. Now, too, the Sword has appeared in your dream because of your own spiritual accomplishment.”

Next the divinity dances, amid offerings of white and green sacred streamers (nusa 昇) and among waving green, snow-dusted branches of the sacred sakaki 神木 tree, while firelight gleams on the vermilion shrine fence; meanwhile, the chorus sings of “the sword that shines like the sun,” “the divine sword that illumines the heavens,” which forever confers peace and prosperity upon the realm. (The expression, “the divine sword that illumines the heavens” [amaterasu kami no tsurugi 天照神の剣] incorporates the name of the sun deity Amaterasu, the ancestress of the imperial line.) When dawn comes at last, the sword re-enters the portals of the shrine.

The Furu Festival

The Isonokami Shrine stands below the hills along the eastern edge of the Yamato plain, within the present city of Tenri 天理市. In Zeami’s time it had a companion Buddhist temple (jingūji 神宮寺), according to the syncretic pattern then normal,15 and the pair were dominated by the Kōfukuji-Kasuga Shrine complex in Nara, which fostered early nō.16 In fact, the Isonokami deity
(that is, an object-infused with the deity’s presence and carried by shrine priests) accompanied the Kasuga deity whenever the armed Kofukuji monks marched in their thousands to Kyoto or elsewhere to press a grievance.

Kofukuji-Kasuga influence is visible in the Furu Matsuri 布留祭 (‘Furu festival’), for which Furu must have been written. According to Washū Furu no Daimyōjin engi 和州布留大明神縁起 (1446), the earliest surviving engi (‘sacred history’ of the shrine, this observance began in the Eiho 永保 period (1081-1084), on the occasion of a ceremonial pilgrimage to the shrine by Emperor Shirakawa 白河 (r.1072–86). Originally, it was performed twice a year on a rabbit 卯 day (probably the second) in the fourth lunar month (summer) and the eleventh month (winter). However, by Zeami’s own time, this twice-a-year event had been replaced by a single festival performed on the fifteenth day of the ninth month (autumn) and probably inspired by the analogous On-matsuri 御祭 (‘Sacred festival’) of the Kasuga Shrine. Two detailed paintings of this ninth-month festival are dated 1432, only four years later than Zeami’s manuscript of Furu. The event involved carrying the deity to a temporary shrine (tabisbo 旅所) erected at a site some four kilometres away. There, music and dance of various kinds were performed, as they had been ever since Shirakawa’s pilgrimage in the late eleventh century. These entertainments included nō plays.

Perhaps Furu was written for the Furu festival of 1428. Zeami’s manuscript of the play is dated the second month of 1428 (Öei 忍永 35), so that if he wrote it for the festival of that year, he certainly finished it early. However, Isonokami Furu jingūji engi 石上布留神宮寺縁起 (1635), an account of the shrine’s companion temple, records especially elaborate Buddhist observances that year in honour of the 500th anniversary of Shirakawa’s death; and it is clear from several Isonokami documents that Shirakawa was considered the “rebuilder” (chūkō 中興) of the shrine. Something special to honour Shirakawa at the shrine that year would have been in order.

Why, then, is the play set not in the ninth month, the month of the festival, but in the eleventh (early winter)? One reason may be a wish to have its season match the one in which the second Furu Matsuri of the year originally took place, and so to honour the old practice that went back to Shirakawa’s time. A second may have to do with the story told in the play, and with the connection between this story and the Chinkonsai 鎮魂祭 (‘Spirit-pacifying festival’), an important imperial rite intended to strengthen and renew the imperial spirit roughly at the time of the winter solstice. The Chinkonsai was performed on the second day of the tiger 卯 in the eleventh month, the day before the Niinamesai 新嘗祭 (‘First fruits festival’), of which the particularly famous variant in an accession year is the Daijōsai 大嘗祭. The day of the rabbit, when the winter Furu Festival originally took place, was therefore the day before the Chinkonsai.
22 Matsumae Takeshi 松前健, "Isonokami Jingū no Saijin to Sono Saishi Denshō no Hensen" 石上神宮の祭神とその祭祀伝承の変遷, Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan kenkyū hokoku 国立歴史民俗博物館研究報告 7 (Mar. 1985): 355. Poetic manuals such as Shūchūshō (1186) or Shirin saijō shō (1365), as well as modern scholars, agree that these emperors lived at Furu. The following discussion of the Isonokami deities relies on Matsumae, pp. 341–4.
23 I will refer to the shrine’s possession of sacred objects consistently in the past tense, since it is difficult to find out what the shrine actually has now.
24 Takemikazuchi, honored at the Kashima Shrines near Tokyo, is also the senior deity at the Kasuga Shrine in Nara. Another name of the sword, Futsunushi-no-kamata-nō-tachi, suggests that Futsunushi 経津主, honored at the Katori Shrine 香取神宮 (again near Tokyo), and paired with Takemikazuchi at Kasuga, is also this sword.

**The Isonokami Shrine**

The Isonokami Shrine had not always been dominated by Nara. In fact, it was already old in the eighth century, when Kofukuji and the Kasuga Shrine were founded. Although its origins are unclear, it is mentioned repeatedly in the Kojiki 古事記 (712) and Nihon shoki 日本書紀 (720), especially in connection with the reign of Suinin 垂仁 (r. 29 BC–AD 70). Emperors Ankō 安康 (r. 453–6) and Ninken 仁賢 (r. 488–98) had their capitals at Furu, and the shrine became particularly important in the fifth and early sixth centuries when the Mononobe 物部 clan was at the height of its power.22

Although I have referred to the “deity” of the shrine, and although a divine sword fills that role in Furu, the real situation is less simple. The identity of the divine presence at such a shrine is often complex. However, it can at least be said with respect to Isonokami that the shrine’s sacred entities all belonged to a single class of material objects: the kind for which the Mononobe, the custodians of the court’s treasures and weaponry, were naturally responsible.23 The chief of these is Futsu-no-mitama 布都御魂, the sword of the deity Takemikazuchi 武甕雄.24 A myth recorded in both Kojiki and Nihon shoki tells how Takemikazuchi sent it down to Jinmu, on the Kii peninsula, thus reviving Jinmu’s prostrate army so that he could resume his victorious march towards Yamato.25

The other important presence at Isonokami was Furu-no-mitama 布留御魂, a name for the Ten Celestial Treasures (amatsushinshi-no-mitsukara-tokusa 天聖瑞宝十種) brought down from heaven by Nigihayahi 雨依日, the ancestral deity of the Mononobe. These consisted of swords, mirrors, jewels, and lengths of cloth.26 They were offered to Emperor Jinmu by Nigihayahi’s son and were used in tama-shizume 鎮魂 (‘spirit-calming’) rites to prolong life and avert disasters. They were in fact so powerful that

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**Figure 4**

*Looking towards the Izumo Takeo Jinja. The steps are across a broad path from the gate into the main honden court (photograph—and those that follow in Figures 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12—by the author)*
shaking them while counting from one to ten could revive the dead. This practice, called *tamafuri*, is one origin of the Chinkonsai, during which a box containing an imperial robe was shaken while the officiant likewise counted from one to ten. *Kuji hongi* states that these treasures were moved from the palace to Isonokami in the reign of Emperor Sujin 崇神 (r. 97-30 BC).

The *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* also speak of treasures brought to Japan from Silla (Shiragi 新羅) in the reign of Suinin, Sujin’s successor, by a Silla prince called by the Japanese Ame-no-hihoko 天日矛 (Celestial Sun-Spear). These, too, found their way to Isonokami, where a “sacred storehouse” already housed, at Suinin’s order, not only the Ten Celestial Treasures but the treasures of all the local chieftains under Suinin’s sway. Hirohata Sukeo has suggested that the “Ten Celestial Treasures” and the treasures of Ame-no-hihoko are the same. At any rate, the sword displayed in *Furu* represents an impressive assemblage of weapons and other power-objects prized by the ancient court. Hirohata described all these objects as “ritual implements for *tamafuri* [‘spirit-restoring’] rites performed for the emperor.”

As the Mononobe fell from power and were supplanted in the seventh century by the Nakatomi 中臣 and their offshoot, the Fujiwara 藤原, the locus of imperial *tamafuri* rites shifted to Ise 伊勢. However, the Isonokami Shrine

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28. See Hirohata Sukeo, *Kiki shinwa no kenkyū*, pp.108-16. In 804, the treasures of the shrine were moved to a site near Heian-kyō, but the Isonokami deity protested so vigorously that they were returned. The female medium through whom he had spoken then performed *tama-shizume* 鎮魂 over a robe belonging to the emperor in a curtained-off enclosure before the shrine (Matsumae, “Isonokami jingū no saijin,” p.344, citing *Nihon kiki* 日本後紀).


30. Ibid., p.113.
remained, and the venerable names of Furu and Isonokami continued to be honoured in poetry, often serving to evoke noble depths of feeling and time. They were therefore discussed in manuals of poetry, and one of these, in order to explain them, gives the earliest known account of the legend told in Furu.

**The legend of the sword and cloth**

Shūchūshō 袖中抄 by Kenshō 頼昭 (1130–?), datable to about 1186, tells the following story:

> Of old, a woman was washing cloth on the riverbank when a sword came down from upstream, cutting its way through all obstacles in its path, until it came to rest enfolded in the cloth. I gather that it is because the sword was then taken up and honored in this shrine that one writes “Furu” with the characters that mean “stop” in the “cloth” ...

Zeami’s play, like other medieval materials on the subject, explains the name Furu in the same way. Evidence from other plays suggests that Zeami sometimes consulted Shūchūshō, but he also could have found the legend in a now-lost predecessor of Washū Furu no Daimyōjin engi, which relates how, in the time of Emperor Shirakawa, the sword of Furu again manifested its power and received renewed reverence. In addition, Zeami knew the poetic manual Shirin saiyō shō 詞林采葉抄 (1365) by Yū 由阿 (1291–?), which comments as follows on the expression “the divine cryptomeria of Furu” (Furu no kamisugi 布留の神杉), often found in poetry:

> Of old, a woman was washing cloth in the river when a sword came floating downstream, cutting its way through earth, rocks, grasses, and trees, until it came to rest enfolded in this cloth. A lay person then took it up and honored it as a deity. However, since its [naked] presence caused excessive harm, it was buried one jō 丈 deep in the earth. Thereupon, a sugi tree grew up in one night. It is called the “sacred sugi.”

This miraculously vigorous cryptomeria, the recognized sacred tree of Isonokami (Furu mentions a sacred cryptomeria forest), is therefore the visible sign of the hidden, terrifyingly powerful sword that reveals itself only to a rare, accomplished few. Isokomaki no Daimyōjin engi (1699) cites a tradition that the Sword of Furu is indeed buried in a stone container, and that the one used in rituals (concealed in a brocade bag) is a replica. In fact, a now-famous sword was indeed dug up at Isonokami in recent times. It is a strange, ‘seven-branched blade’ (shichishitō 七枝刀) that bears a Silla date corresponding to 369 AD. No one knows what relationship it may have to the Sword of Furu. However, according to Nihon shoki, a Silla envoy presented just such a sword to Empress Jingū 神功皇后 in AD 252.
The Sword of Furu

In *Shirin saiyō shō*, as in *Furu*, the Sword of Furu figures as a weapon more magical than material. The sword celebrated in the play is also synthetic in character, for in part one the woman first identifies it as Totsuka-no-tsurugi, the sword with which the deity Susanoo slew the great serpent. Only then does she go on to talk of Emperor Jinmu, relating how, after long years in Kyushu, he reflected that “the lands of Yashima [i.e. Japan] are all royal territory,” and so set out on his campaign of conquest. This sword, she says, gave him victory and was eventually deposited at Isonokami, where it became a “deity who protects the Sovereign and his house.” By means of this juxtaposition, the play assimilates the sword bestowed on Jinmu by Takemikazuchi to the sword of Susanoo, which it then stresses in its concluding passage.

This ambiguity about the identity of the Sword of Furu appears in other documents besides the play. For example, *Washū Furu no Daimyōjin engi* states that the *shintai* (‘god-body’, or sacred object) of Isonokami is the sword of Susanoo, while the much later and more scholarly *Isonokami no Daimyōjin engi* acknowledges this opinion by treating it as an error in need of correction. In fact, these two swords are not the same, nor has the sword of Susanoo ever been present at Isonokami.

Susanoo’s sword is the one that passed in time to the hero Yamato Takeru, whose exploits gave it the name Kusanagi (‘grass-mower’). Under this name it became (together with a sacred mirror and a sacred string of *magatama* beads) one of the three imperial regalia, and was enshrined at the Atsuta Shrine in modern Nagoya. At Isonokami, a ‘divided spirit’ (*bunrei*) of this sword is honoured in a subsidiary shrine (*sessha*), Izumo Takeo Jinja. The *engi* of this shrine tells how, in the seventh century, Emperor Tenji (r.668–71) temporarily took possession of the sword himself, and how Tenmu (r.673–86) kept it with him despite a move of the capital from Omi province to Yamato. The text states:

In 686, [the sword’s] curse made the emperor ill, and it was sent back to Atsuta. On its hilt were eight dragons. That night, an Isonokami priest dreamed that eightfold clouds rose over the mountains to the east. From their midst, a glittering sword illumined the land … . The next morning, the priest went to the place he had seen in his dream and found there eight spirit-stones. The deity then possessed the priest and said: “I am the deity honoured by the women of Owari-no-muraji [at Atsuta]. I have now descended from the heavens to this spot in order to guard the capital [at Kiyomibara in Yamato]. Render me due homage.” The rocks, popularly called the Eight Dragon Deities of the Hi-no-tani, were transformations of the eight thunder deities. A sanctuary was therefore erected at the spot.

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36 Kobayashi, “Furu to Furu engi,” p.3.
37 Confusion or ignorance regarding the identity of a deity is common at shrines, in the past as well as in the present. The issue is not in practice as critical to the cult as a scholarly-minded observer might think.
38 It is a basic principle of the Shinto cult that the sacred presence at a shrine can be ‘divided’ indefinitely, ritually or magically, and enshrined elsewhere, without diminishing the potency of the presence at the original shrine and without endowing the new shrine with anything less than the same, fully potent presence. This ‘divided’ deity is called a *bunrei* or (as below) a *bunshin*. 
Hi-no-tani ('Valley of the Sun') is a place in the mountains near the source of the Furu River. Next, the text relates how, in 863,
an Isonokami priest dreamed that a divine sword descended from Hi-no-tani on the upper reaches of the Furu River, surrounded on all four sides by smaller blades and smashing through rocks and trees. It stopped on the bank of the Kitagawa, behind the shrine. A beautiful woman then flew down, took it up, and placed it upon the hill before the shrine. When honoured there, planted upright, the sword shone with a brilliant light.... The woman said: "I am Izumo Takeo, a bunshin (‘divided body’) of Yatsurugi-no-kami. I conceal myself, calling myself a woman of the Owari-no-muraji of Atsuta." On waking, the priest saw that there really was a five-coloured cloud covering the hill. He reported his dream, and by imperial order a new sanctuary was erected and the deity was honored there as Izumo Takeo no Kami.

The "hill before the shrine" is the knoll on which The 'High Bridge of Fum' (Furu no takahashi) as it is now. In the play, the Chorus sings, "Ah, lovely first snow! Looking out over the High Bridge of Fum, I see bow from of old the Deity has upheld His vow [to aid those who trust in Him]..."

The divine sword of the play is therefore doubly imperial, since it combines two swords that are central to the legendary history of the Yamato sovereigns. Moreover, the story of how the spirit of Kusanagi came to Isonokami resembles in several respects the one told in Fum; and the spirit-sword's sunlike brilliance is like that of the sword in the play. Yet there are also differences between the two legends—differences that preserve something of the two swords' distinct identities. For example, the sword of Atsuta is constantly associated with the number eight (eight dragons, eightfold clouds), as it is in the Kojiki and Nibon shoki accounts of Susanoo's deed; and the dragons themselves no doubt have to do with the serpent that he slew. Again, the Atsuta sword did not "stop" in a woman's "cloth" but was instead retrieved by a magical shrine-woman (or medium) from Atsuta, who set it on the hill. The sword-and-cloth legend is also much more matter-of-fact than the rather highly-coloured legend of the Izumo Takeo Jinja. All this suggests that the founding legend of the Izumo Takeo Jinja is a somewhat nativised and, so to speak, 'imperialised' variant of that of the Isonokami Shrine proper. As I will now argue, the Isonokami legend itself shows the influence of foundation legends such as those associated with the ancient Korean kingdoms of Silla and Koguryō.
The sacred weapon and the water woman

As several writers have pointed out, the story of the sword and cloth in *Furu* resembles the one told in *Kamo* 加茂, a god play attributed to Zeami’s son-in-law, Zenchiku 禪竹 (1405–68).41

Of old, there was in the village of Kamo a woman of the Hata 秦 clan42 who came every morning and evening to the [Kamo] river and dipped water to offer the deity. Once a white-feathered arrow came floating down the river and lodged in her bucket. Picking it up, she took it home and thrust it into the eaves of her house. She then found that she was pregnant and gave birth to a son. When the boy entered his third year, people gathered around him and asked him who his father was. He pointed to the arrow, which became a thunderbolt and rose into the sky as a deity. It was the deity Wakeikazuchi (“Cleaving Thunder”) of the Kamo Shrine.

This arrow recalls the sword in the Furu legend, since both are penetrating weapons that come rushing down a river to lodge in a woman’s receptacle (at Kamo a water bucket, at Furu an enfolding cloth), and since in both cases this penetration results in a renewal of vitality. Moreover, the motif of a weapon penetrating an enclosed space and so producing renewed vitality appears also in the story told in the *Nihon shoki* about Jinmu’s sword:

At this time the Gods belched up a poisonous vapour, from which everyone suffered … . Then there was a man by name Kumano no Takakuraji, who unexpectedly had a dream, in which Ama-terasu no Oho-kami spoke to Take-mika-tsuchi, saying: “I still hear a sound of disturbance from the Central Land of Reed-Plains. Do thou again go and chastise it.” [Take-mikazuchi promises to send down his sword.] … . Thereupon Take-mikazuchi no Kami addressed Takakuraji [in this dream], saying: “My sword, which is called Futsu no Mitama, I will now place in thy storehouse. Do thou take it and present it to the Heavenly Grandchild [i.e. Jinmu].” Takakuraji said “Yes,” and thereupon awoke. The next morning, as instructed in his dream, he opened the storehouse, and on looking in, there was indeed there a sword which had fallen down (from Heaven), and was standing upside down on the plank floor of the storehouse. So he took it and offered it to the Emperor. At this time the Emperor happened to be asleep. He awoke suddenly, and said: “What a long time I have slept!” On inquiry he found that the troops who had been affected by the poison had all recovered their senses and were afoot … .43

The storehouse in this account functions like the “bucket” in the Kamo legend, even though no women is mentioned in association with it.44 Moreover, a late thirteenth-century version of the Kamo legend makes it quite clear that such a motif could be associated with fruitful sexual intercourse, and also combines aspects both of the Kamo and the Furu legends already cited:

Kamo-no-Wakeikazuchi-no-Daimyōjin is the son of Matsuo. Someone was washing cloth on the bank of the Kamo River when he came and had intercourse with her, whereupon she became pregnant. Then he left her, and at that time

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41 For example, Kanai, “Furu,” p.316; Matsu­mae, “Isonokami jingū no saijin,” p.348.
44 Although the sun deity Amaterasu is generally (but in medieval times not uni­versally) considered female, her role in this story is unrelated to that of the Kamo woman.
the woman said: "What memento shall I have of you?" He gave her a white-feathered arrow, which she took and hung over the hearth of her house. She gave birth to a son.45

Later, the child identifies the arrow as his father (the Matsuo deity), whereupon the arrow rises up through the clouds.

If the Furu legend mentions no child, that is because it speaks not of the birth of a young deity but of a rebirth of the emperor's vitality, particularly at the winter solstice. Matsumae Takeshi marshalled the available clues to propose that, originally, the legend corresponded to a rite performed beside the Furu River; and he stated that *furu* (present in the term *tamafuri*) is the same as the Korean word *pul* or *pulli*, and designates a rite to ward off disasters and invite renewal.46 This rite, like Zeami's play, would have associated the sacred sword with the sun. In it, the celebrant (a shrine maiden and medium, *itsukime* 神女) would have invited the sun-spirit, the emperor's life-force, to enter into her to be renewed. In fact, in the *Nihon shoki* account of Jinmu's sword, it is the sun deity, the origin of the imperial line, who issues the order that the sword should be sent down.

**The Chinkonsai**

In short, the Isonokami legend featured in *Furu* is related to the myth that is normally cited as the model for the Chinkonsai. This myth, which tells the story of the Heavenly Rock Cave, appears in both *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*.47 The sun (the deity Amaterasu) has entered a cave, plunging the world into night, and the gods must devise a way to call her forth again. They uproot a sacred sakaki tree, hang jewels, a mirror, and cloth strips in its branches, and set it before the cave. (A similarly uprooted and adorned sakaki tree appears, in a fragment of the *Chikuzen fudoki* 琉球国風土記, affixed to the prow of a ship sent to greet the emperor by an immigrant group from Silla;48 it has in its lower branches not cloth offerings but a sword.) Then a goddess—a prototype of the divinely possessed medium—dances a lascivious dance on an upended tub, while wielding a "spear wreathed with Eulalia grass [chimaki 芝繋] no hokol."49 This performance at last induces Amaterasu to peer out of the cave, whereupon she sees her face reflected in the mirror. Astonished to see before her another sun, she comes all the way out of the cave, while the gods seal the door behind her, and light is restored to the world.

One version of this account, included in *Nihon shoki*, describes the dancing goddess’ spear as follows:

[The deity] Omohi-kane … spoke, saying, "Let there be made an image of this [Sun] Goddess, and let prayer be addressed to it." They [i.e. the gods] therefore proceeded to appoint Ishi-kori-dome as artisan, who, taking copper of the Mt. Kagu of Heaven, made therefrom a Sun Spear [hihoko 日矛].50

Her spear was therefore an "image" of the sun. This "sun spear" is akin to the one for which the Silla prince Ame-no-hihoko, whose treasures were

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45 Quoted by Itō Masayoshi from a collection of Tendai oral teachings entitled *Kigen jinshō sho* 窮源尽性抄; see *Itō, Yōkyoku sho*, vol.3, p.499. This passage, dated 1285, is from an entry entitled “Sannō suijaku shidai no koto” 山王垂跡次第事. Matsumae, “Isonokami jingū no saijin,” p.351, discussed a similar example from *Nijimisha chūshiki* 二十二社注式.


49 Sakamoto, *Nihon shoki*, vol.1, p.112; Aston, *Nihongi*, vol.1, p.44.

deposited at Isonokami, was presumably named by the Japanese. The *Nibon sboki* list of the treasures he brought to Japan calls it Izushi-no-hoko (an “Izushi spear”) and mentions also an “Izushi sword.” Izushi is the place where Ame-no-hihoko’s group of immigrants settled in Japan and where they had enshrined their ancestral sun deity. A document of the Izushi Shrine, dated 1524, shows that the Silla origin of the shrine was still acknowledged in medieval times.

The classical account of the Chinkonsai appears in *Gōkeshidai* (1111) by Ōe no Masafusa 大江家匡房 (1041–1111). It describes a rite in which a sacral woman (kannagi 坐神) pounds with a sakaki branch upon an upended tub, and it states explicitly that her action is modelled upon the goddess’ dance before the cave. Next, the woman ties ten knots in a cord. “This,” the account explains, “is because of the Ten Treasures of Umashimachi, which, when shaken, bring the dead back to life.” (Umashimachi is the name of the son of Nigihayahi, the divine Mononobe founder whose treasures—perhaps in fact those of Ame-no-hihoko—were deposited at Isonokami.) Meanwhile, a “woman official” (jokan 女官) shook an imperial robe in an open box. The gesture of pounding on the tub is probably a cognate of the entry of the arrow or sword into the bucket, cloth, etc. of the Kamo and Fum legends. The whole purpose of this rite is the *tamafurim* already mentioned: the renewal of the emperor’s spirit in the season of the winter solstice.

**Myths of impregnation by the sun**

I have shown, with respect to *Furu*, that the entry of the sword into the woman's cloth implies, among other things, sexual intercourse; and that the sword of the *Furu* legend ultimately comes from the sun. In Japan, the motif of a woman being frankly impregnated by the sun is very rare, but it was common in ancient Korea. In fact, the only Japanese example is the *Kojiki* version of how Ame-no-hihoko came to Japan:

In ancient times, there was a son of the king of the land of Siragi, whose name was Amē-nō-pi-pokō. This man came [to Japan]. The reason why he came [was this]:

In the land of Siragi there was a swamp named Agu-numa. By this swamp a woman of lowly station was taking a noonday nap. Then the rays of the sun shone on her genitals like a rainbow. There was also a man of lowly station, who thought this a strange matter; he constantly observed the behavior of this woman. This woman became pregnant from the time of the noonday nap, and she gave birth to a red jewel. Then the lowly man who had been watching her asked for and received this jewel, which he wrapped up and wore constantly about his waist.

[The “lowly man” leads his cow into the mountains, loaded with food for workers there tending his rice paddies. He meets Amē-nō-pi-pokō, who accuses him of planning to kill the cow, and he saves himself by giving Amē-nō-pi-pokō the jewel.]
Then [Amē-nō-pi-pokō] released the lowly man, took the jewel away, and placed it by his bed. Immediately it was transformed into a beautiful maiden. He married her and made her his chief wife. This maiden always prepared various kinds of delicious foods and presented them to her husband. The king’s son became arrogant at heart and reviled his wife. The woman said: “I am not the kind of woman you deserve for a wife. I will go to my ancestral land.” Then she secretly boarded a small boat and escaped to Japan, arriving at Nanipa … At this time, Amē-nō-pi-pokō, hearing of his wife’s flight, came in pursuit of her …

Having married a daughter of the sun (a transformation of a “red jewel” born from a woman whom the sun had impregnated beside the water), Ame-no-hihoko pursued her to Japan, her “ancestral land.”

This legend was recently analysed by Kuno Akira, who argued that it speaks of rites performed, under imperial (Yamato) patronage, to insure safe navigation between Korea and Kyushu. Kuno further proposed that this patronage, shown in the prosperity of the Oki and Munakata Shrines (on the sea between Kyushu and Korea), suggests that the Yamato lineage preserved the memory of its Korean origins. He also stressed in this regard a strong connection between Ame-no-hihoko and the imperial house.

Korean legends are suggestive in this regard. One, from Samguk yusa, tells how, during the reign of the eighth king of Silla, a couple named Yonorang 延鳥郎 and Syeonyǒ 細鳥女 lived by the sea on the east side of the peninsula. One day, Yonorang was diving for seaweed when a huge rock rose beneath him and carried him to Japan, where he was acclaimed as king. When Syeonyǒ went looking for him, a rock carried her off too, and she became her husband’s queen. However, the sun and moon then no longer shone in Silla, which sent an appeal for the couple to return. Yonorang instead gave the messenger a roll of silk woven by Syeonyǒ, and urged that it be offered to heaven. When the Silla king did this, the clouds parted, and the sun and moon illuminated his land once more. Thereafter, he treated the silk as a treasure and kept it in a “queen’s storehouse” (kwibiko 貴妃庫 …).

Though the parallels are not exact, one recognises here the passage of a royal figure from Silla to Japan, this figure’s link with the sun, and the cloth and storehouse associated with the return of the sun (and moon) to Silla. Moreover, when the treasures of Ame-no-hihoko (which included lengths of magic cloth) were deposited in the “sacred storehouse” at Isonokami, this storehouse was entrusted to the care of Emperor Suinin’s younger sister, Ōnakatsu-hime 大中姫. This recalls the bond, suggested by the Korean legend, between a royal, sacral woman and the storehouse containing the treasure that preserves and renews the light of the sun. The storehouse at Isonokami may have had, in early times, the same function as the “queen’s storehouse” in Silla.

Another Silla legend from Samguk yusa describes the birth of King Hyōkkōse, the Silla founder. Having agreed to seek a king to rule them all, the chieftains of six clans climbed a mountain and prayed to heaven. Lightning then flashed, and a rainbow from heaven touched the earth below
them, beside a certain well, where they saw a white horse. When they reached the well, the horse rose into the sky on the rainbow, and on a rock by the well they found a large red egg that contained “a baby boy whose noble face shone like the sun”: the future King Hyokkose. Here too, despite various divergences, one recognises familiar elements: a dart of brilliant light penetrating the darkness of a “well,” and the celestial spirit-child, born of a sun-egg beside the same well (water).

The woman, missing from the letter of King Hyokkose’s story, is present in the legend of the birth of King Chumong 朱蒙, the founder of Koguryō. The Wei shu 魏書 account of Koguryō states that Chumong's mother was a divine river woman, who, although confined in a dark space, became pregnant from the searching rays of the sun. When she gave birth to an egg, her husband the king gave it to various animals who refused to touch it; nor could he break it. Finally, he returned it to his wife, who kept it warm until a wondrous boy came forth from it. The boy’s name, Chumong, means literally “red darkness,” but since蒙 means ‘dark’, ‘wrapping’, ‘covering’, the full meaning is probably closer to “redly [i.e. brightly] illumined, covered space” from which the newborn, or reborn, king emerges. This space is akin to that within the “cloth” of Furu, when the cloth was penetrated by the sunsword from on high.

Hirohata Sukeo cited such material as this in the course of arguing that the Japanese Chinkonsai was a survival of the tamafuri rite performed at Isonokami. He held that this rite must have involved summoning the sun and implanting its spirit in the Yamato sovereign. He then stated that the term jingū 神宮 (‘grand shrine’), which in Kojiki and Nihon shoki is applied consistently only to Isonokami, is probably of Silla origin; for jingū was the term used in fifth- and sixth-century Silla for the shrine that honoured the ancestor of the Silla kings.

The Monk Dōgyō

According to the play Furu, the Sword of Atsuta, “attracted by the spiritual accomplishment” of a foreign monk named Dōgyō, manifested itself to Dōgyō in Kyushu. Who then was Dōgyō? Nihon shoki states that he was a Silla monk who, in AD 668 during the reign of Emperor Tenji, “stole the Kusanagi sword [from Atsuta] and escaped with it, making for Silla,” until “wind and rain so perplexed him on his way that he came back again.” Longer variants of the same story appear in Kogo sbū 古語拾遺 (807) and in the engi of the Atsuta Shrine. In Furu, however, both the way in which the sword moves to Kyushu and the reason for its journey are quite different. This new version of the story is known only from the play, although it may have been present in Isonokami Shrine documents that were available to the playwright but have since been lost.

The Dōgyō of Nihon shoki may well have made off with the sword of Atsuta because he knew it was from Silla and because he wanted to restore

59 Summarised from the translation in Samguk yusa, p.49.
60 Hirohata, Kiki shinwa no kenkyū, p.109. This legend appears in Korean sources as well, including Samguk yusa, pp.45-6.
By “centre” I mean first of all the region of central Honshu, close to the imperial capital, and secondly the seat there of the imperial presence. The latter in this case means at once the Atsuta Shrine (the Atsuta sword) and the Isonokami Shrine (the sword of Jinmu); for as far as the play is concerned these two shrines are the same place, since a sword infused with the imperial spirit is present at each and since it is precisely this imperial presence that defines centrality. This consideration helps to explain why, in the play, these two swords are one.

It means, first, that Dōgyō, at a spot on the outeredge of the Yamato realm, has had a vision of the power at the centre; he has seen that the Yamato sovereign, not any ruler in Korea or beyond, is the centre of the world. This is roughly the message, transposed into Buddhist terms, of the no play Kasuga Ryūjin and of the legend behind the play Ama. It is also the message of Kureba, a god play which is probably by Zeami. In Kureba, all the world, even as far as China, acknowledges the Japanese sovereign as the world-giver of law and civilised order. Other plays associated with Zeami, for instance Takasago (one of his most famous works) or Akoya no matsu, treat similar direct manifestations of civilising virtue in distant provinces of Japan.

However, there is a second aspect to this affirmation of an imaginary, or rhetorical, Yamato world order. Furu celebrates this order not simply as having been affirmed definitively in the past by Dōgyō’s vision, but as being renewed in the present. To begin with, the play’s waki is a latter-day Dōgyō. Not only is he too a monk, but he has Dōgyō’s own “spiritual accomplishment,” since he sees the same vision. However, he sees it not in Kyushu but at Isonokami, the world-centre defined by the play. His visit to the Isonokami Shrine is, as it were, Dōgyō’s own pilgrimage of thankful homage, and his vision is the confirmation that the Sword of Fum, once manifest in Kyushu, shines in glory, now as always, at Isonokami itself.

According to Kobayashi Kenji’s account of Washū Furu no Daimyōjin engi, this work describes the Sword of Fum as being “freely capable of flight” (bigyō jizai 飛行自在; in the play, jinben jizai 神変自在). This proposition refers especially to the Sword’s “flight” to Kyushu, which Zeami in Furu treated as a visionary rather than a physical phenomenon. A critical item of lore about the Sword is therefore that it once translated itself to a distant place and then returned. This movement of the deity, although expressed here in terms peculiar to Isonokami, is actually a fundamental pattern of movement followed by many Japanese divinities. It is precisely the Fum Deity’s pattern of movement in the Fum Festival at which the play Furu must have been performed.

I have explained that during the Fum Festival, the Fum deity was carried from the main shrine to a temporary one some four kilometres away, where music, dance, and plays were then performed; and I have noted that the festival in this form shows the influence
of the On-matsuri of Kasuga, which was first celebrated in 1136. The On-matsuri provides, among other things, one of the most famous examples of this pattern of regular, repeated movement (main shrine to temporary shrine and back) in Japan. Yamaori Tetsuo, who cited it in this connection, showed that the same pattern could shape the rites connected with even a nominally Buddhist divinity: the “Ko-Kannon” image honoured in the very old and now famous Shūni-e rite at Tōdaiji. The regular movement of the Ise Shrine, every twenty years, between adjacent, alternate sites, probably illustrates it too. This pattern is a constantly renewed affirmation of renewal. The nō play Furu, in the context of the Furu Festival for which it must have been written, makes the same affirmation.

Given the Korean origins of the Furu deity, as well as of Dōgyō himself, this affirmation of the divinity’s ever-renewed power and presence makes a grand claim about the glory of the Yamato sovereign. This claim does not deny all importance to Korea, any more than Kasuga Ryūjin denies that Shakyamuni originally preached in India or Ama that China is a great and mighty land. Instead, it affirms that the Yamato sovereign is the heart of a much larger world than the Japanese islands alone, however dimly (and optimistically) this world may be conceived.

Such a claim is not in itself ‘nationalistic’. Earlier, I called this idea of a Yamato-centred world order “imaginary” or “rhetorical.” That it certainly is. Although the image of the Yamato sovereign in Furu matches that presented by Zeami and other playwrights in other nō plays, and in fact that latent in classical Japanese letters up to Zeami’s time, anyone acquainted with Japanese history can see at a glance that it has no connection with reality in the fifteenth century. In Zeami’s time, the emperor, for all his prestige, was a powerless figure, and even his prestige was then waning fast. In the same way, visions of homage rendered to him by distant lands beyond the islands are of course fanciful.

The disastrous invasion of Korea by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in 1596 showed vividly just how fanciful they were. However, it took a leader as ambitious as Hideyoshi even to conceive such a venture, and in 1428, already late in Zeami’s life, Hideyoshi’s extravagances were still over a century and a half in the future. For Zeami, to celebrate at Isonokami a vision of a largely imaginary sovereign’s wholly imaginary glory was no doubt to evoke what I called earlier the “noble depths of feeling and time” classically associated with the name: depths beyond which lay, even earlier than the T’ang and Po Chu-i, the jealousies and ambitions of an age when traffic between Japan and Korea was vital to the developing culture of the islands. No doubt Furu, like Kasuga Ryūjin and Ama, also betrays a collective nostalgia for the old Nara, the eighth-century capital that attracted goods and visitors from all over Asia, and that saw the founding of Kōfuku-ji and the Kasuga Shrine. In these plays there is none of the outright rejection of the continent and its influence that would become a theme for certain Edo-period thinkers.

In the meantime, other perennial religious concerns, even older than the
Mononobe and at present still residually alive, made their own contribution to the ceremonies of Isonokami. The pattern of a deity's movement to and from a temporary shrine, as an affirmation of renewal, is connected to the agricultural cycle, and the agricultural aspect of the Isonokami deity can be seen in a rite mentioned in the Edo-period Isonokami no Dai moyojin engi and still performed today. On June 30 (formerly the last day of the sixth lunar month), the Sword of Furu is carried to a small shrine in a sacred grove among the fields, where its beneficent power vivifies the crops. In the lunar calendar, this rite coincided with rice-planting.

Midnight Sun in Silla

In his Kyūi九位, an essay on acting, Zeami called the summit of the actor's art “the manner of the wondrous flower” (myōkaifu 妙花風), and he began his discussion of this topic with an image: “At midnight in Silla the sun shines bright.” He continued:

“Wondrous” surpasses speech and confounds the workings of the mind. Can language encompass the sun at midnight? Can it? Therefore the depth displayed by a consummate master of this art is beyond praise ….

In Zeami's Furu, a nameless monk without rank sees, in a vision of peace and majesty, a sword traceable to Silla illumine the night like the sun. Kyūi was written late in Zeami's career but prior to 1428, the year I have proposed for the first performance of the play.

Could Zeami have had this image from Kyūi in mind when he composed Furu? One cannot say. Certainly, he did not invent it, since it occurs in several earlier Zen texts. For example, Muchū mondō 夢中問答, a record of sayings by the great fourteenth-century Zen master Musō Soseki 夢窓破石 (1275–1351), ends with this exchange:

Question: Reverend sir, what is the dharma that you really teach?
Answer: At midnight in Silla the sun shines bright.

Zeami seems sometimes to have drawn on Muchū mondō, especially in his later plays, so that he may well have taken his image from there. I do not know the image's origins or why it involves Silla. However, Zeami clearly admired it and what it stood for, and it is intriguing that in his Furu a midnight sun ultimately from Silla fills with Japan's beneficent light a greater, though largely imaginary world. Such a vision is typical of nō as the popular theatre of the late medieval period, and therefore characteristic of its time.