
研究ノート

A Folktale of *Sanuki*

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Introductory note

With the author's permission to print his work in this form, I present here a short translation of *The Story of the Magic Hood* by Mitsugu Ōnishi. Since this is, of course, not a study of a folktale, I do not add any comment on the work presented here. But I do hope this original work, which gives us the mind and souls of our ancestors who lived long ago in old *Sanuki* (now the prefecture of *Kagawa*), appeals very much to your taste.

*The Story of the Magic Hood**(Yama-uba no Zukin)*

by Mitsugu Ōnishi

This story took place a long, long time ago. There was one of the severest draughts that had occurred in years. In the province of *Sanuki*, fords and rivers and ponds all over *Sanuki* had run dry, and even the well in the paddy fields, dried up by the draught, exposed its dry, starving clay, and the bottom of it remained as dry as a bone for a long time. From dawn till dusk, the broiling sun never ceased its endless, merciless shining, and there was not a single speck of cloud in the sky. In the province of *Hiketa* ((farmer's village) in *Sanuki*, the plowed fields, as well as the paddy fields, dried and cracked, and the rice plants ceased their growing and all hung their heads limply under the

hot sun and at last dwindled and yellowed. But that was not all. The country folk were suffering greatly for want of drinking water. Finally the village people came together, from far and near, for consultation, and asked the headman of the village to worship the water god. In compliance with their requests, the village headman made up his mind, through seven days and seven nights, to pray for rain.

“Oh! *Ryūjin-sama* (Dragon God) of Mt. Ryū-ō!

Please, bless us all, and let the rain fall,

let the rain fall!” again and again he prayed.

On the seventh night, in the midst of the villagers' prayers, from the heavens above there came, all of a sudden, the roaring voice of the Dragon God:

“I'll make a promise to give rainfall to the people in *Sanuki*,” he said, “if the village headman will send one of his three daughters to me in marriage.”

On hearing that, all the village people assembled there sent forth to the sky cries of despair, half-surprise and half-admiration. The village headman remained prostrated, his face to the ground for some minutes, but suddenly stood up resolutely and cried to the heaven at the top of his voice:

“For Heaven's sake, let the rain fall and save our village from this draught, for I'll give one of my daughters to you as you wish.”

The village headman's words were hardly out of his mouth before the heavy rain began to pour down like a waterfall and it never let up until the following morning.

All the rice plants and vegetables in the fields suddenly became bright and alive, green and bright and fresh as the dew on a May morning, and bushes and trees revived, with glistening fresh foliage. In this manner, the crops in the fields were saved, but the whole family of the village headman was plunged into grief and mourning.

The first question, of course, was: Who is going to marry the Dragon God? The people of the village headman's house had to have a consultation about this.

"Won't you marry him? The headman at first asked his eldest daughter. "Oh, no! -no indeed!" returned her answer. And the middle daughter also shook her head and said, "What a thing to say! Oh, no. Not for the life of me!"

"You do well to be angry with me. But, really, who on earth wants to marry him? Here is a pretty state of things!" Mumbling to himself, the village headman and his wife were at their wits' end about what to do.

Just then, the youngest daughter, seeing the plight they were in, came forward and said abruptly, "Father, and mother, I'll go and marry him in place of my elder sisters, of my own free will. But now I only ask you one thing: on the day of my departure, please let me have a copy of the Holy Sutra and a thousand needles as a parting gift."

"That's easy enough, certainly. But, how in the world could I send away my favorite, dearest daughter?"

With these words, her father and mother, who were overwhelmed with grief, caught their daughter in their arms, and cried, but at last they determined to let her go. For they feared that if they did not keep the promise with the Dragon God, he would be very much offended.

At last, the day of her departure arrived: she took a copy of the Holy Sutra and a thousand needles and set out on her long journey. Her father, mother, and the country folk, loath to see her depart, accompanied her as far as to the riverside in *Yamashita*, and then returned home with tears in their eyes.

After leaving the village, she directed her steps toward Mt. *Ryū-ō*, passing through the dales and along the rivers. On the way, she let one needle drop into the river and she halted and recited a prayer the while. When the last one was left in her hand, she found herself at the edge of a gorge.

"My throat's on fire. Let's have a rest for some time here....." With these thoughts in her mind, she approached the edge of the water, when the surface of the water was suddenly disturb-

ed in an uncanny way. Immediately she drew back under the rock and gazed and gazed at the surface of the whirling water, holding her breath. In a few minutes more, the bosom of the waters grew more and more furious—heaving, boiling, and roaring—until at last the swelling water was suddenly split in two and a big dragon appeared and sprang at her. Almost in the same moment, she darted her last needle at him with all her might, and it pierced him straight in the eye. For some time the dragon writhed in a desperate agony and fell down dead and lay stretched out at full length before her.

Just as this was happening, in the province of *Hiketa*, there was a bellow, like a rumbling of the mountain. “The youngest daughter of the village headman must have been devoured by the dragon, oh! Poor thing!” went from mouth to mouth in the village and the village people sighed for her and lamented for her sad, unhappy lot.

At the death of the dragon, she breathed a sigh of relief and made her way back again to the village through the mountains. But the sun had already set. And to make matters worse, she was getting more and more swallowed up by the mountain tracks and she lost her way. Groping her way once more through the dark mountains, finding her path as best as she could, ahead of her in the mountain she perceived a flickering light. Drawing nearer she came to a small thatched-roof house, where an old woman was making ready for dinner. With a sizzling sound, a good smell of rich, hearty cooking wandered out of the house and reached her nose.

“I’m looking for a place to stay for the night. Can you help me?” she asked. To this, an old woman replied, shaking her head.

“This is no place for a human being..... How dare you come to such a place as this at this late hour?”

“I’ve lost my way in the mountains and I don’t know where to look for the night’s lodging; so could you let me stay until morning?”

So saying, she begged her for lodging, assuring her that she could sleep anywhere, even under the eaves or in the shed.

She besought the old woman so earnestly that the old woman was puzzled for some time by what to do with her, but she rose with some effort from the fire-side. After putting the kindling away in the corner of the earth-floored room, she made a bed for her. In the middle of the night, the young girl was awakened by the noisy sound of footsteps and the loud sound of talking.

“Hey, Mountain witch! Here we are again to pass the night! Oh!

We smell human flesh.”

“Surely, the smell of a well-grown girl, indeed.”

She inferred, from hearing their converse, that two devils were coming into this house to pass the night, and soon she heard them walking back and forth in the room, sniffing. While this was going on, she crouched herself under the strawmat, with her eyes tightly shut, trembling all over.

“Don’t talk nonsense, you fool! It’s nothing but the smell of the mountain birds, because I roasted them tonight. Come on, you boys! Go off to bed early!”

At this, the devils seemed to believe the mountain witch and went into the another part of the room, munching the meat the mountain witch had given them. In the meanwhile, overpowered by fatigue, the young girl fell to a deep sleep again.

Early the next morning, the mountain witch took her out of her house quietly and said to her, “If any of the devils should seize you, when you go back through the mountains just as you are, he might eat you up. Now that I can’t bear, so you’d better have this hood on your head.”

With that, the mountain witch took a crumpled hood out of her sleeve with great care and put it on the young girl’s head, at which time she instantly changed into the form of a withered, old woman. “There is one thing more I must warn you,” continued the mountain witch, “if any of the devils asks you a question or two, try to always say to them that you are an old, old woman, and yet, if they do not believe you, please say to them, have a closer look at me,…… have a closer look at me.” When the mountain witch told her all

this, she seemed to feel somewhat relieved, and stretched herself with a beaming smile.

And then, the girl thanked the mountain witch for her food and lodging and went down the path. She had not gone far before a group of the devils—some red, some green, and some mottled—took their seats in a circle by the roadside, building a fire, and talking merrily.

“Are you an old woman or a young lass?” asked one.

“If you are a young lass, I’ll eat you up.” asked another.

“I’m an old, old woman. Please take a good look at me.” she answered them, always remembering what the mountain witch had told her.

“Sure enough! You’re a withered, old woman and no mistake.”

“Go away, quick! I have no more need of you, you old hag!” shouted the devils one after another, showering all kinds of abuse on her. So, therefore, she was able to escape. “But, why did the old woman, who was really a mountain witch, save my life, by changing me into the appearance of an old woman?” So wondering in her mind, she went on her way and walked on all day without taking off the hood given to her by the mountain witch, and presently she came across a large, handsome mansion in a small country town. In front of the house gate, she sat down to rest, when she was struck with a sudden idea.

“Well,” she thought, “no one in my village thinks that I am alive. Now, instead of going back, I’ll go into this house and ask for a position as a servant.” So thinking, she walked in through the gate where she was met by a man, who asked;

“This is one of the wealthiest families in this town. What has brought you here?”

“Could you take me into your service, as I have no house to return to?” she implored.

"If you don't mind such laborious tasks as making the bath, cooking the meals and so forth....."replied the man. To this, she answered willingly;

"I'm at your service."

Thus employed as *hi-taki bā-san* (domestic house maid), she went on with her daily labours as best as she could, never taking off the hood.

However, so ugly and dirty did she look that she was made fun of by all the people employed in the house; and they were always saying:

"Get away from her when she passes by,

For so ugly and dirty she looks!"

But she proved herself at her age to be the very best of the servants, that the people in the rich man's house wondered at her strength and at the same time admired the way she worked.

There was only a son in this wealthy family. Being intelligent, every night he learned to write and read under the monk at the temple school nearby.

It happened that one night, as he came back late from his lessons, he saw a light issuing from the interior of *hi-taki bāsan's* room. Along the passage, he happened to look through the opening of the *shoji* (screen door). Imagine his surprise when he saw the most lovely young girl he had ever seen sitting reading alone under the light of a small lantern.

"That's very strange....." he murmured to himself..... "but what a pretty young girl!" and he could hardly believe his eyes. But the young girl was so pretty that he fell in love with her at first sight.

The next day, in the daytime, he looked in her room, expecting to see her again, and lo! He found her room empty; she was not there. "Where had she gone?"Beside himself, he ran all through the house seeking for her, but in vain.

From that day onwards, he was so occupied with the thought of her that he could think of nothing else but her..... he had only dreamed her.....,

which eventually made him very sick.

The master of the rich man's house, in an excess of anxiety, sent in haste for prayers, doctors, fortune-tellers and magicians. But no one could find the nature of his malady until his nurse was taken to him.

"What is it that preys upon your mind so heavily?"

If you have any reason at all, tell me..... Please only to me,

I beg you!" When his nurse asked him this by his bed-side, he at last was obliged to confess that he fell in love with *hi-taki bā-san* at first sight, and that he hoped to make her his wife.

The people of the rich man's house were all dumbfounded when they heard this from his nurse, and all cried; "What! Why that *hi-taki bā-san*, of all women!"

His nurse, on her part, impatient at the thought of the son's confession, called *hi-taki bā-san* at once and thundered at her: "Oh! Disgusting! You're the very cause of his illness." And laying hold of her, the nurse was about to throw her down onto the floor, when, just then, the hood given to her by the mountain witch dropped off her head, and to the surprise of them all, there appeared a most beautiful young girl.

All the people present around her were greatly astonished at the sudden change of her shape and gazed upon her with wonder and asked what could be the meaning of this.

And then she told them the whole adventure she had had, at which all the household of the rich man expressed their cry of admiration at how kind-hearted and courageous she was, and also at the same time marvelled at the miraculous power the hood possessed.

With that, the son's illness was recovered immediately. The rich man gave his consent for his son to marry the youngest daughter of the village headman: and the wedding was celebrated soon afterwards.

Some time after, the couple returned to her home in *Hiketa*, to find that the Buddhist service was then being performed for her spirit, for it had been

just two years since she had been swallowed up by the dragon. But seeing that the youngest daughter had come back safe and sound with her fine bridegroom, all who assembled there rejoiced exceedingly and shed tears of joy, followed by a grand feast and celebration in honor of the returned couple.

In the meantime, the two elder sisters, who had been lying in sickbed because of their wicked hearts, became well with one touch of the hood. And they all lived happily ever after.