

Court Rank for Village Shrines

The Yoshida House's Interactions with Local Shrines during the Mid-Tokugawa Period

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This paper seeks to understand the ways in which the Yoshida house entered the religious lives of common villagers. The Yoshida house usurped the imperial court's prerogative to grant ranks and titles by devising affordable rank and title certificates for rural tutelary shrines. During the eighteenth century, approximately 2,000 shrines received such certificates. The certificates became especially popular from the early 1690s due to bakufu policies that attempted to define official religious institutions. Ordinary local shrines, most of which were excluded from official recognition, obtained the Yoshida's certificate in an effort to enhance their legal standings. Another factor in the Yoshida's success was that the certificates provided remedies for various problems faced by rural leaders. Most notably, the certificate removed local taboos, such as breeding certain colors of horses and planting certain kinds of vegetables. Lastly, the certificates were issued in exchange for a pledge by shrine functionaries—most of whom were Buddhist and Shugen priests—to remove Buddhist items from shrines and to present offerings to kami different from those offered to bud-dhas. The certificates enabled the Yoshida house to spread its “One-and-Only” (Yuiitsu) Shinto doctrine among shrines controlled by Buddhist and Shugen priests. The certificates served as a channel for the Yoshida house to influence the identities and practices of local shrines, and thereby expanded the Yoshida's authority over local shrines.

Keywords—Yoshida house—court rank—*sōgen* decree (*sōgen senji*)—local shrines

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On the left-hand side of the road stood a new shrine on a hill. [A traveler] asked a local about the shrine. "I don't know much about its past, but nowadays many parishioners believe that it is a shrine of prominence. Recently, it received the title of senior first rank great luminous deity (*shōichii daimyōjin* 正一位大明神) from Lord Yoshida," the local answered. "For what reason did it receive the senior first rank?" the traveler asked. "There is no special reason. Parishioners simply bought the rank." (*Jinkyōron* 人鏡論, p. 239; around 1687)

THE UNIDENTIFIED SHRINE described above was one of the two thousand local shrines that purchased court rank from the Yoshida house during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While court ranks were supposed to be bestowed only upon great shrines by the emperor, the Yoshida house devised rank certificates on its own authority at a reduced price, so that the functionaries and parishioners of local tutelary shrines could afford them. Numerous shrines, which would have never been deemed worthy of court rank in pre-Tokugawa times, came to possess court ranks through the Yoshida house. As a result, the Yoshida came to exert much influence on the ways in which local shrines operated.

During the Tokugawa period (1603–1868), the Yoshida house led the largest Shinto sacerdotal lineage in the country, and Yoshida Shinto doctrine and ritual came to be regarded as "orthodoxy cum orthopraxy" (GRAPARD 1992a, p. 45). Despite the general consensus on the significance of Yoshida Shinto during the Tokugawa period, few Western studies have been written on the nature of the Yoshida house's leadership in the development of the Shinto institution and clergy. Since Kuroda Toshio introduced Yoshida Shinto as the first doctrine that posited Shinto as a tradition distinct from Buddhism (KURODA 1981), Western scholarship on Yoshida Shinto has tended to focus on the thought development and activities of Yoshida Kanetomo 吉田兼俱 (1435–1511), who laid the foundation of the subsequent development of the Yoshida sacerdotal lineage.¹

While Japanese-language scholarship has much to offer on this subject, existing Japanese studies have approached the subject matter mainly from the social-historical perspective, especially in an effort to reexamine the four-status system (*shinōkōshō* 士農工商). The leading scholar of this approach, Takano Toshihiko, has explored the professional group of Shinto priests that became increasingly organized into

¹ For studies of Yoshida Kanetomo see GRAPARD 1992a and SCHEID 2000 and 2001. A translation of Kanetomo's seminal work *Yuiitsu shintō myōbō yōshū* is available in GRAPARD 1992b.

the Yoshida, or other sacerdotal lineages such as the Shirakawa 白川 and Tsuchimikado 土御門 lines (TAKANO 1989, 1992, and 2000).

However, such explorations of the Tokugawa Shinto priesthood do not necessarily shed light on the ways in which Shinto shrines developed. When we examine religious life around shrines, we notice that there were few shrines run by Shinto priests in many regions. For example, the early nineteenth-century official gazetteer of Musashi Province (*Shinpen Musashi fudokikō* 新編武蔵風土記稿) listed shrines and temples with their managers in the region that today includes Tokyo and Saitama prefectures. Here we find that most of the shrines were not managed by Shinto priests. In fact, only four percent were managed by Shinto priests. The rest were under the custody of Buddhist priests (54%) or villagers (35%) (TOKI 1991, pp. 149–59).² If we put together these figures with the existing scholarship's portrayal that the Yoshida house headed the largest Shinto sacerdotal lineage, Yoshida Shinto may appear to have had only a limited influence over the actual practices that took place in ordinary shrines, for it trained only a small subset of Shinto priests. Yet this image belies the larger influence of Yoshida Shinto on local shrines in Tokugawa society.

Instead of the Yoshida sacerdotal lineage, this study focuses on local tutelary shrines and explores how the Yoshida house interacted with local shrine functionaries beyond its sacerdotal lineages. In the process of doing this, it examines such interactions over rank certificates and shows that rank certificates served as an effective channel for the Yoshida to advance its doctrine and ritual among ordinary shrines. Hence, the Yoshida had significant influence on the development of local shrines in villages even though it often did not directly manage them.

Recently two Japanese scholars have called attention to the Yoshida house's rank certificates during the Tokugawa period. The historian INOUE Tomokatsu determined that the Yoshida's rank certificates attracted religious specialists who were striving to establish their positions as managers of local shrines (1997, 1998a, and 1998b). Inoue argued as follows. Local shrines did not necessarily have priests, and this situation gave rise to numerous disputes among different religious specialists over who would be in charge of their shrines and rites. While Shinto priests could establish their positions by procuring licenses from the Yoshida or Shirakawa houses, Buddhist and Shugen priests had no legal counterparts to claim their positions within shrine organizations. Buddhist and Shugen priests used rank certificates to

² The remaining seven percent of shrines had no record concerning who managed them.

assert their managing positions. When a functionary planned to obtain a certificate from the Yoshida house, he needed his lord's reference addressed to the Yoshida house. To obtain such a reference also required permission from his village head, since the villagers would have to pay collectively for the rank. Once references from local administrators were ready, the priest would typically travel to the Yoshida shrine to receive a rank, obtain implements, and return to his village. Upon returning to the village, he would perform a ritual to install a rank certificate, a sheet of paper with a *norito* prayer, and a *hei-haku* 幣帛 (wand of streamers) into the innermost sanctuary of the shrine. After going to the trouble of obtaining a rank, the religious specialist could proclaim to his villagers, his lord, and the Yoshida house that he was responsible for the particular shrine. This view, however, overemphasizes religious specialists' conflicts over shrines. While many functionaries seem to have acquired the Yoshida's rank certificates as part of their effort to establish their control over shrines, rank certificates were issued to shrines as opposed to priests and did not necessarily guarantee a priest's right to manage a shrine.

Another scholar who worked on the popularity of the rank certificate was ENOMOTO Naoki (1997 and 2001). In his analysis of Inari shrines in relationship to the Yoshida, Shirakawa, and Fushimi Inari 伏見稲荷 Shrine, Enomoto explained that the popularity of rank certificates was comparable to the contemporary Japanese craze for fashionable "brand name" items. Purchasing a rank from a particular authority, such as the Yoshida, Shirakawa, and Fushimi Inari, meant establishing a connection between the shrine and a "brand name" house. Enomoto's concept of "brand name" is a useful way to illustrate the function of a rank that provided an affordable emblem of prestige for common shrines, but it does not explain why local shrines needed to create ties with such authorities.

Sources documenting what led villagers to obtain ranks are extremely limited, and scholarly assessments of the popularity of rank certificates have been far from comprehensive. Building on Inoue and Enomoto's research, the present study explains why many local shrines sought connections with the Yoshida house, and how local religious specialists' interactions with the Yoshida changed the ways in which the shrines were managed and rites were performed.

In the pages that follow, I begin with a brief history of court rank bestowed upon shrines and the distribution of the Yoshida's rank certificates. The section that follows is an exploration of the legal background and various factors that gave rise to the boom of rank certificates. Finally, I analyze modifications in local practices of kami

worship resulting from the interactions between the Yoshida officials and local shrine functionaries.

The Yoshida House's Rank Certificate: The Sōgen Senji (Sōgen Decree)

Since the seventh century, the imperial court had assigned ranks to the deities of various shrines. Ranks were conferred to strengthen prayers, or as an expression of gratitude for blessings that deities were believed to have brought. Typical occasions were an important figure's sickness, an imperial journey, or war. For instance, in 749, the court conferred the rank of the first order (*ippon* 一品)³ upon Usa Hachiman 宇佐八幡 Shrine in Buzen Province in supplication for completing the grand Buddha statue (*daibutsu* 大仏) in Nara. This was considered a reward for a provincial group from Usa in Kyushu that had offered support for the *daibutsu* venture, which came to completion in 752 (UEDA 1981, p. 146). Eventually this practice became routine. By 851, the court elevated all the previously unranked deities to the senior sixth rank, after which when the court granted ranks to deities, it was invariably the senior first rank (*shōichii* 正一位). This is why the Yoshida granted the senior first rank, as opposed to other ranks, on all the shrines that applied for court rank.

During the late fifteenth century, the court's prerogative to issue ranks and titles for shrines was challenged by Yoshida Kanetomo (1435–1511). Kanetomo was a descendent of the Urabe 卜部 lineage, one of the three houses that served the Shirakawa house, the head of the council of kami matters (*jingikan* 神祇官).⁴ Kanetomo's ambition was to unify various shrine traditions under his doctrine of the One-and-Only Shinto (Yuiitsu Shinto 唯一神道), and he approached the governing elites of his time to build a cult site that epitomized his ambition. That cult site was called Taigenkyū 大元宮 and can still be found in the precinct of the Yoshida Shrine in Kyoto. Kanetomo held it to be the locus where "800 myriad deities of heaven and earth, or some three thousand deities of more than 60 provinces descend every day,"⁵ and among those 800 myriad deities were those of the Inner and Outer shrines of Ise. Hence, in Kanetomo's words, the Taikenkyū was "the most supreme cult site of Japan," and Kanetomo was the highest priest of Kanetomo's unified Shinto system. Indeed, shortly after the completion of this cult site, Kanetomo began to add to his

³ The "*hon*" was a rank normally granted to children and siblings of the emperor.

⁴ The three houses subordinate to the Shirakawa house were the Urabe 卜部, the Ōnakatomi 大中臣, and the Imbe 忌部.

⁵ *Kyōto gosho Higashiyama gobunko kiroku kō* 96.

official signature the title of “Superior of Shinto” (*shintō chōjō* 神道長上), which implied that he was in charge of all the matters concerning kami (GRAPARD 1992a, p. 43, SCHEID 2001, pp. 121–22.)

While Kanetomo set up a cult site at his shrine, he became increasingly interested in local shrines on the outskirts of Kyoto. Commissioned by the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa 足利義政 sometime during the Bunmei era (1469–1487), Kanetomo investigated shrines in the vicinity of Kyoto. He recorded the deity, the corresponding Buddhist deity, branch shrines, *jingūji* 神宮寺, priest, and founding legends of each shrine. Ashikaga Yoshimasa commissioned this job because he was looking for an appropriate place to erect a tutelary shrine in his summer residence at Higashiyama. This work provided Kanetomo a chance to explore and deepen his knowledge of local shrines around Kyoto. Owing to this project, his interactions with local celebrants of kami increased (HAGIWARA 1962, pp. 390–411).

It was in this capacity that Kanetomo started to issue various licenses and certificates to local Shinto priests at their request (HAGIWARA 1962, pp. 390–411). Kanetomo’s certificate typically granted the senior first rank, or honorable titles such as *daimyōjin* 大明神 and *daigongen* 大権現. At first, Kanetomo sought and obtained the court’s approval for granting ranks and titles to the shrines that made requests, but later he omitted this step, issuing certificates on his own authority as the “Superior of Shinto.” Clearly, Kanetomo’s practice violated the court’s jurisdiction, yet the court did not prevent him from issuing these certificates due to his charismatic and financial power.

From the mid-seventeenth century onwards, the value of the Yoshida house’s certificates and licenses increased steadily. The Tokugawa bakufu privileged the Yoshida in a 1665 decree that made the Yoshida into the central authority of the Shinto clergy. This decree stipulated that the majority of Shinto priests should obtain licenses from the Yoshida house when they wanted to wear colored vestments while officiating rituals. The regulation implied that Shinto priests wearing colored vestments were professionally trained Shinto priests. The 1665 decree enabled the Yoshida house to self-proclaim its position as the de facto leader of the council of kami matters (*jingikan*), the ancient office of the court traditionally held by the Shirakawa house.

This did not mean, however, that the Yoshida won the right to issue court rank, because that was one of the few prerogatives that the emperor kept under the Tokugawa rule (WAKABAYASHI 1991). Eighteenth-century Shinto thinkers such as Amano Sadakage 天野信景 (1663–1733) and Usui Masatane 臼井雅胤 (dates unknown) reproached the Yoshida for violating the emperor’s jurisdiction (INOUE 1998a, pp. 347–48). Nevertheless, the Yoshida’s authoritative position under Tokugawa

rule increased the worth of its various certificates. While the 1665 law did not immediately boost the acquisition of priestly licenses and court rank certificates by local shrine functionaries, starting from the late seventeenth century, local shrines' interest in obtaining court rank through the Yoshida house increased steadily.

The Yoshida's rank and title certificate was called the *sōgen senji* 宗源宣旨, or the Decree of the Utmost Origin (hereafter *sōgen* decree). The word *sōgen* refers to the Shinto doctrine purportedly revealed by the Yoshida house's divine ancestor Ame-no-koyane-no-mikoto 天兒屋根命 and passed down in the Yoshida lineage. The term *senji* normally means "imperial decree." Furthermore, the Yoshida official used the same kind of special paper (*shukushi* 宿紙) used for occasions when the imperial will was communicated to subordinates. *Sōgen senji*, therefore, denotes a decree by the kami Ame-no-koyane-no-mikoto mediated by the Yoshida house.

A typical *sōgen senji* reads:

Order of the Utmost Origin (*sōgen senji*)

Senior First Rank Hachimangū Musashi Province, Sakitama
District Hachijō Ward, Hon-Hachijō Village

Granting the utmost rank to the above is the divine order,
which is hereby revealed.

The twenty-eighth day of the Eleventh month, Shōtoku 2
(1712)

Transmitted by Kanbe Ikinosukune

Superior Deputy of Kami Matters⁶

Senior Third Rank Imperial Court Chamberlain

Urabe Ason Kaneyuki

(*Shin'i negai ikken*, in *Aidake monjo*)

The certificate was supposedly handwritten by the lord of the Yoshida house. The Yoshida house instructed shrine functionaries that the edict was handed down from Kasuga Daimyōjin, which was another designation of the Yoshida house's divine ancestor Ame-no-Koyane-no-mikoto (*Shin'i negai ikken*, in *Aidake monjo* 会田家文書). A *sōgen* decree certificate typically carried with it a prayer sheet (*sōgen norito* 宗源祝詞), and a boxed wand of gold-plated streamers with the name of the deity inscribed on the box. The Yoshida instructed that these three items—certificate, prayer, and the box—be installed in the inner sanctuary of the shrine. The inner sanctuary of a shrine normally

⁶ *Jingi kanryō* (*kanrei*) *kōtō chōjō* 神祇管領勾当長上 is the full title in Japanese.

houses the main object of worship (*shintai* 神体), hence the three-item set was to accompany the *shintai* of the shrine. For this reason, some communities regarded the certificate itself as a sacred body. To this day, Izuru 出流 Shrine in Saitama Prefecture holds an annual festival on 24 July in which the priest waves the *sōgen* decree certificate over parishioners. The parishioners describe this ritual as “receiving the body of the kami” (SAITAMA-KEN JINJACHŌ JINJA CHŌSADAN, vol. 1, 1988, p. 1151).

Acquiring a *sōgen* decree certificate was significantly cheaper than acquiring the official court rank. The single certificate cost about 4 *ryō*, while obtaining the official rank from the imperial court cost 85 *ryō*.⁷ People could not tell whether the rank came from the court, or from the Yoshida house, unless they were told. The *sōgen* decree certificate was obviously an usurpation of official court rank, but this certificate came to be sought by a broad range of people—from common folks to a shogun’s wife of aristocratic origin. In addition to the cost of the certificate, villagers covered additional expenditures such as the priest’s travelling costs to Yoshida Shrine in Kyoto, gifts to the villagers’ lord (whose officials prepared a reference letter addressed to the lord of the Yoshida house) and other items such as a banner that announced the rank and a plaque on which was inscribed the rank and title. The total cost amounted to 35 *ryō* when Hachijō 八条 Village acquired three ranks for their three tutelary deities. Thirty-five *ryō* was far cheaper than the cost of the official rank, but it was still a large sum of money for villagers to come up with, and the villagers recorded that it took fifteen years for them to save up for the cost (*Shin’i negai ikken*).

The sale of rank certificates for deities of local shrines became widespread at the beginning of the eighteenth century. While the imperial court bestowed court rank on only 67 shrines throughout the Tokugawa period (MASE 1993, p. 227), the Yoshida house granted at least 1,998 rank and title certificates during the period between 1691 and 1738 alone. The popular demand for Yoshida’s rank certificates reached its peak in the late 1710s, and declined gradually (see Table 1). Most of these certificates imparted rank as opposed to title, rank certificates amounting to 1,957 out of 1,998.

Gradually, the Yoshida’s rank certificate came under criticism. Various Shinto priests from other major shrines such as Watarai Nobutsune

⁷ The cost of the Yoshida’s rank certificate is based on *Sanshin mikurai onegai nyūmoku chō* 三神みくらひ御願入目帳, in *Aidake monjo*, which is in the possession of Yashio City Archive. The printed version of this document is included in *Yashioshi shi shiryōhen: Kinsei I*. The price of official court rank is cited from *Shokoku reimotsu no sadame* 諸国礼物之定, in MIYAJI 1958, pp. 62–65.

Table 1. The number of *sōgen* decree certificates issued between 1535 and 1738

Year	# Issued	Year	# Issued	Year	# Issued
1535	1	1538	1	1545	1
1555	1	1556	2	1557	1
1559	1	1562	1	1563	1
1565	1	1566	1	1567	1
1568	3	1573	3	1581	1
1614	1	1617	1	1640	1
1653	1	1655	1	1663	1
1668	1	1680	1	1687	1
1688	1	1689	2	1691	3
1692	6	1693	4	1694	9
1695	3	1696	8	1697	3
1698	7	1699	5	1700	5
1701	11	1702	16	1703	12
1704	17	1705	22	1706	15
1707	25	1708	38	1709	27
1710	39	1711	65	1712	57
1713	58	1714	71	1715	77
1716	124	1717	76	1718	128
1719	116	1720	46	1721	53
1722	57	1723	60	1724	47
1725	35	1726	43	1727	71
1728	30	1729	44	1730	36
1731	35	1732	39	1733	47
1734	73	1735	42	1736	43
1737	80	1738	71	TOTAL	2028

Source: *Yoshidake ohiroma zakki* and Higashiyama Library Collection Volume 98.
Both sources are not complete records of *sōgen* decree certificates. Some volumes of the former are lost and the latter does not include title certificates.

度会延経 (1657–1714) and Confucian scholars including Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠 (1666–1728) and Dazai Shundai 太宰春台 (1680–1747) raised their objections against the Yoshida practice, since it dismantled the imperial court's prerogative. Furthermore, in 1734, the Yoshida granted rank certificate to a shrine in Sendai Domain despite the fact that the shrine had not obtained the domainal lord's approval. Sendai Domain raised an objection against the Yoshida through the Konoe house, the regent at the time, leading Yoshida Kaneyuki 吉田兼敬 (1653–1731) to make an official apology. Afterwards, the Yoshida's rank granting practice became more cautious, and the court began to monitor the Yoshida's rank granting activities more carefully. In 1738, the Yoshida house voluntarily stopped issuing rank certificates, perhaps due to the rise in criticism against the practice. After 1738,

shrines seeking a senior first rank had to petition the court for the official rank and had to earn the approval of the emperor himself. The Yoshida continued to grant titles of *daimyōjin* and *daigongen* to deities, but titles were clearly less popular than rank, since people conventionally called their shrines with such titles, even though they had never obtained official permission. In contrast, a shrine with a ranked name clearly reflected the acquisition of some authority. In this way rank certificates served as obvious markers of prominence.

Local shrines continued to demand rank certificates after 1738. By the mid-eighteenth century, the Fushimi Inari Shrine began distributing their version of rank certificates, although their certificates authorized only Inari shrines on the pretext that local shrines were to receive divided spirits of the ranked deity of Fushimi Inari. The Shirakawa house adopted the same method and started a similar service providing ranked spirits, as opposed to the rank itself, to a variety of Inari shrines.⁸ Technically, the Shirakawa had the authority to issue such certificates to any shrine, but as far as I have seen, all of its rank certificates were granted only to Inari shrines.⁹

Ranked Inari shrines became so pervasive by the end of the eighteenth century that Inari was treated as an exception in rank-granting practice. Hence the senior first rank became increasingly associated with the Inari shrines. In 1802, the bakufu issued for the first time a decree prohibiting the issuance of court rank without permission by the emperor. By this time, however, many versions of rank certificates to Inari shrines circulated, and the state could no longer control their circulation.

Some functionaries of Inari shrines collected rank certificates from a variety of authorities, believing that the number of rank certificates would strengthen Inari's miraculous power. Kintarō Inari 金太郎稲荷 in Shimotsuke Province, the house protector of the Tomuro house, provided one such example. On the thirteenth day of the second month in 1863, Tomuro Yajūrō 戸室弥十郎 visited Aizen-ji 愛染寺—attendant temple of Fushimi Inari—to receive a rank certificate for his Inari shrine. The next day, he went to the Yoshida Shrine to obtain another rank certificate. Still not content, he went to the Shirakawa house on the fifteenth to have a calligraphical inscription of the spirit's title made (ENOMOTO 1997, pp. 176–83).

⁸ According to the study of ENOMOTO (1997, p. 16), the earliest rank certificate from the Shirakawa house extant in the Kantō region was issued in 1799.

⁹ See *Shirakawake shokoku kanssen dome narabi ni gaku go senhitsu dome*. We have no record indicating that certificates from the Fushimi Inari and the Shirakawa house removed locally held taboos.

Distribution of Sōgen Decree Certificates

This study focuses on the Yoshida's *sōgen* decree certificates issued between 1691 and 1738 by the Yoshida house that were recorded in the *Yoshidake ohiroma zakki*—the administrative journal of the Yoshida house—and a list of rank certificates compiled by the Yoshida house (*Kyōto gosho Higashiyama gobunko kiroku kō* 98). Shrines that obtained *sōgen* decree certificates during this period shared three common features.

First, the typical recipients of rank certificates were the functionaries of modest shrines. Such shrines ranged from house protectors at samurai residences to village tutelary shrines. A cross check of those shrines that obtained rank certificates in Musashi Province with shrines listed in the *Shinpen Musashi fudokikō* reveals that most of the shrines were tutelary shrines of villages. In contrast, historically important shrines such as the *Ichinomiya* 一宮 shrines (the principal shrine in each province) did not obtain *sōgen* decree certificates. Their priests must have understood that the Yoshida's rank certificates were rather a symbol of humility. In fact, the Yoshida house granted rank certificates more easily to commonplace "shrines in the countryside" than to shrines of significance (*Yoshidake ohiroma zakki*, 8-10-1733). For instance, when the Yoshida house received a request of a rank certificate for an Edo castle Inari shrine from Hiroko, the sixth shogun Ienari's wife, Yoshida Kaneyuki consulted Imperial Regent (*kanpaku* 関白) Konoe Iehisa 近衛家久 (1687–1737) to make sure no trouble would arise between Kyoto and Edo. They decided that a *daimyōjin* title certificate was more appropriate for Hiroko (*Yoshidake ohiroma zakki*, 8–10–1733). This incident shows that the rank conferred in the *sōgen* decree certificate was privately approved by the Yoshida house, and such rank certificates were tailored to ordinary shrines. As long as the recipients were unknown and insignificant, the Yoshida could easily reclaim the rank from them if any problem occurred. However, it would not have been easy for the Yoshida to confiscate a rank from the former shogun's wife. Yoshida Kaneyuki must have felt bittersweet that even the person whose status deserved a official court rank found the *sōgen* decree certificate significant. For the Yoshida, the original purpose of circulating *sōgen* decree certificates was to attract owners and functionaries of numerous local shrines, thereby gaining more wealth and influence.

Second, given that only four percent of shrines in Musashi Province were staffed by Shinto priests, it comes as no surprise to know that the majority of the *sōgen* decree recipients in Musashi were Buddhist priests. According to the *Shinpen Musashi fudokikō*, sixty-four percent

of the *sōgen* decree certificate recipients were controlled by Buddhist priests, seven percent by villagers, and only two percent by Shinto priests (the remaining percent are not specified). In this way, the Yoshida's rank certificates spread far beyond the Yoshida sacerdotal lineage. The Yoshida house must have encouraged Shinto priests to receive ritual transmission and hence a priestly license. At the same time, the Yoshida was well-aware that numerous shrines were unstaffed and were maintained by villagers, or under the control of Buddhist and Shugen priests. By issuing rank certificates to shrines as opposed to functionaries, the Yoshida house succeeded in carving out a special niche in the world of shrines despite the fact that most were controlled by non-Shinto priests.

Third, the *sōgen* decree certificate was not distributed consistently throughout the country. As shown in Table 2, the high number of rank-acquisitions in the early eighteenth century was primarily a phenomenon of northeastern Japan. The *sōgen* decree certificate was especially popular in the Kantō region with the exception of southern Chiba and Kanagawa prefectures. We can hypothesize several reasons for this. On the one hand, the high concentration of rank-acquisitions seems to correlate with the popularity of Inari shrines in the Kantō region. Inari shrines that obtained rank amounted to the largest number—250 shrines out of 1,998 were Inari shrines.¹⁰ Inari shrines became especially prevalent in Edo and its vicinity, and many of them were erected in the houses of samurai and merchants as house protectors. Samurai and merchants purchased rank for their house protectors.

On the other hand, the Yoshida house might have campaigned for rank certificates more actively in northeastern Japan. The Yoshida's authority was derived from the fact that the bakufu patronized it, and regions where rank certificates were popular were territories that the bakufu directly governed. Perhaps, the Yoshida could campaign in these regions more effectively with the bakufu's backing. When the lord of Yoshida was visiting Edo, he issued rank certificates. It is possible that such visits were advertised as good occasions for obtaining *sōgen* decree certificates. Normally, shrine functionaries would travel to Kyoto to obtain *sōgen* decree certificates. If they could procure rank certificates in Edo, it would have reduced the financial and physical burden of those who lived in northeastern Japan.

Yet another possible hypothesis to explain the unequal distribution of *sōgen* decree certificates in the northeast stems from the large presence

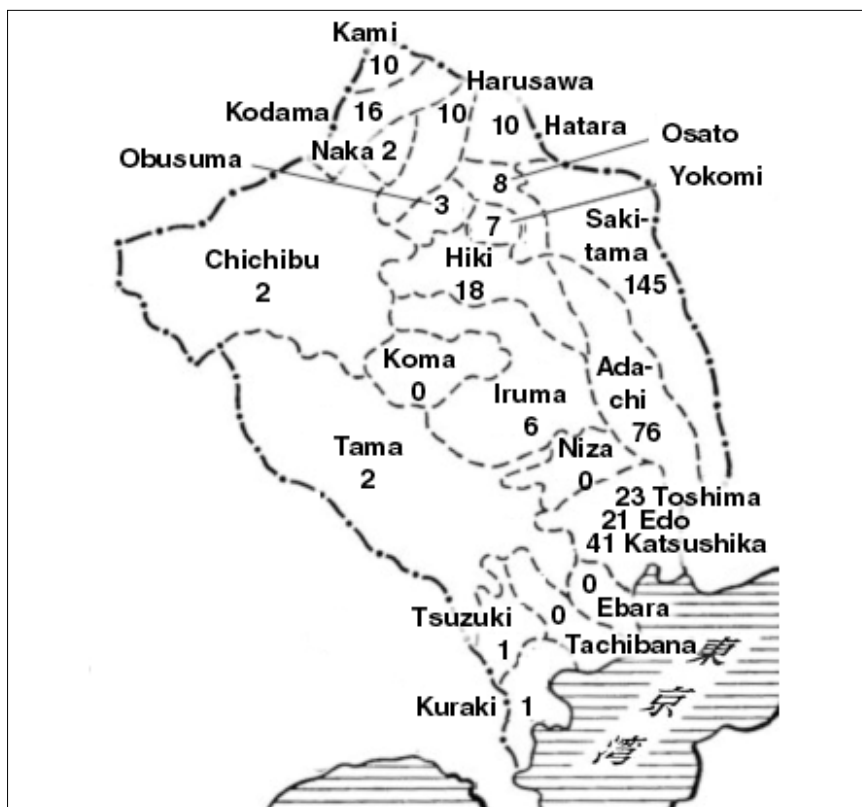
¹⁰ The second largest group of shrines was Suwa 諏訪 shrines (145), and the third was Hachiman 八幡 shrines (114).

Table 2. The number of *sōgen* decree certificates issued by province (1535–1738)

Province	#	Province	#	Province	#
Mutsu	92	Kii	4	Dewa	22
Harima	11	Shimotsuke	264	Tanba	71
Kozuke	242	Tango	0	Hitachi	139
Tajima	1	Shimosa	233	Inaba	12
Kazusa	43	Hoki	6	Awa 安房	3
Izumo	2	Musashi	402	Iwami	0
Sagami	13	Mimasaka	7	Izu	6
Bizen	1	Kai	99	Bitchu	2
Suruga	9	Bingo	2	Totomi	12
Aki	1	Mikawa	6	Suwa	18
Owari	4	Nagato	3	Mino	9
Awa 阿波	3	Hida	0	Sanuki	0
Shinano	50	Iyo	7	Echigo	26
Tosa	0	Etchu	3	Chikuzen	1
Kaga	3	Chikugo	1	Echizen	5
Buzen	0	Wakasa	1	Bungo	2
Omi	36	Hizen	8	Iga	9
Higo	0	Ise	42	Hyuga	9
Shima	1	Osumi	4	Yamashiro	11
Satsuma	4	Yamato	15	Iki	1
Settsu	29	Sado	1	Kawachi	4
Unidentified	2	Izumi	11	TOTAL	2028

of individuals who brokered between the Yoshida and local priests in that region. For example, Shibazaki Kunai 柴崎宮内, the Shinto priest of Kanda Myōjin 神田明神 Shrine in Edo, was an active broker of the certificates. He often visited the Yoshida Shrine to request rank certificates on behalf of shrine functionaries in Musashi Province (ENOMOTO 2001, p. 110). After Shibazaki's return, local functionaries received rank certificates at Kanda Myōjin Shrine. Kanda Myōjin Shrine seems to have functioned as one of the branch offices of the Yoshida house in Edo before the Yoshida opened its Kantō office in 1791 (SUGIYAMA 1980). The lord of the Yoshida house as well as the Yoshida's high officials stayed at Kanda Myōjin and had audience with local priests when they were visiting Edo (*Chiba shaki*, p. 116; SUGIYAMA 1980, p. 103).

Even within a single province, there was regional variation in the acquisition rate of *sōgen* decree certificates. If we take a look at Musashi Province—where the *sōgen* decree certificate was most popular—we find an unequal distribution among districts (see Map 1). While eastern districts such as Adachi 足立, Sakitama 埼玉, and Katsushika 葛飾



Map 1

had a high acquisition rate, the corresponding rate in the western districts was strikingly low. This provincial difference is hard to explain. Again, it is possible that the intermediaries in the east were more active in encouraging shrines to receive rank than those in western regions. Another general characteristic of these eastern districts was a high percentage of newly irrigated land (SAITAMA-KEN 1988, p. 559). Naturally this area included many villages that were newly formed, and hence there were many new tutelary shrines. As I will argue in the next section, new shrines had a stronger incentive to procure *sōgen* decree certificates.

The Religious and Social Contexts for the Popularity of the Sōgen Decree

THE LEGAL CONTEXT OF THE RANK BOOM

Every household in Tokugawa society was required to register at a temple, and the temple in turn issued certificates to the individual

household certifying that its members were not Christian. Since this was an important administrative function, the bakufu tried to control the number of temples that undertook the temple registration. In 1631, therefore, the Tokugawa bakufu issued the first decree prohibiting the construction of new shrines and temples. Shrines were also a target of the bakufu's control, since the number of religious institutions affected the bakufu's tax revenue. The larger the number of religious institutions, the heavier the financial burden on the populace to sustain those institutions, and the greater limit on the bakufu's ability to tax the populace.¹¹

After 1631, the bakufu issued similar decrees in 1658, 1663, and 1668. The frequency of such decrees conversely indicates Tokugawa people's eagerness to set up new sites for worship. Lamenting the inefficacy of the law prohibiting new religious institutions, the Confucian scholar Ogyū Sorai wrote:

It is only in castle towns where the law prohibiting the construction of new shrines and temples is enforced. Even in castle towns, no one knows what merchants and samurai have in their residences. Since no supervisor lives in the countryside, things are left open and no one accuses those who constructed new shrines and temples. There are always people who worship at such [shrines and temples]. Some are renovated, and others are newly constructed. They soon developed into great shrines and temples. But no one knows how they evolved. Shinto priests would raise funds from their parishioners, travel to Kyoto, and request court ranks from the Yoshida. Obtaining a senior first rank is so easy.... In fifty years or so, no one can trace [such developments] in records; even people who remember [the developments] will pass away. There are numerous shrines and temples that later became huge edifices. It is because there are no fixed ranks for shrines and temples.

(*Seidan* 3, p. 356)

Despite the bakufu's attempt to control the number of religious institutions and specialists, people would set up mini cult sites commemorating miraculous healing and appearances, or erect small private shrines in private residences. After a series of decrees prohibiting new temples and shrines proved ineffective, the bakufu finally issued the 1692 decree. This order stipulated that shrines and temples built after that year would be considered illegal: "Temples that have been considered new property thus far will be granted amnesty and now considered

¹¹ For a discussion on how religious institutions were controlled by the bakufu and the financial burden they placed on the populace, see TAMAMURO 1987 and TAKANO 1989.

the same as old property temples. [But] from now on, (the bakufu) firmly prohibits building a temple in a new property” (*Shisō zasshiki* 7: 508). While this law did not stop people from building new shrines and temples either, it was the last one in a series of similar laws that the bakufu issued and hence became the most authoritative. Shrines and temples still increased after 1692, but this law made a legal distinction that was thereafter applied to religious institutions.¹²

In the same year, the bakufu compiled a register recording all the temples recognized by the head of each sect (TAMAMURO 1987, p. 323). Since this register was lost and is only known through scattered records, we cannot know how many and which kind of religious institutions were included. Extant local documents show that shrines were also part of the register. After this decree, shrines and temples built before 1692 came to be called old property (*koseki* 古跡) institutions, whereas those built after 1692, or those that might have existed before 1692 but did not make it to the register were called new property (*shinchi* 新地) institutions. The bakufu regarded only old property institutions as officially recognized religious institutions. New property institutions were considered proprietary institutions (ŌKUWA 1979, p. 12).

Old property institutions had a higher status and a better legal standing than new property institutions. For example, ŌKUWA Hitoshi (1979, p. 12) noted that in principle only priests in charge of old property temples were able to carry on people’s religious affiliation review (*shūmon aratame* 宗門改). As for shrines, the bakufu did not approve of priests taking over unstaffed shrines categorized as new property shrines. These facts might mean that the bakufu’s register included only those shrines that were attended by religious specialists, irrespective of their religious affiliations. For this reason, the register must have excluded a large number of shrines, since many ordinary shrines lacked attendant priests during the mid-Tokugawa period.

Ironically, the bakufu’s attempt to control ever-expanding religious institutions seems to have resulted in the creation of a context that fostered the popularity of the *sōgen* decree certificate. People were well aware of the old or new property status of their tutelary shrines. If they believed that their shrines would merit the old property status, they initiated legal actions to improve the status of their shrines. The historian Yoshida Masataka has observed that during the Kyōho 享保 era (1716–1736) popular movements emerged among Edo residents to petition the bakufu to register their tutelary shrines and thereby gain official recognition (YOSHIDA 1998). Yoshida determined two ele-

¹² Each domain had a slightly different definition of what constituted official religious institutions. For the case of Kaga Domain, see ŌKUWA 1979.

ments that parishioners emphasized in negotiating for their shrines' official status: 1) their long-term relationships with the shrines; and 2) the fact that their shrine became staffed with religious specialists (YOSHIDA 1998, pp. 75–76).

The rise in commoners' interest in gaining official recognition for their tutelary shrines seems to have been an important factor in the popularity of the *sōgen* decree certificate. The Yoshida house's rank certificates could be used to compensate for the two elements that shrines needed to gain official status: 1) the shrine existed before 1692; and 2) the shrine was staffed with a (Buddhist, Shinto, or Shugen) priest. The Yoshida house conferred rank certificates on shrines regardless of their new or old status and provided legal certificates to shrine functionaries categorized as new property shrines. Furthermore, when applying for a *sōgen* decree certificate, a shrine functionary submitted his shrine's foundation legend. A *sōgen* decree certificate from the Yoshida house could serve as a legal document validating the new-property shrine's history previously unrecognized by the state. This helped new-property shrines to gain the official status by means of the Yoshida's recognition.

Not limiting themselves only to the *sōgen* decree certificate, Yoshida officials undertook legend compositions for local shrines. In general, Tokugawa society stressed pedigree and genealogy in justifying a household's social status. Fabricating genealogies was commonly practiced among the samurai class. Many daimyo manipulated their genealogies so that they appeared to have descended from the Minamoto house—the quintessential ideal of the Japanese warrior. By the eighteenth century, the practice of forging the household's pedigree had also spread to elder peasants. The historian Iwahashi Kiyomi demonstrated that elder peasants became increasingly interested in composing foundation histories for their villages in order to underscore that they were descendants of the founders of the villages, and hence they were entitled to hold village leadership (IWAHASHI 1996).

The common preoccupation with pedigree and the 1692 decree reinforced the incentive for small shrines to forge their ages and histories. In fact, the historian Hirakawa Arata observes a rise in composition of shrine legends after 1692, noting that major shrine legends extant from the Sendai Domain were compiled between 1692 and 1716 (HIRAKAWA 1993, p. 44). It was rare for rural shrines to possess records of their foundations, and their priests were lucky if fragmented stories of the inception of the shrine were orally transmitted. Some local priests wrote histories of their institutions on their own, while others ordered established scholars and priests to create histories, in effect fabricating their mythical origins. Once legends were completed,

some shrines further obtained seals and signatures of important personalities. Shrine legends with the seal of rulers, nationally recognized scholars and priests, and court nobles—not to mention the Yoshida house—made their forgery more authoritative and prestigious.

As INOUE (1997) argued, *sōgen* decree certificates also helped to establish a priest's managing position over the shrine, which would satisfy the second element of legality. The Yoshida house required applicants to clarify who were in charge of shrines. It is not clear if the Yoshida house accepted villagers as the managers of shrines, but all the applications that I have seen so far list Buddhist priests as the chief manager of their shrines.

While obtaining a rank certificate did not automatically win an old property status for a shrine, holding a *sōgen* decree certificate vastly improved the shrine's legal status. Indeed, those who acquired the *sōgen* decree certificate submitted copies of the application and accompanying documents to the tribunal in support of their position if the shrine became an object of law suits.

DISPLAYING THE TUTELARY SHRINE'S PRESTIGE

Certainly the most obvious reason for a shrine functionary to purchase rank was to gain higher prestige for the shrine. A ranked shrine could differentiate itself from unranked shrines, and having the prestigious shrine as their guardian was exalting for the shrine functionary as well as for its parishioners. Villages were compelled to obtain ranks as more and more neighboring villages acquired them. Documentary evidence reflects this pressure to “keep up with the Joneses.” For example, Tateno 立野 Village of Musashi Province, where the *sōgen* decree certificate was most popular, acquired one “because there had been a gradual increase in ranked shrines in the neighboring villages” (*Uezatochō-shi: shiryōhen*, pp. 872–73).

For villagers, rank was not an abstract elevation of a shrine's status. Rank was displayed in banners and plaques that were acquired specifically for that purpose. Oftentimes, rank acquisition occasioned a more elaborate decoration of the shrine. When a shrine near his own acquired a rank,¹³ Yamamoto Kaneki, the nineteenth-century Shinto priest of Tōtōmi Province, recorded the following:

Hatsuyama Ryūmonbō 初山龍門坊 [Shrine] had been a small shrine adjacent to a temple near Hatsuyama. It was so small that the people living there had hardly even known about it. This time, however, a new shrine building was erected in the precinct of the Eishidō 永思堂 temple, northeast of Hatsuyama.

¹³ This particular rank certificate was issued by the Tsuchimikado house.

A torii gate was even built. A newly carved wooden statue from Nagoya was installed inside the shrine. A big parade was organized [for the installation ceremony]. Small and large banners with the title “Senior First Rank Ryūmonbō Daigongen” were placed at the shrine. Talismans with the same “Senior First Rank Ryūmonbō Daigongen” were on sale. The shrine was crowded with so many people.

(*Inasa chō shiryōhen Yamamoto Kaneki nikki*, p. 189)

As described in the quotation, the ranked title was presented visually on talismans that the shrine sold, on the plaque to be placed at the torii gate, and on a banner to be displayed at the entrance to the shrine. A parade was organized, and villagers marched in procession from village to village. In this way, villagers could publicize their tutelary shrine’s upgraded status to outsiders. The passage above also illustrates that some of the material symbols of Shinto shrines that we take for granted today were not in place at rural shrines during the Tokugawa period. Today, most shrines have torii gates, whereas even at the end of the nineteenth century, building a torii gate was considered extraordinary for a rural shrine. Upon acquiring a rank, the shrine functionary also tried to augment his shrine with more paraphernalia, so that the shrine’s ranked status became visibly apparent.

The Yoshida house was well aware that commoners desired special shrine paraphernalia to announce the elevated status of their shrines. The Yoshida offered various shrine accessories that functionaries could purchase such as banners and plaques on which the name of the deity was inscribed. The plaque was to be placed on the center of the torii gate. Typically the calligraphy inscribed on banners and plaques was written by the lord of the Yoshida house. However, the Yoshida also mediated for commoners who sought the calligraphy of other members of the nobility for their shrine plaques. Princess Rihō 理豊 (1672–1742), the eleventh daughter of Emperor Gosai 御西 and an acclaimed calligrapher, was an especially popular choice. Karitamine 荻田嶺 Shrine in Sendai Domain acquired her calligraphy through the Yoshida house for the plaque to be placed in the main hall of the shrine, and another plaque done by Yoshida Kaneo 吉田兼雄 (1705–1787), which decorated its torii gate. Its worship hall had a plaque by the fifth lord of Sendai Domain. If parishioners could afford to, they collected special items that exhibited their relationships with nobility, thereby exalting their shrines’ prominence. In this way, the Yoshida house catered to villagers’ penchant for embellishing their shrines by providing such items themselves, or offering to broker between nobility and local shrines.

EXHIBITING THE POWER OF THE RICH

To outsiders, a *sōgen* decree certificate increased the prominence of the shrine and its parishioners as a whole, but to insiders, the acquisition was a concrete manifestation of the financial power of the donors who contributed most to its purchase. In general, the functionary and the rich controlled the way in which the shrine was operated (WALTHALL 1984). Well-to-do peasants offered to renovate their tutelary shrines, or to donate shrine paraphernalia such as a portable shrine (*mikoshi* 御輿), torii gate, or banner. While such acts demonstrated donors' devotion to their deity, they also had the effect of asserting their advantageous position over the management of the shrine and village politics.

Therefore gaining prestige for the tutelary shrine meant the elevation of the status of village leaders themselves. Even a shrine's identity could be shifted by the change in dynamic among parishioners. Mimeguri Inari 三囲稲荷 Shrine illustrates well how such shifts could occur. Mimeguri Inari Shrine obtained a *sōgen* decree certificate in 1716, and from that time the identity of the shrine was radically altered to suit its wealthy patron, the Mitsui family. Mimeguri Inari Shrine, located by the Sumida River, first became famous for its miracle for producing rain in the early 1690s. During the drought of the summer of 1693, Enomoto Kikaku 榎本其角 (1661–1707), a disciple of Matsuo Bashō, ran into a group of villagers praying for rain at the shrine. Kikaku's companion suggested that he compose a poem in supplication for rain, and Kikaku composed the following:

Shower the field

With the grace of the kami of Mimeguri.

(*Mimeguri jinja kankei monjo*, p. 148)

The next day, rain fell in Edo. Since then, the shrine became especially popular among *haikai* 俳諧 lovers.

Subsequently, the acquisition of a rank certificate with the help of the Mitsui house gave rise to the popular image of Mimeguri Shrine as the guardian deity of the Mitsui. According to one speculation, the shrine came to the Mitsui's attention, because the characters of Mimeguri 三囲 are written in such a way that they enclose the "well" (井) character of Mitsui 三井, thereby it appears that the (name of the) shrine is guarding the Mitsui family. At the level of personal connection, Shin-fuku Sōi 神服宗夷,¹⁴ a Shinto priest in the Yoshida lineage, was instrumental in bringing Mimeguri Shrine to the Mitsui family's attention.

¹⁴ The pronunciation of his name cannot be verified, so what is given here is an educated guess.

While managing Kishima 木島 Shrine in Yamashiro Province, Sōi was serving as the prayer master for Mitsui Takafusa 三井高房. It was Sōi's effort that convinced Takafusa to acquire a rank certificate from the Yoshida house. Evidently, Sōi told Takafusa that every night he received a message (apparently from the deity of Mimeguri Shrine) requesting the senior first rank. Convinced by Sōi, the Mitsui purchased a rank certificate for Mimeguri Shrine. In exchange, the Yoshida offered a special prayer for the protection of the Mitsui family and instructed that only the Mitsui family members be allowed to see inside the box in which the certificate was placed (*Mimeguri jinja kankei monjo*, pp. 2–3).

In 1727 the Mitsui family again approached the Yoshida house asking to divide the spirit of Inari to be brought to Mimeguri Shrine. This means that the Mitsui changed even the main object of worship in the inner sanctuary of the shrine. The Mitsui family's association with the shrine became so firm that by the 1760s the following *haikai* was composed:

Rain shower
 Keeping his fingers crossed is
 The kimono shop [referring to the Mitsui's Echigoya Kimono
 Shop]. (WAKASUGI 1981, p. 167)

As this example indicates, a rich patron could use the *sōgen* decree certificate to introduce drastic changes in the way a shrine was perceived. Those who attempted to make changes in shrine operations used the Yoshida house's authority to justify their acts. Changes were more easily made if they gained approval by the central authority first and then convinced the locals.

LIFTING LOCAL TABOOS

The use of the *sōgen* decree certificate by the local leader to force changes in local practices was expressed most vividly in the *norito* prayer attached to the certificate. The *norito* prayer accompanying the *sōgen* decree certificate expressed to the deity the acquirer's wishes. The majority of such *sōgen norito* were in a standardized form that prayed for the peace and prosperity of the village and the country:

This day on the thirteenth day of the fourth month of Kyōho 6 [1721], a selected auspicious day, we humbly speak before the senior first rank Hikawa 氷川 Daimyōjin and various deities of its subordinate shrines, who dwell in Ōma 大間 Village, Adachi District, Musashi Province. The priest and parishioners of this shrine, united in one heart, requested the senior first rank to the Deputy of Kami Matters, Urabe Kaneyuki. Following precedents, [Urabe] bestows the ultimate rank [upon the deity] by

an order of the utmost origin. Decorate the inner sanctuary with *heihaku* streamers and your praises are fulfilled. Please hear our prayer so that the realm becomes more peaceful, the shrine more prosperous, and so that Shinto will flourish more. May the priest and parishioners be happy, the five grains be abundant, wind and rain fall according to the seasons, and may all the people be rich and merry. Protect us day and night. We humbly speak.¹⁵

Some *sōgen norito* also included specific demands of villages or individuals. Typically, they referred to the lifting of taboos, or ritual prohibitions, held in certain villages. Such requests were particularly prominent in Kai Province. Approximately 65% of *sōgen* decree certificates acquired by the shrines in Kai Province included requests for the removal of specific taboos. By contrast, the average number of all *sōgen* decree certificates that could be found in the *Yoshidake ohiroma zakki* between 1692 and 1743 and included such requests amounts to 24% (INOUE 1997, p. 51). Even though many villages worshiped the same deity as their guardian, prohibited items varied depending on the village. For instance, Inari Daimyōjin of Teratani 寺谷 Village (Adachi District, Musashi Province) disliked double cropping of wheat on rice paddies (*Yoshidake ohiroma zakki*, 1-15-1715), whereas Inari Daimyōjin of Hara 原 Village in the same province disapproved of raising dappled brown horses¹⁶ and building houses of five *ken* 間 (about 10 yards) in length (*Yoshidake ohiroma zakki*, 12-2-1734). This indicates that taboos were related to the village, not to the kind of deity. Therefore, the character traits of a deity was locally defined, even though multiple villages adhered to the deity of the same name such as Inari and Hachiman. Each parishioner group had a special relationship and contracts with the deity of their locale, and making modifications to such contracts required them to seek a higher authority who could mediate between the local deity and the parishioners. The Yoshida house offered this service to local deities and their parishioners.

Originally, Kanetomo issued *sōgen* decree certificates every time a shrine wanted to modify the existing rules that Shinto priests were subject to, or to make new arrangements for the shrine. The latter included the acquisition of rank and titles. For instance, in 1546, the priests of Ikoma 生駒 Shrine in Ōmi 近江 Province acquired a certificate for building two new torii gates (HAGIWARA 1962, p. 677).

¹⁵ This is the *Sōgen norito* issued to Hikawa Myōjin 氷川明神 in Ōma Village. See *Konosushishi shiryō hen 4: kinsei 2*, p. 722.

¹⁶ The dappled brown horse is generally considered a messenger to the deity of Suwa, but the deities that disliked the horse were not limited to Suwa.

Other certificates permitted the relaxation of regulations regarding the priest's mourning period, the eating of chicken, the Shinto priest's engaging in agricultural labor, and so forth. This means that until the eighteenth century, a priest who wanted to ease his burden on the long mourning period and who also wanted to elevate the rank of his deity had to obtain two separate certificates. From the 1690s, the Yoshida house limited the function of the *sōgen* decree certificate to either rank or title conferment and issued a *norito* prayer that was attached to the certificate. Petitions to modify various shrine customs and rules came to be addressed in this prayer. In this way, the Yoshida repackaged the *sōgen* decree certificate so that petitioners could obtain at the same time both a rank (or title) and permission to change the existing rules. The Yoshida prayed on behalf of local priests so that the local deity would accept modifications in exchange for a rank. Hence, the Yoshida's *sōgen* decree certificate was believed not only to confer rank but also to have various benefits that would improve village life.

Taboos that appeared in prayer varied from village to village, and the majority of them concerned agricultural production. For instance, the *norito* issued for Nagasaka Kamijō 長坂上条 Village in Kai Province reads: "the things that this solemn deity has been said to dislike are his parishioners' raising cattle, growing cowpea, cotton, and sesame for commerce" (*Yoshidake ohiroma zakki*, 11–13–1727). Other agricultural items that deities prohibited parishioners from growing in prayer were hemp, red bean, burdock, safflower, corn, taro, millet, buckwheat, rush, bottle gourds, grapes and so on. "Growing wheat in rice paddies" (double cropping) came up often. These prohibited crops were generally of foreign origin (ENOMOTO 2001, p. 110), but then production grew as a market economy developed in Tokugawa society. As indicated in the *norito* for Nagasaka Kamijō Village, these items were cash crops whose production began to rise gradually from the seventeenth century.¹⁷

The appearance of such prayers exhibits the rise in farmers' desires to respond to the growth of the market. Indeed, the eighth shogun, Yoshimune 吉宗 (r. 1716–1745), encouraged farm production for commercialization (TOTMAN 2002, p. 252 and SAITAMA-KEN 1989 p. 344). The *sōgen* decree certificate served as the religious endorsement of enterprising peasants who began to take more practical and rational attitudes towards old prohibitions. *Sokkō nanshin*, the agricultural guides written by Hashino Kakumu 橋靄夢 in 1722, reflects the emer-

¹⁷ By the late seventeenth century, villages near Edo began to grow various farm products due to the massive development of Edo as the consumer center.

gence of such attitudes among village leaders:

[Shallot bulbs] keep a human body warm. When a man of learning eats them regularly, they will have a good effect on one's spirit and makes one's soul peaceful. Since there are various other merits in them, Chinese appreciate them.... However, Buddhist teachings do not allow us to eat this kind of vegetable, or the so-called five spicy vegetables. Just stepping into a field where they were grown, one will have a harder time to attain enlightenment. Hence eating [the five spicy vegetables] is strictly prohibited. However, eating [them] should not be abstained from as one does during a time of mourning, or as one abstains from polluted things. In principle, renouncers are outside the people of the four classes. It is their rule to keep precepts that were determined by the Buddha; hence, they were exceptional. If lay people intensely follow their way and behave like renouncers, the duty assigned to the people of the four classes will be neglected, and we will go against the five relationships. We secular people should be simply honest and should not carry bad thoughts. We should worship gods of heaven and earth and respect the three jewels, pay respect to our superiors, trust our friends, and be merciful to our inferiors. We should be filial to our parents, and be good to our siblings, spouses, and children. If we spend every day in this way, how could we be punished?

Shinto of our country has a custom of a fixed mourning period. Even if there is pollution beyond this fixed period, we should purify ourselves before visiting the shrine and abstain from eating the five spicy vegetables for one day. If we do so, our daily life can be led routinely. We do not have to abstain from these things in our normal lives. (*Sokkō nanshin*, pp. 171-72)

Other kinds of taboos were also associated with the improvement of amenity and agriculture. People petitioned for permission to use a quern, to build a house of a certain design and size, to drill a well in the village, and to keep horses of various colors. This must have been an attempt to expand their livestock resources, since securing enough livestock was a common problem that farmers faced during the early eighteenth century (NAGASHIMA 1995, p. 223). The scarcity of livestock meant that farmers needed cash to purchase commercial fertilizers such as sardine and the byproducts of sake and vegetable oil production.

Those who could venture cash cropping were well-to-do peasants who owned a large land holding and constituted village leadership. Again, special requests included in the *sōgen norito*, therefore, reflected the desires of the village leadership. Certain *sōgen norito* prayed for

specific households' wishes. In this case, these households seem to have been the agents who initiated and paid for the acquisition of rank. For example, the *norito* issued to Inari Shrine (Tsukakoshi 塚越 Village, Adachi District, Musashi Province) reads as follows:

There has been a long held belief that this venerable deity prohibited the Kawashima and Kawada houses from displaying the New Year pine decoration and the Murata from growing potatoes; by offering this rank and the power of the deity, the divine illumination will become increasingly brighter. Therefore, please remove and purify these long held obstructions.

(*Yoshidake ohiroma zakki*, 1–14–1722)

In order to modify existing local practices, villagers needed a higher authority to nullify the polluted meaning associated with them. Permission obtained from the center could be used to convince other peasants that the change could be justified and accepted by the deity, and hence their growing prohibited crops could be allowed. In this way, the *sōgen* decree certificate responded to desires and ambitions of rural elites.

The Yoshida House's Influence on Local Shrines

IDENTITY-MAKING OF LOCAL SHRINES

We have seen how the *sōgen* decree certificate responded to the various needs of those who were involved in the management of the shrine. In this section, we discuss what the Yoshida gained by circulating rank certificates. Along with considerable income, *sōgen* decree certificates brought occasions to influence the identity of local shrines.

When preparing an application for rank, shrine functionaries had to articulate their shrine's characteristics such as the name of the shrine, the name of the deity or deities worshiped at that shrine, the corresponding Buddhist deity or deities, the object of worship (*shintai*), its history, crest, ritual, and the ritualist and what was offered at the shrine. The *sōgen* decree certificate meant that the Yoshida had approved of the reported traits.

However, such pieces of information were not readily obtainable or were even non-existent for many local shrines. The Yoshida were well aware of this. When Yoshida Kanetomo conducted a survey of shrines in the outskirts of Kyoto during the late fifteenth century, he found that many shrines lacked even individual names. People reported to him that they would call their shrines by generic terms such as "tutelary shrines" (*chinju* 鎮守), "clan deities" (*ujigami* 氏神), and "combined

shrines" (*sōja* 総社) (HAGIWARA 1962, pp. 394-95). In other cases, shrines were called simply after the place where they were located, or after some natural feature of the local topography. This suggests that the name of the deity was not a quintessential concern for villagers during the medieval and early Tokugawa periods.

A telling example is the case of Kinomiya 木宮 Shrine, in Musashi Province, where, according to the *Shinpen Musashi fudokikō*, the tutelary shrine of Wataruse Village was located. In a cadastral survey compiled in 1594, this shrine was simply noted as "forest" (*Bushū Kodama gun Wataruse mura no kinsei monjo daiisshū*, pp. 1-16, 309). By 1672, however, it had advanced to "Kinomiya Myōjin," while in 1716, when villagers had obtained a rank from the Yoshida house, the formal name of the shrine was "Senior first rank Kinomiya Daimyōjin." This example suggests that commoners became increasingly interested in particularizing their local deities.

The Yoshida house not only recognized this concern, they also helped to assign new attributes to shrines that applied for a *sōgen* decree certificate, in case they were not able to present the necessary information. In 1709, Seki 勢貴 Daimyōjin Shrine in Musashi received not only a rank but also a new identity constructed by the Yoshida house.

As for our deity, we had an orally transmitted belief that it is Takeime-no-mikoto 多氣比命, Seki Daimyōjin, one of the four deities [recorded in the spirit register in the *Engi-shiki* compiled in 927] of Adachi Province. However, we have lost our legends and other kinds of documents to fire, and our origin could not be clarified. The attendant temple (*bettō* 別当) and parishioners responded to this situation. At Yoshida in Kyoto, we inquired into our past. [The Yoshida] determined as follows: our deity is [to be represented by] three *heihaku* to be placed in the inner sanctuary and three dishes are to be presented. The seal of the deity is the inedible green citrus fruit, and the date of the festival is the seventeenth day of the ninth month. The *honjibutsu* 本地仏 is Gondainichi Nyorai 金大日如来. Thereupon, we were given the court rank, the senior first rank, as we requested, and the deity is called the senior first rank Seki Daimyōjin. We received the rank on the sixteenth day of the twelfth month.

(INOUE 1997, p. 62)

In some rare cases, the Yoshida refused to issue certificates to the shrine whose identity presented problems to the Yoshida house. For such shrines, the Yoshida seems to have provided instructions to better the situation. The one case that has come to my attention is Gōgi 恒義

Shrine in the Hiki 比企 District, Musashi Province, whose legends included disobedient acts against the emperor.¹⁸ Gōgi Shrine was originally known as Tsunegi Shrine, founded by Fujiwara Tsunegi 藤原恒儀. The Yoshida officials investigated into Tsunegi's past and found in the record entitled *Ōseigyoku* 王政玉 that Tsunegi killed Kiyohara Kumataka 清原熊鷹 in a sumo match. Afterwards he received the emperor's reprimand. For this reason, the Yoshida house refused to offer a rank certificate. However, the Yoshida instructed that the shrine adopt a different pronunciation and rename itself as Gōgi Shrine. By the time the bakufu official took a general survey for compiling the *Shinpen Musashi fudokikō*, the shrine's name was established as Gōgi Shrine (*Shinpen Musashi fudokikō* 10: 33). When problems were found, the Yoshida house exercised its authority to rectify a shrine's presentation according to its own theology.

TRANSFORMING LOCAL RITUAL

Shrine functionaries who requested certificates could consult the Yoshida house for proper ritual. For instance, the Buddhist priest of Hachijō Village submitted several questions asking about specific ritual procedure for the deities that he served (*Shin'i negai ikken*, in *Aidake monjo*). His questions included how many wands should be offered to their Hachiman deity at a festival, on what days he should hold a festival, and if his way of preparing offerings was appropriate. The Yoshida house provided answers for each question. While this Buddhist priest did not seek ritual transmission from the Yoshida, this example suggests that there was a rise in the concern over proper shrine ritual among functionaries.

In granting the certificate, the Yoshida house promoted the idea that the *shintai* of a kami should be located in a place distinct from where images of buddhas are placed. The Yoshida ordered functionaries to remove Buddhist items from the inner sanctuary of the shrine. When shrines reported that their inner sanctuaries enshrined a Buddhist statue as a kami, the Yoshida instructed the priest to replace it with either a kami statue or a wand with cloth streamers. Moreover, the *sōgen* decree certificate was to be installed in the inner sanctuary. The removed statue was to be placed in the attached building typically called the *honjūdō* 本地堂. In this way, the Yoshida house furthered the idea that no Buddhist items were to be allowed in the inner sanctuary of a shrine, and thus imposed its doctrine of the One-and-Only Shinto

¹⁸ To the best of my knowledge, this is the only known instance of a *sōgen* decree application being rejected by the Yoshida house. Since records concerning certificates are scarce, we cannot know how often the Yoshida rejected applications.

on local shrines, which were commonly managed by Buddhist priests (KANEMOTO 1998, pp. 30–47).

Evidence is mixed as to whether or not Buddhist priests followed the Yoshida's instructions on this matter. For example, the Buddhist priest of Hyūga 日向 Daimyōjin in Harima Province obeyed the instructions, whereas the Buddhist priest of Hikawa 氷川 Daimyōjin in Kisoro 木曾呂 Village, Musashi Province, installed a statue of Kannon in the inner sanctuary when he received the rank from the Yoshida house. Hence, the Yoshida house's command was not necessarily observed by the functionary once he returned to his local shrine.

Another ritual that the Yoshida promoted on the basis of their doctrine was the inclusion of fish in food offerings to the deities. In pre-modern Japan, Buddhist priests abstained from eating fish, and so at many shrines where Buddhist priests were in charge, fish was not a part of their offerings to deities. Typically, the *sōgen* decree application included a pledge by the priest to include fish in food offerings presented to the deities.¹⁹ In the above citation concerning Hyūga Daimyōjin, the Buddhist priest initially reported to the Yoshida that he would not serve fish, but the Yoshida ordered that he offer fish to the deity. In this way the Yoshida house gradually promoted the idea that kami required a separate ritual from Buddhism (KANEMOTO 1998, pp. 30–47).

Conclusion

The popularity of rank and title certificates enabled the Yoshida house to influence ordinary local shrines that were mostly controlled by non-Shinto priests. This indicates that they used different devices to spread their influence among different groups of religious specialists. On the one hand, the Yoshida passed down special rituals to Shinto priests of their own sacerdotal lineage, whose training could take up to nine lunar months. On the other hand, the Yoshida issued rank certificates instantly to a wide range of shrine functionaries, many not members of their own lineage, who were forced to acknowledge—if not to adhere to—the Yoshida house's doctrine and ritual that promoted the distinction between kami and buddhas. The certificates also allowed the Yoshida to influence the identities of local shrines and to standardize the form of *shintai* installed in the shrines.

For shrine functionaries, rank certificates offered a wide range of benefits that fulfilled villagers' needs. The 1692 decree and the bakufu's

¹⁹ KANEMOTO, 1998, pp. 30–32, *Satteshi-shi kinsei shiryō hen*, pp. 679–80; *Kōnosushi-shi shiryōhen 4 kinsei 2*, pp. 2–3; and *Shin'i negai ikken*, in *Aida ke monjo*.

compilation of shrine and temple registries gave rise to villagers' concerns about the legal standing of their tutelary shrines. The Yoshida house was the *de facto* central authority of Shinto priests and shrines, and a rank certificate from the Yoshida house could function as a legal protection. Hence, villagers found the rank certificate useful in enhancing the legal status of their shrines.

The Yoshida house also satisfied village leaders' desire for higher prestige by marketing various shrine paraphernalia and composing shrine legends. Just as genealogy defined individual status in Tokugawa society, history was seen as an important element in establishing a shrine's status. Furthermore, the *sōgen* decree certificate authorized peasants to modify existing customs that had constrained their lives and agricultural practices. This increased progressive village leaders' options in regard to issues such as livestock and cash cropping, which gained importance with the growth of the market. The Yoshida responded to eighteenth-century peasants' needs to adopt their lifestyles and agricultural practices to the pace of a commercial economy.

The Yoshida house could initiate interactions with local shrine functionaries because it was ready and willing to cater to the needs of local shrines. In fact, from the time of Yoshida Kanetomo, the Yoshida house accumulated intimate knowledge of local shrines and their functionaries. As described above, Kanetomo conducted a survey of shrines on the outskirts of Kyoto. Kanetomo's successors increased their contact with local shrine functionaries by providing certificates and ritual transmissions to them. After the Yoshida house took over leadership of the Shinto clergy in 1665, it used its position to learn about local shrines' conditions. In 1759, the Yoshida house petitioned the bakufu's *jisha bugyō* 寺社奉行 (Commissioner of temples and shrines) to command all daimyo and bakufu intendants to compile registers that recorded the shrines staffed with functionaries (NISHIGAKI 1980, pp. 32–33). Supposedly all of these registers became available to the Yoshida house.

The Yoshida's attentiveness to villagers' needs increased the popularity of *sōgen* decree certificates. The certificates offered to commoners prestige, legal protection, ritual guidance, and concrete benefits—all in one neat package. On the surface this package did not put forth the Yoshida's doctrine of the "One-and-Only" Shinto. Yet, the Yoshida skillfully used the local incentive for change to establish their own ritual system and institutional framework—a system and framework that transcended locally specific practices. The wide circulation of *sōgen* decree certificates enabled the Yoshida house to standardize to a large degree popular kami worship.

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