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Status and Stratification
Cultural Forms
in East and Southeast Asia

Edited by
Mutsuhiko Shima
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2 The Curse of the Fugitive Samurai: A Look at Social Stratification and Conflict in Rural Japan

D. K. Andrews

Introduction

The inhabitants of the inland village of Kogata, situated in Japan's Tōhoku region, have for generations on end fought famine, flood, and fire in a climate that is well-known for being less than hospitable. Their community and most of its arable land is wedged between thickly forested mountainous terrain. On the hilltops are tobacco fields, and the river that cuts across the village is lined with the rice paddies on which the community's few thousand residents have traditionally carved out a living. Today, less than 700 households form a village of about thirty neighborhoods.

An entrance, or intrusion, into any given community by an 'outsider' can be a cause of interest, concern, and possibly fear for the community's inhabitants. Yoshida Teigo in his research on the 'stranger' in connection with Japanese folk religion surmised that strangers are 'unknown and unclassified' and therefore present a potential threat in both a 'physical and mystical sense' (Yoshida 1981: 95). This thought-provoking appraisal of the relationship between 'the established and the outsiders' (Elias and Scotson 1994) leads us to ask, is it possible for the outsider identity to linger on even though the outsiders themselves have become 'known and classified,' being firmly entrenched within the social fabric of a community?

During the course of my research in Kogata, I discovered that a group of six households in two neighboring hamlets derived their status and authority from the peculiar circumstances surrounding the founding settlement in the village. They are known by the term Ochiudo, which means fugitive samurai, a reference to the alleged status of their founding ancestors.

Delving into a study of belief and society within this geographically well-defined community (the heart of the village is found nestled in a river valley), I gradually became aware that underlying social tensions within the community occasionally erupt into conflict. Disputes are frequently connected to status relations. And, in this community where heavy emphasis is placed on vertical social relations, villagers believe that three of the more politically influential and socially dominant Ochiudo households suffer from tatarī (curse/retribution).

This study examines social stratification and conflict in contemporary rural Japan, illustrating how social status is perceived, manipulated, and challenged. I argue that the curse of the Ochiudo can be comprehended as a technique through which villagers negotiate issues of social disparity within their community.

To understand the relationship between the Ochiudo households and the manifestation of the curse, I first describe the pertinent features of the Japanese household, the historical context underlying the Ochiudo classification, and some characteristics of Ochiudo communities. Then I turn toward a discussion of tatarī and the social receptivity of the supernatural, highlighting the connection between tatarī and the Ochiudo. Drawing on my research experience, I furnish three case studies of reportedly cursed Ochiudo households. In the last part of this study I undertake an analysis of the monumentalizing of the Ochiudo identity and the nature of the social conflict in which the Ochiudo are embroiled.

The continuity of the Japanese household

In rural Japan, traditional socio-political authority tends to lie with the older and more established households. In this vein, the Ochiudo households of Kogata are widely understood by the inhabitants to be among the oldest in the village, believed by some to be founding households. Amid the course of my research, the paradox of the Ochiudo's enduring identity as outsiders became apparent. The question posed by the persistence of this identity necessitates an elementary understanding of the Japanese household (ie). First, 'The ie is always conceived as persisting through time by the succession of the members,' and second, after being established, any given household has the potential to continue indefinitely (Nakane 1967: 1–2). This ideology likewise lends support to the perception that a household's status (iegarā), in terms of pedigree, is resistant to change. The people of Kogata view a household's status as if it were a palpable heirloom that is passed down over time. Notwithstanding that contemporary examples of the rise and fall of households abound, the standing
of households and more particularly that of the main households (honke), are perceived by the villagers to be durable property.

Historical context of the Ochiudo

Towards the end of the Heian period (794–1185) two feuding clans, the Minamoto and the Taira, engaged in a conflict spanning several decades that culminated in the naval battle of Dan-no-ura (1185) where the Taira were irreversibly defeated. Born out of this historic event, we find that even today the tales of the Taira clan’s consequent diaspora live on. These tales have been incorporated into innumerable local histories spanning the length of the Japanese archipelago.

Generally, the term Ochiudo evokes the image of a samurai who, losing in a power struggle, is forced into exile. In Kogata the theme of the Taira as noble wanderers is deeply engaging because of the attached romantic mystique. For example, the origin of the village’s most worshiped religious object, a bronze statue of a Buddhist saint, is ascribed to a Taira clan lord named Shigemori (1138–1179). He is said to have carried it secured in his helmet on his journey through the hinterlands of Japan. On the grounds of a local temple where the statue is now enshrined stands a nutmeg tree estimated at 700 years of age. Shigemori is claimed to have planted it in commemoration of his arrival in the village. As we will see, this allegorical imagery of Kogata’s illustrious heritage has permeated the collective consciousness of the villagers.

Characteristics of the Ochiudo community

Takahashi Yuriko’s (1980) investigation of Ochiudo neighborhoods in the Tohoku region has revealed that geographic isolation, a specialized trade, consolidated kinship relations, and distinguishable language and customs are common characteristics of Ochiudo communities. Following this framework I now proceed to elucidate these categories in the context of Kogata.

To begin with, the Ochiudo are often separated from the main population of the village; Ochiudo environs are often found in removed mountainous areas or river valleys. In Kogata, two neighboring hamlets have been dubbed Ochiudo. Because of their location, several kilometers upstream from the central village in a narrow river valley enveloped by precipitous stone walls, the hamlets were often referred to as ‘hidden.’

Moreover we find that the Ochiudo often have specialized trades or occupations. They may garner additional income from their mountainous environment. For example, in Kogata Ochiudo are known for their involvement in forestry, the production of wood charcoal, and the manufacturing of woven baskets of which they also had the regional monopoly. The inherited skills for this economic industry are credited to the ingenuity of their educated samurai ancestors. Almost all Ochiudo neighborhood households participated in this local industry. Because the production of baskets was performed during the non-agricultural winter months, men of the Ochiudo neighborhoods refrained from the seasonal migration that other villagers were compelled to undertake. This routine absence of fathers and sons was a taxing burden on both individual households and the community as a whole. Hence the ability of the Ochiudo to avoid this seasonal migration created a socio-economic disparity with other villagers.

Additionally, the Ochiudo neighborhoods tended to have a relatively high rate of endogamous marriages. Extensive kinship ties within the community can be traced over several generations, contributing to the perception that the Ochiudo neighborhoods of Kogata were not only autonomous, but exclusive.

A final characteristic of the Ochiudo enclaves is that they are perceived to be distinguishable from the village at large in terms of language and custom. For instance, in Kogata, it is often non-Ochiudo individuals who state that the Ochiudo dialect differs from that of the rest of the village and reflects the ‘high culture’ of their elite samurai heritage. Their continued adherence to conservative rules of etiquette within their own community, including the enforcement of strict seating orders at communal gatherings, is said to distinguish Ochiudo from other Kogata neighborhoods.

Tatari and the social receptivity of the supernatural

A degree of familiarity with the supernatural resonates in the lives of the villagers of Kogata. Talk of death, which seems to permeate daily conversation, is not considered to be unnatural. It is conceivable that this reflects the community’s demographics—the community is steadily aging—that the general acceptance of the subject of death and associated phenomena is arresting. Asked why it was his responsibility to make offerings to the dead at his household’s Buddhist altar (butsudan), a grandfather laughingly replied, ‘Because I’m the closest
to the dead" (watashi wa hotoke-san ni ichiban chikai kara), both in terms of age and social relations. Admittedly, my research has been oriented toward the supernatural and its various manifestations, and villagers have responded to my inquiries regarding the supernatural. Some, for example, have recounted seeing apparitions of the dead walking through their homes or places of work, or even floating above the fields and rice paddies. In addition, my informants have shown a keen interest in the meaning of supernatural occurrences such as a hidama (fireball) seen shooting through the early morning sky, which they believe predicts death or calamity in the direction that it vanishes. The people of Kogata have catered to my solicitation for associated narratives, and in doing so have expressed an active belief in the supernatural.

Another deeply rooted belief among the villagers is that 'death comes in threes.' Not just a local expression, this is a belief that underscores how the people of Kogata manage misfortune. As it directed by some supernatural imperative, people die in threes.4 When a second individual dies, a correlation is made to the first, and it is generally assumed that another death is approaching. Conversations then typically turn toward those at risk, flagging possible future victims.4 After the third death, villagers will remark, 'As expected, a third person has passed away,' thus reconfirming the logic of a process of supernatural causation. Succession intimates that a prominent characteristic of death in Kogata is the collective social response. What I want to emphasize here is that the depth of the local people's belief in the supernatural is repeatedly observed in the milieu of their social interactions.

There is a common belief in Japan that an unusual cry from a crow may forewarn ill fortune; it may even announce the death of someone within the community. One of my informants, for example, explained that while chatting with a neighbor, they both noticed that crows were cackling in the direction of this neighbor's home. My informant unwittingly joked that the crows had gathered ominously above the neighbor's house and that someone was evidently at death's door. She was shocked, however, to later hear that the neighbor's son had hung himself that very day. Afterwards, when I overheard conversations between his friends and neighbors, I was interested to learn that they directly attributed the suicide to a curse stemming from the father worshipping an excessive number of deities.10 The son's death was said to be yet the latest chapter in an unfolding tragedy surrounding this household. Even among those who gathered in support of and

mourned alongside the father, the definitive explanation for this misfortune was assigned to supernatural causes.

In his work on spirit possession, Yoshida Teigo defined tatari as a punitive response to 'a person's disrespectful and impious behavior toward local deities and spirits' and 'a failure to worship deities or spirits properly' (1967: 238). His research also detailed the links between ill fortune and the supernatural (Yoshida 1967: 237). To cite another example from Kogata, a sake (rice wine) brewer-dealer who was also the village's largest landholder is currently purported to be cursed. This household has held a prominent position in the village both socially and economically. However, the household head recently died in a fire that engulfed his home. As Yoshida stressed, it has been said in the village that the cause of the fire and his death were directly related to his ceasing to attend the festivals of the tutelary shrine of his neighborhood, a shrine that the man's ancestors had built and had been the principle beneficiaries of.11

By analyzing data collected from cases in Kogata, I concur with Yoshida's findings and conclude that tatari, as a form of supernatural violence, can be characterized as deities, spirits of the dead, and other transcendent beings attempting to force a redress for negligent behavior as well as social and moral violations, both past and present, by inflicting illness, injury, death, and other adversity. The beliefs of the people of Kogata actively incorporate the conception of tatari. A reliance on supernatural causation to explain the ills that befall members of the community is not uncommon. Receptivity toward an otherworldly explanation is additionally evinced in the case of the Ochiudo where the actions of their samurai ancestors are believed to have led to their descendents being afflicted by curses.

The connection between tatari and the Ochiudo

My research was not limited to, nor did it anticipate the uncovering of, the tatari of the Ochiudo. Perhaps needless to say, members of the supposedly afflicted households never acknowledged the curses to me. It was through daily conversation with the villagers, which can rightly be described as gossip, that my overall awareness of the association between the Ochiudo and tatari gradually developed. I should stress that the bulk of information used in this study was gathered from fleeting commentaries and under the breath accusations that infrequently slipped from the mouths of the locals concerning their
supposedly cursed neighbors, and as such, it contains emotional sentiments that may contradict the views of other villagers.

Interestingly, be it social, political, economic, or religious, authority in the Ochiudo enclaves has been held by historically influential main households. Although the settlement of these households is steeped in legend, their declarations of genuineness were outwardly supported by the possession of samurai weapons, armor, and other antiquities. As I will show, despite this material evidence, the persistence of their outsider status as descendants of fugitive samurai is maintained to a great extent through the exercise of their own volition in the ongoing process of reconstructing an image as entities invested with authority.

Komatsu Kazuhiko has written about legends surrounding the killing of outsiders, after which tatari is affixed to the murdering household by their victims. These curses then usher in the decline of the assailant’s household and spell trouble for later generations (Komatsu 1997: 60). There is a twist to this motif in the case of Kogata with the outsider as murderer. In this community, it is mostly non-Ochiudo villagers that draw a connection between the samurai status of the Ochiudo ancestors and the adversity which is said to befall their descendants. Villagers attribute these misfortunes to curses attached to the households. The reason given is that the Ochiudo ancestors, in keeping with the authority granted to their social position as samurai, would have slain others. This killing, not atoned for, remains indefinitely bound to their households. Hence, a supernatural reckoning has been placed on the Ochiudo of Kogata, transcending the generations, in which the descendents now must bear the burden of their Ochiudo identity.

The cases of three Ochiudo

The Tamura main household sits at the head of a lineage composed of nine households that is also the largest of the five lineages in its neighborhood. The household head conventionally had final say on any issue affecting the Ochiudo, playing a central role in governing the two Ochiudo neighborhoods. Its influential position has led other lineages to state that their own roots could be traced to the Tamura household.

Furthermore, the household’s political influence extends beyond the confines of the Ochiudo neighborhoods. The men of four consecutive generations, dating back to the early 1900s, have served as village assemblymen. The present household head advanced to the position of chairman, and once made a bid for mayor.

The current Tamura household is known throughout the village by its house name jito. Literally translated, this means ‘head of the land,’ but this title was given to the Tamura household in earlier times for its role as village administrator. The household’s status is further supported by the samurai regalia it possesses, which is symbolic of its high position and alleged historic past as descendents of fugitive samurai. One legend relates the story of the lord who lived in the Tamura neighborhood. When he broke the taboo against eating meat, he was imprisoned, and later put to death. This tale is used to reinforce, first, the Kogata Ochiudo identity as conservative and authoritarian, and second, it sets the stage for the Ochiudo to be linked with tatari, for they have murdered.

Stories of this household’s ‘curse’ are told in hushed tones. According to one informant, she was employed to pick apples in the hillside orchards when the other village women acquainted her with the Tamura household’s tatari. Slanderous gossip to some, they said that this household’s samurai ancestors used to ‘chop off people’s heads.’ The question of specifically who they killed, however, remains unanswered.

The supernatural retribution incurred by the Tamura household primarily affects the women of the family. For example the strange, if not neurotic, behavior of the head of the Tamura household’s wife is said to be a manifestation of such a curse, as was her early death. Another example is a woman who was rumored to have been locked in the house from an early age because she suffers from some trauma or mental disorder. A local shaman was once consulted to help cure her, but to no avail. With no reports of her death, however, the household’s reputation continues to be shrouded by a shameful secret.

In the same Ochiudo neighborhood, the main Sano household is positioned at the head of a separate lineage of four households. This household, by maintaining close kinship relations with Tamura, has appropriated a degree of authority and is now often seen playing the role of enforcer for Tamura. As is common among powerful households in the village, the main Tamura and Sano households are linked by kinship, with the younger brother of the former marrying into the latter to become an adopted husband (muko-yoshi).

The role of history, whether fictive or not, is pivotal in the formation of many contemporary perceptions of the Ochiudo within Kogata. For instance, in accordance with the newly imposed proclamations for the
separation of Shinto and Buddhism at the beginning of the Meiji Era (1868–1912), agents of the government reportedly came to the village to confiscate the Buddhist statue that the famous Taira clan lord Shigemori had supposedly bestowed. Although one common story says that a local priest hid the statue to safeguard it, there is another version of the story attached to the Sano household. Having returned home from duty in the army, a young Sano man single-handedly repulsed these custodians by standing bravely before them and announcing himself to be an imperial soldier. By means of such heroic depictions, the reputation of the Sano family as warriors is brought forth to a more recent past.

The Sano household was also famous for its ‘Flower Well’. This name derived from the fact that flowers grew in the vicinity of a freshwater spring located on the Sano farm. Used as a means of divination, the upcoming year’s harvest could be foretold and consequently the fortunes of farmers, depending on when the flowers first blossomed. This folklore enhanced the Ochiudo community’s mystique, as if it directly mediated with the supernatural world.

Returning to the manifestation of curses, villagers explain that the Ochiudo misfortune is passed down over generations. In the Sano family’s case, the villagers suggest that the tatari has moved from the mother-in-law to the daughter-in-law. More generally, however, the indications of tatari at work in this household have been cited as being the premature death of the household head’s wife, arguments between the household head and his son, and the conjugal separation of the son and his wife.

Separated from Tamura and Sano, the main Ogawa household is the top household of its Ochiudo neighborhood, with two branch households in its lineage. Like Sano, the members of the Ogawa household do not overtly engage in politics, but instead rally behind Tamura.

In addition to its possession of short swords, unglazed teacups and Buddhist statuary, all of which are recognized as Ochiudo items, the Ogawa household boasts a lacquered flute said to be made from the leaves of bamboo grass. It is this flute that has made the Ogawa household famous.

The value of this object is predicated on its supposed origin. The owner of the flute was a defeated Taira samurai warrior who fled to what is now the village of Kogata. This wandering samurai is said to have given the flute in payment for shelter provided by the peasant Ogawa household. Yet in another version, lord Shigemori is said to have been the bearer of this sacred instrument as well as the founder of the Ogawa family line. This prestigious past and its particular features have gained the flute considerable newspaper coverage over the years; however, when the flute was being exhibited at the village museum, an overzealous scholar attempted to authenticate the flute by making cuttings with a knife. He wanted to verify that the flute was a historical artifact and not a fraud. The household head is reported to have been overwhelmed with remorse for his failure to properly protect the flute. After this incident, his health started to falter. To the villagers this was indicative of a curse. The household head had offended his ancestors who had entrusted him with safeguarding the flute. Therefore they manifested their displeasure by inflicting a curse on him. He was also harshly criticized by the local community. He was condemned for exploiting the flute to achieve celebrity for himself.

The household head swore that the flute would not be publicly shown again. His repentant declaration may have allowed him to avoid an untimely demise. Still, he has not completely appeased his critics, for despite the incident taking place some twenty years ago the villagers maintain that his persistent illness is symptomatic of an active curse, and that as long as he has pride in his Ochiudo heritage his physical condition will remain incurable.

**Ochiudo as commodities**

In recent years, a large public works project in the form of a dam forced the abandonment of the old Ochiudo neighborhoods. They were relocated to two new subdivisions situated on opposite sides of the Ochiudo valley. The flooded valley became a lake, and combined with the dam itself became the latest tourist attraction for the township. The lake was appropriately named after Ogawa’s flute, thus locating the Ochiudo imagery at the forefront of the village identity. At a nearby Shinto shrine, a carved stone statue has been put in place immortalizing the Taira clan lord Shigemori. As part of a strategy to attract tourists, he has been elevated to the standing of a god, being worshiped by visitors and townspeople alike, and thus capitalizing on the Ochiudo legends.

The national government’s proposal to build the dam initially sparked a heated opposition movement. A concerted effort was made by all of the Ochiudo households to derail the project. After ‘persuasive pressure’ from the government, however, Tamura suddenly decided to endorse the project and relinquish the lands of the entire Ochiudo
of her own unfavorable situation, echoed the opinions of many, saying, 'Here is my grave, the grave of the poorest woman in the village, right alongside the graves of the village's richest families.' By this comparison, she implied a discomfort at being forced to live in the shadow of the more economically advantaged Tamura and Sano, who, rejecting harmonious uniformity, instead facilitate dissimilarity with their fellow villagers. Moreover two of the Ochiudo, one of whom is Tamura, have also erected stone markers on their graves bearing inscriptions pronouncing their links to fugitive samurai origins. For the Ochiudo, these monuments are the marked symbols of their inherent authority as ruling elite.

The main households of the Ochiudo neighborhoods were always recognized as being comparably wealthy families of high standing. The dam project simply increased that wealth, magnifying their economic status. People comment that the money from the dam construction caused members of the Ochiudo community to get snobbish. As an example, the son of the Sano family is regularly criticized for showing a lack of reserve. He is by all accounts unapologetic. Eliciting antagonism he is called by the name of his neighborhood, in this case a euphemism for 'Ochiudo,' connoting his alleged self-absorption in his social standing.

In response to the Ochiudo's display of wealth the villagers have created new categories by which to reverse their marginalized or subjugated positions. Identifying the Ochiudo as cursed can be a form of 'retribution for perceived injustices' (Schnell 1995: 322) for those who lack the ability to address their grievances by other means. Generally, in Kogata open disputes with fellow villagers are strongly discouraged; however, villagers also understand that conflict is sometimes unavoidable. One informant who is in conflict with the Sano household explains, 'You can't fight in the village. But if things get really bad, then it can't be helped.' Working with and assigned below a member of the Sano household, this informant is often harassed and derided for not knowing his/her station, that is, being from a branch house of modest means. Although wanting to confront the offender, my informant refrains from doing so, reluctant to openly oppose the socially powerful Sano family. Instead this informant gossips about the Sano household being cursed and fishes for a sympathetic ear. Being neither able nor willing to overtly confront the social, political, and economic disparity found in the community, a person may choose instead to level the playing field by identifying what they believe to be tatari.
Conclusion

I have sketched a rather unfamiliar, although contemporary, picture of Japanese society. Besides offering insight into the present state of supernatural belief, it provides a clue toward comprehending social stratification in modern Japan.

One of the first conclusions of this study is that wrongdoing by both ancestors and their descendants is seen to generate misfortune for the Ochiudo. As we have seen, by committing murder the samurai ancestors of Tamura and Sano incurred eternal curses to their family lines. In the case of Ogawa, the household head, being negligent in his duty to safeguard a family heirloom, saw his health suffer. In short, these examples help to frame tatari as the alleged source of discord, illness, or death among the family members of these households.

In the case of the Tamura and Sano households, tatari was manifested in the wives developing a neurosis, falling ill, and dying. The untimely death of the women (i.e., that they died before their husbands) is also seen to be indicative of supernatural causation. It transpired, however, that there is no social stigma attached to associating with a cursed household, and no ostracism ensues. This leads to the conclusion that the tatari of the Ochiudo is not deemed to be socially detrimental.17

The gossip surrounding the cursed households does not impede social interaction with them. Robert J. Smith has argued that gossip, as a coercive measure, has the ability to reign in social deviation and effect changes in behavior (Smith 1961: 524). This study has attempted to show that the motivation for the labeling of an individual or his household as being afflicted with tatari does not necessarily lead to any changes in their behavior or their position in the traditional social order. Rather it is an assertion that the legitimacy of authority and status of the allegedly afflicted parties may be contested by other members of the community.

When examining the history of the Ochiudo, a tempting point of departure for the researcher would be the analysis of the paradoxical nature of the founding samurai. With the liminal status of outsiders, they allegedly first came to the ‘hidden’ valley to escape their fugitive status by disguising their nobility. Yet, to merge into the community they would either have had to submit themselves to the established power structure or compel the inhabitants to accept their authority. The latter scenario, as we have seen, is the one depicted in the folktales I heard in Kogata. Nonetheless, it must be emphasized that the villagers need not fully articulate the details of this history. The overall acceptance of the idea of Ochiudo and its inherent contradictions can be comprehended in much the same way that Robert J. Smith related that his informants gave him conflicting accounts. In rebuking one villager’s account, another informant explains, ‘Oh, they like to say that. We don’t mind. It doesn’t do anyone any harm after all’ (Smith 1974: xviii). When I posed the question of his family’s authenticity to an elderly member of the Tamura household, he explained that he had been raised hearing stories of his family’s Ochiudo origin from his parents and grandparents and that he never had any reason to doubt those tales. What would be the advantage for him in doing otherwise? Clearly, for many the act of identifying a case of tatari is more relevant than clarifying the extraneous details. One can conclude that villagers interpret their historical realities and then engage each other in a struggle to legitimize or devalue their constructed identities.

Embedded within the dramatic religious context of tatari, a sociological aspect can be discerned that reflects the tensions found within the community. Through tatari the underlying social conflicts that are rooted in the doctrines of status and authority manifest symbolically. Although tatari references fractured relations with the supernatural, it may be observed that tatari is perceived by the inhabitants of Kogata as explaining social disparities in the standing of households. Following the lead of other scholars who recognize the curse as a social control mechanism (e.g., Schnell 1997: 1), I propose that tatari may be identified as a means by which villagers negotiate issues of status and redress disparity.

Labeling a household as cursed is a political act. In Kogata it is a strategy to downplay the the Ochiudo’s authority. This designation, however, does not negate their status; instead, it calls into question the legitimacy of their authority. Ann Waswo has pointed out that ‘one’s social status is determined not simply by income or pedigree but also by how one is treated’ (1977: 116). The handling of the Ochiudo households as cursed is one way by which to challenge their status.

It is important to note that ‘Narratives are not only structures of meaning but structures of power as well’ (Bruner 1986: 144). For both the Ochiudo, who seek to glorify themselves by evoking a historical past linked to noble samurai figures, and for other villagers, who seek to condemn the subjugating behavior of the Ochiudo and address perceived economic disparity by using that same history, the manipulations of the Ochiudo’s historical origins ‘are the products of contestable human choices and interests’ (McCutcheon 2001: 87).
A 'community,' it has been remarked, 'is premised on various forms of exclusion and constructions of otherness' (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 13). Whether conscious or not, through labeling Ochiudo households as cursed, villagers can be seen to be setting the Ochiudo apart from themselves. Conversely, through the process of monumentalization, the Ochiudo households move to create a 'tangible historic context' (Ivy 1995: 56) in which to assert their genuineness as agents of authority and draw attention to the legitimacy of their being categorically set apart. Ironically, both sides contrive to position the Ochiudo outside the normative body of village households.

Glossary

bunke 分家
butsudan 仏壇
hidama 火玉
honke 本家
hotoke-san 仏さん
ie 家
iegara 家柄
jitō 地頭
muko-yōshi 婢養子
ochiudo 落人
sake 酒
tatari 崇り
yagō 屋号
Chapter 2

1 The author acknowledges the sensitive nature of the subject material presented within this study. But he also wishes to assure the reader that the stated objective of this research does not extend beyond trying to grasp how Japanese people participate in and respond to conflictual situations. In an effort to protect the privacy of residents in the subject village, the names of people and places have been changed to provide anonymity.

2 Some recent examples: in 2001 a fire engulfed seventy-four acres of woodlands. Perhaps more destructive was a flood in 1999 that caused over sixty recorded landslides and forced the evacuation of 120 households.

3 *Honke* is the central or parent household in a lineage to which branch households (*bunke*) trace their origin.

4 The two clans are also known as the Genji and Heike respectively.

5 For a more detailed account of the conflict between the Minamoto and the Taira see Sansom (1964).

6 The statue measures only twenty centimeters.

7 Similar to other rural areas in Japan, the village population has been battered by a decreasing birth rate and an exodus of younger generations to urban areas.

8 Seemingly unrelated deaths are to the villagers aligned in an often unforeseen pattern of supernatural causation.

9 Likely candidates are the ill and the elderly. Most traumatic to the community are unexpected deaths, that is, accidents, suicides, and young deaths. Talk of possible victims waylays fears over unexpected death. Conversely, the deaths of the elderly, those over eighty years of age, are greeted with congratulations for a long life.

10 As curses are more commonly attributed to a lack of worship, this is a noteworthy case.

11 The shrine constructed in the mid-18th century enshrines a deity worshipped to protect against fire.

12 House names (*yagō*) have been used to distinguish between households, which was particularly beneficial in areas where households shared the same surname.

13 All told, these neighborhoods have been depicted as the bastions of conservative adherence to tradition in Kogata. This tendency toward conservatism has been noted by Sugano (1980) in her study of an *Ochida* community in Akita prefecture.

14 The community is said to have become divided over loyalties to either of two *Ochida* 'bosses' who, being unable to make peace, resettled further apart from each other. One boss, Tamura, took with him the majority of the *Ochida* households.

15 In a similar vein, while explaining that the villagers of one Japanese community exhibit their wealth via their graves, Ronald Dore points out that 'the older generation, are very susceptible to pride of ancestry' (1994: 287).

16 Dore similarly reports the difficulty of having an altercation with people with whom you come into contact daily (1994: 48).
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