Embedding Prayers in Cotton, Ramie, and Silk: The Symbolism of Textiles in Datsueba Worship

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Abstract: This paper explores the function and symbolism of cloth in rituals devoted to Datsueba, focusing in particular on types of fabric. The Japanese Buddhist folk deity Datsueba is well known as the ugly old woman who takes away clothes from the deceased by the Sanzu River, which people are supposed to cross after death. Cloth has long been associated with Datsueba since her earliest appearance in religious texts from the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In addition to her role of taking clothes of the deceased, some religious texts relate that Datsueba allows the deceased to keep their clothing if they make a cloth offering while living. Inspired by such narratives, the rituals and worship practices dedicated to her often involve fabric. The types of fabric utilized in such practices include cotton, ramie, and silk, which have contributed to developing diverse, multifaceted aspects of the deity.

Keywords: Datsueba, Ubason, Clothes, Tateyama, Agano, Shōjuin

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Introduction

In the popular imagination of the afterlife in traditional Japan, deceased individuals are believed to cross the Sanzu River (Sanzu no kawa 三途の川) flowing through the intermediate state between death and rebirth. The *Bussetsu Jizō Bosatsu hosshin innen jūō kyō* 仏説地蔵菩薩発心因縁十王経 [Scripture Spoken by the Buddha on the Causes of Jizō Bodhisattva Giving Rise to the Thought of Enlightenment and the Ten Kings; hereafter referred to as *Jizō jūō kyō*] composed in Japan in the twelfth century based on the Chinese apocrypha *Foshuo Yanluo wang shouji sizhong nixiu shengqi wang sheng jingtu jing* 仏説閻羅王授記四衆逆修生七往生浄土経 [The Scripture Spoken by the Buddha to the Four Orders on the Prophecy Given to King Yama Concerning the Sevens of Life to Be Cultivated in Preparation for Rebirth in the Pure Land; hereafter referred to as *Scripture on the Ten Kings*] narrates the experience of the deceased during this period as a judicial procedure.[1] According to this scripture, they must undergo a series of courts administrated by the Ten Kings of Hell where they suffer various forms of torture; they cross the river before reaching the court of the second king Shokō-ō 初江王.[2] One of the differences between the *Jizō jūō kyō* and the Chinese apocrypha is that in the Japanese scripture, the female ogre Datsueba 奪衣婆 (Clothes Snatching Old Woman) appears by the river. She takes the clothes of the deceased and passes them to her male counterpart Ken'eō 懸衣翁 (Clothes Hanging Old Man), who hangs the clothing on tree branches.[3] Datsueba also appears in the story entitled 'Renshū hōshi' 蓮秀法師 [Priest Renshū] included in the eleventh-century collection of religious tales *Dai Nihon koku Hokke genki* 大日本国法華験記 [An Account of the Wonders Worked by the *Lotus Sūtra* in Japan; hereafter referred to as *Hokke genki*]. In the story, Renshū suddenly dies and subsequently encounters Datsueba by the river. She attempts

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1 Teiser, *'The Scripture on the Ten Kings'*, 57–58.

2 Ibid., 212; *Bussetsu Jizō bosatsu hosshin innen jūō kyō*, 301.

3 *Bussetsu Jizō bosatsu hosshin innen jūō kyō*, 301. For other developments, see Teiser, *'The Scripture on the Ten Kings'*, 58–60.

FIG. 1 Postcard of Datsueba, hungry ghosts, animals, asura, and Amida's decent, from the 'Jigoku gokuraku' 地獄極楽 [Hell and Paradise] set illustrated by Kasai Hōsai 笠井鳳斎 (early 20th century). Photo by author.

to take his clothing, but he is saved from her by divine boys and he is revived because of his devotion to the *Lotus Sūtra*.[4] The descriptions of Datsueba in the above texts are brief, and she does not appear to be an important figure. However, by the thirteenth century, she had increased in status and become a distinctive element of Japanese hell imagery, as exemplified by Buddhist paintings depicting the afterlife experience or the six paths of rebirth (Fig. 1).[5] Meanwhile, her persona and roles were variously interpreted, and by the Edo period she came to be worshipped as a border-marker, a saviour of women, and a miraculous deity who grants various worldly benefits.

Cloth has been an important item associated with Datsueba since her earliest appearance. In addition to her role of taking clothes of

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[4] *Hokke genki*, 138–39.

[5] For Datsueba images included in these paintings, see 'Visual Representation of Datsueba: From Hell Scenes to the Popular Sphere' in Saka, *Datsueba the Clothes Snatcher*.

the deceased, some religious texts relate that Datsueba allows the deceased to keep their clothing if they make a cloth offering to her while living.[6] Inspired by such narratives, the rituals and worship practices dedicated to her often involve fabric. Moreover, in addition to signifying the deeds of the dead in the *Jizō jūō kyō*, cloth plays more diverse roles in devotional practices. For example, cloth is offered to her at rituals ensuring people's salvation, Datsueba sculptures sometimes hold a piece of cloth in their hand or are dressed in fabric clothing, and on occasion layers of floss silk are placed on her head.

These worship practices can be explained as memorial services for the worshippers themselves, who wish not to be stripped of their clothes by Datsueba after death. Considering her descriptions in religious texts, this is a direct motivation to offer cloth to Datsueba. Nevertheless, in my view, Datsueba's association with cloth has further implications that have inspired specific devotional customs. I have examined several examples in *Datsueba the Clothes Snatcher: The Evolution of a Japanese Folk Deity from Hell Figure to Popular Savior* and demonstrated how the functions of cloth were reinterpreted and contributed to diversifying her persona. In this paper, however, I would like to look at selected cases from a different angle, focusing on the types of fabric utilized in practices and analyzing its functions.

Ramie Cloth in Ubason Worship, Tateyama Town, Toyama Prefecture

The first example I would like to discuss concerns Ubason 嫗尊 worship in the Tateyama cult, which centers on faith in the Tateyama mountains located near the town of Tateyama 立山 in Toyama 富山 prefecture.[7] In this region, Ubason is identified with Datsueba and

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[6] *Tengu no dairi*, 612.

[7] When referring Datsueba as Ubason, the character 姥 (*uba*) is often used. However, in some cases, different characters are assigned to the deity. Examples include the Tateyama cult and Ubason worship in Agano. For the characters, please see page 231 for Ashikuraji Ubason and page 241 for Agano Ubason.

worshipped as one of the most important deities in the cult. The tale entitled 'Shugyōsō Ecchū Tachiyama ni itari wakaki onna ni au koto' 修行僧至越中立山会小女語 [How an Ascetic Went to Tachiyama of Ecchu and Met a Young Woman] included in the twelfth century *Konjaku monogatarishū* 今昔物語集 [Anthology of Tales from the Past] narrates that the mountains have been regarded as a place of judgment and retribution.[8] At the same time, the mountains were considered as the manifestation of the Pure Land as demonstrated in the depiction of Amida's descent in many *Tateyama mandara* 立山曼荼羅.[9] The mountain deity Tateyama Gongen 立山権現 was identified with Amida 阿弥陀 and enshrined at the top of Mount Oyama 雄山 within the Tateyama Mountains.[10]

In the Edo period, the Tateyama cult was promoted by two different religious communities, Iwakuraji 岩峅寺 and Ashikuraji 芦峅寺. Although they both recognized Tateyama Gongen as the principal god, each had another important deity which characterized its faith and worship practices. While Iwakuraji worshiped the male deity of Mount Tsurugi 劍, Tachio Tenjin 刀尾天神, Ashikuraji venerated the old goddess Ubason who is identified with Datsueba.[11]

The *On Ubason engi* 御姥尊縁起 [Origin Story of Ubason; 1820] relates Ubason's complex identity.[12] It emphasizes her aspect as a creation deity by claiming that she created the nine levels of rebirth in the Pure Land and the one hundred and thirty-six hells, indicating that the Tateyama mountains, regarded as the location of both Hell

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[8] Dykstra, trans., *Konjaku Tales*, 249.

[9] For illustrations of *Tateyama mandara*, see Toyama-ken Tateyama Hakubutsukan, *Sōran Tateyama mandara*. Caroline Hirasawa examines the religious landscape of the Tateyama cult as well as its relationship with the religious communities and worshippers in Hirasawa, *Hell-bent for Heaven*.

[10] The three main shrines enshrining Tateyama Gongen are located at the top of Mount Oyama, in Iwakuraji at the base of the Tateyama mountains, and in Ashikuraji at the foothill of the mountains.

[11] See Hirasawa, *Hell-bent for Heaven*, 19–22.

[12] For transcription of the document, see Toyama-ken Tateyama Hakubutsukan, *Tateyama no jiboshin Onbasama*, 55–56.

and the Pure Land, were generated by her. She is also related to childbirth because she is the mother of Tateyama Gongen and plays the role of giving clothing to unborn children in the womb. Moreover, while identifying Ubason with three buddhas (Amida, Shaka 釈迦, and Dainichi 大日), the origin story states that she will manifest as Datsueba by the Sanzu River and rob the clothes from deceased individuals who failed to return cloth to her during their lifetime.[13]

Clothes Change Ritual

In the Edo period, an Ubason triad clothed in fabric clothing was enshrined at the Uba Hall (Uba dō 姥堂) in Ashikuraji, along with sixty-six other images of Ubason symbolizing the permeation of her divine favour and protection throughout all the sixty-six provinces in Japan. Because of the later dissolution of the Tateyama cult due to the separation of Buddhism and Shinto promoted by the Meiji government, the Uba Hall as well as many sculptures enshrined there have been lost.[14] However, twenty-two images of Ubason are presently enshrined at the surviving Enma Hall (Enma dō 閻魔堂) (Fig. 2). Some follow the standard appearance of Datsueba sitting with one knee up and exposing their upper body. Others show features which are unusual for Datsueba sculptures, including mudras and calm facial expression. Some of Ubason images which were recently added to the group of Ubason images at the Enma Hall prominently show these unusual features.[15] It may be difficult for viewers to notice the differences because all of them are clothed in white burial shrouds which are renewed during the Clothes Change Ritual called Omeshikae お召替え.

In the rites I participated in 2015 and 2016, women in Ashikuraji came to the Enma Hall in the morning of March 13 to make new

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[13] Toyama-ken Tateyama Hakubutsukan, *Tateyama no jiboshin Onbasama*, 55–56.

[14] Ibid., 20–23.

[15] For the mages, see Fukue, 'Tateyama sanroku Ashikuraji ni okeru Ubason shinkō no kenkyū', 23–36.

FIG. 2 Ubason images enshrined at the Enma Hall in Ashikuraji. Photo courtesy of Tateyama Museum.

FIG. 3 Cloth used in the Clothes Change Ritual. Photo by author.

burial shrouds for the images enshrined there.[16] Prior to the event, white cotton cloth was cut into pieces and arranged in sets by the organizers for the convenience of participants (Fig. 3). They sewed the pieces together without balling up the thread, following the traditional manner of making burial shrouds. Despite the casual, friendly atmosphere resembling a local gathering, participants were very careful not to stain the cloth with their blood because the sullied fabric must be disposed of. Once completed, the shrouds were taken to the Ashikuraji Oyama Shrine (Oyama Jinja 雄山神社) located a few minutes away on foot from the Enma Hall, and the chief Shinto priest conducted a purification ceremony at the hall dedicated to the founder of the Tateyama cult Jikō 慈興. Upon returning from the shrine to the Enma Hall, the women disrobed the Ubason images and clothed them in the new, purified shrouds. Men participated at certain junctures, such as the purification ritual and the final chanting of sūtras. After the ceremony, men also joined the other participants for lunch at the Enma Hall. However, those who made the shrouds and changed Ubason's clothing were mostly women from the community.

The appearance and procedure of the Edo-period Omeshikae ritual differed significantly from the present rite. The origin of the practice of clothing Ubason images is obscure, but Edo-period documents confirm that it was certainly practiced by that time. For example, the ritual is mentioned in a document dated 1722, and another document from the nineteenth century describes details of the rite while suggesting various changes occurred over a few hundred years. According to it, seven women were selected to make the shrouds. They must have been over sixty-one years old and were required to participate in a purification ritual in which they perform ablutions three times a day. After approximately two weeks of the purification period, they began spinning thread out of ramie fiber to make cloth for the shrouds. The rite to dress five specific images in the new costumes was held on the ninth day of the second month. Although women were responsible

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[16] Presently, they make shrouds at the community centre by the prefectural museum. Because it is brighter there comparing the Enma Hall, it is easier for old participants to sew cloths together.

for making the shrouds, high-ranking male priests conducted the rite at the Uba Hall. Since the hall was covered with curtains, no one except the male priests were able to see the undressed images.

This ritual suggests several meanings embedded in cloth. The first is in accordance with the direct motivation to offer cloth to Datsueba—the memorial service for the participants themselves. Since the origin story of Ubason relates that Ubason lends people baby clothes at birth, it can be regarded as an opportunity for them to return cloth to her.[17]

The material of the shrouds may imply the identity of Ubason as a mountain deity. The Edo-period records relate that the Clothes Change Ritual was held on the ninth day of the second month, which was regarded as the day to celebrate the mountain deity. Fukue Mitsuru points out the importance that ramie grows on the mountains purportedly created by Ubason. Also, the reason why women were not allowed to change the clothes of the images can be explained by the characteristic of a mountain deity who was believed to be jealous of other women.[18]

Another possible interpretation relates the use of ramie cloth to the rite's origin. A reference to ramie cloth being used for clothing by the Japanese appears in the chapter commonly known as 'Gishi Wajinden' 魏志倭人伝 [Account of Wa People], included in the third-century Chinese history book *Sangokushi* 三国志 [Records of the Three Kingdoms].[19] Throughout the ancient and medieval period, ramie was widely utilized regardless of class; and especially for the commoners, it was an important textile for daily use.[20] However, from the fifteenth century onwards, the production of cotton spread out across Japan. By the Edo period, cotton became the dominant fabric for commoners with the improvement of strains, production processes, and distribution networks.[21] However, as demonstrated

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17 Fukue, 'Ubason omeshikae gyōji no imi', 43.

18 Fukue, 'Edo jidai to gendai no omeshikae gyōji', 43.

19 Nagahara, *Choma, kinu, momen no shakaishi*, 6.

20 Ibid., 6–8.

21 For the increasing popularity of cotton from the fifteenth century onwards, see ibid., 217–304.

in the Edo period ritual procedure, the use of ramie was an indispensable part of the Clothes Change Ritual even though cotton was widely available at that time. The predisposition for ramie may attest to the rite's long history. As mentioned earlier, it is unknown when the ritual started, but it is possible it started before cotton was popularized, considering that one image of the Ubason triad is dated 1375.[22] Or Ashikuraji priests might have attempted to make a claim for the long history of the rite by using ramie cloth instead of the popular new fabric cotton.

In addition to ramie, silk was also popular before the proliferation of cotton;[23] but it may not have been considered suitable for use in the Clothes Change Ritual because of its production process. After silkworms spin cocoons, the cocoons are boiled with pupas inside and raw silk is reeled off. Since this process involves killing, there was a controversy of whether Buddhist priests should be allowed to wear robes made of silk. The assertion that priests should refrain from wearing silk robes was based on an argument by the Chinese priest Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667), who strictly interpreted the prohibition set forth in the *Shibunritsu* 四分律 (Skt. *Dharmaguptaka-vinaya*). The Vinaya prohibits monks and nuns from ordering new silk robes, but allows them to receive silk cloth from followers. Daoxuan, however, argued that any use of silk must not be permitted. For him, wearing a silk robe is identical to eating meat because both involve taking life; thus, according to his theory, Buddhist priests receiving silk cloth are taking part in killing. His reading of the *Shibunritsu* was criticized by various priests including the Chinese monk Yijing 義浄 (635–713) and Japanese Zen monks such as Eisai 栄西 (1141–1215) and Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253). Although Daoxuan's theory was not dominant, silk garments were often considered inappropriate mainly because of their luxurious quality; black, simple robes were regarded as a symbol of strictness and seriousness for devout priests of the Ritsu 律 School.[24] Ashikuraji priests were not involved in this

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[22] Toyama-ken Tateyama Hakubutsukan, *Tateyama no jiboshin Onbasama*, 20.

[23] Nagahara, Choma, kinu, momen no shakaishi, 6.

[24] Nishimura, 'Kaiko no koe', 60–66; Riggs, 'Robes of Rags', 1164–66.

argument, but the idea that death was associated with the production of silk might have been problematic considering their efforts to avoid defilements and maintain purity throughout the Clothes Change Ritual.

Cloth Bridge Consecration Ritual

While the use of ramie cloth might have a special meaning for the Clothes Change Ritual, this attitude is less evident in the Nunobashi Kanjō-e 布橋灌頂会 or Cloth Bridge Consecration Ritual, a ritual actively promoted by Ashikuraji priests to attract patrons and worshippers, especially targeting those who were unable to enter the mountains due to their femaleness and physical ability. Although it is unknown when it started, Edo-period documents provide evidence that the Cloth Bridge Consecration Ritual was one of the most important annual events held during the autumn equinox. The *Shodō tsutomekatatō nenjū gyōji gai kensū* 諸堂勤方等年中行事外件数 [Annual Events and Other Ceremonies Including Services at Various Halls; 1842], reports that an enormous amount of white cloth was used for the ritual because it covered the path between the Uba Hall and the Enma Hall located across the river. After participants experienced ritual death by confessing their bad deeds at the Enma Hall, they walked on the path of white cloth to the Uba Hall. They then attended services conducted by the priests and received *kechimyaku* 血脈 (lit. blood heritage) talismans which save women from the Blood Pond Hell, transform them into the male body, and promise their rebirth in the Pure Land. [25]

After the Meiji Restoration, the Cloth Bridge Consecration

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[25] For further information on the Cloth Bridge Consecration Ritual, see Fukue, *Tateyama mandara*, 107–19; *idem*, *Tateyama shinkō to Nunobashi Daikanjō-hōe*, 96–226; Kikuchi, *Wagakuni no gishi saisei girei*, 22–33; Hirasawa, *Hell-Bent for Heaven*, 148–59; Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*, 187–90; Averbuch, 'Discourses of the Reappearing', 1–5, 22–49; Saka, *Datsueba the Clothes Snatcher*, 179–86.

FIG. 4 Women crossing the Cloth Bridge during the Cloth Bridge Consecration Ritual. Photo by author.

Ritual was discontinued with the dissolution of the Tateyama cult. However, it was resurrected as a cultural event sponsored by the local governments in 1996 and came to be held in September once every three years (Fig. 4). The use of white cloth in the event is eye-catching. Participants are all women who usually apply and pay fees to attend the event. Dressed in white clothing and wearing white blindfolds, they walk on the path of white cloth over the Cloth Bridge between the Enma Hall and the Tateyama Museum's theatre built next to the site where the Uba Hall was once located. Since the present ceremony is designed based on scholarly studies and historical records, the basic appearance may not be very different from the Edo period rite, though several scholars have expressed their skepticism.[26]

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[26] See Toyama-ken Tateyama Hakubutsukan, *Tateyama no jiboshin Onbasama*, 22–23, 50–52; Katō, 'Nunobashi kanjō-e kenkyū no hōhō', 1–22.

Two types of fabric are used in reproducing the present ceremony.[27] One is cotton or *momen* 木綿 which is used to make participants' costumes as well as blindfolds. The other is calico or *kyarako* キャラコ, a plain-woven, starched textile made from white cotton, which is laid over the bridge. Compared to *momen* cloth, *kyarako* cloth is more durable and economical. Because the large amount of cloth laid on the ground cannot be reused after the event, organizers have decided to use *kyarako* instead of *momen*.

During the Edo-period rite, too, a massive amount of white cloth was used. For example, some documents report that 136 *tan* 反[28] of white cloth was laid over the bridge between the Enma and Uba halls, and other documents state that 360 *tan* was used.[29] The exact material of cloth is unknown because the documents simply describe it as *hakufu* 白布 (white cloth). However, it was probably ramie, hemp, or other plant-cloth, considering that *hakufu* usually refers to plant fabric and that cloth used at the rite was later made into burial shrouds and distributed among parishioners.[30] Unlike the Clothes Change Ritual where a small number of ritual participants spun thread out of ramie fiber and wove it into cloth, the white cloth for the Cloth Bridge Consecration Ritual was supplied by the entire Ashikuraji community in the Edo period.[31] It was not realistic for them to make cloth from ramie fiber because it took a lot of time to weave the fiber, so it was probably purchased from merchants.

The mediating function of cloth is prominent in the ritual which can be compared with the performance of death and rebirth. Similar to the deceased going through the series of courts

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[27] I would like to express my gratitude to town officials who work with the executive committee of the event for providing me with this information.

[28] One *tan* is used to make a suit of clothes. There is no exact regulation, but it is about 36–37 centimeters in width and 12 meters long.

[29] Fukue, *Tateyama shinkō to Tateyama mandara*, 61–65.

[30] Katō, 'Nunobashi Kanjō-e kenkyū no hōhō', 10; Toyama-ken Tateyama Hakubutsukan, *Tateyama no jiboshin Onbasama*.

[31] Fukue, *Tateyama shinkō to Tateyama mandara*, 64.

administrated by the Ten Kings of Hell and experiencing suffering from torture, participants attended the confession ceremony at the Enma Hall to extinguish bad karma. The Uba Hall was the site of salvation, where they ceremoniously experienced better rebirth in this world and ensured their future rebirth in the Pure Land. Their going back and forth between this world and the otherworld is represented by walking on strips of white cloth laid over the bridge between the halls.

The costumes associated with the ritual may also be related to this mediating function. As can be seen in some *Tateyama mandara*, Edo-period participants wore white clothes that were probably equated with burial shrouds. In addition to mediating between life and death, cloth connects Ubason with Datsueba. Their association may be a later creation confirmed in the 1820 *On Ubason engi*, which describes Ubason's origin and the efficacy of the Cloth Bridge Consecration Ritual. Claiming that Ubason gave people swaddling clothes at birth, it defines the rite as an opportunity for worshippers to return cloth to her and ensure rebirth in the Pure Land. Meanwhile, it relates that those who miss the opportunity would be stripped of their clothing by Ubason manifested as Datsueba after death. While the clothes robbed by Datsueba represent the bad deeds of the deceased, cloth is transformed into the symbol of salvation in the rite.

Robes Made of Silk in Ubason Worship, Agano City, Niigata

While plant fiber cloth was used in Ubason worship at Tateyama and the principal images used to be covered with ramie clothing, in the city of Agano 阿賀野 in Niigata 新潟 prefecture, Datsueba (locally called Ubason 優婆尊) is clothed not in burial shrouds but in monastic robes made of raw silk. Among several Sōtō Zen temples dedicated to Ubason in Agano, the central institution promoting the cult is Kehō ji 華報寺 which was originally affiliated with the esoteric Shingon temple and came to function as the local head temple of Sōtō 曹洞 Zen. Another centre is Kōtoku ji's 高徳寺 Uba Hall known as Haguro Ubason 羽黒優婆尊, whose tradition claims that it was founded in

the seventeenth century upon a miraculous message from the Kehō ji Ubason. Although the origin story shared by these temples clearly identifies Ubason with Datsueba, it doesn't include the *Jizō jūō kyō*'s characterization of Datsueba as a horrible, violent old woman who takes clothes from the deceased. Instead, she is regarded as a compassionate deity who grants worshippers various benefits such as safe childbirth, good health, and salvation after death.[32]

While Ubason images enshrined at Kehō ji and Kōtoku ji share features identical to the standard visualization of Datsueba, they show new developments which may be related to the characteristics unique to Ubason. Datsueba is often attired in white shrouds or simple garments, but Ubason images in Agano are clothed in the priestly garb made of raw silk. For example, the Kehō ji image is attired in a white monastic robe, and a whitish cloth is draped over the head. The image enshrined at Kōtoku ji's Uba Hall is clothed in a red monastic robe with golden brocade. Although the robe covers the body, according to the Kōtoku ji chief priest, the Kōtoku ji Ubason image holds a lotus flower in her hand.

The meanings of the monastic robes worn by Ubason can be related to her nature as a saviour. As the origin story reveals the compassionate nature hidden beneath Ubason's terrifying appearance, the robes may symbolize her vow to save sentient beings. Or, it may represent the narrative of the origin story that she delivers her messages through priests and manifests in different forms, including religious practitioners, to save people.

Another possible interpretation concerns the mediating function which is different from that of the Cloth Bridge Consecration Ritual. According to the head priest of Kōtoku ji, the garments worn by Ubason are given to priests when worshippers offer a new robe. The garments presented to Ubason are usually plain, pure silk robes so that they can be passed to priests. However, the one presently worn by the image is with gold brocade and thus more flamboyant. In order to show their devotion to Ubason, worshippers might have

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[32] For further information on Ubason worship in Agano, see Saka, *Datsueba the Clothes Snatcher*, 191–98.

presented a gorgeous robe made of luxury fabric. In this context, monastic garments indicate the spiritual connection between Ubason and the clergy while linking Ubason to her worshippers and exhibiting their religious piety.

Floss Silk in Datsueba Worship at Shōjuin in Shinjuku Ward, Tokyo

Datsueba is not usually regarded as a deity associated with silkworms, unlike deities commonly related to them such as Ukemochi no Kami 保食神, who produced various food items from her body; Konjiki-hime 金色姫, who transformed into a silkworm after death; Oshira-sama オシラサマ, worshipped as a pair of a man (or horse) and a woman in the Tohoku region; and Memyō Bosatsu 馬鳴菩薩, who is believed to provide clothing to the poor. However, floss silk features prominently in some Datsueba worship practices, such as the practice of placing layers of floss silk on the head of Datsueba images. Among them, the Pure Land temple Shōjuin 正受院 in Shinjuku 新宿 ward, Tokyo is perhaps the most famous example.[33] In the early Kaei 嘉永 era (1848–1854), the Datsueba statue at Shōjuin gained sudden popularity as a *hayarigami* 流行神 (lit. faddish deity), the deity who grants worshippers various worldly benefits. Hearing the miraculous stories about her, many people in the city of Edo crowded the temple to make a wish. Various ukiyoe artists, in particular Utagawa Kuniyoshi, designed prints featuring the fad, which further incited the image's popularity among the masses.[34]

The most prominent feature of the Shōjuin Datsueba is a mound of floss silk covering her head (Fig. 5). As described in *Kōgai zeisetsu* 巷街贅説 [Gossip in Town] by Jinsaiō 塵哉翁, worshippers offered floss silk that was then piled up in a hall.[35] In the late Edo period, it

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[33] For faith surrounding silkworm farming, see Kuraishi, *Ko o yashinau onna tachi*, 73–106; Murakawa, *Kaiko to kinu no minzoku*, 65–91; Hatanaka, *Kaiko*, 90–149.

[34] Saka, *Datsueba the Cloth Snatcher*, 83–95.

[35] Jinsaiō, *Kōgai zeisetsu*, 299–300. The section on the Shōjuin Datsueba

FIG. 5 Shōjuin Datsueba covering the head with layers of floss silk. Photo by author.

was common for *hayarigami* to be associated with items familiar to the populace, such as tofu, soba (buckwheat noodles), konjak, salt, amazake (sweet sake), and dango (sweet rice dumplings).[36] It was floss silk that was presented to the Shōjuin Datsueba.

Sericulture has a long history in Japan, since it is mentioned along with ramie cloth in the above-mentioned *Gishi Wajinden*.[37] By the Kofun period (mid-third to sixth c.), silk came to be regarded as a fabric for the ruling class, and from the sixth to twelfth centuries, silk cloth was one of the most important goods collected as tax.[38]

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craze is also introduced in Tomizawa, 'Shōjuin Datsueba no nishikie to sesō', 37–38; *idem*, *Nishiki-e no chikara*, 41–42; *idem*, 'Nishikie no naka no minkan shinkō', 96–97; Minami, *Bakumatsu Edo no bunka*, 223.

[36] Miyata, Edo no hayarigami, 45–46.

[37] Nagahara, *Choma, kinu, momen no shakaishi*, 6.

[38] Ibid., 6–7

Later, in the Edo period, responding to the increasing need for silk produced in Japan, various manuals for sericulture were published.[39] Illustrations included in manuals and ukiyoe prints featuring silkworm farming reveal that it was mostly women engaging in the work.[40] During the production process, cocoons were boiled to kill silkworms inside; after the carcasses were removed, they were flattened into floss silk. Since no weaving skill was required, the production was easier compared to that of woven silk, and it could have been done solely by silk farmers.[41]

The piling of floss silk on the Shōjuin Datsueba's head can be explained by a folk remedy. The Shōjuin Datsueba was originally believed to cure coughing. It might have been inspired by the similarity between the words for cough (*seki* 咳) and border (*seki* 関), for Datsueba is said to appear at the border between the living world and the afterlife.[42] A popular folk treatment for coughing encourages patients to cover their throats with floss silk, and thus her efficacy of curing coughing developed the practice of floss silk offering.

Another explanation links floss silk to old age. Datsueba is often visualized with white hair, which floss silk does indeed resemble. Thus, it is possible to interpret the placing of floss on Datsueba's head as a means to make the image appear more lifelike. Considering that the Ubason images in Agano are dressed in real fabric clothing which suggests that they are regarded as 'living' buddhas, layers of floss silk may be another device to make the images appear to be 'alive.'

This practice may also allude to the custom of old women wearing a floss silk hat. The *Miyako fuzoku kewaiden* 都風俗化粧伝 [Handbook of Fashion and Makeup in the Capital; 1813] introduces fashionable trends in the late-Edo period, and it describes that old

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[39] Examples of sericulture manuals are introduced in Atsugishi Kyōdo shiryōkan, *Yōsansho to shuppan bunka*.

[40] For ukiyoe prints featuring silk farming, see Shiruku Hakubutsukan, *Egakareta yōsan*.

[41] Nagahara, *Choma, kinu, momen no shakaishi*, 159.

[42] Miyata, *Kinsei no hayarigami*, 45; *idem*, *Edo no hayarigami*, 74.

women wore silk floss hats in order to keep themselves warm.[43] Also, the historian Ema Tsutomu posits that old women used a silk floss hat to cover their thinning hair.[44] Furthermore, images of the famous priest Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–1282) are often enshrined with layers of floss silk (sometimes dyed red) covering his head just like the Shōjuin Datsueba. The use of floss silk in this case symbolizes an episode from his life relating that he received a floss silk hat from an old woman to cover a wound on his forehead.[45] As these examples show, a floss silk hat was a symbolic item often associated with old women.[46]

The Shōjuin Datsueba's relationship with children may also be reflected in her association with silk. During the Kaei-era *hayarigami* fad, the Shōjuin Datsueba was regarded as a miraculous deity who would grant any kind of wish. While needlework may be promoted as most the most efficacious in modern times, the aspect of the Shōjuin Datsueba being a protector of children is more traditional. In addition to her efficacy at curing coughing, she was also believed to be able to stop babies from crying at night and to relieve the convulsions of children.[47]

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[43] A bride wears a silk floss hat when being attired in white, but this custom started in the Meiji period. Shimazaki, *Mawata no bunkashi*, 74.

[44] Ema, 'Agebōshi to watabōshi no kenkyū', 18.

[45] At Komatsubara (modern Kamogawa city, Chiba prefecture), Nichiren and his disciples were attacked and injured by Tōjō Kagenobu 東条景信 (d.u.) and other conspirators who were angry at Nichiren's criticism toward *nenbutsu*. Nichiren fled, and having lost his disciples, he was taking a rest in a cave while cleaning the cut on his forehead. An old woman happened to pass by, and she gave her floss silk hat to him so that his wound could be covered. Ichikawa, *Nichiren Shōnin no ayumareta michi*, 2627.

[46] In addition, the appearance of an old woman selling layers of floss silk in the *Shichijuichiban shokunin utaawase* 七十一番職人歌合 [Poetry Contests of Seventy-One Artisans] may suggest that sericulture was women's job and that many old women were involved in the industry. The illustration is available on the National Diet Library Digital Collection and the Tokyo National Museum Image Search.

[47] Matsuzaki, *Jizō to Enma, Datsueba*, 55.

The above-mentioned historian Ema traces the origin of wearing a floss silk hat back to the episode of the prehistoric mythological character Empress Jingu 神功 and a group of women called *katsurame* 桂女, and relates floss silk to midwives. When leading military forces to Silla, the empress covered her head with floss silk and wore a maternity belt received from her lady-in-waiting Katsura-hime 桂姫. Upon returning from Silla, Katsura-hime put the belt on her head. Another tale relates that Katsura-hime wore a white banner around her head at the time of the empress's delivery. This allegedly is the origin of *katsurame*, women who covered their heads with white cloth and sold sweetfish from the Katsura River in Kyoto. They also served as shamans and religious performers and were invited to various occasions, including childbirth.[48] However, this custom declined in the Edo period; instead, midwives came to be responsible for assisting with delivery. According to Ema, they wore a floss silk hats which symbolize Empress Jingu's silk floss headdress along with the appearance of *katsurame*.[49] Although Ema argues that midwives are depicted with layers of floss silk on their heads in paintings, it is difficult to confirm the kind of cloth. However, if covering the head with floss silk was customary for old women, it would not be surprising if experienced midwives dressed in a similar manner.

The last matter I would like to discuss in relation to floss silk is, again, its mediating function. Just like burial shrouds, strips of white cloth, and priestly garments, floss silk also helps worshippers to establish a karmic connection with the deity. For instance, when I attended a special showing of the Ubason image at Kōtoku ji, one of the participants gave me a piece of flattened floss silk. According to her, her mother was also a devout believer of Ubason and thus received some of the old floss silk when new silk was presented to the deity. It can be kept as a talisman and can be used to ease the pain of a diseased body part. Another example of this mediating function can be observed at the Shingon temple Hōkōin 宝光院, located in Yahiko 弥彦, Niigata prefecture, where an image of Datsueba is enshrined as

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[48] Ema, 'Agebōshi to watabōshi no kenkyū', 12–17.

[49] Ibid., 18.

Myōtara Tennyo 妙多羅天女, a old hag and cannibal who became a protector of children after converting to Buddhism.[50] Layers of floss silk are laid over her head, and small packages of floss silk are placed in front of the sculpture to be distributed to worshippers.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have explored the functions and implication of cloth and clothing in Datsueba worship while considering particular types of fabric. Some were chosen to symbolize the characteristics of the deity or to exhibit worshippers' devotion, while others were selected for practical reasons such as durability and reasonable cost. In Ubason worship at Ashikuraji, the use of ramie cloth alludes to the cult's close connection with the mountains as well as the preference to avoid the defilement associated with silkworms. In modern times, ramie has been replaced by cotton and calico, allowing present-day organizers to revive and carry on the tradition. While plant fiber fabric was preferred at Ashikuraji, Agano Ubason images are dressed in monastic robes made of raw silk and have layers of floss silk covering their heads. These costumes can be regarded as making the images appear more life-like, suggesting that Ubason is a living deity. The garments are presented to Ubason by worshippers and are supposed to be passed down to the head priest, thereby establishing a karmic connection with the deity. The prohibition of silk garments for Buddhist priests is obviously not a concern here, for the interpretation by Daoxuan was not pervasive in Japan. While a plain robe was sometimes regarded as a symbol of a pious priest, in the case of Agano Ubason worship, luxurious costumes seem to be preferred because gifting them is an opportunity for worshippers to exhibit their

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[50] Myōtara Tennyo is identified with Yasaburōbasa 弥三郎婆, the cannibal old woman appearing in well-known folk tales in the region. For versions of Yasaburōbasa tales, see 'Yamauba, Yasaburō Basa, Datsueba' in Reider, *Mountain Witches: Yamauba*, 105–07. For features shared between Datsueba and Myōtara Tennyo, see Saka, 'Myōtara Tennyo shinkō to Datsueba teki yōso'.

devotion to Ubason. The donation of floss silk, another aspect of Agano Ubason worship, is often associated with Datsueba. The most prominent example is the Shōjuin Datsueba, whose floss silk head covering alludes to her efficacy at alleviating coughing. Since floss silk resembles gray hair, and it was also customary for old women to wear a floss silk hat in order to keep themselves warm and to cover their thinning hair, the interpretation of floss silk as a sign of old age can be applied to Datsueba images in general, especially those enshrined in areas with heavy snowfall. Layers of floss silk also function as a medium. As discussed above, a karmic connection between the deity and worshippers is materialized in the form of floss silk talismans which visually and physically guarantee their future salvation.

In sum, cloth in one form or another has been an indispensable aspect of Datsueba worship. As her character evolved from a vicious being into a more complex figure often displaying a benevolent nature, in addition to the original symbolism associating cloth with bad deeds of the deceased, cloth came to represent Datsueba's power to grant worshippers salvation and various worldly benefits.

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