

Functions of Millenarism in Premodern Japanese Literature

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Abstract

This article explores social functions of millenarism which are defined in the field of social studies, history, and theology, focusing on its subversive nature to change power relationships between people. It also discusses whether theories about millenarism are also applicable to the Japanese tradition, which has been strongly influenced by Buddhism. The latter part of the article examines the way in which social functions of millenarian attempts were described in premodern Japanese literature, in the Heian and the Kamakura periods. Particular historical cases which influenced millenarian thought are explored, in order to balance with millenarian theories which dominantly come from the West. The main texts to be discussed are the Heian-era fiction *Genji monogatari*, since the work was influenced by Genshin's *Ōjōyōshū* and Amidism, and was written when the age of *mappō* was widely diffused, and the Kamakura-period essay *Hōjōki*, which vividly describes apocalyptic events in the transition from the Heian to the Kamakura periods. The examples in these texts indicate that millenarism as an attempt to change the power relationship and to regain a new identity is not unusual in premodern Japanese culture.

Keywords: Buddhism, *Genji monogatari*, *Hōjōki*, Kamo no Chōmei, *mappō*, millenarism, millenarian thought, Murasaki Shikibu, premodern Japanese literature

1. Introduction

The terms millennium in Latin and chalias in Greek signify a period of one thousand years. According to the Judeo-Christian tradition, millenarism is about Christ's return and his and his saints' one-thousand-year reign. It has been said that at the end of this period, Satan will come into power but will finally be destroyed by Christ. The victory will lead to the resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, and the final redemption. This has been the quintessential form of millenarism in the Western world since Christianity became influential. Since World War II, however, the study of millenarism has been conducted by social scientists in the fields of anthropology, sociology, political sciences, and social economics, and the term is now used cross-culturally to reflect distinct social movements (Talmon, 1968). One tends to assume that the Judeo-Christian millenarian tradition has the longest history, but it originally derived not from Judaism but from Zoroastrianism. Zoroastrian millenarism was transmitted to Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Trompf, 2000). In fact, millenarian movements can be observed in all over the world from ancient times to the present.

In this article, I examine the social functions of millenarism, which are defined in the fields of social studies, history, and theology, focusing on its subversive nature to change power relationships between people, and discuss whether theories about millenarism are also applicable to the Japanese tradition, which has been strongly influenced by Buddhism. Then, I look at the way in which examples of changes in power relationships led by millenarian thought were described in premodern Japanese literature, in the Heian and Kamakura periods. I will also look at particular historical cases which influenced millenarian thought, in order to balance with millenarian theories which dominantly come from the West. I examine the Heian period *Genji monogatari*, which was influenced by Genshin's *Ōjōyōshū* and Amidism, and was written when the age of *mappō* was widely diffused, and the Kamakura period *Hōjōki*, which vividly describes apocalyptic events in the transition from the Heian to the Kamakura periods. Finally, I comment on the social function and the transition of the millenarian phenomenon in premodern Japan.

2. Methodology

2.1 *Millenarism Defined as Salvation*

According to Talmon (1968), who has undertaken comprehensive researches on such movements since World War II, millenarism is defined as the longing and quest for “total, imminent, ultimate, this-worldly, collective salvation.” This means that the new dispensation by this salvation is not a mere improvement of the situation but perfection itself, and it is irrevocable. The time of the salvation is viewed as close at hand, and believers live in tense expectation and preparation for it. The salvation occurs in this world, bringing the heavenly place on Earth, and it is to be enjoyed by the faithful as a group. Talmon adds several important characteristics: apocalyptic, messianic, and ecstatic. Many millenarian movements involve revolutionary and catastrophic visions, since there is a deepening crisis which can be resolved by the ultimate salvation. Often, the movements have a messiah or a prophet who plays the role of mediator between the divine and the human. At the same time, many millenarian movements tend to be antinomian, deliberately breaking accepted taboos. Expressions of aggression are very common, sometimes turned inward, with believers destroying their own property or even killing themselves.

Talmon’s definition of millenarism was innovative in the 1960s since it attempted to shed Christian particularity, and to endow it with a more general, cross-cultural signification. The definition derived from her detailed studies on millenarian phenomena from the ancient to the contemporary, in places such as East Asia, Europe, the Middle East, East Asia, the South Pacific Islands, and North and South America. However, Talmon was not entirely free from the Judeo-Christian millenarian tradition, for her definition and characteristics of millenarism are associated with millenarian movements in Europe of the Middle Ages: those who will set the time of salvation, or who will seek perfection in the other world, or who will personally embrace a millenarian hope without joining particular groups, do not fall into the category of millenarists. Also, the concept of time, which defines the salvation ultimate and irrevocable, is linear, and therefore conflicts with the cyclical concept of time in Buddhism, which theoretically allows the qualified believer to have limitless numbers of rebirths in Buddhahood. On one hand, it is true that many millenarian movements in all areas of the world include catastrophic destructions and ecstatic phenomena. But it is also true that there are a number of millenarian movements without wholesale destruction, hysterical behaviors of the mass, or leaders as messiah.

It is very difficult to define the concept of millenarism in a culturally neutral way since the millenarian traditions in the West are predominantly Judeo-Christian oriented, and the sociological studies have been conducted using Western formulas. In 1960, the year when Talmon published her definition of millenarism, Thrupp (1970) defined it in a broader sense. She argues that millenarism is people’s hopes and beliefs in a dramatic and supernatural solution to “their world’s ills,” with anticipation of “some perfect age or a perfect land.” Thrupp’s definition tolerates a wider range of millenarian movements from the private to the collective such as Maitreya faith in China, Amidism in Japan, the cargo cults of the South Pacific, and ghost dance movements in North America.

Thrupp’s description of millenarism, however, has one ambiguous point: the goal is explained as “some” perfection. There are different goals in different types of millenarian movements: Amidism holds the ultimate perfection of other worldly time and place as a goal, Ghost dance movements set as their goal peaceful relationships with white immigrants, and tribes in the South Pacific seek to obtain material advantages. Trompf (2000) argues that cargo cults should not be considered as a millenarian movement since the sense of finality is too weak. However, the perfection and finality are relative concepts, and it is difficult to judge whether material abundance for nineteenth-century tribes in the Third World is a “weak” type of finality. The definition of millenarism in the contemporary setting, therefore, uses more general terms such as seeking improvements or social transformation in a positive way. Accordingly, it can be temporally understood that millenarian movements are people’s hope of dramatic, religious solution to the calamity of the world, with an anticipation of positive improvements.

2.2 *Millenarism Defined as Power Economy*

Scholars suggest several factors and theories to explain the emergence and rise of millenarian movements. As most scholars agree, millenarian movements tend to arise when society suffers from deteriorated life conditions: famines, plagues, long droughts, devastating fires, tyranny, economic stagnation, social oppression and wars. Also, it is widely agreed that people who join such movements are primarily from the lower social strata, oppressed and politically powerless. Some scholars claim that when people at the bottom suffer multiply from natural disasters and social calamities, they are inclined to dramatic and divine narratives that sweep their miseries away (Daniels, 1992). However, these disastrous situations have been present in all time periods. Not all cases of natural and social disasters result in millenarian movements: they may instead bring about popular

insurrections. It is true that people who belong to the lower social strata are more affected by such disasters, yet there are quite a number of cases in which frustrated secondary elites and aristocracies in colonial countries formed millenarian movements. Hence, deterioration is one of the most important factors in the millenarian condition, yet it does not fully account for the emergence of the movements.

There is another hypothesis that millenarian movements tend to take place when society experiences transitional periods. Talmon (1968) insists that millenarian movements usually do not appear in societies totally untouched by modernization, and appear rarely in highly modernized societies. Instead, they appear in intermediate societies. Cargo cults of the South Pacific, ghost dance movements in North America, and the messianic movements in South America show that millenarian movements took place when isolated tribes had contact with modernization, and the cultural assimilations were processed. Millenarian movements flared up when Europe moved from the Middle Ages towards modern times. Likewise, when Japan experienced the Meiji Restoration and rapid modernization in the early Meiji period, millenarian movements by new religious organizations prevailed. Also, Talmon (1968) points out that those who experience the double transition of inter-country and intra-country migration and both new immigrants and new urbanites are prone to millenarian movements, for they undergo a number of unknown strains from acculturation.

This hypothesis well explains the important factor of the emergence of millenarian movements, for many examples occur during unstable and variable times. It is possible to argue that social strains and frustrations in times of unpredictable change will lead to millenarian movements. However, Talmon's (1968) claim that highly modernized countries rarely have millenarian outbursts is unconvincing when we consider the millenarian phenomenon in the contemporary United States, where many people believe in the Rapture, and there are various religious groups that long for the end of the world (McIver, 1999). It was difficult to predict what relationship the postmodern world would have with millenarism in 1960s, yet it seems that at the present moment, millenarian ideology is an influential cultural theme for films and animations in postmodern societies such as Japan and the West. Daniels (1992) also points out that acculturation, where a culture of unimagined power impinges on a significantly weaker one, often occurs in colonialization, however he argues that a similar thing occurs in postmodern societies: exclusive elites manage advanced technologies and economies with which the rest of us have little or no contact. They function totally outside of our awareness, and have enormous effects on our lives that we cannot control. Daniels (1992) insists that when important areas of our lives are outside of our control, we are in an acculturative situation; we have to learn new rules to live by. It is thus more appropriate to state that millenarian movements often rise in acculturative situations, rather than the transition from premodern to modern times.

As discussed above, I would argue that the millenarian movement is not about distress caused by powerlessness but about the intent to obtain power and to survive in the power economy, for it often functions as a substitute for politics. Daniels (1992) refers to the potential political element in millenarian movements: they always begin as primarily religious in tone, but they invariably become political in their insistence on a more just order. Activist movements are obviously prone to have political intentions, but even less overtly political ones also involve some kinds of protest against the status quo or the elite in the power relationship. Burrige (1969) is a scholar who claims that religion is concerned with power as much as it is concerned with truth. He explains that millenarian salvation is closely related to the politico-economic process, particularly the prestige system. This prestige system is "based upon particular measurements of manhood which relate to gaining or retaining self-respect and integrity" (Burrige, 1969, p. 14). Therefore, the important factor of millenarian movements is not the "relatively deprived" situations of the people in the lower social strata, but the situations which make people "feel" oppressed by the current assumptions of power. Regardless of their social status and their degree of deprivation, people who have millenarian ideas have unsatisfactory power relationships and weak self-respect. Usually the strong other, such as people with authority and the government, can exercise power over their lives. When their problems cannot be solved any other way, people turn to the divine; it is the ultimate and perfect source of empowerment, authority, and justification. Hence, I argue that millenarism is the subversive intent to gain power, since it arises when people become fully aware of power imbalances and lose self-respect. Nothing but the divine will alter the situation. Therefore, millenarian scenarios often include implicit or explicit criticism towards the other in power, and function to provide escape from the present power hierarchy ultimately with the permission of the divine. Below, I study examples of premodern Japanese literature according to this hypothesis.

3. Discussion

3.1 *The Heian period – Mappō and Shukke*

After Buddhism became the national religion in ancient Japan, there was a system of entering the Buddhist

clergy called *shukke*, meaning to leave home in order to become a priest or a nun. *Shukke* as a system thus originally required one to abandon one's belongings and connections to this world, such as family and profession, and to enter a temple or go to the mountain for training. According to Mezaki (1976), priests in the Nara period were civil servants working for the nation, so the capacity of the priesthood was limited, and legislation prohibited ordinary people from becoming clergy. However, when Buddhist ideals were strongly emphasized for national politics in the late Nara period, taking the tonsure and becoming a priest without permission—called *shido* or *jido*—became fashionable. Such self-ordained priests were called *ubasoku* or *ubai*. They were considered neither ordinary people nor proper priests, and were regarded as outsiders. This phenomenon became popular in part because priests were exempt from paying taxes and serving in the civil army. *Ubasoku* is the first example of people who used the *shukke* system as a means of escaping from the status quo. Although *ubasoku* are an anti-establishment example (they sought to elude labor and heavy taxes imposed by the authority), they did not seem to be based on millenarian ideas, as they did not express a particular understanding that society was full of ills and required a divine solution.

In the Heian period, the *shukke* system has more millenarian elements since the age of *mappō* (the Last Dharma Age), which was considered to have started in 1052 according to Saichō, was recognized among the court. The term *mappō* originally comes from the Buddhist theories of the Three Ages: *shōbō* (the True Dharma Age), *zōbō* (the Imitation Dharma Age), and *mappō*. *Shōbō* is the period of five hundred years after Buddha's death, when people could attain the enlightenment through the Dharma during this period. *Zōbō* is the period of five hundred or one thousand years after *shōbō*. Even though people cannot attain the enlightenment during this period, the teachings of Dharma and followers continues to exist. *Mappō* is the ten thousand years after *zōbō*, when people are unable to attain enlightenment through Dharma, and society becomes morally corrupted. The Dharma itself remains true, however in the age of *mappō*, people are concerned with its details and even priests cannot understand and exercise it in the correct way (Marra, 1988).

Thus, the original meaning of *mappō* did not connote apocalyptic catastrophe or even millenarian ideas. It simply meant the undesirable condition that Buddhist ideals would not be attained. However, in the early Heian period, the idea of *mappō* combined with Amidism, which teaches that through devotion to Amitabha one will be reborn in the Pure Land where enlightenment is guaranteed. Amidism became closely associated with *mappō* pessimism especially in the tenth century, when in the preface to his book *Ōjōyōshū* the influential monk Genshin declared that Amidism was necessary for people living in the age of *mappō*. Social instability such as plagues, natural disasters and famines in the eleventh century enhanced pessimistic moods in the Amidist faith (Iwase, 1972).

In the age of *mappō*, the number of relatively young people who attempted *shukke* based on Amidism increased. It was common for elderly high-ranked aristocrats to take the tonsure when they retired, lost partners, or became seriously ill. However, relatively young aristocrats also took religious vows, for they sought Amidist solutions for the transience and pessimism of the world. It is understandable that commoners who suffered from social instability in more serious ways made the choice to renounce the world, yet during the mid-Heian period significant numbers of middle- to high-ranked young aristocrats did the same. I would argue that the *shukke* custom in this period comes to bear some millenarian aspects for the younger generation, even though taking the tonsure was a personal act and not a group movement.

Mid-Heian society met the transitional period from the *ritsuryō* (criminal and civil statutes) system to the *sekan* (regent) system and high-class male aristocrats were faced with desperate power battles over the hegemon. Even very high-born aristocrats who failed in battle, such as Sugawara no Michizane in the Shotai Incident in 901 and Minamoto no Takaakira in the Anna Incident in 969, were exiled to the outlands. During the period of the establishment of the Fujiwara regent system, traditional *ritsuryō* status collapsed, the control of *shōen* (manors) which provided funds for aristocrats became difficult, and there were constant power struggles among the nobles. As the idea of *mappō* became diffused, it led to a feeling that all the efforts to keep the right teachings of Buddha would be in vain. This enhanced the ideas of karma, fate and impermanence, and led many people, including promising young aristocrats, to look for divine solutions to such powerlessness. In the case of female aristocrats, the situation was even more severe: despite their status they had few rights, and many women of middle to high rank were used as commodities for marriage politics in the battles for hegemony. In such a powerless situation, *shukke* as a system attempted to change the power balance. Taking a religious vow cannot overturn the power hierarchy, yet it is able to disturb the power relationship to some extent. There are examples of *shukke* among female characters in *Genji monogatari*, which was written when the northern Fujiwara clan held the ultimate political power via marriage politics. The *shukke* strategies of younger female characters show how they attempt to gain some sort of power in their relationships.

There are a number of characters in *Genji monogatari* who take religious vows, and it can be said that most of

the high-born ones do so as a rite of passage in old age. However, the cases of those who take vows while still young are intriguing. Among them, the first dramatic example is Fujitsubo, for her sudden taking of the tonsure surprises not only Genji but also her closest relatives, such as her brother, Prince Hyōbu, and her ladies in waiting. She is five years older than Genji, making her twenty-nine or thirty years old when she takes her religious vows. In the Heian period it was common for empresses to take religious vows on the deaths of their husbands to dedicate themselves to pacifying the souls of the dead emperors. However, it is clear that there are political and relational motives in Fujitsubo's case. After the Kiritsubo Emperor dies, the status of Fujitsubo as empress becomes very insecure, since both her husband and parents are dead, while her rival Kokiden has the support of her powerful father, a Minister of the Right. The Kiritsubo Emperor asks Genji on his death bed to take care of Fujitsubo and the crown prince, who is actually Genji's son. After the son of Kokiden becomes the Suzaku Emperor, her profound concerns are described thus:

Lacking anyone else to trust, she looked only to Genji in all things, and his failure to give up his unfortunate obsession often reduced her to despair. Meanwhile the mere idea that His Late Eminence had noticed nothing terrified her, and in fear that some hint of the truth might spread at any moment, with grave consequences for the Heir Apparent (Murasaki, 2001, vol. 1, p. 203).

To secure her son the throne, Fujitsubo needs political and financial support from Genji. She realizes that she cannot avoid relying on his care and support for the Heir Apparent. However, Fujitsubo suffers from Genji's plea for the relationship; she feels frightened and guilty when she thinks of the Kiritsubo Emperor, who did not know about their affair. Yet her biggest fears are not for herself, but for her son: if the rumor of her secret affair leaks out, she is sure that it will damage his future. Fujitsubo's dilemma is between keeping Genji as a powerful supporter and avoiding him as a suitor. She even asks for prayers, which stops Genji's plea, and makes every effort to avoid him. However, to her shock and pain, Genji breaks into Fujitsubo's bedroom. She shows strong displeasure at this incident, refusing to answer him. Nevertheless, she cannot survive without his help, "For the Heir Apparent's sake she fears that he might now have turned alarmingly against her, and that if he had had enough of worldly time, he might even act to renounce it" (Murasaki, 2001, vol. 1, p. 204).

Fujitsubo knows that if she keeps refusing Genji in this manner, there is a chance that he will take a religious vow and withdraw support for the Heir Apparent. Fujitsubo thinks it very considerate that the Kiritsubo Emperor made her an empress in order to back up the crown prince, who lacks the support of powerful relatives. However, she decides to take religious vows realizing that she needs to adapt to the new situation following his death, for "the memory of His Late Eminence's exceptional regard brought home to her how profoundly all things had changed" (Murasaki, 2001, vol. 1, p. 205). The Kiritsubo Emperor's consideration does not seem to be enough, since Kokiden, who is now in power, regards Fujitsubo's status as a shame, and it looks almost impossible for Fujitsubo to stay away from Genji without damaging his feelings. It is this powerlessness in the political transition and in the relationship with Genji to lead Fujitsubo to take religious vows. Fujitsubo's sudden decision causes distress for others, but it works very well for Fujitsubo. Norma Field points out Fujitsubo's political success by *shukke*:

Once girded by her vows, Fujitsubo becomes more generous with her attentions... In time, upon Genji's return from his self-imposed exile, the two become political allies, acting in bond unison to establish the Reizei Emperor's reign on a secure footing. A marvellous economy develops in which the hidden, pent-up energy of erotic longing is converted into invisible political performance of the truth might spread at any moment, with grave consequences for the Heir Apparent (Field, 1987, p. 29).

Fujitsubo succeeds both in protecting the crown prince and herself from the disgrace of the affair with Genji and in maintaining his political and financial support. Her major objective of making his son an emperor is safely achieved with the help of Genji, and she comes to interfere with political matters such as Akikonomu's entering into Reizei's court and making her an empress. Thus, Fujitsubo is a good example of *shukke* with millenarian aspects: becoming a nun changes the power relationship with Genji and consequently secures her status and her son's throne in a transitional political phase. Religious justification greatly helps to improve her powerlessness.

Another dramatic case of taking a religious vow in *Genji monogatari* is that of the Third Princess. She is thirteen or fourteen when she marries Genji, and takes a vow just after she delivers a son. She is still a teenager when she becomes a nun. The Princess is in deep distress, for she has the child as a result of an affair with Kashiwagi. The affair is initiated by Kashiwagi, and it is not clear that the Third Princess herself is in love with him. The situation is similar to Fujitsubo's. However, while Fujitsubo, feeling guilty, decides by herself to take vows, the Third Princess must get permission not only from her husband, Genji, but also from her father, former emperor Suzaku (Suzaku-in). Suzaku-in is deeply worried about the Princess, whose mother is dead, and asks Genji to

take care of her as a principal wife. For the Princess, still a childlike teenager, Genji is more like a substitute father than an affectionate husband. What Suzaku-in asks Genji is to “look after” and “educate” her when Suzaku-in takes the tonsure. It is required for the Third Princess to have enough attention and visits from Genji in order to live respectably, which satisfies Suzaku-in. After Genji discovers the affair between the Princess and Kashiwagi, he reads a letter from Suzaku-in advising his daughter that she should endure the undesirable relationship with Genji. Then Genji gives the princess a sermon:

... in reality I have no reason to hesitate (to take a vow). It touched and pleased me, though, you know, that he should turn to me to look after you, and I have not wanted to disillusion him by then leaving you in my turn, as though all I had in mind was to keep up with others (Murasaki, 2001, vol. 2, p. 665).

Genji indirectly tells the Third Princess that she does not understand his earnest consideration in marrying her by giving up taking a vow. At the same time, this statement is a threat that he may take the tonsure and withdraw his support, if the Princess continues to misbehave. Genji actually goes on to say that there no one left whom he has to take care of, and that others are old enough take vows with him if the time comes. She suffers from the fact that the affair will damage the promised support from Genji.

Just after she delivers her son, the Princess hears that Genji has not seen the child, and behaves in a contemptuous way. She decides to take vows because she is distressed. She is totally shaken; she looks down on herself and suffers from Genji’s condescending attitude and the insecurity of her status. Genji, hearing the Princess’s petition, thinks that it will save their difficult relationship between the two and prevent Suzaku-in hearing the rumours of Genji’s treatment of her. However, the Princess looks too young and attractive to renounce the world; her petition is refused. Next, she asks her father, who goes down the mountain to see her. Suzaku-in has the ultimate power over her future, and allows her to take vows, for he regrets the fact that she is unhappily married. If the Princess becomes a nun on this occasion, people will think it comes from sickness rather than an unhappy marriage. Suzaku-in then repeatedly affirms to Genji the support of the Princess after she becomes a nun. Thus, the Third Princess wins her liberation from a condescending, unaffectionate husband. While she continues to have his financial support, she does not have to have a sexual relationship with him.

At the fifty-day celebration after the birth of Kaoru, Genji complains that the Third Princess is abandoning him by becoming a nun, and asks her to take pity on him, implying that he wants to resume their past relationship. The Princess replies “I hear that someone like me, now, knows little of human feelings. What can I possibly say, then, since I have never known them anyway?” (Murasaki, 2001, vol. 2, p. 686). She says that she does not know what a pity is in this world since she has become a nun and now belongs to the other world according to Buddhist tradition. Besides this sarcastic comment, she makes incisive remarks about her childishness, which he has commented on several times. Now she can easily insist that she cannot meet Genji’s expectations as a wife. However, her status as a nun is not described as secure, like Fujitsubo’s: The Third Princess is still under the protection of Genji. He still cannot give up the Princess, and approaches her through poems. He does not allow her to move to the other house which Suzaku-in prepares for her. The Princess eventually hopes to move out of the Rokujō palace for Genji “should have left her in peace by now, but instead she suffered so much from his continued pursuit that she longed to move elsewhere, far away” (Murasaki, 2001, vol. 2, p. 712). Even after becoming a nun, she still needs to evade Genji’s approaches, giving him cold replies to his poems. Regardless of Genji’s pursuit, the Third Princess can escape from her misery to some extent, disturbing the power relationship between Genji and herself, and between Genji and her father, Suzaku-in.

The last dramatic example of *shukke* is Ukifune’s case in the last ten chapters of the tale. Kaoru considers Ukifune a substitute for her half-sister, Ōigimi who used to live in Uji, and marries her since he cannot forget Ōigimi. Kaoru moves Ukifune to the villa in Uji, where he leaves her alone, and she has an affair with Prince Niou and becomes unsure about whom she really loves. Ukifune believes that the extramarital affair degrades her status as a daughter of a prince, stating that “Surely even menials seldom suffer misfortune like this!” (Murasaki, 2001, vol. 2, p. 1038). She decides to commit suicide, but her attempt fails and she is saved by the Yokawa priest. Ukifune asks him to make her a nun, for she is very ashamed that she is still alive and afraid that Kaoru will hear the rumours about her. The Yokawa priest gives Ukifune gokai, entitling her to be a Buddhist layperson.

When she stays with a nun who is a sister of the Yokawa priest, the Middle Captain (the husband of the dead daughter of the nun) falls in love with Ukifune. One night while the sister nun is away, the Middle Captain tries to visit Ukifune. She hides, thinking over her strange course of life and feeling disgust over her past affair with Prince Niou. Ukifune now finds Kaoru, who used to be reserved to her, is more appealing, and hopes to see him again even from a distance. However, she thinks it is inappropriate to think of him for she suffers from the guilt

and degradation of the affair. To avoid trouble by further relationships with men and to recover from her low self-respect, Ukifune decides to become a nun in the morning when the Middle Captain leaves; it is the best occasion for her since the sister nun is gone, and the Yokawa priest is visiting. She pleads to the priest as follows: I have suffered misfortune ever since I was a child, and my mother told me a nun even then, so that when I came to understand a little on my own, I longed to live not as others do but ever absorbed in prayer to be granted that better life to come (Murasaki, 2001, vol. 2, p. 1099).

Ukifune refers to her early life when she was neither recognized by her father, the Eighth Prince, nor loved by her stepfather, the governor of Hitachi province. Even though she is a daughter of a prince, she grew in the countryside, and did not have many chances to be educated in a courtly manner. She feels displaced and treated unfairly by her stepfather. Her mother arranged the marriage with a middle-ranked aristocrat, but he abandons her because he finds out that she is not the real daughter of the governor who will financially support the new groom. Instead, he marries her young half-sister with all the furnishings prepared for Ukifune.

Ukifune, humiliated, has a strong will to change her life by renouncing this world. After the Yokawa priest cuts her hair, she feels “as though for this it had been worth living after all,” and “she felt only peace and happiness, because to her, who could not imagine living much longer, her new state was something wonderful, and she was filled with joy” (Murasaki, 2001, vol. 2, p. 1100). These are the most positive statements of Ukifune’s feelings in the story; she does not have to worry about how to survive in her unstable situation in relationships with men, and gains the firm goal of going to the Pure Land. She does not need to suffer from low self-esteem as a stepsister and a substitute for Ōigimi, for now she has a new identity as a nun. She can live with the sister nun for the Yokawa priest who is willing to support her while he is alive. She spends her time more relaxed, chatting with elder nuns and playing chess, while she diligently exercises sutras.

Haruo Shirane (1987) points out that Ukifune is similar to Yūgao, who is obedient to her lover then attacked by an evil spirit. However, while Yūgao dies in the end, Ukifune is reborn through taking vows. Ukifune successfully obtains a new identity, remaining silent about her past; she gains the sister nun as a new mother, the Yokawa priest as a new father, and the old nuns as her new ladies in waiting. None of them know Ukifune’s past. Yet the most dramatic change about Ukifune is her defiance: she refuses to become a substitute for the dead daughter of the sister nun, though she used to play the role of Ōigimi’s substitute obediently. The new Ukifune maintains her identity, refusing to talk about her past, to remarry the Middle Captain, to see her younger brother, or to be identified as “past Ukifune” by Kaoru.

However, Ukifune is still less secure than the Third Princess; she still has some feelings for Kaoru, who finally discovers her whereabouts. When Kaoru discovers that Ukifune has renounced the world, he explains their relationship to the priest, who loses confidence in making Ukifune a nun; the priest did not know that Ukifune had married Kaoru and attempted suicide because of her affair. In Buddhist tradition, one should finish all relationships which may disturb life after the tonsure, and suicide is considered a serious sin. Learning that Kaoru is still interested in Ukifune, the priest advises her to come back to this world and help to eliminate Kaoru’s sin of adherence. From his advice, it is clear that the Priest thinks Kaoru’s interest is more important than Ukifune’s. Ukifune is more powerless compared to Fujitsubo and the Third Princess. Besides this, she has some feelings left for Kaoru and feels very ashamed to see him since she has become totally different from what she used to be.

It is very difficult for Ukifune to continue to refuse Kaoru even though she shows defiance, and her attempt to renounce the world does not function as a millenarian attempt for long. As Akiyama, Abe and Imai (1972) suggest, Ukifune’s effort to refuse to see Kaoru and to return to this world shows that her relationship with him is a painful one; she still has feelings for him, and wishes to avoid further pain and sin in this life. However, she has no one else to support her being a nun. Thus, personal *shukke* as a system in *Genji monogatari* still depends on the social status of the person and whether that person has support after taking vows. The personal *shukke* can successfully disturb power relationships with others with divine justification, yet its success still depends on power dynamics and financial situation

3.2. The Kamakura Period – Tonsei and Suki

We have seen that the *shukke* system in the Heian period increased when society met the gradual transitions in sociopolitical system, and the idea of *mappō* combined with Amidism created a pessimistic mood not only among people in the lower social strata but also in high-ranked nobles. People felt unstable and anxious about their powerlessness. Examples in *Genji monogatari* illustrate personal millenarian attempts to change power imbalances to some extent. During the late Heian to early Kamakura periods, however, society underwent a more drastic transition. The Heian aristocratic society formed by the Fujiwara clan had its peak in Michinaga’s time

and its mature culture moved towards decadence. Natural disasters were frequent, and the struggle for supremacy among aristocrats increased social unease and insecurity. While aristocrats were losing their power due to internal power struggles, the warrior class in local districts was rising and joining the battle for supremacy. Tamura (1969) mentions that social changes in the thirty years between the Hōgen and Heiji wars and the fall of the Taira family were equal to the changes in previous several hundred years.

During a time of such a drastic social change, people felt a sense of crisis more acutely; even though Fujiwara regents such as Michinaga diligently sought the Pure Land, they had not yet faced ultimate despair towards this world. In this sense, their attempt of *shukke* is an act of *jiriki*, an attempt to obtain salvation on one's own. Three examples of *shukke* in *Genji monogatari* deal with women arranging to take vows by themselves in order to take some power of their own. The idea of the age of *mappō* was already widely diffused in the mid-Heian period, when *Genji monogatari* was written, yet people did not have the full experience of what *mappō* suggests; whether the three female aristocrats believe in Amidism is not clearly described. Their lives as nuns appear to be rather formalistic. However, in the late Heian and early Kamakura periods people experienced a series of unexpected natural disasters, plagues, poverty, and political instability due to wars. This situation led to denial of this world and absolute reliance on Amida Buddha and the Pure Land. In the age of *mappō*, salvation on one's own is impossible, and complete devotion to the divine, *tarikī*, can save people in distress. The style of Buddhist exercise also changes in this period. As we have seen, *shukke* as a system met its limits in the Heian period, for priests and nuns at home still had to struggle with this-worldly issues such as finance and family relationships to some extent.

A new style of pursuing Buddhism, *tonsei*, emerged in the late Heian period. *Tonsei* originally referred to the same act as *shukke*, but came to include escaping not only from homes but from society as a whole. It can be said that the rise of *tonsei* derives from the millenarian condition of ultimate despair against this world. To enter the mountain and live a recluse's life became a kind of fashion in this transitional period (Mezaki, 1976). It is interesting to see a similar change in literature; while the writings of women in the court flourished during the mid-Heian period, the writings of the hermits emerged more in the Kamakura period. The most representative example of hermit literature in this period is Kamo no Chōmei's *Hōjōki* and Yoshida Kenkō's *Tsurezure gusa*. I will discuss *Hōjōki* since it explicitly deals with the millenarian intention and apocalyptic themes in Chōmei's intention to disturb and criticize the power of the status quo.

Hōjōki is an essay which is a mixture of social chronicle and personal testimony, written when Chōmei was in his late fifties. It has three parts. The first is Chōmei's observation on the series of calamities which overtook Kyoto at the end of the Heian period. The second is his commentary on the fragile and transient human condition. The last is about his reclusive life in the mountains. The reason why Chōmei chose to live a secluded life is partly outlined in part three, but his life and background information before he goes to the mountain helps to explain his intention in writing the work.

Chōmei was born in 1155, the second son of Kamo no Nagakatsu, who was a *shōnegi sōkan* (superintendent) of the Shimogamo Shrine in the northeastern Kyoto. Nagatsugu, as a high-ranking member of an important shrine in Kyoto, had considerable political influence and responsibilities. Chōmei's major interests from an early age were poetry and music, required talents for those who would take a position at the Kamo Shrines. However, his father died when Chōmei was nineteen years old, and Chōmei's uncle took over as *shōnegi*, depriving Chōmei of the chance to get a position at the Kamo Shrines. Instead, he established himself as an accomplished poet. He was able to publish his own collection of poetry by the age of thirty-two, and was a member of important poetry circles. In 1201, he was chosen as one of the members of *waka dokoro* (the office of poetry), and worked to promote the poetry for Former Emperor Gotoba (Yanase, 1971).

The crucial turning point took place in 1203. Former Emperor Gotoba, who wanted to reward Chōmei's efforts, advised him to take a *negi* position at Kawai Shrine, one of the branches of the Kamo Shrines. Experience as a *negi* at Kawai Shrine is a prerequisite to becoming a *shōnegi* at the Kamo Shrine. But Chōmei's cousin Sukekane, the *shōnegi* at Kamo Shrine at the time, opposed this plan since Sukekane regarded Chōmei as lacking experience as a priest. In addition, Sukekane insisted that a son of a *shōnegi* in the Kamo Shrine traditionally had been a *negi* at Kawai Shrine. Eventually, Sukekane's son Sukeyori became a *negi* of Kawai. Former Emperor Gotoba then tried to make a different arrangement to make Chōmei a *negi* by giving another branch shrine of the Kamo official status. Chōmei, however, declined this offer, resigned his job at *waka dokoro*, and took the tonsure. At fifty years old he went into the mountains and started to live in a hermitage (Marra, 1991). As such, Chōmei's life met a series of mishaps even though he became an established poet. His lifelong hope to return to his family occupation, which would give him stable status and financial advantage, was crushed by his powerful relatives. When Chōmei lost interest in his worldly career, he chose to go into seclusion not in the capital, but in the

mountains. His despair and powerlessness are well described in *Hōjōki*, and his observations, thoughts and lifestyle bear millenarian elements to counter the status quo.

Hōjōki begins with a famous passage describing the impermanence of human life. Chōmei particularly focuses on the theme of houses and those who live in them; vulnerability, instability, and transience. Then Chōmei goes on to show how the lives of houses and human beings are changeable, giving the five examples of a big fire, a great whirlwind, a sudden movement of the capital, a famine lasting two years, and a great earthquake. In the first example, Chōmei writes that a big fire indiscriminately destroyed one third of the capital, including some parts of the imperial palace, and dozens of people died. He says, “All man’s doings are senseless but spending his wealth and tormenting himself to build a house in this hazardous city is especially foolish” (Kamo, 1994, p. 38). For him, a house symbolizes status and materialism; people of high status make much effort to build a big mansion. However, a mansion means nothing in times of disaster; it is as helpless as an ordinary house in a fire. Chōmei criticizes such materialism for there is no guarantee that it will last. Attachment to status in this world may cause great agony.

Chōmei also refers to the great whirlwind that hit houses and people in the capital. This wind too damaged many houses regardless of their size, and people regardless of rank. He states that “It was all so freakish I thought it must be an omen” (Kamo, 1994, p. 40). This caution from the divine actualizes as a sudden relocation of the capital. The capital had been located in Kyoto for over four hundred years, and Chōmei believed that it should not be changed on a whim. However, Taira no Kiyomori, who held the ultimate political power at that time, suddenly transferred the capital from Kyoto to Fukuhara (present-day Kobe area), for he thought that Fukuhara would be easier to protect in battle. This relocation of the capital caused serious social anxiety. On one hand, the old capital looked desolate, for some houses were separated into pieces and taken to the new capital, while others were left behind and demolished. On the other hand, the new capital was not yet complete, and everything seemed to be changed for Chōmei:

When you looked around, those you might expect in carriages were now on horseback. Those you thought to see in court attire were in common dress. The style of the capital had suddenly changed. Former gentlemen now seemed mere provincial soldiers. All this was felt to be prelude to civil chaos. Sure enough, time passed and confusion, anguish filled the hearts of all (Kamo, 1994, pp. 43-44).

Noblemen no longer used carriages or wore the proper court attire. Chōmei saw a crisis in the cultural transition to the new capital; refined Heian aristocrats lost their elegance and looked like rustic warriors in the provinces. As we have seen, transitional periods often bring about a millenarian mood; the new power of the warrior class led the aristocrats to realize a loss of dominance. In this description, it is not the warriors who resemble the aristocrats, but it is the aristocrats who resemble the warriors. The change of manners was often regarded as an omen, and it accelerated anxiety. Chōmei explicitly criticized the warrior Kiyomori’s whim and misrule, contrasting it to the compassionate rules of wise emperors in the past.

Chōmei further uses two examples of miseries which he observed in a two-year long famine and a great earthquake. During the dreadful famine, all people, including well-dressed men in Kyoto, starved and begged. In the second year, plagues prevailed in Kyoto and many people died in the streets. Since tree cutters also starved and did not do their job, some people tore down their own houses and sold the materials in the street. Thieves broke into temples, tearing down the fittings of the halls and statues of Buddha and chopped up these precious things decorated with red and gold. Chōmei comments “Sinful times! That I should witness such a dreadful thing!” (Yanase, 1994, p. 109). The word *jokuakuse* (literary meaning “defiled evil world”) means the worsening condition in which disasters, crimes, attachments, poor Buddhist teachings, and short lives of people prevail in the world. This state is thought to become worse in the age of *mappō*. The idea of *mappō* and helplessness in such a time period is fully realized in Chōmei’s writing. It seemed no one would be saved in such a transient world. Even a warrior who belonged to the class ascending to the top of the power structure could not escape from the calamity of the earthquake.

Chōmei explains that status is never reliable. Regardless of social rank, all people suffer; the powerful are greedy, the single are mocked, the wealthy fear to lose, and the poor envy others. Then he questions whether we can find a place to rest our hearts even for a short while. Chōmei answers his question, explaining the way in which he has lived in his misery in the capital and the place where now he achieves tranquillity of mind. In the age of *mappō*, his social status and housing could not be relied on. The transition of political power from the aristocrats to the warriors gradually changed the norms in society, and Chōmei challenges the powerful to establish his new way of living.

Chōmei abandoned this world by going to the mountains, simply stating that he had a troubled mind in this

unkind world, and realized his hopeless luck. Ten years later, he built *hōjō-an* (a hut of ten feet by ten) in the Hino mountain, the smallest house he ever had. However, he was happy to live in this hut, and explained his life in detail. He decorated the hut with pictures of the Amida Buddha and Fugen, the Lotus Sutra, *wagon*, *biwa*, writings on poetry and music, and extracts from *Ōjōyōshū*. The transition of the seasons in the woods can be well observed. We find that his life in the hut, however, was not exclusively religious:

When in no mood for chanting nor caring to read sutras I can choose to rest. I can be lazy if I like, no one here to hinder me... In the morning when my heart is full of “the white-topped wake that flows astern” I look out at the boat plying round Okanoya and write, in the manner of Manshami. In the evening when the wind blows through the katsura tree and makes its leaves dance I think of the Jin-yo River and play, imitating Gentotoku (Kamo, 1994, pp. 64-65).

He spent his time chanting and training, but it was a life of enjoying interests (poetry and music) which are highly sophisticated. However, his refined interests did not presuppose an audience: they were solely for himself. Chōmei felt more content without judgment of the other, which would lead to comparison and the creation of a power relationship. Only the life of a recluse can achieve the ultimate essence of art.

Mezaki (1976) argues that Chōmei is the archetype of *suki mono*, a person who exclusively engages in literature or art. Chōmei himself defines *suki* in *Hosshinshū*: a person who does not like to socialize, does not lament over the downfall of status, feels sorrow in the flower that blooms and falls, and thinks over the moon that rises and sets. His heart is always clear, not tainted with the contamination of this world. This is what Chōmei argues against the powerful as a millenarian attempt; he lost the political battle in the capital and does not have any power at all in the life as a recluse. However, the aesthetics of his life as a *suki mono* becomes a discourse to counter the status quo for him, especially the rising warrior class.

Marra (1991) argues that the *suki* life of Chōmei is the heir to the counterideology in *Ise monogatari*, for both Chōmei and the compilers of *Ise* express their profound political dissatisfaction with the status quo. While Ariwara no Narihira represents the aesthetics of *miyabi* which stands opposite to the opportunistic Fujiwara hegemony, Chōmei represents *suki* aesthetics which further pursue *miyabi* aesthetics against the rustic warrior class. Narihira and Chōmei lose their political battles, and seclude themselves in the realm of aesthetics and forge their counter discourses. Marra explains the characteristics of the aestheticization of reclusion in Chōmei’s writing:

The conjunction of *mappō* with unfortunate politics upset the order of the capital. By building his tiny hut, Chōmei appears eager to restore the destroyed order, reestablishing the capital’s values within the context of a reclusive life. Within a mere ten-foot square he organizes all the elements of courtly aesthetics, placing them in the framework of a space made, as it were, of impermanence (Marra, 1991, p. 96).

Chōmei’s attempt to reestablish order to counterbalance the political and religious decline in the world lies in the traditional sophistication of the courtly interest which the rising warriors cannot fully understand or follow. As a *suki mono*, he gives himself to the practice of art, yet its purpose is not political. While the Fujiwara clan in the Heian period used literature and music as means of politics, Chōmei composes poems and plays musical instruments for his own sake. Art is, for Chōmei, a sphere of perfect freedom in which the artist can break all ties with the world.

His *suki* lifestyle relies more on *tariki* salvation rather than *jiriki* effort. Therefore, in the very last chapter of *Hōjōki*, he questions himself whether his manifesto of reclusion is truly the way to salvation, for he is not sure that he is not sinful in pursuing his artistic interests. Chōmei simply states he has no answer for this question, instead he chants the name of Amida Buddha a few times. In this world of *mappō*, Chōmei knows he cannot be saved by his own effort and practices. In the climax of his doubts whether he can justify what he does as a recluse, Chōmei ultimately leaves it to faith in the divine. With the help of *tariki* faith, which does not rely on one’s effort, Chōmei successfully presents his counterideology as a *suki* recluse who pursues courtly and traditional sophistication. He looks totally powerless compared to the rising warrior class and those who denied him succession of the Kamo Shrine. However, through his millenarian attempt at reclusion, he is able to establish his own *suki* discourse to empower himself and to obtain the peace of mind in this world.

4. Conclusion

We have seen several examples of millenarian attempts in premodern Japanese literature, particularly from the late Heian and the early Kamakura period. In the Heian period, the *shukke* custom functioned to give the powerless a voice and to change the power relationship especially between men and women; by *shukke*, female aristocrats successfully disturb their relationship with suitors and husbands, and express their strong will of

denial toward them. They can avoid troubles and live with hope for the Pure Land. However, these attempts we find in *Genji monogatari* depend on the social status of the female aristocrats: the higher their status, the more successful the *shukke* attempt. People still needed to rely on *jiriki*, their efforts and their environments in attaining power and the perfect goal of salvation.

In the late Heian and early Kamakura periods, society met the drastic change in politics and unfortunate calamities of natural disasters. The idea of *mappō* which had been diffused since the late Heian period was taken more seriously. In such a changeable society, people started to think that efforts to attain enlightenment were not effective enough, and some Buddhist leaders advocated absolute devotion to Amida Buddha rather than personal efforts in order to be redeemed. This *tarikū* discourse was born in when people fully realized helplessness and powerlessness in the impermanence of this world. Kamo no Chōmei's recluse life in the ten-foot square hut comes from the *tarikū* discourse, for Chōmei placed more importance on his faith in Amidism than on austere practices. Though he had lost political battles in the capital and became a recluse without many belongings, his *suki* lifestyle empowers him against the powerful, especially the rising warrior class. Chōmei implicitly and explicitly criticizes the rising warriors for causing confusion in society, the degeneration of courtly culture and poor policy in case of disaster. Then he presents the counterideology of the *suki* lifestyle which reestablishes the tradition of the Heian courtly culture which the warriors cannot fully appreciate. Besides, his solitary life without wealth can avoid social confusion and the emotional distress of the loss of property in times of calamity, and offer him a peace of mind. Chōmei's millenarian attempt is successful for he becomes the archetype of *suki mono* in this period.

As seen above, millenarism as an attempt to change the power relationship and to regain a new identity is not unusual in premodern Japanese culture. Millenarism is understood as a universal phenomenon for it is for anyone who loses all hope but the divine intervention. Premodern Japan had already developed its centralized political system since the Nara period, and the ruling class stabilized the roles and status of each individual. Accordingly, it was very difficult for people who suffered from their social situations to escape from the hardships or to change their circumstances. However, there was one exception of taking a religious vow. Through this millenarian attempt, some were able to escape from the bondage, unexpected relationships, and sometimes to win the autonomy by religious insurgence. Thus, millenarism offers the last and ultimate hope to people who cannot even have a slightest hope in their future. The justification and empowerment by the divine in the millenarian discourse have given the powerless the courage to venture their life to obtain the dignity as human beings in the premodern periods when one could have little autonomy of the individual.

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