

## The Cinderella Tales of Niigata

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### Introduction

For a number of years I have used folktales in my English language classes at the university level because they offer an approachable way of reinforcing all language skills in a medium that most students find interesting. In the process of examining and evaluating various folktales, students also learn to consider the differences among tales from their own culture in comparison to tales from other countries. Using folktales in the language class can also help students acquire academic skills related to critical thinking—skills such as learning to make inferences, summarising and analyzing. While folktales, of course, can be studied as a form of literature, they can also be examined from an interdisciplinary context to introduce topics related to history, religious beliefs, sociology as well as anthropology.

Some time ago, while preparing for a seminar where students were comparing the Cinderella type stories from various countries, I was reading *Cinderella: A Casebook* (1988) edited by Alan Dundes. In the essay written in 1969 by Archer Taylor, I was intrigued by the following statement:

The most important recent event in the study of the Cinderella cycles is the appearance in print of Kenichi Mizusawa, *Echigo no Shinderera* (Cinderella in Echigo), Sanjo-shi, Niigata, 1964, pp.17—720. Unfortunately, it is now out of print and altogether unobtainable. ... In this book, he has published the seventy five versions of Type 510A and nineteen versions of Type 510B that he found in the prefecture of Echigo (now called Niigata). This is clearly a work comparable in its extent and nature to Miss Cox's Cinderella, although more limited in its range.<sup>1</sup>

Some years earlier I had also been surprised by a misleading statement made by Donald Richie in his column in *The Japan Times*. In his review of

Fanny Hagin Mayer's *Ancient Tales in Modern Japan: An Anthology of Japanese Folktales* <sup>2</sup> Richie says,

We find no Cinderella-type stories where something nice happens to a girl or woman. Boys and men, yes. Also, while there are many stories about brothers, there are few about sisters. Just what one would expect (sic) in an officially male-oriented society where male-bonding is an accepted social norm. <sup>3</sup>

Clearly, Richie had not read this anthology very carefully. In Part One, Chapter 4 of Mayer's *Ancient Tales in Modern Japan*, there are a number of tales about sisters, and in nearly all of them, good fortune comes to the stepsister who had been abused – very much like the classic story of Cinderella.

When Mizusawa Kenichi's *Echigo no Shinderera* was published, it was reviewed briefly by Fanny Hagin Mayer, former Professor of English at Sophia University, in a 1965 issue of *Asian Folklore Studies*.<sup>4</sup> However, there seems to be very little else of Mizusawa's remarkable work translated into English. Scholars of folktales in the West apparently know very little about this collection of 94 Cinderella tales from the Echigo region (today's Niigata Prefecture) which was so carefully and systematically collected, then transcribed by Mizusawa Kenichi nearly forty years ago.

Although Archer Taylor describes *Echigo no Shinderera* as being “altogether unobtainable” I was fortunate enough to find the book in several local libraries. In this paper I hope to introduce Mizusawa's work to those who are not able to read his original anthology in Japanese. This paper will include two sections. The first will be an overview of the tales and an explanation of Mizusawa's interpretation and analysis of the tales. In this section I will include some comments comparing these Japanese tales with tales of this type most familiar in the West. I hope also to offer suggestions to the questions raised by Fanny Hagin Mayer in her review of this anthology. The second section will include translations of two representative tales from Mizusawa's anthology.

### **Part One: The Cinderella Folktales of Echigo**

Joseph Campbell, the mythologist has stated that:

*Fairy tales are told for entertainment. You've got to distinguish between the myths that have to do with the serious matter of living life in terms of the order of society and of nature, and stories with some of those same motifs that are told for entertainment. But even though there's a happy ending for most fairy tales, on the way to the happy ending, typical mythological motifs occur—for example, the motif of being in deep trouble and then hearing a voice or having somebody come to help you out.*<sup>5</sup>

It may be important, at the outset, to clarify the term “folktale”. The folktale is generally defined as the narrative literature of the common people, or folk. However, a precise definition of the folktale is somewhat difficult, because in many ways folktales may include forms similar to legends, fairy tales, fables and myths, and, as in the above quotation, the word “fairy tale” is often used synonymously with the term “folktale.” The origins of many well-known fairy tales are folktales, but when written down and labelled “fairy tale”, they are generally thought of as children's stories. In Japan, the folktale is generally referred to as *mukashi banashi*, a tale of long ago, which distinguishes it from the *densetsu*, a legend, which is believed to be a story about an extraordinary event that actually happened at a particular time and place.

The folktale is handed down orally from one generation to another, and in this process, key elements of the tale may be preserved, while other parts are changed, omitted or embellished. Thus the folktale is an organic, ever changing entity, containing elements from tales of the past but also taking on elements from the culture of the day. Another important feature of folktales, as Joseph Campbell mentions, is that while they were primarily a means of entertainment for illiterate common folk, the tales often include a deeper meaning or instructional message for the listeners.

Mizusawa Kenichi (1911–1996) was a dedicated folktale collector and folklore scholar of Niigata Prefecture. During his life he published numerous folktale anthologies with a focus on the tales of the old Echigo region. Born and raised in Joganji, a small village east of Nagaoka City, he grew up hearing folk tales from his parents and others who visited his home. As

Mizusawa became involved in folklore research, he was strongly influenced by the fieldwork approach to folktale collecting which was advocated by the pioneer folklore scholar, Yanagida Kunio.<sup>6</sup> Mizusawa's interest in folktales was intensified by his belief that these tales were an important basis for the understanding of the folk ways and traditions of the common people, as well as a means for providing insights into of folk religion and beliefs.

Mizusawa Kenichi was by profession a school teacher and principal in various Niigata schools. However, making use of weekends and summer holidays, he was able to pursue his passionate interest in collecting folktales of the Echigo region—a region that, because of its long gloomy winters, with villages deep in snow, as well as its geographical isolation from other areas of Japan—was a veritable treasure house of folktales that had lingered over generations. These folktales had remained relatively unchanged by contact with tales from other regions. Mizusawa travelled to remote villages deep in the mountains, farming hamlets, and seaside ports throughout Niigata, searching for *kataribe*, or storytellers, some of whom could narrate dozens of different stories. Most of these *kataribe* were elderly women, in their 70's, 80's and 90's. Mizusawa was acutely aware that story telling was a dying art, and if these tales were not collected and recorded, they would be forever lost.

Mizusawa was familiar with the work of Marian R. Cox who, in 1893, traced a world-wide distribution of 345 Cinderella-type tales. One of the tales included in her work was one tale from Japan, "Hachikatsugi".<sup>7</sup> By the time Mizusawa began his work on the Cinderella tales of Niigata, various scholars had collected and recorded numerous variants of the Cinderella tale from regions all over Japan.<sup>8</sup>

*Echigo no Shinderera*, just one of Mizusawa's folktale anthologies, is a collection of the nearly 100 Cinderella type stories collected in Niigata. As a point of reference, Cinderella tales are categorized as type 510A and 510B in Aarne-Thompson's type and motif index; Hiroko Ikeda, in *A Type and Motif Index of Japanese, 1971*, also follows the Aarne-Thompson system. In Yanagita Kunio's *Nihon mukashibanashi meii*, the Cinderella-type story is tale number 34.<sup>9</sup> According to Mizusawa, his anthology was the first time for one type of tale, 510A and 510B, to be collected systematically from a single region.<sup>10</sup>

In order to verify the authenticity of the tales and retain characteristics of the local dialect, Mizusawa felt that he had to go himself to the remote regions and record the tales from the many *kataribe*. He wanted to trace the distribution of the tales, the regional varieties of the tales and to get some sense of the diffusion of the tales — or how the tales were passed on from one generation to the next, one area to another. He also felt it important to learn about the folktale narrators themselves and to consider the possible meaning of these Cinderella-type tales.

*Echigo no Shinderera* has four sections. In the introduction Mizusawa defines the characteristics of the folktale and explains the importance he finds in the gathering of the tales. The second section consists of the 94 tales arranged by region. This section includes the two general types of Cinderella tales, “Nukabuku, Komebuku” (the names of the stepsisters in tale type 510A) and “Uba-kawa” ( “the old woman’s skin” in tale type 510B). The third section is a summary and an analysis of the tales. In the final section Mizusawa introduces the common beginning and ending formulaic phrases used by story tellers when they narrate the tales in the regional dialects of Niigata. In this paper I would like to discuss some of the main points of Mizusawa’s analysis of these tales in the third section of his anthology. Due to limitations of space, this paper will limit its discussion to the “Nukabuku, Komebuku” tales.

### Collecting the Tales

As mentioned earlier, these tales were gathered over a period of 10 years, from 1955 to 1965. Of the 94 tales, 34 of the total were gathered in 1959.<sup>11</sup> Mizusawa discusses some of the difficulties in finding regions where he hoped to encounter the old story tellers. He would pour over maps, seeking out isolated mountain and farming villages, and before heading off to a specific location, would try to make inquiries in advance. Often, teachers in the local primary schools could direct him to one *kataribe*, storyteller, and then that *kataribe* would introduce him to another. In collecting the tale, Mizusawa always made note of the place, name and age of the narrator. When writing the tales down, he also took pains to retain the features of the local dialect and, where necessary — in the published tale collections — would include the standard equivalent of the language in

parenthesis next to the local expressions.

During these ten years, Mizusawa travelled the length of Niigata visiting areas in Joetsu, Chuetsu and Kaetsu. Most of the tales come from the Chuetsu region, which was the area where Mizusawa lived. Of the 75 "Nukabuku, Komebuku" tales, 67 of them were narrated by women; most of these women were in their 70's and 80's. Interestingly enough, while the older narrators were unfamiliar with the European Cinderella tale, 15 of the younger narrators, those in their 20's to 50's, seemed to be aware that the "Nukabuku, Komebuku" tale was very similar to the European tale of Cinderella.<sup>12</sup>

When collecting the tales Mizusawa also wanted to learn about the diffusion process of the tales. Where, when and from whom did the narrator first hear the tale? In most cases the narrator heard the story from her grandmother or mother. Typically, when a woman married into the household of her husband's family she took her repertoire of narrative folktales with her; these tales were then told to her children and this process was repeated over generations. In several cases, Mizusawa found different versions of the same tale within one household.<sup>13</sup> With the passage of time, the tale moved from one household to another and one village to the next—a pattern very similar to the diffusion process of folktales world wide.

Other far fewer sources of the tale were the travelling tradesmen and peddlers who travelled around the region and told tales in the different inns or households where they stayed. In some of the tales these peddlers and tradesmen put themselves into the tale as one of the story characters.<sup>14</sup> In this way, as in most folktales elsewhere, the tale was spread from region to region and, over time, the tale changed with the interests of the narrators and the different groups of listeners.

### **The Nukafuku , Komefuku Tales**

A general outline of the 75 "Nukabuku, Komebuku" tales in *Echigo no Shinderera* is as follows:

1. There is a family of a father, mother and daughter. The mother dies and the father remarries. Another daughter is born to the new wife. The elder daughter of the first wife is abused.
2. The two stepsisters are sent to the mountains to gather chestnuts in sacks.

- The younger sister goes home ahead because her sack is full.
3. The elder sister cannot fill her sack because the stepmother has given her a sack full of holes. The elder sister is assisted by someone and given a magical object. She returns home.
  4. The stepmother and her child, the younger daughter, go to a festival or a play.
  5. The elder daughter must stay home to do tasks, but she is helped by friends (and others) and is able to finish her chores quickly.
  6. The elder daughter uses the magical object to dress herself beautifully and then goes off to the festival or play.
  7. At the festival or play she is noticed by a young man who later visits the home to take her as his bride.
  8. A “test” is given the two girls and the elder sister is chosen. She marries the young man.
  9. The stepmother and younger sister are punished.

### **The Meaning of the Stepsister's Names**

In the Echigo region the step sisters have variations of the following names: Nukafuku and Komefuku, Awafuku and Komefuku, and Benizara and Kakezara. *Nuka* means rice bran, *awa* means rice millet and *kome* means uncooked white rice. There are 40 tales with sisters named with variations of Awafuku and Komefuku, 31 tales with sisters named with variations of Nukafuku and Komefuku, and only four tales where the sister's names are variations of Benizara and Kakezara (crimson dish and cracked dish). Since Niigata is a major rice growing region it seems appropriate that in the Echigo tales the names related to rice are more predominant.

In these Echigo Cinderella tales, it is always the elder sister, the daughter of the first wife, who is abused. In some of the tales this daughter sleeps in the *nuka* or the *awa* very much the way Cinderella, in some of the European tales, sleeps in cinders or ashes. Although there are a few exceptions, in most of these tales the elder sister's name is a variation of Nuka or Awa while the younger sister is named a variation of Kome.

There is another explanation for the origin of the stepsisters' names. In Echigo the words related to rice—rice bran, rice millet and white rice—were closely associated with good fortune and blessings from the gods. When a

child was born, offerings of rice products were given to the *ubugami*, the god or goddess of birth, as a means of granting that child future happiness and prosperity. According to Mizusawa, during the Meiji Era, and before, the names Nuka and Kome were popular names for girls, particularly among the farming folk.<sup>15</sup> The character for *fuku* also means good fortune, thus combining *kome* and *nuka* with the word *fuku* was a name intended to bring happiness and prosperity to the child. In other variations of the stepsisters names, instead of the word *fuku*, the ending of the names is *fukuro*, which means sack or bag. Thus Nukabukuro means “sack of bran” and Komebukuro means “sack of rice.”

### The Story

In these tales, the mother of the heroine dies while the daughter is very young. The father then remarries and a younger daughter is born to the father and his second wife. In nearly all of the tales we are not told much about the father's occupation, nor does he appear again in the story.

In the Echigo Cinderella tales both sisters are sent off at the beginning of the tale to go out in the mountains and gather nuts. This seems to indicate that they are from a farming, or common family, and both are expected to do this customary seasonal task. This is an interesting contrast to the well known European tales, of Perrault and Grimm, where only Cinderella is banished from the family and given tedious tasks to do.

Another interesting contrast to the European Cinderella stories is that the conflict, which is between a young girl and the stepmother and two stepsisters, is closely related to the heroine's legacy. In the European tales, the Cinderella character has been deprived of her rights in the home of a noble or a wealthy family; her objective in the story, in addition to marrying happily, is to regain her position in her family and in social status.<sup>16</sup> In the Echigo “Nukabuku, Komebuku” tales, this is not one of the elements in the story. The young girl is from a common family, and with luck as well as fortitude, improves her position in life by marrying someone from a higher status than herself. She is not reclaiming a social status or family legacy of which she has been deprived.

In the Echigo tales, after the younger sister returns home with her sack full of nuts, the elder girl is left in the mountains and given assistance by



some magical being. This assistance comes from the spirit of the girl's dead mother (in 24 tales) a *yamauba*, or old mountain woman (in 27 tales), an ogress (in six tales) a *Jizou*, a guardian deity of children (in five tales), a weasel (in three tales), a crow (in three tales), an old midwife (in one tale) a monk (in one tale) and an old man (in one tale).<sup>17</sup> In many of the tales the elder sister spends the night with the old woman or other helper and is asked to remove lice, snakes and other gruesome things from the old woman's head.

This old woman or other helper gives the girl a magic object of some sort. In the Echigo tales this object is most often a magical mallet, a small treasure box, or a magic sack. These magical objects help bring about the eventual marriage of the elder sister because they have the power to grant her every wish.

A few days after the elder sister returns home, the step mother and sister set off for some public event, leaving the elder girl at home to mind the house and do various household tasks. In 32 of these tales, this event is a *matsuri*, a festival; in 23 of the tales it is a play. In some cases the exact place and name of the festival or play are stated in the tale. In the Cinderella-type tales collected elsewhere in Japan, there are two ways in which the household tasks are assigned; in one, both girls are assigned the tasks and whoever finishes most quickly is taken to the event, while in the other version, only the elder sister is given the tasks to do. According to Mizusawa, in the Echigo tales only the latter example is evident.<sup>18</sup>

The tasks assigned are chores such as pounding rice millet, firing up the bath, grinding something in the stone mill, preparing dinner, scouring the blackened pans, and other typical household tasks. In many of the Echigo tales, the elder sister, who is left at home, is given assistance, once again, in accomplishing these chores. In most of the tales her friends in the village come by to help her. In a few of the variants she is assisted by sparrows, a nun, her dead mother, a neighbouring woman, or a *Jizou* who is a guardian deity of children.

Upon completing her assigned tasks, the elder sister dresses herself in the finery provided by the magic object given to her by the helper in the mountains. Then she goes off to the festival—or play—where she is noticed by a young man. This young man is usually the son of a rich man, a

nobleman, or the son of an official. In many of the tales, the younger stepsister also notices the presence of the fine young girl at the event, who reminds her of her elder sister. In some of the tales, while at this event, the elder sister shares cakes or sweets with her unknowing stepsister. Curiously, in other tales, the heroine throws objects, such as sweets or fruit peelings, at her younger sister. In some tales, when the younger sister recognises her stepsister and mentions this to her mother, the mother strongly denies it. Later, when the suitor comes asking to marry the girl who was at the festival, the mother insists that only the younger sister was at the event. At this point, the elder sister, who had meekly obeyed her stepmother in the early part of the tale, becomes more proactive. Her resolve and assertive behaviour at this point in the story lead to her eventual marriage.<sup>19</sup>

As a point of comparison, it is interesting to note that in this respect the Cinderella in the Echigo tales is more similar to the Cinderella character in Grimm's version of the tale than Perrault's. In the Grimm version of the tale, when Cinderella is given impossible tasks to do and denied permission to go to the ball until the tasks are done, she herself calls on pigeons and turtle doves to help her with the tasks. And then, when her stepsisters have gone off to the ball without her, she goes to the hazel tree planted at her mother's grave and calls to the bird there to provide her with the garments necessary for the ball.<sup>20</sup> In Perrault's version of the tale, Cinderella weeps after her stepsisters go off to the ball, and while she sits crying pitifully, her godmother appears and magically provides the carriage, horses, footmen, gown and the glass slippers — which, incidentally, were first introduced by Perrault in his version of Cinderella.<sup>21</sup>

In most of the Echigo tales, the young man himself comes to find the fetching young woman he saw at the festival. In other variants it is the father of the young man or a match maker. When the mother insists that the girl at the event was her younger daughter, a test is given to determine which of the girls would become the young man's bride. In the Echigo tales there are 11 different tests, or combination of tests. Some of the tests involve the young man simply comparing the two sisters; in other tales the two girls are required to move a branch without disturbing the sparrows perched on it. In a majority of the tales the test includes a poetry competition.<sup>22</sup>

This poetry competition is a fascinating element of the Echigo Cinderella

tales, particularly in contrast to the familiar “shoe test” which is common in most of the European tales of this type. In only one of the tales in this anthology of tales from Niigata, is there a “shoe test”. The fact that a young girl, who apparently comes from a common farming family, is able to recite poetry is curious and would be an interesting point to investigate further.

Nevertheless, the scatological poem recited by the younger sister was undoubtedly uproariously funny to the listeners long ago, who gathered around the hearth listening to the entertaining tales of the storyteller. Fanny Hagin Mayer has noted that love of humour is a significant characteristic of the Japanese folktale, and the common folk of Japan did not shy away from bawdy, crude topics in their simple tales. Early translators of Japanese folktales in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as W. E. Griffis and A. B. Mitford, may have avoided translating tales of this type, or may have altered the stories because of the prevailing Victorian sensibilities of the day.<sup>23</sup>

In the Echigo tales the suitor naturally chooses the elder sister whose poem is far more elegant, and they live happily ever after. For their cruelty and spitefulness, the stepmother and younger sister are punished in a variety of different ways. In 27 of the tales the younger sister is killed or injured, either by falling in a well, being crushed under a mortar, being thrown into a river or over a cliff, or in other, rather violent, manner. Strangely enough, in most cases, the stepmother, who seems far more malevolent than the younger sister, is involved in the punishment of her own daughter. In other versions of the tales, the younger sister is turned into a pond snail or a frog. In many of the tales nothing is mentioned of the stepmother's fate, though in some cases she is also killed, thrown into a well, over a cliff, or becomes a beggar.

As a point of contrast, in the Grimm's Cinderella tale the two spiteful stepsisters are punished by having their eyes pecked out by pigeons on the way to and from Cinderella's wedding ceremony at the church.<sup>24</sup> In Perrault's version, the sweet and gentle Cinderella forgives her sisters, begs them to love her in the future, and then out of the goodness of her heart, proceeds to arrange marriages for them with great noblemen of the court. Perrault concludes his tale with two morals directed to virtuous young women of his day.<sup>25</sup>

### Interpretation of the Tales

In the summary section of *Echigo no Shinderera* Mizusawa suggests that these tales are symbolic of certain rites of passage for young women: that they represent the stages and tests a young woman must experience in preparation for marriage. In other words, they symbolize the transition from childhood to adulthood. Being banished from the house may be symbolic of women being confined to the *taya*, a separate shed, during menstruation and childbirth. Mizusawa acknowledges that his interpretation, in this regard, is similar to the explanation introduced by Seki Keigo.<sup>26</sup>

Joseph Cambell has also explained this rite of passage in the following way:

The rituals and primitive initiation ceremonies are all mythologically grounded and have to do with killing the infantile ego and bringing forth an adult, whether it's the girl or the boy. It's harder for the boy than for the girl, because life overtakes the girl. She becomes a woman whether she intends it or not, but the little boy has to intend to be a man. At the first menstruation, the girl is a woman. The next thing she knows, she's pregnant, she's a mother."<sup>27</sup>

In the "Nukabuku, Komebuku" tales the two sisters are sent to the mountains; in many of the tales the elder sister remains in the mountains, staying overnight in a hut with the mountain woman or ogress. This hut, according to Mizusawa, may be a representation of the *taya*, and the mountain woman perhaps represents a midwife or other wise woman who assists the young girl in her transition to adulthood. In Japan, until fairly recently, it was common practice for a woman to be secluded in a separate shed during menstruation and childbirth. This custom was particularly prevalent in communities along the western seacoasts of Japan.<sup>28</sup> Even in modern Japan, instead of staying with their husbands, it is customary for women to return to their family homes for the period of time before and after a child is born.

According to folklore scholars, this kind of seclusion at these stages in a girl's life is a common feature throughout the world. It is related to peculiar practices and taboos associated with the mysterious shedding of blood during menstruation and childbirth. Folklore scholars have suggested several

explanations for these taboos: the woman's desire for privacy during these times; the importance of being attended by a female midwife at the time of birth; to protect other family members, especially men, from the dangerous powers of the life force; and, perhaps most importantly in relation to the Japanese context, to protect others from the impurity and contamination by the blood related to childbirth and menstruation.<sup>29</sup> In order to avoid her own mother's fate, it may be that the lessons here, for the Cinderella of Echigo, are that is essential to follow the traditional practice of going away from the home, as well as patiently obeying the difficult demands of her stepmother. Her completion of these important duties is connected to her own future happiness, and long, prosperous life.

Other aspects of this tale may also indicate that this is a story of "rite of passage." The gathering of chestnuts in old Japan was not a just a casual leisure activity; in the autumn, chestnuts, cooked with rice or made into sweet cakes, were an important part of the diet of common people. Going into the mountains, gathering chestnuts and then peeling away the tough inner shell so they could be eaten, was a time consuming, but necessary task for women among the "folk."

The motif of chestnuts may also have a deeper meaning. Folklore scholars have noted that chestnuts are believed to have curative powers. In some countries they were thought to be a charm against backache or considered good for the blood.<sup>30</sup> Other scholars have suggested that nuts, like grain, are mysterious to humans because they are a food and as well as a seed. Nuts also seem to represent the power of fertility because a large tree can grow from a small seed. In many countries nuts are symbols of marriage, birth and motherhood.<sup>31</sup>

All of the tasks assigned to the stepdaughter, such as spinning, pounding the *mochi*, glutinous rice cakes, washing clothes, and preparing the bath, are examples of the customary and essential skills in the daily lives of farming women. Even the removing of lice from the old woman's head, which appears in 16 of the tales, represents the fact that in the past, mothers often were required to remove the lice from their children's heads.<sup>32</sup> For a girl of the common folk, it was necessary to demonstrate that she was capable of accomplishing these tasks before she was qualified for the next stage of life — marriage and motherhood.

In her 1965 review of *Echigo no Shinderera*, Fanny Hagin Mayer concludes with the following questions which she felt should be addressed in regards to Mizusawa's anthology of Cinderella tales. "Why is the Nukabuku, Komebuku" tale an autumn story, why the festival as the setting for matchmaking, and why does the succour come in the mountains?"<sup>33</sup>

The fact that it is an autumn story perhaps can be explained because the time for gathering chestnuts was the autumn, and as mentioned above, chestnuts were an important part of the diet for the common people. The symbolism of the chestnuts as a element in the story, also mentioned earlier, may be a consideration as well. Additionally, since seasonal references are a common characteristic in so many aspects of Japanese life, mentioning the season when a story takes place seems a very natural feature of folktales from Japan.

The reason for occasion of the festival or play being the setting for matchmaking may also be quite understandable. For the common folk, who are usually the main characters in folktales, the local temple or shrine festivals were one of the social events that would normally be attended by the common farming folk. It was an exciting event, familiar to everyone from all levels of society. In his analysis of the Echigo tales, Mizusawa indicates that the festival or play where the abused stepsister makes her grand appearance dressed in beautiful kimono, may also represent the coming of age ceremony or, the marriage ceremony itself.<sup>34</sup>

As for the question raised by Professor Mayer, of why the succour, or assistance, comes in the mountains, again there may be several explanations. One aspect of Japanese folk religion is mountain belief, *sangaku shinkou*. The mountains—the sources of streams so vital to rice cultivation—were revered as the dwelling place of the gods, *kami*. The gods of the rice field and mountain were often interchangeable, with the gods coming down from the mountains to the rice paddies in early spring, and then returning to the mountains in the fall.<sup>35</sup> The mountains were also considered to be a place where the souls of the dead reside, so mountains were thought to be the meeting ground where those left in this world could have contact with the souls of those departed.<sup>36</sup> This would explain why, in many of Echigo Cinderella tales, the heroine meets the spirit of her dead mother in the mountains.

Moreover, in Japan the mountains were the places where ascetics retreated to gain magical powers or spiritual enlightenment.<sup>37</sup> In this folktale, the Cinderella of Echigo certainly gains spiritual strength, as well as magical powers with the object given her by the mysterious being in the mountains. The *yamauba*, mountain woman, was also originally considered to be a mountain deity and frequently appears as an amusing, aged hag in Japanese folktales.<sup>38</sup>

There are many other curious events and mysterious motifs in the tale which are difficult to explain and understand. While it is fascinating to think about the possible interpretations and symbolic meanings of this story of the abused daughter, I believe it is important to refrain from being too reductionistic in the reading of these tales. Despite the many imaginable explanations, probably the message most clearly understood by those who heard this tale long ago was simply the lesson of the importance of loving and caring family relationships, regardless of the presence of a blood connection between parent and child. No one sympathised with the wicked stepmother who showed no love toward her stepdaughter. The stepmother and stepsister are punished because of their cruelty and unfair treatment of the tale's heroine. The tale also stresses the importance of courage, kindness, diligence and correct behaviour, which gives a young girl important wisdom about what is expected of her as a woman as she moves on to the next stage of her life.

### **Conclusion to Part One**

The Cinderella story is undoubtedly one of the best known fairy stories in the world. Hundreds of variations of the tale from all parts of the world have been collected and interpreted in countless different ways. Folktale scholars agree that the earliest tale of this type was first written in China in the mid 9<sup>th</sup> century, while the versions of Charles Perrault and the Grimm brothers are those included in most fairy tale collections. Sadly, Disney's version of Cinderella, an adaptation of Perrault's tale, is the story most popular with and familiar to young people everywhere. Many are totally unaware that there are many, much older and remarkable versions of this "rags to riches" tale.

While Disney's animated version, which came out in 1950, may have its

own appeal, the dreamy, sweet and lovely Cinderella of the film — with tiny, tiny feet — who sings her wishful songs, and is helped by her cute little animal friends and the jolly fairy godmother, has very little in common with Echigo's Nukabuku, the Cinderella of Niigata. The heroine in the Echigo tales comes across as a “down to earth” young woman. She has pluck and courage. She is not squeamish, and she is supported not only by the magical being but also by her village playmates, which demonstrates the importance of the bonds of friendship. This is contrary to what Ritchie claimed as being evident mostly among men in Japanese folktales. The Echigo Cinderella is a more hardy and assertive character; she must prove herself by accomplishing tasks, as well as by reciting poetry. In the majority of the tales she is not “tested” just by her beauty and dainty feet. She is, all in all, a much more realistic and believable character than the Disney Cinderella. It is interesting to note that these Echigo tales were collected long before feminist writers, in the 1970s, began to re-examine the passive role of Cinderella portrayed in the most familiar, and more recent, tales of this type.<sup>39</sup>

Many Japanese folktales are well-known to Westerners: *Momotaro*, “Peach Boy,” *Urashima-taro*, *Issun Boshi*, the Japanese “Tom Thumb,” *Shitakiri-suzume*, “The Tongue-cut Sparrow,” *Kobutori-jiisan*, “The Wen Removed,” *Kasa Jizou*, “Sedge-hats for the Jizou,” and others. It is unfortunate the Japanese Cinderella stories are not so widely known; in *Echigo no Shinderera*, Mizusawa Kenichi has provided us with many fascinating variants of this tale for further study and comparison to similar tales from other cultures.

Mizusawa Kenichi's *Echigo no Shinderera* is truly a valuable contribution to the study of Cinderella tales. His long dedication to collecting these tales, and his evident ability to listen, again and again, to the tales told — in heavy dialect — by the aged story tellers, are a testament to his patience and commitment to preserving the old tales of the Niigata region. In his careful transcription of the tales, the stories seem almost raw; while reading the tales one can almost “hear” the voices and characteristics unique to each *kataribe*, storyteller. In this collection it is apparent that Mizusawa did not alter the tales or try to impose his own interpretations. The 94 tales are collected in this volume with all their roughness and rustic charm.



## Part Two: Translation of two tales

In an earlier publication (*Bulletin of Keiwa College*, No. 7, 1998, pp. 149 – 153 ) I translated one of the Cinderella tales collected by Mizusawa. That tale, discovered by Mizusawa some time after the publication of *Echigo no Shinderera*, includes the “shoe test,” which is rare in the Niigata tales . For this paper I have selected and translated two tales from *Ehigo no Shinderera*. It was difficult to make the selection because each of the tales is unique and worthy of attention. I have included the opening and ending phrases that were used by the Niigata *kataribe*. These phrases, in the local dialect, were a way of alerting listeners that a tale was about to begin, and then letting the listeners know that the tale had come to a end.

### NUKABUKURO, KOMBUKURO

*Mukashi mukashi attande.* (Long, long ago ...)

Long ago there lived a man and his wife. They had one daughter named Nukabukuro. The mother died of illness and the man took a second wife. A daughter was born to them and she was named Komebukuro.

One autumn day, the mother said, “I want you two girls to go to the mountains to gather chestnuts. I’ll give each of you a sack to fill.” To Nukabukuro she gave a sack with holes in the bottom. To Komebukuro she gave a strong, sturdy sack.

The two went up into the mountains and began to gather chestnuts. No matter how many chestnuts Nukabukuro gathered, her sack never filled up. Komebukuro's sack was full right away. After a while they decided to stop for lunch, and they rested beside a pond in the mountains. The two threw their lunch *dango* (dumplings) into the pond. Nukabukuro's *dango*, which were made of *nuka* (rice bran) floated on the water, while Komebukuro's *dango*, made of rice, sank.

After that, the two continued gathering chestnuts. Still, Nukabukuro's sack would not fill up. Komebukuro's sack was full, so she said, “I’m going back home, because my sack is full.”

Nukabukuro said, “I can’t go home. My sack is still empty.”

“Well, I’m going to go on ahead, then,” said Komebukuro, and off she went.

No matter how many chestnuts she gathered, Nukabukuro's sack was

empty. She sat down by the pond, crying. Then her dead mother appeared and said, "Nukabukuro, why are you here, in such a place?" Nukabukuro explained everything to her.

"Ah—that's a pity," said her mother. And then she tied up the bottom of Nukabukuro's sack for her. I'm going to give you this magic mallet. It will give you anything you wish for."

Nukabukuro was delighted to have the mallet and she said "Come out chestnuts! Chestnuts come out!" Piles of chestnuts came pouring out. She put them in her sack and went home. When she got home, she called out, "Mother, I'm home!"

Her stepmother answered, "Komebukuro came back a long time ago with her sack full of chestnuts. You are really late—your sack better be full of chestnuts."

"Oh yes, I've brought back chestnuts."

"Then dump them out on this mat."

The chestnuts on the mat were so plump and big, the stepmother was surprised.

Some time later, it was the day of the village festival. The stepmother took her own daughter, Komebukuro, but told Nukabukuro to stay home and mind the house. She gave her a lot of chores to do as well. Then the stepmother and Komebukuro went off to the festival.

As Nukabukuro was doing all the chores, her friends came by and said, "Let's go to the festival."

"I can't go. I've got to wash these clothes, hang them out to dry and do a lot of other chores as well," replied Nukabukuro.

"Well then, we'll help you." And working together they quickly got all the chores done.

Nukabukuro got out her magic mallet and called out. "Come out, fine kimono! Come out, fine sash! Come out, fine hair ornaments!" and all these things came tumbling out. Nukabukuro dressed herself in all these pretty things and went to the festival. She looked lovely indeed.

At the festival Komebukuro noticed her and said to her mother, "I think our Nukabukuro is here at the festival."

Her mother said, "That's impossible. Nukabukuro doesn't have a fine kimono or anything like that. She's still at home, I'm sure."

Then a nobleman saw Nukabukuro and thought to himself, "That's a beautiful young woman. I'll have her as my bride."

Nukabukuro hurried home ahead, changed back into her usual tattered kimono and busied herself tending the fire for the bath. When her stepmother and Komebukuro got home, Komebukuro asked, "Were you at the festival today?"

"No, I wasn't there. I had no time to go to the festival."

A few days later, a matchmaker for the nobleman came to their house and said, "My master wants Nukabukuro as his wife."

The stepmother refused, saying, "He can have Komebukuro as his bride, but not Nukabukuro." So it was decided that whoever could recite the best poem would become the nobleman's bride. A tray was brought out, and on it was a plate. On the plate was a pile of salt, and a small branch of pine was stuck in the salt. It was Komebukuro's turn to go first.

She made this poem:

Hair is on the turd made by the cat last night  
Stinky steam rises from the turd  
Made by the cat this morning.

Next it was Nukabukuro's turn.

Ah, on this tray—  
Can it be a pine, taken root  
In this mound of freshly fallen snow.

The matchmaker said, "Since Nukabukuro's poem is much better, she will be my master's bride." And arrangements were made for when Nukabukuro would be escorted to the nobleman's house.

When that day came, Nukabukuro took out her magic mallet and wished for her fine kimono. Dressed in her beautiful garments, she went off, carried in a palanquin.

Seeing this, Komebukuro whined, "I want to be someone's bride and get carried off in a palanquin too." Her mother put her in a basket and threw her in the river.

*Korede, zatto mukashiga futsu-tsuaketa.* (And that's the way it was in the old days.)

Told by Nakamura Kie, age 88, Showa 34 (1959)  
Shibata City<sup>40</sup>

### AWA, KOME

*Tontomukashi attato.* (They say that once, long ago ...)

Long ago there was a man and his wife. They had a daughter named Awa and they loved her very much. One day the mother became ill and died. Soon after that, the man took another wife and a girl named Kome was born to them. This second wife was cruel to Awa but loved her own daughter, Kome.

One autumn day, when the girls had become older, the stepmother gave Awa a worn out sack and gave Kome a strong sack. She said, "Both of you go to the mountains and gather chestnuts. When your sack is full, come on home. Kome, you are younger, so you follow behind Awa." So the two set off for the mountains.

Awa and Kome began gathering chestnuts. As soon as Awa put a chestnut into her sack, it would fall right out through the holes in her old, tattered sack. Kome, following along behind, would pick up the chestnut and put it in her sack. After a while it became evening. Kome said "Hey Awa, my sack is full. Let's go home."

"I can't go home" said Awa. "My sack isn't full yet. You go on ahead." So Kome went on home.

Then, while Awa kept trying to gather chestnuts, the mountains became very dark. In the distance, Awa could see a light glowing, so she went toward that light. She came to a mountain shack, and in the shack was an ogress tending a fire.

Awa said, "I'm very tired. Please let me spend the night."

The ogress said, "You know, I am an ogress. But if that doesn't worry you, you are welcome to spend the night." So Awa decided to spend the night there.

Then the ogress said, "Would you remove the lice from my head?" Awa said, "Sure, I'll remove the lice for you." So Awa began to pick out the lice from the ogress' head. Tangled in the hair of the ogress Awa found

wriggling centipedes and slugs.

Awa said, "You don't have lice in your hair, there're centipedes and slugs!"

The ogress said, "Then you'd better chew up all of those centipedes and slugs." So Awa did as she was told. But as soon as she put them in her mouth, she went to the corner of the shack and spat them out.

The ogress then said, "Ah—now that those lice are out of my head, I'll be able to relax and sleep."

The next morning the ogress said to Awa. "You are a good girl. I will give you this magic mallet. When you want something, just say what you want and tap the mallet. It will give you anything you say." And she gave Awa a mallet.

Awa was delighted and immediately called out. "Come out good chestnuts! Come out strong sack!" And when she tapped the mallet, chestnuts and a strong sack appeared. She put the chestnuts in the sack and hurried home.

"Mother! I'm home, and I have a sack full of chestnuts!"

"How come you're so late? Kome came home yesterday!" the stepmother scolded.

Awa did not say anything about the magic mallet she got from the ogress and she carefully hid it away.

One day there was going to be a play in the village, and the stepmother dressed Kome in a nice kimono, arranged her hair nicely and said to Awa. "Kome and I are going to see the play. You stay home and pound the rice." And they went to the play, leaving Awa behind.

Awa began pounding the rice, but she really wanted to go to the play, so she got out her magic mallet. "Come out nice kimono! Come out nice sash! Come out nice *tabi* (socks)! Come out nice wooden sandals! Come out fine parasol! Come out coins!" And all these things appeared. So, dressed in all the fine things and with spending money, Awa went to see the play. Awa sat in the best section on a raised platform. Below her she saw her stepmother and sister. Awa ate some pears and apples and threw the half eaten pieces down at Kome. Kome picked them up and ate them. Then Kome said to her mother.

"Mother, that young woman over there looks a lot like our Awa. Awa is

here.”

“That’s impossible. Awa doesn’t have any fine kimono. And I told her to mind the house and pound *mochi*.” The mother didn’t know that Awa was at the play.

Before the play ended, Awa hurried home ahead of her stepmother and stepsister. She put on her tattered kimono and busied herself with her chores. After a while her stepmother and sister came home. The stepmother said. “Awa, we’re home! Have you been pounding the rice?”

“Yes I have.”

Then Kome brought out some of the half eaten pears and apples. “Today a fine lady came to see the play and she gave me lots of pears and apples. I’ll give you a little bit of them. That fine lady looked a lot like you—you weren’t at the play, were you?”

“No, I didn’t go to the play. And I don’t want any of those pears and apples,” said Awa.

Then, a matchmaker for a rich man came to the house saying that his master wanted Awa as his bride. “My master wants to marry Awa, who was at the play the other day.”

“It was Kome who was at the play. I will let you take Kome as your master’s bride. Awa is foolish. I can’t let you take her.” insisted the stepmother.

“No, it wasn’t Kome. It was Awa.”

“No, you have to take Kome.” The stepmother was very stubborn.

So a tray was brought out, and a plate was put on it. On the plate they put some salt, and a pine twig was put in the salt. It was decided that whoever could recite the best poem would become the bride of the rich man. Kome made her poem:

Furry hair is in the turd, made by the cat last night  
From the turd made by the dog this morning—stinky steam rises,

Then Awa made her poem:

Ah—the plate on the tray  
Snow has fallen on the mountain

On the fresh snow there, has a pine tree taken root ?

Awa's poem was lovely. "Yes, Awa is the right one as the bride." And it was decided. Awa tapped with her magic mallet and her beautiful kimono came out. She was a lovely bride, and rode off in the palanquin.

Kome wailed, "I want to ride off in a palanquin too!" Her mother stuffed her in a basket and dragged her around. The basket fell off a cliff into a rice paddy and Kome turned into a pond snail.

*Sorekkiri!* (That's it for the story!)

Told by Ohguchi Tomo, age 72 Showa 33 (1958)  
Naka-uonuma-gun, Nakazato-mura <sup>41</sup>

**Appendix:** Other sources from anthologies by Mizusawa Kenichi.

Mizusawa Kenichi. *Attatengana: Niigata-ken no Mukashi banashi shu*. Sanjo City, Niigata Prefecture: Nojima Publishers, 1978. (Showa 53)

**Note:** This is a collection of a variety of Niigata tales. It includes two Cinderella-type tales which were collected after the publication of *Echigo no Shinderera*.

Mizusawa Kenichi. *Echigo no Enshoutan*.

Tokyo: Hama Hisatoshi; Koushi Shoin Publishers, 1998.

**Note:** This is a collection of humorous, erotic and bawdy tales that were collected posthumously from the 1400 recordings left by Mizusawa. These were not published during his lifetime.

Mizusawa Kenichi. *Kikimimi Sou Shi: haha to ko no tame no mukashibanashi*.

(Folktales for mothers and children.) Sanjo City, Niigata Prefecture: Nojima Publishers, 1980. (Showa 55)

**Note:** In this collection of tales there is a Cinderella tale narrated by Shiga Chitose, who also narrated a tale in *Echigo no Shinderera*. However, in the tale in this collection there is a "shoe test" and the mother and stepsister do not receive an unpleasant punishment. Perhaps Mizusawa felt the violent ending in other more typical tales was not appropriate for mothers and children!

Mizusawa Kenichi. *Robata no Tonton Mukashi*. Sanjo City, Niigata Prefecture: Nojima Publishers, 1971. (Showa 46)

**Note:** This a collection of folktales collected by Mizusawa while doing fieldwork in the Ojiya region of Niigata Prefecture. This collection includes five additional “Nukabuku, Komebuku” tales not included in *Echigo no Shiderera*. Mizusawa adds interesting comments at the end of each tale.

#### Notes

- 1 Archer Taylor, “The Study of the Cinderella Cycle,” Alan Dundes, (ed.) *Cinderella: A Casebook* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982) p. 125.
- 2 Fanny Hagin Mayer (trans.) *Ancient Tales in Modern Japan* (Bloomington, Indiana: Bloomington Indiana press, 1984).
- 3 Donald Richie, “The Asian Bookshelf” , *The Japan Times*, Saturday, July 20, 1985.
- 4 Fanny Hagin Mayer, *Asian Folklore Studies*, XXIV (1965) 151-153.
- 5 Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988) p. 138.
- 6 Mizusawa Kenichi, *Echigo no Shinderera*, Sanjo City, Niigata Prefecture: Nojima Publishers, 1964) from introduction.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 664.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 665.
- 9 Mayer, *Ancient Tales in Modern Japan* p. 339.
- 10 Mizusawa, *Echigo no Shinderera*, from introduction.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 666.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 668.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 669.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 670.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 672.
- 16 Jack Zipes (ed.) *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001) p., 444.
- 17 Mizusawa, p. 675.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 676.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 679.
- 20 Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, “Cinderella,” *The Complete Brothers Grimm Fairy Tales*, Lily Owens (ed.), (New York: Avenel Books, Crown Publishers, 1981), pp. 89- 96.
- 21 Zipes, p. 444.
- 22 Mizusawa, p. 680.
- 23 Mayer, p. 680.
- 24 Grimm, pp. 89-96.
- 25 Zipes, p. 453.
- 26 Mizusawa, p. 687.
- 27 Campbell, p. 138.



- 28 Mizusawa, p. 688.
- 29 Maria Leach, (ed.) *Funk and Wagnall's Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*. (New York: Harper Row, Publishers Inc. , 1972) p. 217.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 217.
- 31 Barabara Walker, *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1988) pp. 489 - 490.
- 32 Mizusawa, p. 689.
- 33 Fanny Hagin Mayer, *Asian Folklore Studies*, XXIV (1965) pp. 151-153.
- 34 Mizusawa, p. 689.
- 35 Ichiro Hori, *Folk Religion in Japan: Continuity and Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) p. 151.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 151.
- 37 *Japan, An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1993) p. 1423.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 1729.
- 39 Jack Zipes (ed), *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 97.
- 40 Mizusawa, pp. 447-482.
- 41 *Ibid.*, pp. 145-155.