Worshipping Kokuzo as Sakugami, the Growth Deity of Agriculture

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It is a conventional viewpoint to regard Sakugami the growth deity as one of guardian deities of paddy fields in Japanese folklore. The Sakugami was mainly discussed in relation with the interchangeable nature between a paddy fields deity and a mountains deity or with ancestor worship.

This report presents several viewpoints for further research for the relationship between Kokuzo-bosatsu, an object of Bosatsu worship, and Sakugami worship.

First, an investigation was made on the background of the nature of worshipping Kokuzo as the guardian deity of sericulture. The local legend that Kokuzo was a corruption of Kokuzo, that is, silkworm excretion, should be given a consideration as the Hata clan among the settlers from Silla who brought with them sericulture and silk goods producing technology into Japan had a close relationship with Kokuzo worship.

Second, analysis was made on the farmers' relationship with the Kokuzo shrine in the precincts of the local temple in Kuroiwa in Fukushima Prefecture, which is associated with sericulture worship, to show their growing demands for Sakugami to worship according to changes in the kinds of crops they grew.

Third, a rain-praying ritual in the Hokuitsu district was discussed to show how the development of worshipping Kokuzo as Sakugami coincided with the settlement of mountaineering ascetics who used to travel around the country.

It is concluded: that the worship of a divine deity, or an object of worship, called Sakugami, which started in the olden times, underwent several changes in forms of intensities of worship in the past, and that it was reorganized as a current ritual through the interactions between men of religion and people in local communities, showing a typical folkloric aspect of a local ritual.