Shimotsuke-no-Kintoki and
the Establishment of the Legend of Kintarô

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“Kintarô of Mt. Ashigara” (SAKATA-no-Kintoki), along with Momotarô, is a typical
hero of the Japanese old tales. Kintarô, who is a legendary “figure”, did not really exist.
However, Section 2-12 of “Dainihon Shiryô” recognized Shimotsuke-no-Kintoki as
the original model for the “Kintarô of Mt. Ashigara”. Based on this, the author wished,
firstly, to clarify the true image of Shimotsuke-no-Kintoki, mainly from contempor-
ary historical documents, including various records; and secondly, to chronologize the
process of development from Shimotsuke-no-Kintoki to the legendary “Kintarô of
Mt. Ashigara”, concentrating mainly on the Middle Ages.

Studies show that the process of development from Shimotsuke-no-Kintoki, who
really existed, to the legendary hero named “Kintarô of Mt. Ashigara” can be summa-
ized as follows:

(1) Kintoki was born in 1000 A. D. (the second year of Chôhô), the son of Shimot-
suke-no-Kintomo and a daughter of Owari-no-Kanetoki. Kintoki died on or before
August 24, 1017 (the first year of Kannin) in Tsukushi, Kyûshû, at the age of 18. He
started his career as an Attendant of the Imperial Guards, and was rapidly promoted to
Group Leader. During his career, as far as is known today, he was in charge of matters
concerning songs (Azuma-asobi), dances, horse-back archery, and Sumô (wrestling). He
was also worked as an attendant of FUJIWARA-no-Michinaga.

(2) He was called the “Number One” among the officers of the Left and Right Head-
quarters of Imperial Guards, and had a high reputation even a century after his death.
It was just at that time that the transition from Kintoki to the legendary “Kintarô”
started, as seen in the “Konjaku Monogatari” (Once-Upon-A-Time Stories).

(3) In the Kamakura Period, the legend of “Yorimitsu’s Four Warrior leaders” appeared
for the first time in “Shibuigaki”, which is thought to be an indication of the morals
of the warriors of that time. Furthermore, in the contemporary “Kokon Chomonjyû”
(Collection of Famous Tales, Ancient and Modern), the legend of “Yorimitsu’s Four
Warrior leaders” became established, at the same time as the original form of the later
story of the expedition against fiends came into being.

(4) In the process seen above, FUJIWARA-no- Yasumasa was added to “Yorimitsu’s
Four Devas” in the story of “Shuten Dôji” contained in the “Otogi Zôshi”, which was
completed before the end of the Middle Ages. This famous story of the expedition
against fiends spread, forming the original of the legend of “Kintarô of Mt. Ashigara”.

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