Birth of Kasha
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Kasha, which emerges in modern folklore, is a kind of monster which appears in the sky over funeral processions and carries away the dead. The monster is often identified as a cat, and “nekdanka,” which is an old tale of a cat playing tricks together with the priest of a poor temple to make the temple prosper, is also known in various places.

Kasha was originally a Buddhist carrier that allegedly took villains to hell. However, when kasha is portrayed as a monster, its Buddhist character is weakened, and the dead taken by kasha are not necessarily villains. The first half of this article clarifies the connection between kasha in Buddhism and kasha as a monster, using medieval materials. During the Muromachi period, kasha for the death was “externalized,” and thunderstorms were considered to represent going to hell, while in the last half of the 16th century, the story of thunder carrying away the dead appeared. At the same time, at the end of the Sengoku period, the story of a Zen Buddhist monk defeating kasha gained ground. People’s concerns about thunderstorms at funeral processions are connected with the fact that in the last half of the Middle Ages, gorgeous funeral processions of the upper classes attracted many spectators.

It seems that kasha were first identified as cats in the late 17th century. In early modern times, kasha were also identified as raccoon dogs, tengu, moryo, etc., leaving Buddhism and beginning to walk alone as unique monsters. The traditional story of kasha, which appears at the death of a villain, was continued until early modern times, but in the story of kasha as a monster carrying away the dead, the dead was often not villains. If kasha still had the character of a monster which carries away people to hell, the rumor that kasha took the dead might have tarnished the reputation of the latter. For this reason, the character of kasha as a tormenting devil in hell would have gradually been weakened.

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