Translator's Preface: Interpretive Problems

This chapter is Ishikawa's earliest attempt to explore the complex nature of a genre of medieval Sōtō Zen literature dealing with interpretations of kōans known as kirigami. It should be stressed that the field of kirigami studies was hardly explored at the time the essay was written in the early 1980s, and therefore it was nothing but Ishikawa's courage, passion, and painstaking efforts that opened up the field of studying these esoteric materials. Subsequent to this publication, Ishikawa produced dozens of important articles elaborating on this pioneering work.

The original text by Ishikawa is a highly condensed work and contains stylistic difficulties often shared with traditional Japanese sectarian scholarship. For this reason, in some cases the contents do not seem readily accessible to Western readers unless mediated and supplemented by additional remarks. I took the liberty of editing Ishikawa's text for the benefit of the Western audience. These additions are shown in brackets to distinguish them from the original text.¹

Interpretive problems of this kind seem to be generic to the enterprise of translation. In working on this particular text, however, I was obliged to pay attention to the following issues. It is frequently pointed out that there is a significant stylistic difference between American and Japanese academic writing. For example, some Japanese scholarly texts lack question-proposing passages. Ishikawa's essay also lacks propositional segments. As translator, I was confronted with an interpretive gulf from the outset, and I had no choice but to read his essay thoroughly and add a plausible proposal to the original text. To
complicate this problem further, Ishikawa offers insufficient explanations for the quotations he employs in the paper. *Kirigami* are essentially esoteric documents dealing with the tradition of kōans and, hence, their contents are hardly understandable, not only for a Western audience but also for Japanese readership outside the closed circle of the tradition. (If anyone is confident of his or her reading skills of these medieval esoteric sources, I hope that he or she will contribute to the development of *kirigami* studies.)

Clifford Geertz once remarked that the objective of the humanities is to extend the realm of human discourse. Benjamin Schwartz insists on the importance of making particular forms of Asian thought accessible to the Western audience based on a detailed knowledge not only of the language but of the cultural context underlying the thought forms (see Schwartz’s foreword to Hoyt Cleveland Tillman’s *Utilitarian Confucianism: Ch’\’en Liang’s Challenge to Chu Hsi*, Harvard University Press, 1982). In pursuit of these goals, I either shortened the original text or added supplementary sentences to Ishikawa’s text, and also have offered definitions for several key terms that Ishikawa overlooked, in order to make Ishikawa’s argument more accessible and “extend the realm of human discourse.” I have done my best for my Dharma friend Ishikawa Rikizan, who passed away on August 4, 1997.

**Kirigami as a Style of *Shōmono***

There is a genre of historical sources called *shōmono*. These are one of the sets of documents that are especially useful for revealing the nature of Zen training in the medieval Sōtō school as well as the popular religious practice of lay and common people in this period. [This chapter attempts to provide not only a general definition of the *shōmono* genre, which involves detailed commentaries on traditional kōan collections like the *Mumonkan* and *Hekiganroku*, but also detailed philological data on secret initiation documents called *kirigami*, which are one of the varieties or subgenres belonging to *shōmono* literature, dealing especially with esoteric comments on specific kōan cases.]

*Shōmono* documents are medieval Sōtō teachers’ colloquial commentaries on traditional Zen texts. [Medieval Sōtō teachers, instead of utilizing the recorded sayings of previous Zen masters as one of the training methods, adopted their own understanding of the traditional texts as a means to instruct their students. Since their thoughts and understanding were expressed in the form of so-called *shō*, or explanatory notes, these records were later called *shōmono*.]

The *shōmono* group is further classified into five categories according to content: *kikigakishō/gorokushō*, or phonetic transcriptions of “open lectures on kōans presented at medieval Sōtō monasteries”; *monsan*, or secret kōan manuals or documents of “the curriculum, questions, and expected responses for each kōan”; *daigo*, which refers to a teacher’s correct answer, exegeses of *gorokushō*, anecdotes about a student’s conversation with a master that provoked his enlightenment, and the answers to kōan questions; *daigoshō*, or fur-
ther commentaries and explanatory notes on daigo; and kirigami, or secret initiation manuals. [Kirigami literally means “paper strips” on which monks concisely recorded manuals of instructions for the performance of secret initiations and rituals. These instructions differed from traditional Chinese codes of monastic rules and regulations (shingi) because they referred to rituals conducted privately by particular abbots and reflected the assimilation of Japanese folk beliefs and magical practices. Among those things the monks recorded were closely guarded tips for daily rituals, explanations of the “three personal belongings” (san-motsu) to be transmitted from a master to a pupil, concrete illustrations of these personal items, and some monsan and sanwa (which are a particular type of kirigami providing questions and answers about a single koan).]

A detailed analysis of these documents, however, leaves researchers with many difficulties, and a study of kirigami, which is the author’s primary concern among the shōmono documents, is especially problematic. This is so partially because the project of researching shōmono in general, as well as kirigami in particular, is relatively new to the field of Japanese Buddhist history, despite the fact that the method of kirigami transmission was extremely popular among Sōtō monks and was practiced throughout the entire Sōtō organization, from generation to generation, and from the medieval to the modern period. [Questions still remain: Why has in-depth research on kirigami been overlooked thus far? What kinds of problems impede the process of analyzing kirigami?]

One of the problems in evaluating the kirigami is the magico-religious elements observable in some of the documents. Because the kirigami frequently contained occult ritual, such as Shinto-Buddhist syncretistic or pseudo-yin/yang types of divination, studies of kirigami in general came to be neglected and even despised in the later (that is, the early modern) Sōtō tradition. There were masters of Zen scholasticism who went further in stating that some kirigami notes merely demonstrate the original “scribbler’s” own misconstrued ideas or their teachers’ distorted views. [In the Edo period, a tendency to look down upon kirigami was so exaggerated that some of them are believed to have been incinerated.] For instance, Menzan Zuihō in “Tōjōshitsunaïdanshi renpi shiki,” stresses the need to burn a kirigami in an essay titled “Shisho shōkyaku” (“Incineration of Transmission Certificate” [which apparently called for the destruction of transmission certificates, documents that were highly prized in Menzan’s orthodox view of the monastic system]). Menzan asserts:

The shisho (transmission certificate) is the last document anyone should ever consider burning up. For instance, a scroll of a certificate that the founder of Eiheiji temple received at T‘ien-tung ssu (J. Tendoji) temple is, in fact, kept in the master’s room at Eiheiji temple. But in the medieval period a new, problematic con-
cept of Buddhist lineage (garanbō) was introduced. Due to the introduction of this rule, disciples easily received Dharma certificates from their masters, and the accession to abbacy at temples also became easy. Shisho was no longer of importance and was even returned to the previous master! [According to this practice], when there is no one or no place to return the certificate to, it should be incinerated.

The contents of kirigami, and also the making of them, are thus useless. They are the documents that must be burned up. ("Shicchū," Sōtō-shū zensho)

With this assertion, Menzan points out the problem of the practice garanbō, by which the arbitrary custom, or rather the audacious practice, of the incineration of transmission documents came into effect. Therefore he strongly asserts that it is the kirigami, which records secret oral instructions for what he considers inauthentic practice, that must be destroyed in flames. Menzan, substantiating each flaw in the practice, further demanded that another collection of 145 kirigami of spurious origins be destroyed by fire.

In the Eiheiji shicchū danshimokuroku narabini in, Menzan goes on to negate the authenticity of a collection at Eiheiji temple (founded by Dōgen) containing 140 paper strips or kirigami:

In the summer of 1746 (the second year of the Emperor Enkyō), I stayed at the Jōyō-an hermitage of Eiheiji temple for about fifty days to receive intimately the Dharma Treasure from the master in his room. When I looked around the room, I happened to come across as many as one hundred and forty kirigami lying about there. After having examined the list and contents of those documents I understood that all of them conveyed the past teachers' misconstrued and distorted ideas, and that none of them were useful to the Sōtō institution. ("Shicchū," Sōtō-shū zensho)

It is, indeed, true that every document Menzan takes up for discussion is of spurious origin, but at present these materials are being reexamined and re-evaluated in the fields of religious studies and kyōkagaku (studies of the process of the propagation of Buddhism) as a rare source of information depicting the actual Zen missionary situation in medieval Japan, as well as the regional development of Sōtō organizations. In other words, there is no doubt that the kirigami are precious historical sources in spite of their apocryphal contents.[As was mentioned earlier, in-depth research on kirigami presents researchers with various difficulties.] More precisely, these difficulties include the problems of the diverse nature of the contents and the rare availability of kirigami documents of authentic origins. According to Sugimoto Shunryū in his Tōjō shitsunai kirigami narabini sanwa kenkyū, which was a path-breaking work for contemporary comprehensive studies of these documents, kirigami can be classified into nine groups [based on their function], these are gyōji (dealing with sustained practice and ceremonies), tengen (eye-opening rituals), sōbō (funer-
KIRIGAMI

als), kechimyaku (lineage charts), shihō (Dharma transmission), kuketsu (secret oral instructions), sanwa (questions and answers about a single kōan), kaji (prayers and incantations), and zōsan (miscellanea). However, Sugimoto’s taxonomy is still provisional, and there is a need for further critical evaluation of his approach.

It was not until the modern period of Japan that kirigami were collected and edited in bound volumes instead of taking the form of separate cut leaves or paper strips. This development has enabled some researchers to work with a complete set of kirigami derived from a single stream of a particular Sōtō community. However, originally the documents were in the form of discrete paper sheets that had been transmitted one by one. Therefore they easily became scattered as time went by. Kirigami from the medieval period are especially difficult to find and obtain. (It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss the special circumstances of the historical situation of the medieval period in which kirigami had their origins.)

It is noteworthy that most kirigami discovered in the process of recent research efforts are from following periods: Kan-ei era (1624–1644), Bunki era (1501–1504), Eishō era (1504–1521), Genki era (1570–1573), and Tensho era (1573–1592). However, their recorded dates are more or less self-proclaimed or spurious records, and close scrutiny suggests that among these kirigami those deriving from the Kan-ei era are actually the oldest, in spite of the recorded ages of other documents. Documents like kirigami and monsan often trumpet their own authenticity by fabricating lineage charts that somehow trace back to certain key persons such as Dōgen and Eiō. Some even claim to trace back to Ju-ching, Dōgen’s mentor in Sung China [in order to gain symbolic authority by evoking a direct transmission of the ancient tradition from China]. Among kirigami documents that are of the most plausible authenticity, those of the Kan-ei era were handed down in collected volumes to later generations. In contrast, there is no historical evidence available to indicate that the other documents claiming to derive from earlier eras were also collectively bequeathed to posterity.

Kirigami and Kōan Literature

Based on a philological analysis of the source documents, the development of various kinds of kirigami will be discussed, especially the category of sanwa that are directly related to instruction in the study of kosoku-kōan, or traditional kōan cases originally contained in Chinese sources. Sanwa are one of the various types of kirigami documents, as was mentioned in Sugimoto’s taxonomy. The difference from other kirigami categories is that sanwa documents contain questions and answers specifically about kōans, often referring to a single, specific case, in addition to various doctrinal points. Other kirigami, however, are collections of manuals of instruction for the performance of cer-
**Figure 9.1. Evolution of Shômôno literature. Translator's note: Genealogy of Kiri-gami as a variety of Shômôno. From the gorokushô and daigo that collected lectures on traditional kôans there arose monsan manuals, with sanwa-kirigami emerging as the final stage of commenting on the source dialogues. This figure also highlights the role of daigoshô, or further comments and notes on the daigo, influencing the development of the kirigami. Ishikawa's essay itself, however, which emphasizes that sanwa are a variety of kirigami, does not further develop this point.**

Since rituals, such as the animating of Buddha images through the eye-opening ritual, holding funerals, conferring precepts, and transmitting the Dharma.

There are numerous monsan documents available from diverse streams of the Sôtô tradition which are very similar in content to sanwa-[kirigami] documents. Many of the monsan, or secret curriculum manuals of acceptable responses to kôans, appeared in the medieval period accompanying the spread of "Kôan Zen," or a kind of Zen training emphasizing the study of traditional kôan cases [usually based on the major Chinese Ch'an collections, such as the Wu-men kuan (J. Mumonkan), Pi-yen lu (J. Heiganroku), and Ts'ung-jung lu (J. Shôyôroku), in addition to Dôgen's Mana Shôbôgenzô and Ehiei gen goroku texts]. However, I believe that a majority of the monsan documents did not necessarily stem from a direct study of traditional kôans in the major Chinese collections, but rather originated as a form of commentary on gorokushô and daigo documents [that, in turn, were records of lectures, sermons, and spontaneous discussions of traditional kôans, as well as additional cases originating within the medieval Japanese sect]. Therefore, it is possible to speculate that the two groups of the gorokushô and daigo were actually forerunners of the monsan, which then gave rise to the development of the [sanwa variety of] kirigami (as suggested in fig. 9.1).

**Daigo** are a kind of exegesis appended or words "capped" (jakugo) as indirect, allusive comments onto gorokushô. Usually gorokushô commenting on traditional dialogues and kôan cases conclude with a section of acknowledgments and with the capping phrases of daigo. Generally, the latter introduce episodes of a student's conversation with his master which provoked the former into an experience of enlightenment, and they also include answers for the questions raised by the kôans themselves. Although the following suggestion is based in part on speculation, probably all of these daigo archives were sorted into an independent subgroup of records which then developed into monsan or secret kôan manuals.
An ancient master said, "Chōmongen ('Eye on the head') is capable of casting a piercing light on all four lands around Mount Sumeru. What kind of eye is it?" The master pointed at a lamppost and said, "What an arrogant eye and ear it has!" The "Eye on the head" can be transmitted only when a master and his pupil have an eye-to-eye relationship. Original Heart (or Buddha Mind) can be transmitted only when they have heart-to-heart reciprocity. The "Eye on the head" has been transmitted from generation to generation until now.

The process of the evolution from the secret monsan manuals to the esoteric kirigami is more evident. [To illustrate this, we note that] among sanwa materials there is a document called Chōmon no manako kirigami (that Sugimoto groups in the category of kuketsu or secret oral instructions instead of sanwa), which is reproduced as figure 9.2.

The origin of the kirigami in question is found in a monsan document which is written on a scroll that Jakuen is said to have given to Giun [referring to two early, thirteenth-century patriarchs of the Sōtō sect at Hōkyōji temple]. It reads as follows:

The Sixth Patriarch said, "The 'Eye on the head' is capable of casting a piercing light on all four lands around Mount Sumeru. What kind of eye is it?" The master pointed at the nearest lamppost and said, "What an arrogant eye and ear it has!" He continued, "The 'Eye on the head' can be transmitted only when a master and his pupil have an eye-to-eye relationship. Original Heart can be transmitted only when they have heart-to-heart reciprocity. The 'Eye on the head' has been transmitted from generation to generation up until now."

Assimilating the words in the scroll, the Great Practitioner at Eiheiji said, "A head corresponds to eyebrows, and ears correspond to eyebrows. These relations
are called the ‘Eye on the head.’ It is the eye of the Dharma. . .”

Never let anyone else see this! This is the founder’s authentic handwriting.

Bowing a hundred times to Ryūtengohōzenjin [a Buddhist guardian deity], Rev. Jakuen presents this to Rev. Giun.

(Document from Hōkyōji Temple, Ōno City, Fukui Prefecture, Japan)

According to the legend of Hōkyōji temple, the scroll containing the dialogue of the Sixth Patriarch commenting on the “Eye on the head” was first mentioned by Dōgen and was later recorded in Jakuen’s authentic handwriting. If this is the case, there is no doubt that the monsan belongs to the Jakuen stream or faction of the sect. The question is how this came to be transmitted in the form of a kirigami. The difference between the two archives [of the monsan and kirigami (or sanwa)] is readily apparent from the style of the documents: the kirigami, which is the first record cited here, lacks the section known as nentei, or the passage that introduces a classic Zen dialogue or kōan in the manner of “taking up such-and-such a case.” The kirigami also bears a diagram which reads, “Mountains, Rivers and the Earth; Sentient and Insentient Beings; Enlightened All at Once” (fig. 9.2).

There are similar diagrams observable in a kirigami called Tsuki Ryōko (reproduced as fig. 9.3):

Showing this kirigami to Gasan, Rev. Keizan said, “Unless you know there is a pair of moons you cannot be a blade of grass of the Sōtō tradition.”

The kirigami in question is based on a kōan from the source titled, Gasan oshō gyōjitsu, which reads:

One evening Kin (Fourth Patriarch Keizan) was enjoying the beauty of the moon when he abruptly asked Gasan sitting behind him, “Do you happen to know that there is a pair of moons?” Gasan replied, “No.” Keizan said, “Unless you know that, you cannot be a blade of grass of the Sōtō tradition.” (“Shidenka,” Sōtō-shū zensho)

This kōan was transmitted to Gasan’s successors, especially to those in Mukyoku’s clique, which branched off from Ryōan’s faction. Mukyoku Etetsu founded the temple of Ryōtaiji in Gifu Prefecture. The temple possesses his own handwritten epistle to Gekkō Shō bun:

I will show an important thing of our school to Shō bun.
Beyond our general knowledge, there is a pair of moons. Where is there not such a pair?"
Abbot at Ryūsenji Temple, Etetsu
A full moon contains a new moon. A new moon contains a full moon. A full moon is to a new moon what a waxing crescent is to a waning one. Divide [fig. 9.3a] into two diagrams, and see [fig. 9.3b]. It seems that the Perfect Form of the moon (○: Full Moon) contains all phases as well as the hidden truth that a moon is circular (●).

"The hidden truth (the Formless Truth) in the Actual Form ((J: Early Crescent)" is identical with "the Actual Form in the Formless Truth (I: Waning Crescent)." The Perfect Form of the moon also exists in the Absolute Truth that contains both the Perfect Form and the Formless Truth (●). A pair of moons, one existing in the physical sphere and the other in the metaphysical sphere, mutually reflect and interpenetrate one another to form one unified moon. This metaphor alludes to the relationship between a master and his successor, which is also like a pair of mirrors that mutually reflect each other so that neither one loses its brightness.

**Figure 9.3. The Tsuki Ryōko kirigami**
In addition to this epistle there is also a monsan of Mukyoku's stream that takes up the story of "two moons" for discussion. Taisōha hisan, which is the property of Kongōji temple in Tochigi Prefecture, similarly deals with the topic discussed in the above-quoted document. It says:

A couple of moons sat before the master. The master made a brief commentary on an old text. The master, substituting for his pupil, replied to the commentary saying, "A lord illuminates an upper territory with this light, and his retainer illuminates a lower one with it. Reverend Fushū used to put his forefinger on the lower part of his thumb and say that a lord sheds this light on an upper place. Putting his thumb on the lower part of his forefinger, he also said that a retainer sheds this light on a lower place." [middle section omitted] For more details, see the diagrams and the kirigami as well [highlighting by Ishikawa].

Menzan Zuihō insisted that the pair of diagrams in the kirigami referred to as the Tsuki ryōko were the concoction of previous teachers' heathen views. However, it is clear that the formation of such a kirigami presupposes the popularity of the instructional technique of kazoesan among monks engaged in the practice of daigo in the medieval period. [Kazoesan is a teaching method devised by teachers of daigo. Usually a kōan of any kind consists of a few gradual levels of instruction. Daigo teachers added additional pedagogical steps to each level of instruction so that students might understand the kōan more smoothly. Those newly added steps were called kazoesan. ] A [well-known] kirigami on the saying "this very mind is Buddha" is a typical example of this technique. Thus the importance of kirigami in transmitting daigo, which interpreted the "main or critical phrases" (wato) of traditional kōans, cannot be denied.

But we must further clarify the relation between the monsan and the kirigami styles or genres of documents. For instance, in the above-quoted monsan called Taisōha hisan the master recommends that his pupil consult the kirigami for further interpretations of the source passage. As I have tried to show, these archives suggest the possibility that there was a strong sense of continuity and linkage in the process of the transition from monsan to kirigami in the medieval practice of kōan studies.

Final Thoughts

When one is considering the role of monsan as records of interpretations of traditional kōan cases in the medieval Sōtō sect, it is important to recognize that each stream transmitted its own unique sanwa documents, which were apparently distinguishable from those of different factions. But although there were many differences among the [sanwa]-kirigami transmitted by the various streams, many of the kirigami documents were virtually identical in terms of content and appearance. The only observable difference was often a slight variation in a few words that probably does not affect our understanding of
the historical sources. Therefore we can conclude that sanwa were useful in disseminating the monsan of various streams but were a somewhat simplified genre of the overall shōmono literature that relied on using symbolic expressions, such as diagrams, transmitted in the form of cut leaves or paper strips (kirigami).

One of the main problems in investigating these records is the deterioration of the strips of paper. However, at a certain point in modern Japan, kirigami were compiled into collected, bound volumes. The tasks of determining the time and nature of this crucial turning point in the history of the kirigami and of clarifying the process of compilation still remain untouched. These await additional philological research comparing the different kinds of kirigami documents of the medieval [unbound] and modern [bound] periods.

**Translator's Notes**

4. In the Chinese Ch' an tradition, daigo referred to "an alternative answer to an old question or the master's own answer for a question to which no monk in the assembly would respond. In medieval Sōtō kōan literature, however, dai always indicated that the teacher is supplying the correct answer in order to instruct his student, not in order to replace the answer in the original text. . . . The students expected only to become conversant with the many nuances of each kōan. They did not have to create new responses." See Bodiford, *Sōtō Zen in Medieval Japan*, p. 153.
5. Garanbō was a new concept of Buddhist lineage that insisted on maintaining exclusive loyalty from generation to generation to the lineage of the founder of a temple. By so doing, the system could allow temples effectively to reject other able competitors from different lineages for the abbacy.
7. Ishikawa cited these works, which were among the few available at the time of the composition of the chapter. Sakurai Shōyū, "Sōtōmonka ni okeru kirigami sōjō no ichikōsatsu," *Shūkyōgaku ronshū* vol. 9; Ishikawa Rikisan, "Chisei Zenshūshi kenkyū to Zenseki shōmono shiryō," *Ida Toshiyuki hakase kokki-kinen tōyōgaku ronshū*; and Ishikawa, "Chūsei ni okeru Zenshū shū kirigami no shiryōteki kachi," *Shūkyō kenkyū* vol. 246.
8. I have interpreted only a portion of Ishikawa's quotation, because kirigami documents were written in esoteric script and contain specialized terms and expressions that could be understood only within a particular group (that is, of course, what the documents were for). For the original kanbun or Chinese writing, see *Indogaku bukkōgaku kenkyū* vol. 30–2, 1982, p. 744.
9. Only the first half of the quotation is translated here.
10. I owe this information to Daiten Izuka, Ishikawa's successor at Komazawa University. In addition, I am deeply grateful to Dr. James Roberson at Sugiyama Women's College for his editorial assistance.