

One of the oldest folktales in Japan is the Tale of the Bamboo Cutter, the story of *Kaguya Hime*, the Bamboo Princess. Discovered inside a stalk of bamboo by a bamboo cutter and raised as a beautiful child, the Bamboo Princess was never completely of this world. She longed for her real Heavenly place of origin, and her eyes filled with tears whenever she gazed at the full moon, which is also a symbol of Truth in Japanese legend.

In the story 5 princes seek her hand in marriage, but not wanting to marry in this world, she presents each of them with a task to bring her something so rare and genuine that it is almost impossible to obtain. The stone begging bowl of the Buddha, a jeweled branch from the island of Hourai, the legendary robe of the fire rat in China, a colored jewel from a dragon's neck, and a swallow's seashell treasure. The princes fail one after another by attempting to deceive the Princess with a fake substitute. The princess wants the real thing, so hard to find in this world.

Eventually she even turns down an offer of marriage from the Emperor of Japan, and returns to the Moon from where she came.

I can't help but think of this story watching the stream of news about deceptions and fake substitutes for the sake of profit at other people's expense. A few recent headlines would be seem to be enough to keep the Bamboo Princess from ever coming back.

- Police arrest 4 bogus doctors *The Asahi Shimbun*
- 7 arrested for trading counterfeit brand-name products in Yamagata *The Japan Times*
- Scandals in food industry shatter safety myth *The Japan Times*
- Judge arrested for allegedly stalking woman *The Japan Times*
- Japan construction scandal widens *BBC News*

These deceptions are scandalous because they are being perpetrated by doctors, retailers, food manufacturers, court judges, and architects, who you would hardly suspect of being the scum of society. And they are doing it purely for profit, for as long as they can get away with it, without any regard for the dangerous consequences of their deceptions for unsuspecting consumers. Under the circumstances, it would appear that business people and professionals could do with a little moon gazing.

## Bamboo Princess In Search of Truth



The character for Truth (真 *makoto*) was originally written as a pictograph of a kettle, or container with legs, which held something of value.

Today the character *makoto* means *sincerity*, as well as truth.

The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter tells us this,  
That as he cut through the stalk he found true bliss,  
A beautiful child he uncovered inside,  
Whom he then raised as his daughter, filled with pride.

Bamboo Princess came from a heavenly place,  
She longed for home as she gazed on the moon's face;  
Princes came from afar to seek her hand,  
Instead she gave them all a task to land.

Something rare and genuine they must obtain  
Before her lifelong partnership they could gain;  
Old Buddha's bowl, a jewelled branch from Hourai isle,  
Perhaps the Fire Rat's robe, would make her smile.

Or maybe the swallows' treasured seashell  
Or a precious gem from the dragon's lapel;  
But none could find the original one,  
And proffered only a copy, or none.

Surrogates were delivered to her side,  
The real thing just too hard to find worldwide;  
To the Emperor's offer she turned her back;  
To the silver sphere travelled a hurried track.

The moral of the tale we should take care,  
*Makoto* means truth, sincerity: it's rare;  
The news is full of headlines of deceit  
Stories of fakes and substitutes repeat

To all those perpetrators of these crimes  
And all of us, yes, taken in sometimes,  
Gaze on the moon tonight, don't do less,  
Remember the Tale of Bamboo Princess.

*Verse by Hugh Purser*