

The Legend of Princess Miyako

In the late 7th century in a village known as Kuama, there lived a girl named Miyako who could grow no hair.

One year, there was a poor catch of fish. It was because of a mysterious light shining out from the sea bottom. Miyako's mother Nagisa believed that karma from a past life was the reason her child's hair would not grow. As an act of atonement, she dove into the sea to save the villagers.

When she went deep into the waters to see what was shining so brightly, she found it was a small gold statue of the bodhisattva Kannon.



Nagisa brought the statue up out of the waters and carefully enshrined it in a humble hut. With the light gone, there was then a large catch of fish. The villagers then worshipped Nagisa without reserve, but she humbly continued her prayers on their behalf without boasting of her achievement.

One night, Kannon appeared to Nagisa in a dream. In her dream, she made a plea on behalf of her unfortunate hairless daughter. When she awoke, beautiful hair was growing on Miyako's head. Nagisa and her husband Hayataka were ecstatic and expressed profuse thanks for Kannon's favor.

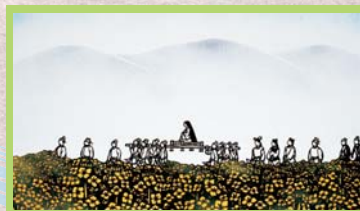


As time went by, her hair grew long and because her black hair was so beautiful she came to be known as "the long-haired princess."

One day, a swallow gathered up some of Miyako's beautiful, long, black hair and carried it to the palace of Fujiwara no Fuhito, a powerful figure in the days when Nara was Japan's capital. When Fuhito saw that beautiful hair, he decided the hair's owner should serve in the palace and he adopted Miyako.

Fuhito's adopted daughter would be betrothed to Emperor Monmu, and one of her children would go on to be Emperor Shomu, who built Todai-ji Temple in Nara.

Even though she went to Nara, Miyako never forgot her hometown Kuama and worried in particular about the Kannon statue left behind in its little hermitage. Her worries eventually reached the ears of the emperor, who proclaimed that a temple should be built to venerate the statue that had given Miyako her beautiful, long, black hair. This, it is said, is how Dojo-ji Temple was built.



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