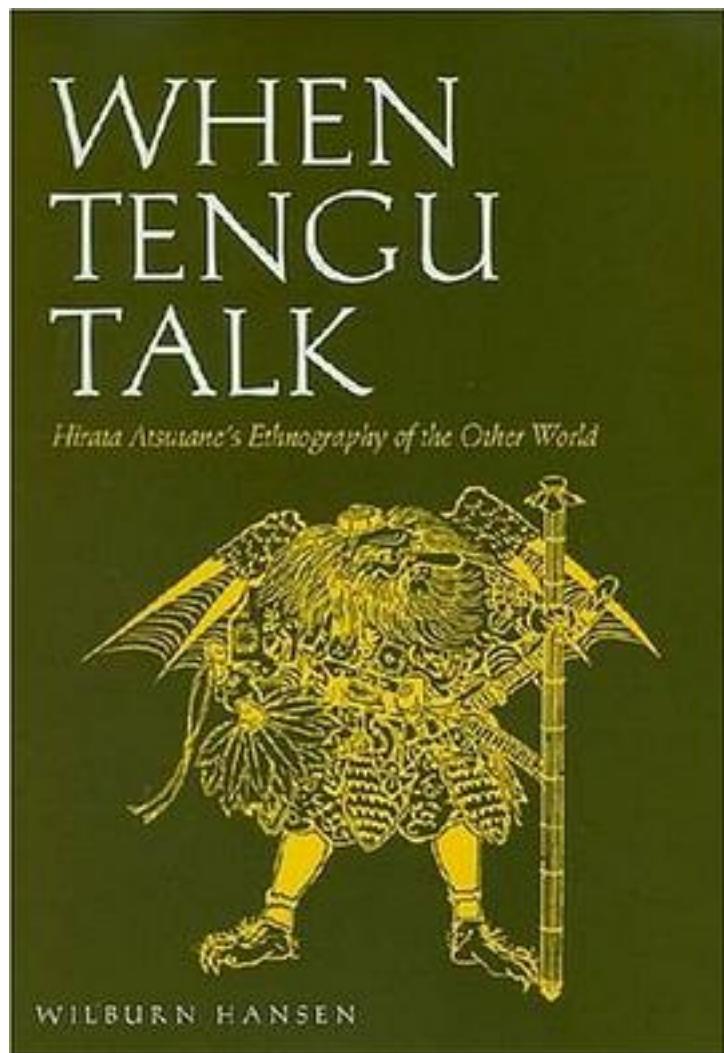


# When Tengu Talk



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Hirata Atsutane (1776-1843) has been the subject of numerous studies that focus on his importance to nationalist politics and Japanese intellectual and social history. Although well known as an ideologue of Japanese National Learning (Kokugaku), Atsutane's importance as a religious thinker has been largely overlooked. His prolific writings on supernatural subjects have never been thoroughly analyzed in English until now. In *When Tengu Talk*, Wilburn Hansen focuses on *Senkyō ibun* (1822), a voluminous work centering on Atsutane's interviews with a fourteen-year-old Edo street urchin named Tengu Kozan; Torakichi who claimed to be an apprentice tengu, a supernatural creature of Japanese folklore. Hansen uncovers in detail how Atsutane employed a deliberate method of ethnographic inquiry that worked to manipulate and stimulate Torakichi's surreal descriptions of everyday existence in a supernatural realm, what Atsutane termed the Other World. Hansen's investigation and analysis of the process begins with the hypothesis that Atsutane's project was an early attempt at ethnographic research, a new methodological approach in nineteenth-century Japan. A rough sketch of the milieu of 1820s Edo Japan and Atsutane's position within it provides the backdrop against which the drama of *Senkyō ibun* unfolds. There follow chapters explaining the relationship between the implied author and the outside narrator, the Other World that Atsutane helped Torakichi describe, and Atsutane's nativist discourse concerning Torakichi's fantastic claims of a newly discovered Shinto holy man called the sanjin. In the final portion of his book, Hansen addresses Atsutane's contribution to the construction of modern Japanese identity.

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