

Ahiratsu Shrine

In Japanese mythology, Princess Ahiratsu is the first wife of Jimmu, the legendary first emperor. The two live together and have children before Jimmu sets out on a quest to conquer all of Japan, which he accomplishes by defeating rival tribes and establishing a government in the central part of the country, in what is now Nara Prefecture. In some versions of the story, Ahiratsu joins her husband on this journey, while in others she stays behind to pray for his success. The princess is enshrined as a deity at Ahiratsu Shrine, which has for centuries been the main shrine in the village of Aburatsu.

Ahiratsu Shrine was originally dedicated to Otohime, a goddess of the sea who appears in many folk tales, sometimes together with her two companions: a monkey and a pheasant. Twin statues of these animals still guard the approach to the shrine, which was renamed for Princess Ahiratsu following the Meiji Restoration of 1868. The government of Emperor Meiji (1852–1912) institutionalized Shinto as the state religion and encouraged the worship and maintenance of sites associated with native mythology and the origin legends of the imperial family. In this context, it made sense for the people of Aburatsu to make the wife of Emperor Jimmu the primary deity of their shrine.