Teigo Yoshida

GODS, ANCESTORS AND MEDIATORS: A COSMOLOGY FROM THE SOUTHWESTERN ARCHIPELAGO OF JAPAN

My aim in this article is to describe and analyse certain Japanese notions—such as that of the other world, ideas about the snake *habu* and about certain plants (pampas-grass and beans), and the image of a supernatural monster—current among the inhabitants of the Nansei Shotō (Southwestern Archipelago), particularly of the Amami Islands. While the notion of the other world has been investigated in Okinawa (see, for example, Origuchi 1975a, 1975b, 1976; Ogo 1966), its status in Tokunoshima, one of the Amami Islands, has been hardly documented—although Kreiner has reported (1971) with regard to the idea of the other world in Kakeroma, another of the Amami Islands. Native ideas of *habu*, of supernatural monsters, and of plants have been given least attention by previous scholars. While my own emphasis here is placed upon the native point of view, interpretations independent of the people's own explanations are also attempted for certain phenomena.

This paper is a modified English version of one that I originally published in Japanese, entitled 'Notes on the Symbolic Interpretation of Cosmology: Folk Ideas in the Amami Islands', in the *Research Bulletin of Liberal Arts* (University of Tokyo, Faculty of General Education), Vol. XV (1983), pp. 1–21. I wish to thank Joy Hendry for her invitation to the Conference on the Social Anthropology of Japan, held in Oxford in 1984. I am also grateful to her for revising the English style and supplying helpful comments which are incorporated in this paper. A summarized English version of the original paper was presented in a seminar at the Nissan Institute of Japanese Studies, Oxford, in January 1984. I also wish to thank Itabashi Sakumi, Namihira Emiko, Shirakawa Takuma, and Kanda Yoriko, with whom fieldwork was often jointly undertaken. Fieldwork was funded from the Scientific Research Fund of the Ministry of Education in Japan as part of a joint research programme on Japanese shamanism whose representative was Professor Oguchi Iichi, and of my own research project in 1978, 1979 and 1981.

The Notion of Neira*: The World Beyond the Sea*

Among the inhabitants of the Amami Islands the notion of a world located far beyond the sea, variously called *neriya*, *neira*, *niira* or *nēra* (*nirai* or *nirai-kanai* in Okinawa), exists even today.

It is in a ritual called *hamaori* (descent to the beach), annually performed in the island of Tokunoshima, that this notion of *neira* is most clearly revealed. The ritual is performed in almost every village on the island, and as in most other festivals and rituals in the Amami and Okinawa Islands, it is performed according to the old (lunar) calendar. It takes place on three days after *bon* (the festival honouring the ancestors) –namely, *hinoe* (elder of fire), *hinoto* (younger of fire) and *tsuchinoe* (elder of the earth).[1] On the first day several groups of patrilineally related families construct their own hut in which they place three stones in the shape of a 'U' to make a *kama*, or oven. It is said that this first day of the ritual is devoted to inviting ancestors to the beach to make them feel comfortable. On the second day the members of each group gather in their own hut to eat and drink together after offering food on the *kama* to their ancestors. Although several years ago the actual construction of huts ceased, they still gather on the beach and build the oven on the day of *hinoto*. On this day they perform a rite called *miibama kumashi* (*niibama fumashi* in standard Japanese, i.e. stepping on the new beach). The rite consists of taking to the beach babies that have been born since the last *hamaori* of the previous year to make them take their first steps on the sand of the beach. People say that this is done in order to inform the ancestors of the arrival of the babies to their descendants, and to obtain protection from them. The people then enter the sea and splash water three times towards the god of the sea. They then purify themselves by splashing water over themselves, with the prayer 'We came here today for the ritual of *hamaori*. Please accept our offerings.' On the third day *sumo* wrestling or bull-fights are performed on the beach.

Several notions are involved in the ritual of *hamaori*. With regard to its purpose, old informants in Tokunoshima state that it is performed once a year for the purpose of praying to the ancestors for a good harvest through pleasing them on the beach. It is also said that *hamaori* is a ritual for the ancestors who died more than thirty-three years ago. In many southwestern parts of Japan the 33rd anniversary is customarily the last occasion on which the Japanese honour their ancestors. However, in Amami this occasion is not the last, for those ancestors who died earlier are also remembered in this ritual of *hamaori*. It seems that they annually worship deceased relatives and ancestors who died during the period of thirty-three years on the occasion of the *bon* festival.

In the village of Kaneku in Tokunoshima there exists a legend concerning the origins of the *hamaori* ritual. It had been customary for the inhabitants to spread

1. Five natural elements—wood, fire, earth, water and metal –are divided respectively into the elder and the younger, and then applied to days. For example, the 6th and 7th August 1983 were *hinoe* (elder of fire) and *hinoto* (younger of fire).

harvested ears of rice on the beach for two days before threshing. On one occasion a typhoon washed them all away. The villagers grieved at the loss of their rice. However, when they came to the beach afterwards, they found, to their surprise, that all the ears of rice had been returned to the beach, pushed back by the sea. Since then they began worshipping the god of the sea who, they thought, had been responsible for returning the rice to them—hence, according to the villagers, the beginning of the ritual of *hamaori*.

Thus the ritual of *hamaori* is practised to welcome the ancestors and to worship the god of the sea as the god of rice. The latter implies that a feature of the ritual is the celebration of a good harvest. Indeed, some informants from the island said that those ancestors that are prayed to during the ritual of *hamaori* would come from the other world of abundance called *neira* or *neriya*. The offering of food above an oven made of three stones on the beach is said to be for the purpose of expressing gratitude to the ancestors for a good harvest, and of praying for another good harvest the following year.

The *hamaori* ritual is thus directed towards the ancestors in order to secure a good harvest as well as the protection of their descendants, and to express gratitude to the god of the sea and to the gods of *neira*, as the god of rice. Praying in front of the stone oven is directed not only to the ancestors but also to the god of fire.

In villages on the island of Iheya in Okinawa, when a wife dies, the oven-hearth (*kamado*) of her house is destroyed and abandoned. After the *shōkō* (incense burning), on the 49th day which follows the death, an auspicious day is chosen to go to the beach to look for three proper stones to worship as sacred objects of the god of the oven or god of fire. In all the houses in Iheya, the god of the oven called *okama-ganashi* is worshipped in the kitchen located in the northwestern part of the house. The three stones are sacred objects which are said to come from *nirai-kanai*, equivalent to *neira* in Tokunoshima, located far beyond the sea. For this reason beach sand—sometimes seaweed—is scattered around the stones.

Accordingly, *neira* or *nirai-kanai* is on the one hand conceived by the inhabitants of Amami and Okinawa as the world of their ancestors; on the other hand, it is the world from which rice and fire are brought to people (Mabuchi 1980).

Moreover, evil things such as illness and misfortune are also thought to be brought from *nirai*. Some scholars think that *nirai* as a source of misfortune is older and has been transformed into a world of happiness; other scholars argue, on the contrary, that *nirai* was a paradise which in turn became a world of evil. In both cases a linear development is presupposed, but with little evidence. It seems that *nirai* is rather to be regarded as a world possessing the ambiguous characteristics of evil as well as of good, of misfortune as well as happiness.

Yet in the island of Tokunoshima the tendency exists to think of the *neira* rather as a paradise, where there live those ancestors who passed away more than thirty-three years ago, than as an evil world. In the village of Inokawa, located on the east coast of the island, they burn the leaves of a tree called *shii* (*Shiia sieboldii*) on the 33rd anniversary of a death, and the spirit of the dead is then supposed to ascend to the sky along with the smoke from the leaves, to join the ancestors in the

world of *neira* beyond the sea. In the village of Matsubara, located on the west coast of the island, they have a similar custom, following the same idea, where the soul is conceived of as making a journey along the line of a parabola.

The notion of *neira* seems to be closely connected with the idea that a man or certain creatures (such as dolphins or whales) or objects floating in from the sea are regarded as sacred things which can bring about happiness. This idea can be seen in a legend told by contemporary inhabitants of the village of Inokawa concerning a shrine called Ibiganashi. As I have noted elsewhere (Yoshida 1981), the motif in this legend—namely, that a man who treats a stranger with warm hospitality will gain happiness—can be found in several ancient folk-tales in Japan. For example, a rich man who refuses to allow a beggar-priest to stay in his house becomes poor, whereas a poor man who offers lodging to the priest becomes wealthy. Such a motif can be found in the folk-tales concerning Kōbō Daishi. A similar notion with regard to the stranger is also found in ancient Greece, where there existed a belief that the gods often visit cities in the guise of strangers from afar. Mystical notions about strangers can also be found in Africa and elsewhere (Fortes 1975; Maloney 1976).

It is illustrated clearly in the legend of Ibiganashi that objects from the sea (associated with *neira* or *nirai*) may be regarded as sacred things. This notion is also found in ideas about *yorimono* (*yurimun* in Okinawa; literally, 'objects which arrived'); the custom of collecting things which came from the sea in order to worship them is widely distributed among the coastal areas of the Japanese islands, and these objects are often worshipped as the god Ebisu.

In addition to what can be called the horizontal movement of the divinities deriving from *neira* or *nirai-kanai* located in the remote sea, below the sea, or in the bottom of the earth, we should also recognize the vertical movement of the celestial divinities associated with the cult of *utaki* (a cult dedicated to the mountains or the forests considered sacred).

The Snake Habu, *Messenger of the Other World*

According to folk notions in Amami and Okinawa, certain animals and plants are intermediaries between this world of reality and the other, supernatural world. In this region in general the *habu* (*Trimeresurus flavoridis*) is considered a messenger of the gods and the ancestors. The snake is feared as it is poisonous, and unless its bite is immediately treated with a serum injection, it will normally cause death. To dream about a *habu* is considered a sign that someone will die in the near future. Being bitten by a *habu* is believed to be a mystical punishment (*habu atari*) by some supernatural being, such as an ancestor or other deity. The punishment occurs because one has neglected ancestor worship, or defiled certain sacred things, or done some other thing to invoke the anger of the gods.

Since a bite by a *habu* implies some mystical involvement, people consult a *yuta* (shaman or medium) to discover the reason for the bite, and act according to the

instructions given by the *yuta*. Several years ago Mr Matsuyama Mitsuhide in Tokunoshima was bitten on the heel by a *habu* in his garden and had to be hospitalized (Matsuyama 1967). One old woman from his village visited him in the hospital and told him that she could not understand why a good man like him had been bitten by a *habu*. However, his mother immediately went to consult a *yuta*, who told her that the bite was caused because her son had defiled something sacred. According to her report, her son soon realized that he had unwittingly moved a stone to use as part of a hand-basin for a toilet, but the stone had formerly been brought into the garden from the sea by one of his ancestors (as described above, a stone from the sea is considered sacred because of its association with the *neira*).

The *habu* also possesses positive attributes. If one saves the life of a *habu* instead of killing it, one will be protected from accidents involving fire.

The times when a *habu* is believed to appear are fixed, and they are liminal in character: viz., in the *āyone* (twilight), at the *yuna-asa* (midnight) and in the *akatoki* (dawn). Twilight and dawn are both liminal hours between day and night, and midnight is the turning-point of one day to the next.

The *habu* is not only a messenger of the other world, but a deity of water and is often considered to be the master of Mount Ude in Tokunoshima. In this mountain villagers refrain from killing *habu*, because they are thought to be mystically punished if they kill one. People say that *habu* bite those who are impure—because of their attendance at funeral ceremonies or because of a death among their relatives—if they enter the mountain. This impurity due to death continues for seven days. *Habu* exist in other mountains or hills as well, and they do not permit such 'impure' people to enter. Neither do they like the menstrual pollution of women.

Because the *habu* transmits messages of the other world to human beings, it plays the role of mediator between this world and the other. One of the names given to the *habu* is *ayakubushu mēregua*. *Ayakubushu* means 'decorated with beautiful designs', and is an admirable quality of the skin of the *habu*, and *mēre* means 'beautiful girl' (Matsuyama 1967). This comparison of the *habu* with a young girl is possibly due to its role of mediator between this world and the other world, because such a role is often symbolically associated with women. In the Amami and Okinawan Islands most women are traditionally priestesses for public rituals. In assuming the role of mediator, the *habu* bites men in order to let them know that the worship addressed to the god of water is not sufficient, that the cult of the ancestors has been neglected, that a tree has been cut down in a sacred place, that a sacred stone has been defiled or polluted, or that a house has not been properly built according to the relevant directions.

Besides the *habu*, various other living beings may play the role of mediator—including birds, in particular crows and butterflies. In Izena Island, Okinawa, rats are considered messengers sent from the *nirai* world. Also a tree called *kuba* in Okinawa and Amami (*birō* in standard Japanese; *Livistona chinensis* var. *subglosa*) is believed to be a temporary residence of the gods, and similarly the *akō* (*Ficus wightiana*) and *gajumaru* (*Ficus retusa*) trees are inhabited by monsters called *kenmun* (see next section). The *susuki* (*Miscanthus sinensis*), the *yomogi* (*Artemisia*

vulgaris), the *urajiro* (*Gleichenia glauca*), the *bashō* (*Musa basjoo*) and the *tobira* (*Pittosporum tobira*) are also considered mystical plants. For example, in rituals such as the *maburi waashi*, which will be described in a later section, the *yuta* (shaman) in Amami customarily put on a garment called *bashagin*, made of the *bashō*.

The Monster Kenmun

Beliefs in various kinds of supernatural monsters used to be widespread among villagers in Japan. For instance, the red bean (*azuki*) is associated with one such supernatural being, who was supposed to produce noises by washing these beans in hollows in the countryside. It is said that when strange noises like the washing of beans are heard as one passes a stream or dale in mountainous areas at dusk, the noises are made by an old 'red bean' woman (*azuki baba*). In Sakugun, Nagano Prefecture, she was also believed to live in an empty house and sing a song which ran, 'Shall I wash red beans or eat a man?'

In the Amami Islands a belief in the supernatural monster called *kenmun* has survived to this day. In the mainland of Amami, as well as in Tokunoshima, this monster, conceived of as being male, is said to be covered with red hair, short like a child, with a long trunk, and short legs, and to salivate; while elsewhere it is also said that the *kenmun* has legs longer than his trunk when squatting. In Omonawa, in Tokunoshima, it is said that the *kenmun* wears leaves of a tree and for this reason he looks as if he is wearing a kimono of *kasuri* (splashed patterns). According to traditional beliefs, the *kenmun* sleeps in the hollow of a dead tree, and is often found on the banks of rivers, on the boundaries between the village and the beach, in caves on the beach, in shallows, in *akō* or *gajumaru* trees, in the bush, and at crossroads; he is also said to walk around at night in the shallows at low tide, carrying a lamp.

A man who happens to look at a *kenmun* is said to get a fever. He then gets lost in the mountains and cannot find his way home; his eyes become bloodshot and he sometimes falls unconscious. According to an informant from the village of Kinen, Tokunoshima, when a girl disappeared years ago, villagers searched for her for three days until they found her unconscious in the mountains; they beat her with bark from a tree to bring her back to consciousness. She then told the villagers that she had been deceived by a *kenmun*, and vomited what she had eaten; it all consisted of snails, which traditionally were not considered food for human beings. It is said that what a *kenmun* offers to men appears to be delicious, but in reality it is nothing but horse dung or snails.

According to the folklorists Ebara Yoshimori in Nase and Matsuyama Mitsuhide in Tokunoshima, the *kenmun* is not 'a monster of hairs' (*ke no mono*) but 'a monster of trees' (*ki no mono*), where *mun* is a dialect version of *mono* in standard Japanese referring to a spirit or supernatural being (personal communication). This monster corresponds to the *kijimun* of villages in Iheya, the northernmost island of Okinawa. The *kijimun* is also believed to be a spirit of trees, and is called *akakanaza* because his body is covered with red hair (Moromi 1981: 69).

In spite of the notion of the *kenmun* and the *kijimun* as spirits of trees, they are also believed to walk in the shallow waters of the sea at night, carrying a lamp. It is said that if fishermen in the shallows find their lamp going out and unwittingly ask a *kenmun* or *kijimun* for a light, they may get drowned by the monsters. On the island of Iheya the *kijimun* is believed to dislike and fear octopuses. An informant told me of an instance in which a man who was frightened by a *kijimun* in the shallow water at night threw an octopus at him. In anger, the *kijimun* tried to kill him, but the man narrowly escaped.

Inhabitants of the west coast of the mainland of Amami say that the body of the *kenmun* is covered with red hair, but the hair on his head is grey, and his face has neither eyes, ears, nor eyebrows. According to a local published report, one man saw two *kenmun* with hanging testicles and with plates on their heads; he told villagers later that when the *kenmun* squatted, their legs appeared so long that their knees were over their heads. The man died afterwards because, it is said, he was mysteriously 'defeated' by the *kenmun* just by looking at them (Setouchichō Editorial Committee 1977: 394 498).

However, while *kenmun* often harm people, they have benevolent aspects as well. In Kasarichō on the main island of Amami, and elsewhere, it is said that fishermen have a good catch in the sea when they become friends of *kenmun*; they also say that the fish a *kenmun* catches for his friends in this way have only one eye because he eats the other eye of the fish but does not eat the meat.

The *kenmun*, who has thus an amphibious character, is sometimes identified with the *kappa*, a monster legendary in the mainland of Japan, a spirit of the waters, who is said to drown people swimming in rivers by pulling at their legs. In Kikaijima, the northernmost island of the Amami chain, I found that the word *kenmun* is known, but is usually referred to locally by the term *gaorō*. It is said that they live in a freshwater pond connected with the sea. Unlike the *kappa* in the mainland, the *gaorō* shares characteristics with the *kenmun* in living also in the *gajumaru* trees.

Like other supernatural monsters in Japan, such as *oni* (half-man/half-beast) and *tengu* (half-man/half-bird), *kenmun* is said to be like a human child, yet a half-beast covered with red hair.

Many peoples in the world attribute mystical qualities to certain animals. One of the explanations why certain animals are endowed with mystical features is that they seem to have anomalous characteristics to the people concerned: for example, the pangolin in Lele culture (Douglas 1966), the cassowary in Karam (Bulmer 1967), the cuscus in Nuaulu (Ellen 1972), etc. Furthermore, people tend to create imaginary monsters such as the unilateral figure (Needham 1980) and the Japanese monsters discussed above. In this context then, it is interesting to note the deformity associated with the *kenmun*; in one oral tradition, as mentioned above, he has neither eyes nor brows nor ears. Also, the *kenmun* eats only one eye of a fish but leaves the meat intact. The *kenmun* is not explicitly said to be left-handed but it is associated with left-handedness. In Tokunoshima they say that one should bite the forefinger of one's left hand in order to escape from the *kenmun*,

because he is said to carry away a man or woman by pulling his or her left hand, and he would then let it go. Moreover, in order to cure the victims of *kenmun*, they tie a 'left rope' (*hidari-nawa*)—that is, a rope made by twisting strands in the opposite way to usual—to an *akō* tree, in which the *kenmun* is supposed to live. Similarly, when an eye disease is attributed to a *kenmun*, they stretch a 'left rope' around a *gajumaru* tree– -a tree in which a *kenmun* is also believed to live.

The magical power of the 'left rope' is used by villagers in Tokunoshima also for other purposes: for example, at a funeral those who carry the coffin from a house to the village graveyard customarily protect themselves from the spirit of the dead by tucking up their sleeves with a 'left rope'. Also, when domestic animals become ill, a 'left rope' is tied round the cowshed to prevent evil spirits from entering. Formerly, when it thundered, people tried to protect themselves by hanging a 'left rope' made of pieces of clothes under the eaves of the house. On a day designated for 'destroying insects' the owners of rice-fields used to place a 'left knot' made of *susuki* (*Miscanthus sinensis*) in the opening of the irrigation channel for the fields. It is also said in Tokunoshima that one can defeat a *kenmun* in *sumo* wrestling if one 'wrestles with the left' (left hand under the enemy's armpit) (Ogawa 1970: 583–4).

Thus it seems that the left principle is endowed with the magical power to drive out the *kenmun* just as the 'left rope' and the *susuki*, or pieces of cloth tied in a 'left knot', are used to expel the spirits of the dead or evil spirits. It is also often found in other cultures that the left hand is used for some magico-religious purposes (Needham 1960, 1973; Goody 1962: 111; Vogt 1969: 419; and see also Matsunaga, in this volume).

Symbolic reversals are often considered effective in driving out evil. Thus in Omonawa, Tokunoshima, in order to avoid harm from the *kenmun*, men take off their loin-cloths and tie them around their heads.

The hypothesis that animals which violate spatial boundaries tend to be endowed with mystical powers (Douglas 1966; Tambiah 1969) is also relevant here because of the 'amphibious' character of the *kenmun*, inasmuch as they wander around in the sea as well as in the trees and mountains, and the way the supernatural monster is associated with both spatial and temporal boundaries. It will be recalled that the places where the *kenmun* is likely to appear include village boundaries, crossroads, and a freshwater pond where the sea-water comes in at high tide. Furthermore, just as the 'red bean' woman and other monsters are believed to appear in the evening dusk, the *kenmun* is said to be most likely to appear at twilight. In Matsubara, Tokunoshima, people say that it is most likely to be about in the twilight of rainy days.

Similar notions associating the dusk of the evening with supernatural monsters or evil spirits exist in Bali and Malaysia. The dusk of the evening is called in Bali *sandi kala*, *sandi* meaning 'joint' or 'knot' and *kala* meaning evil spirits or 'time' (Howe 1981). Possibly it refers to the time between day and night. In the Amami Islands twilight or dusk is called *santuke* (*yūgata* in standard Japanese). People there say that during this time one should not visit tombs, nor weave or cut clothes, and that childbirth at this time of the day is detested. They also say that it is at this time that the human soul (*maburi*) is likely to go out, so that it is better not

to walk on the street at twilight. It is also advised that young girls should not go out at this time of day because they are particularly likely to encounter *mainamun* (supernatural monsters) and *minkirawa* (pig monsters without ears) during twilight.

As mentioned earlier, *kenmun* is a red monster; *kijimun* in Okinawa is called *akakanaza*, in which *aka* denotes 'red', because his body is covered with red hair. While the colour red in the Japanese mainland is used as a good, auspicious colour, in both Okinawa and Amami, however, red is not a good colour. According to Tsunemi Junichi, in Okinawa, while the colour blue is a symbol of life, red expresses ageing, old age and death. Thus it is no surprise that the colour of the *kenmun*'s body is red.

The Susuki *and the Bean*[2]

The *susuki* is called *zukki*, *azaha* or *adaha* in Amami. The *susuki* generally plays an important ritual role in the southwestern archipelago. For example, in Amami, for the sake of an easy childbirth, a *susuki* used to be placed underneath the bed of a woman during her confinement. In Tokunoshima, in the ritual described earlier for expelling insects, a knot of 'left-tied' *susuki* is placed on the edge of an irrigation ditch. Its effectiveness may be attributed to the 'left tie' used, but the *susuki* itself is also supposed to have mystical powers.

Among the rites still performed today in Kikaijima there is a ritual called *shichami*, in which people pray for the health and growth of children of one to twelve years. It is performed in August on a prescribed day of the lunar calendar. Five *susuki* are prepared for boys of five, seven for the girl of seven and so on. Early in the morning their parents or grandparents take them to a pond or well, dip the *susuki* in the water, and shake the drops extracted over the children, saying 'Get bigger quickly!' (*Okiku nare nare*). After this, a number of stones equal to the age of the child is collected from the pond, wrapped in the *susuki*, and brought home. The stones are later placed in the domestic shrine (*kamidana*).

In Kikaijima there is another ritual in August called *shibasashi*. This involves ancestor worship in which flowers are placed on the surface of the tombstones, swept beforehand by some *susuki*, and then *susuki* are placed in the four corners of the house, on both sides of the gate, and beside the well, for the purpose of expelling evil spirits.

In Setouchi-cho, Amami Oshima, on the day of the *shibasashi*, the *susuki* is first placed on the four corners of the roof and also of the rice-fields. The purpose of this is said to be to purify the houses and fields and to expel evil spirits. The day of *shibasashi* is also the day when people receive *kōsoganashi* or *kosuganashi*, 'ancestors of the old time'. They are undoubtedly the ancestors who died more than thirty-three years ago. On this day straw and grasses are burnt so as to make the smoke

2. This section has particularly benefited from Lévi-Strauss 1979.

by which the ancestors are supposed to come down from the sky. The ancestors are said initially to have come from the *neira*, far beyond the sea, so that they are said to be wet and cold, and need to be made dry and warm by the fire. The *susuki* are put together with the flowers in a vase in front of the ancestral tablets moved from their usual place to a room on the east side of the house (*omote*).

In Okinawa, on the day of *shibasashi*, rice mixed with *azuki* (red beans) is offered at the family altar, and the *susuki* tied with branches of mulberry are planted in the eaves to expel evil spirits. As Yanagita Kunio has remarked (1951: 451), 'just like the *shichoku* (*Aucuba japonica*), the *susuki*. . .is liked by gods'.

On the one hand, the *susuki* is used to expel evil spirits; on the other hand, it is used to invite or summon up a spirit or soul of the dead. For example, there is a ritual in the Amami Islands called *maburiwaashi*, performed by the *yuta* (shaman). Generally, it is practised within the period of 49 days after a death– in general the 19th, 29th or 39th day—but certain shamans refuse to practise the rite before the 7th day, because during the period of seven days after a death the pollution caused by the death is said to be too strong. The ritual begins with the summoning of the soul (*maburi*) of the deceased. The shaman calls the soul by reciting certain formulae, while holding the *susuki* with a fan, then moving them in a circular fashion around his or her mouth. The *yuta* thus invites the soul to inform its living relatives through his or her mouth of anything that it might have failed to say when it was alive. The soul is supposed to possess the shaman, who then announces its wishes etc. as if the soul of the deceased itself were speaking.

After the departure of the soul which was possessing the *yuta* another rite takes place to expel the soul of the deceased. This consists of the symbolic act of cutting the air with a sword both inside and outside the house. Then the *yuta* scatters roasted soya beans (*Glycine max soybean*) which have thus become black. They say that just as the roasted beans will not germinate again, they throw them in order that the soul will never return.

Since it is believed that the souls of the living are inclined to leave with the soul of the dead, the *yuta* lightly strikes the head and shoulders of those present with the *susuki*, in order to make the soul of the living stay firmly inside the body.

The *susuki* is used to call up not only the souls of the dead, but also the souls of the living. It is believed in the Amami and Okinawa Islands that the souls of the living may escape when a man is surprised or falls out of a tree. In Nase City, Amami, the ritual performed by the *yuta* to call back the lost soul to its body is called *maburimuke* (to invite a soul), while in Okinawa this is called *maburigumi*. In this ritual the role of *susuki* is again important. In Okinawa the *yuta* holds the blades of *susuki* to call back the lost soul. She moves the *gen* (ring of *susuki*) three times over the head of the patient whose soul is missing. Then the *gen* is hung on the wall of the room for a week. In Nase, while the soul of a patient is absent, the *yuta* places the *susuki* beside the pillow of the patient, with the root directed towards the outside of the house and the leaves towards the inside. She also strokes the body of the patient with the *susuki* while reciting formulae.

Thus in the case of the ritual of calling up a soul of the dead, the *susuki* is first used to summon the soul of the deceased and is also used to hold the souls of the living at the time of expelling the soul of the dead. In the case of the *maburimuke* ritual, the *susuki* is again used to bring back the soul of a living being who is suffering from absence of the soul. In the context of the *shichami*, the *susuki* is used to pray for the health and growth of children. In the Amami and Okinawa Islands, the *susuki* is placed or planted not only in the ritual of *shibasashi*, but also in a new house, in a vacant house from which a family has moved out, and beside a new well for the purpose of expelling evil spirits. At funerals the *susuki* is placed on a coffin also to expel evil spirits.

In the last phase of the ritual of *maburiwaashi*, while roasted soya beans are thrown—with the idea that, since the roasted black soya will never germinate, the soul of the dead will never return—the *susuki* is used to hold in the souls of the living. Thus the roasted soya may be opposed to the *susuki* in this context, so that if the soya beans are situated on the side of the dead, the *susuki* can be placed on the side of the living (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1979; 1983: 271).

The *susuki* is thus used not only to invite back the souls of the dead, but to help growing children, to call back the souls of the living, and to expel evil spirits. Why is this so? As Lévi-Strauss noted in his recent book (1983: 271–2), the mystical nature of the *susuki* may stem from its enormous strength of growth in a wilderness. Note that in festivals in the Japanese archipelago the *susuki* is often used in place of the rice plant—a fact which may be related to the resemblance between the two plants; certainly the *susuki* belongs to the rice family.

Whereas the *susuki* was originally confined to the Far East, the geographical distribution of beans is very wide. The soya bean seems to have originated in north China, but was already cultivated in Japan in the Yayoi period (300 BC to AD 300). The custom of expelling evil spirits on the day of *setsubun* (the eve of the beginning of spring) by throwing out roasted soya beans and reciting 'happiness be inside, demons be out!' still persists to this day. In some places in north Kyushu fishermen throw roasted soya beans into the sea to calm a storm.

Besides the soya bean, magical and mystical powers are attributed to the red bean (*Azukia angularis Ohwi*). Archaeological evidence indicates that the red bean was eaten in the early period of the Jomon Culture (4800–300 BC). It is customary in Japan to cook rice with red beans on days of happy events. On January 15th Japanese eat a gruel of rice mixed with red beans. On the occasion of childbirth it is customary in certain places to eat *mochi* (pounded rice) with a paste of sweet red beans. In certain areas people cook rice or rice gruel with red beans at the time of starting on a journey or moving into a new house.

However, red beans are eaten not only on happy occasions, but also on unfortunate occasions: at funerals, for example, at the moment of placing a corpse in the coffin, the close relatives eat rice gruel and red beans, and again after the burial, (sweet) red beans. It can probably be concluded then that the red bean is eaten at a time of transition from one state to another: New Year, childbirth, departure on a journey, moving in and out, death. Moreover, the red bean was used because of its mystical powers to expel evil beings, the god of leprosy, foxes, rabbits, and wolves, by feeding them with it. Some scholars contend that the mystical nature of the red bean stems from its red colour, but taking into account the mystical power attributed to the soya bean itself, it is not the colour that should be treated as the main reason.

The Japanese thus customarily treat beans in notable ways, but the attribution of mystical powers to beans is not unique to Japanese culture. In ancient Greece, for example, the broad bean was either prohibited food among certain groups or else considered sacred. According to Detienne (1972: 96–100), in ancient Greece the bean was considered a mediator between this world and the other. Among northern and central American Indians a certain mystical nature is also attributed to the bean (Lévi-Strauss 1983: 263–75). Of the Zinacantan Indians of Highland Chiapas, Mexico, Laughlin reports that 'if beans are mistreated their soul will cry and complain to the earth lord and to the gods in heaven, thus calling down famine upon mankind' (1975: 112).

In Japanese mythology the beans (soya and red beans) emerged from the genitalia of the goddess Ukemochi. According to one Japanese dictionary, the Japanese word for bean, *mame*, also in fact means genitalia, clitoris, and woman. The symbolic association of the bean with woman is also found in other cultures. For example, the resemblance of the bean to the female sexual organ was also recognized in ancient Greece (Detienne 1972: 97). Gossen notes that in the mythology of the Chamula, Tzotzil-speaking Maya Indians of the Central Chiapas Highlands of Mexico, maize came from a piece of the (male) sun's groin and included a part of his pubic hair, which is the silk of the ear of maize, but the (female) moon gave potatoes (her breast milk) and beans (her necklace) (Gossen 1972: 143).

It seems clear then that the mystical notions associated with the bean—its ambiguous position as an intermediary between this world and the other, and its symbolic association with woman—are not unique to Japan. Yet the interrelation between these notions may have stronger force in the Japanese context, since, as Yanagita argued (1962: 14), it was customarily ordinary women in villages who played the magico-religious role of performing rituals as intermediaries between this world and the other.

In the Amami and Okinawa Islands, these women worked as farmers and housewives in daily life but performed various rituals as priestesses, clothed in white, for the welfare of their village. This pattern still persists to this day in certain villages in these islands. In the village of Tokuwase in Tokunoshima the highest priestess amongst these 'divine women' (*kaminchu*) used to live in a house called *agere* (related to the word *agari*, meaning the sunrise or east). The *agere* house is located on the eastern side of the *nēma* house in which the founder of the village and his successors lived. The *agere* and *nēma* are situated in the highest place on the mountain side of the village, which is considered to be superior to the sea or lower side. The presence of these two houses illustrates the traditional political structure of the village, though it has ceased to operate at present. Formerly, the village was politically controlled from generation to generation by the head of the *nēma* house, whereas one of his sisters who lived in the *agere* house acted as the highest priestess, conducting the rituals and other religious affairs of the village. Theoretically, the position of secular leader was inherited by his son, while the status of the priestess passed to one of the daughters of her brother, the leader of the village. The priestess never married and her successor was chosen from among the daughters of the secular leader. The political leader was called *iiri* (meaning 'brother'), and the priestess *unari* (meaning 'sister'). The *iiri* was in charge of village politics, but he discharged his duties according to oracles interpreted by the *unari* (Matsuyama 1970). While in secular life the *unari* was under the protection of the *iiri*, they had a complementary relationship (Mabuchi 1964). Dual sovereignty of this sort has also been found in Okinawa, well described by Torikoshi Kenzaburo in 1944.

Dual sovereignty is not practised any more in these villages. However, notions underlying it still persist today. It was customary, for example, for Okinawan men, when leaving for a distant fishing trip or long journey, to take along with them a towel of their sister as an amulet. During World War II soldiers took along with them to the battlefield a 'thousand stitch-belt' (*sennin-bari*), towels, or hair of their sister as amulets. It was believed that brothers protect their sisters in secular life, while sisters extend their spiritual powers to protect their brothers (Mabuchi 1964).

Concluding Remarks

An analysis of the *hamaori* ritual performed in Tokunoshima reveals that the notion of ancestors is divided into two kinds: those ancestors who died more than thirty-three years ago and are supposed to live in the *neira* located far beyond the sea, and those who died during the period of thirty-three years. This division of the dead is clearly reflected in the plan of the house in the Okinawa Islands. In all houses on the island of Iheya it is always in the 'first' room on the east side of the house that more distant ancestors—identified with gods—are worshipped, while more recent ancestors are worshipped in the 'second' room, located on the western side of (and next to) the 'first' room. The distant ancestors are enshrined in an altar (*kamidana*) constructed on the northern side of the 'first' room, whereas the more recently deceased ancestors are represented by the *ihai* (ancestral tablets) placed in a small altar (*butsudan*) situated on the northern side of the 'second' room.

It is the *yuta* who are believed to transmit messages from the ancestors to human beings. It is also the *yuta* who serve as mediators between the living and other, supernatural beings. Moreover, there exist certain animals and plants which are conceived to mediate between this world of reality and the other. We have seen that the *habu* snake, the *susuki* and the bean are regarded as intermediaries between the two worlds, and that in a certain ritual context the *susuki* are situated rather on the side of life, whereas roasted soya beans are more on the side of the dead. A female *yuta* states that in the ritual of summoning a soul of the dead, roasted soya beans are scattered both inside and outside the entrance to a house in order to help the soul or ghost enter the house more easily because it has no legs with which to walk. It is assumed here that a soul or ghost comes in sliding on the beans. As for the red bean, in so far as it is eaten in Japan at the times of New Year, departure on a journey, moving house, childbirth, and death,

one can probably safely state that it is connected with transition.

The notion of the *kenmun* or *kijimun* can only be understood in relation to the symbolic structures of the inhabitants of the Amami and Okinawa Islands.

While there exist cultural peculiarities in the ideas and practices associated with dual sovereignty in these islands, dual sovereignty of a similar kind is described in detail by Georges Dumézil for the ancient Indo-European peoples. He has shown that the gods Mitra and Varuna in India were the cosmological projection of the dual sovereignty which existed there: Mitra as legislator and Varuna as priest. Mitra represents this world and Varuna the other world (Dumézil 1948). Rodney Needham has shown the existence of a dual sovereignty among the Meru in east Africa in which the 'elder' corresponds to Mitra and the Mugwe, high priest, is essentially equivalent to Varuna in ancient India (Needham 1960). Considering such comparative material, as Needham put it, 'complementary governance is not peculiar to any particular tradition. . .but is a fundamental and global instance of an elementary classification of powers' (Needham 1980: 88). Thus the dual sovereignty and complementary protection between brothers and sisters found in the Amami and Okinawa Islands can be regarded as an example of such a classification of powers.

What seems to be the most important of all is the possibility of a synthesis between a regional detailed study of the collective notions of a particular society and a global point of view covering vastly different areas (cf. Geertz 1976). It is essential to study the peculiarities and uniqueness of a culture. But at the same time we should not lose sight of the similarities between cultures.

References

Bulmer, R.N.H. 1967. 'Why is the Cassowary not a Bird?', *Man* n.s., Vol. II, pp. 5–25.

Detienne, Marcel 1972. *Les Jardins d'Adonis*, Paris: Gallimard.

Douglas, Mary 1966. *Purity and Danger*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Dumézil, Georges 1948. *Mitra–Varuna: Essai sur deux représentations indo-européennes de la souveraineté*, Paris: Gallimard.

Ellen, Roy F. 1972. 'The Marsupial in Nuaulu Ritual Behaviour', *Man* n.s., Vol. VII, pp. 223–38.

Fortes, M. 1975. 'Strangers', in M. Fortes and S. Patterson (eds.), *Studies in African Social Anthropology*, London and New York: Academic Press, pp. 229–53.

Geertz, Clifford 1976. 'From the Native's Point of View', in K.H. Basso and H.A. Selby (eds.), *Meaning in Anthropology*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, pp. 221–37.

Goody, Jack 1962. *Death, Property and the Ancestors*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Gossen, G.H. 1972. 'Temporal and Spatial Equivalents in Chamula Ritual Symbolism', in W.A. Lessa and E.Z. Vogt (eds.), *Reader in Comparative Religion*, New York: Harper & Row, pp. 135–49.

Howe, L.E.A. 1981. 'The Social Determination of Knowledge: Maurice Bloch and Balinese Time', *Man* n.s., Vol. XVI, pp. 120–34.

Kreiner, J. 1971. 'A Study of the Notions of God and of the Other World in the Southwestern Islands' (in Japanese).

Laughlin, R.M. 1975. *The Great Tzotzil Dictionary of San Lorenzo Zinacantan*, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology, no. 19.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude 1979. 'Pythagoras in America', in R.H. Hook (ed.), *Fantasy and Symbol: Studies in Anthropological Interpretation*, London and New York: Academic Press, pp. 33–41.

. . . 1983. *Le Regard éloigné*, Paris: Plon.

Mabuchi, Toichi 1964. 'Spiritual Predominance of the Sister', in Alan H. Smith (ed.), *Ryukyuan Culture and Society*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, pp. 79–91.

. . . 1980. *Recollections and Reconnaissances on Studies on the* Onari-gami (in Japanese).

Maloney, C. (ed.) 1976. *The Evil Eye*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Matsuyama, Mitsuhide 1967. *Folk-Beliefs with Respect to the Bite of the* Habu *Snake and its Folk Medicine* (in Japanese).

. . . 1970. *The Structure of the Village Community* (Tokunoshima) (in Japanese).

Moromi, Seikichi (ed.) 1981. *A History of Iheya Village* (in Japanese).

Needham, Rodney 1960. 'The Left Hand of the Mugwe: An Analytical Note on the Structure of Meru Symbolism', *Africa*, Vol. XXX, pp. 20–33.

. . . 1980. *Reconnaissances*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

. . . (ed.) 1973. *Right & Left: Essays on Dual Symbolic Classification*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ogawa, Hisao 1970. *Beliefs and Life* (Tokunoshima) (in Japanese).

Ogo, Kinichi 1966 (repr. 1973). *The Notion of Ancestors and Rituals in North Okinawa* (in Japanese).

Origuchi, S. 1975a. *Complete Works of Origuchi Shinobu*, Vol. 1 (in Japanese).

. . . 1975b. *Complete Works of Origuchi Shinobu*, Vol. 2 (in Japanese).

. . . 1976. *Complete Works of Origuchi Shinobu*, Vol. 16 (in Japanese).

Setouchicho Editorial Committee (ed.) 1977. *Description of Setouchi Town* (in Japanese).

Tambiah, S.J. 1969. 'Animals are Good to Think and Good to Prohibit', *Ethnology*, Vol. VIII, pp. 423–59.

Torikoshi, Kenzaburō 1944. *A Study of Ancient Ryukyuan Society: Politics and Religion* (in Japanese).

Vogt, Evon Z. 1969. *Zinacantan: A Maya Community in the Highlands of Chiapas*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Yanagita, Kunio 1962. *Collected Works of Yanagita Kunio*, Vol. 9 (in Japanese).

. . . (ed.) 1951. *Dictionary of Japanese Folklore* (in Japanese).

YOSHIDA, Teigo 1981. 'The Stranger as God: The Place of the Outsider in Japanese Folk Religion', *Ethnology*, Vol. XX, pp. 87–99.

JAPANESE REFERENCES

クライナー・J
1971 「南西諸島における神観念他界観念の一考察」
大藤時彦・小川 徹編『沖縄文化論叢』東京：平凡社
馬渕 東一
1980 「オナリ神研究をめぐる回顧と展望」『成城大学民俗学研究所紀要』4
東京：成城大学
松山 光秀
1967 「ハブ咬傷にまつわる俗信とその民間療法」『徳之島郷土研究会報』1
67～100頁
1970 「村落共同体の構造」『徳之島町誌』458～491頁 徳之島町編 委員会編 亀津：
徳之島町役場
諸見 清吉(編)
1981 『伊平屋村史』那覇：伊平屋村史発行委員会
小川 学夫
1970 「信仰と生活」『徳之島町誌』569～588頁
大胡 欽一
1966 「北部沖縄の祖霊観と祭祀」『政経論叢』35、1 東京：明治大学 政経研究所
1973 『現代のエスプリ－沖縄の伝統文化』121～137頁 東京：伝統と現代
折口 信夫
1975 『折口信夫全集』1 東京：中央公論社
1975 『折口信夫全集』2 東京：中央公論社
1976 『折口信夫全集』16 東京：中央公論社
瀬戸内町誌編集委員会(編)
1977 『瀬戸内町誌』瀬戸内町：瀬戸内町編集委員会
鳥越憲三郎
1944 『琉球古代社会の研究－政治と宗教』東京：三笠書房
柳田 国男
1962 『柳田国男全集』9 東京：筑摩書房
柳田 国男(編)
1951 『日本民俗学辞典』東京：東京堂

KAZUTO MATSUNAGA

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LEFT HAND IN TWO TYPES OF RITUAL ACTIVITY IN A JAPANESE VILLAGE

Introduction

THE purpose of this paper is to present and interpret certain findings concerning the left hand[1] in the context of worship at a Japanese village Shinto shrine and in funeral practices. I have found that the use of the left hand is significant in rituals at a Shinto shrine and also in Buddhist funeral practices at a village near Yame City in Fukuoka prefecture. Rituals performed at the shrine are considered pure by the villagers (who are all Buddhists), while the funeral practices are considered impure and polluting. In this sense, the two contradict each other. This is illustrated by the fact that members of a family in which a death has occurred neither visit the village shrine nor participate in any of its rituals for a year, because of the pollution caused by the death of the family member. In the first part of this paper, I will describe the use of the left hand, and in the second part I will offer an interpretation. This paper deals mainly with findings made at the village mentioned, but I will occasionally refer to data from other villages.

The main agricultural products of the village have traditionally been rice (rice cultivation begins in May or June and ends in October or November) and wheat (cultivated between November and May), although horticulture has recently been introduced also. There are 98 households in the village, with a population of

1. Left hand does not mean just 'hand' itself in this paper but also foot, as shown by Hertz (1960). Hertz also refers to 'foot', despite the title of his paper. Thus, for example (p. 104), 'A holy place must be entered right foot first. Sacred offerings are presented to the gods with the right hand.'