

# Space and Time in Ryukyuan Cosmology\*

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Here the term "Ryukyus" includes the four archipelagoes to mention from south to north: (1) Yaeyama, (2) Miyako, (3) the main island of Okinawa along with adjacent islets, and (4) Amami. In these archipelagoes, the indigenous culture as a whole has been far less imbued with Buddhism than in Mainland Japan, while the influence of folk-Taoism seems to be somewhat stronger, even though it has been much acclimatized to the cultural milieu of the Ryukyus.

When trying to reconstruct Ryukyuan cosmology, the researcher

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\* This paper was primarily submitted to Professor Richard M. Dorson, Indiana University, who convened a symposium "Folklore in the Modern World" at the 9th International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, Chicago, August-September 1973. It was planned then to publish the papers submitted in two volumes with the same title as the symposium name. For various reasons, however, the publication was not only much delayed, but also its allocation program of papers seems to have undergone more or less change. Sometime in 1978 Professor Dorson informed me that the papers—perhaps at least partially—were being edited by Professor Willis E. Sibley, The Cleveland State University (still now?), but I could not hear from him after all. Accordingly I wrote Professor Sol Tax, the editor-in-chief of *World Anthropology* volumes (papers and conference publications of the Congress), inquiring about the situation of my paper and suggesting that it might better be published in *Asian Folklore Studies*. In his letter of 25th April 1979, Professor Sol Tax replied: "Willis Sibley has to have published the papers on Far-East topics . . . But Dr. Sibley (who has been ill) has cancelled plans for his book. Hence my advice to you is to publish elsewhere", and moreover he wrote: "I suggest you send it now to *Asian Folklore Studies*." Thus, I am now publishing my paper as it stood in 1973 before its being edited in the United States. On this occasion, I express my gratitude to Dr. Matthias Eder for his goodwill of permitting me to publish my paper in this journal.

would be inevitably confronted first with tremendous diversity of local informations and practices concerned. This is especially the case with the ways of performing community rituals, on either hamlet or village level, which seem to provide us with an important clue to reconstruct the people's cosmology.

## I

Before dealing with such community rituals, we shall discuss briefly about the people's view relevant to the cardinal points (Mabuchi 1968: 121-127). This seems to be well reflected in the plan of both house and house-yard in many localities. The house-yard is often surrounded by walls made of coral reef stones, the entrance being found usually on the south thereof. The most widespread is the four-room plan. The two front rooms are parlours, of which the east one, namely, the room on the right, is the first parlour, and the west one on the left is the second parlour. It is on the north side of the first parlour that the altar for deities or deified ancestors is situated, while the altar for the souls of the dead is set on the north side of the second parlour in most households, both altars facing south. Important guests are entertained in the first parlour, and the second parlour is the place for social intercourse of daily life, particularly of women. Meanwhile, the two rooms in the rear of the house are regarded as those for women and children.

In this connection, it seems noteworthy that the outdoor rituals of the family are held usually at the southeastern part of the house-yard. On the other hand, toilet and pigstay are placed at the northwestern corner and cattleshed or workroom, if any, at the southwestern part thereof.

Thus, we have here a scheme in which the east is sacred and superior as compared with the west, the former being the male side and the latter the female side. With regard to the contrast between the north and the south, however, the situation is less consistent and even contradictory at least seemingly. According to the context of rituals, either side may be superior.

Generally, in the Ryukyus, the male predominates over the female in social affairs, while the situation is the reverse in religious ones. At the family level, the ritual for the "fire deity" of the hearth—in the kitchen room attached on the west, not the east, to the dwelling house—is monopolized by women, under the leadership of the mistress, but in Yaeyama, still often of the sister or father's sister of the male family-head (Mabuchi 1964b: 79-91). Though the family rituals for the souls of the dead as well as the deified ancestors are usually presided by male

representatives, the lineage or clan priestess in Okinawa plays an important role in the rituals for remoter ancestors at the "stem house" of the group concerned. In the Ryukyus as a whole, the female predominates over the male particularly in the community rituals which are conducted mostly by priestesses or female functionaries of various classes, the male being often excluded from participating in some core rituals or merely qualified to playing the role of assistant. To some extent in parallel with the house altars mentioned, the altar of shrine or sanctuary frequently, if not always, faces south and the mortals face north. The seats close to the altar or incense-burner are on the north side and are superior to those on the south side where the male representatives are allowed to sit. As to whether the east is always superior to the west, we cannot say definitely in this case. Surely there are many instances indicating the superiority of the east, next to the north. Meanwhile it is not rare to find instances in which the situation is just the reverse. In this regard, some people seem rather vaguely to be cognizant of its being based on the "deity-centered view": as viewed from the side of deity, the east is the left side and the west the right side, that is, the superior side.

In any case, the fact that the altars face south usually at the house and frequently at the shrine or sanctuary does not necessarily lead the people to think that such beings as deities or the souls of the dead dwell or come from somewhere on the north. People seems to be far more concerned with the east-west axis, as reflected in their behaviour way of dramatic outdoor rituals which are performed with some festivity to secure the fertility of crops and the people themselves.

## II

Grand rituals, or rather festivals, are held often in the Summer or early Autumn, as will be discussed later on. Here the emphasis seems to be laid on welcoming and seeing off the deities from a distance who annually visit respective communities, either hamlet or village, to bless the people. These are the overseas deities and the mountain deities, more often the former. The settlement site, farming field, neighboring bushes for fire wood, etc. represent the mundane world in the ritual context, with an ill-defined boundary. In this sphere there are various deities who supervise and protect the people of the community. Tentatively we shall call them the "community deities". In most cases of the main island of Okinawa, the priestess called *ni gami* presides the cult of the hamlet deities, while the *nuru* supervises all such cults within the village, that is, an administrative as well as religious

organization of a higher grade, composed of several hamlets. In other archipelagoes, except some localities of Amami, it is rare to find such an organization above the hamlet level. Moreover, in both Miyako and Yaeyama, a hamlet contains several cult groups, each with the priestess-in-chief of its own.

Superiority of the east comes often to the fore in ritual activities. In the ritual tug-of-war performed by the people of two sides of a hamlet, eastern half represents the male side and the western half the female side. The female side should ultimately win, otherwise the fertility will not be gained, the main theme being to "draw" the blessing of fertility from the east to the west, namely from the overseas holy land to the mundane world. In Yaeyama, the tug-of-war is often preceded by some ritual dramas, including such one as follows: two young men disguise themselves as an old man and an old woman, the former representing a deity from the holy land and the latter the hamlet people as a whole or the priestess as the ritual leader of the hamlet. The old man comes from the east and the old woman from the west, to meet at the place where the tug-of-war will be soon performed. The old man gives the old woman a basket containing several kinds of seeds including rice, millet, barley, sweet potato, etc. The gift of seeds is no sooner handed over than they separate and hurry away in opposite directions, the old man toward the east and the old woman toward the west.

The ritual superiority of the east is widely observed also in the tug-of-war performed in the main island of Okinawa. In some localities, however, the situation is seemingly the reverse: the eastern side, that is, the male side, should ultimately win. This might imply to "draw" the people toward the blessing of fertility, as some informants explain rather vaguely. In such cases too, the east-west axis is taken well into account.

The implication of the boat-rowing ritual is in conformity with the tug-of-war mentioned, especially in Yaeyama. When they row out to the sea, they do this slowly while singing a song welcoming the overseas deities and then, the boat race is performed from the open sea to the shore as if they were in a hurry to bring the overseas deities along with them to the hamlet.

It is true that, in many hamlets facing the sea approximately on the east, the overseas deities are believed to come either from somewhere beyond the horizon or even from the bottom of the sea, far in the direction of sunrise. In other hamlets facing the sea on the west, however, it is hard to perform the boat-rowing ritual in conformity with this. Here, the theme is simply to "draw" the fertility from the overseas

holy land, without specific emphasis laid on a definite direction (Mabuchi 1968: 127-130).

In both southern Miyako and northern Okinawa, there is held here and there in the sanctuary yard a ritual of what may be called the "boat-rowing on the land," not on the sea. Stones are arrayed or two ropes are stretched so as roughly to form a boat, the former being found mostly in Miyako and the latter in Okinawa. As will be discussed later on, there seems to be involved two points much relevant to the present topic: (a) in Miyako, the bow of the stone boat, exclusively rowed by men, is roughly directed to the east, while women perform a dance by holding the skirt tucked up to receive the "fertility" sprinkled down from the sky by the deities often conceived as those from the overseas holy land far on the east; (b) in Okinawa, the rowing of the "rope boat" is practised exclusively by priestesses who seem to represent the overseas deities returning home. In this part of Okinawa, on the other hand, it is often said that such deities come first to some hill in the vicinity of hamlet and eventually return home from the shore.

It would be well to add here that, in a few hamlets of both Miyako and Yaeyama, there is held a ritual welcoming the invisible boat of the overseas deities at the seashore, instead of rowing either stone boat or ordinary boat which is annually held in adjacent hamlets. According to the situation, such deities might come and go by either airline or sea road, or at least partially, by submarine way, even though their homeland is of one and the same place.

As compared with the overseas deities, the mountain deities are far less conspicuous in Ryukyuan rituals as a whole. Here and there in the northwestern part of the main island of Okinawa, however, the mountain deities are of a well-defined figure, side by side with the overseas deities. Arrival and departure of both kinds of deities are ritually dramatized by disguised priestesses whom the people call the "mountain deities" and the "sea deities" respectively.

By referring to the classes of priestesses who participate in the ritual drama, we shall be able to differentiate several types: (1) The *nuru*, *ni-gami* and some other priestesses of higher classes are little more than a bystander, the drama being performed by other class of priestesses called the *asibi-gami* ("play deities") who are specialized to play the role of either the sea deities or the mountain deities; (2) the "play deities" act presumably two characters, first as the sea deities and then, as the mountain deities in most cases, the interchange being perhaps observable in their re-arranging the dress, headgear and implements, generally accompanied by a round dance moving more often clockwise, repeated five or seven times—the number of times

concerned presumably implying the transposition from a given world to another, as inferred from a number of other symbolic acts; (3) the *nuru*, along with some other priestesses of higher classes, represents the mountain deity, while the sea deities are invisible visitors; and (4) along with some priestesses of higher classes, a few *nurus* represent the sea deities and several *ni-gamis* the mountain deities. There are some other instances in which the characters of the visiting deities represented by priestesses still remain obscure and prevent us from classifying them.

In ritual contexts, both (1) and (2) refer to the three cosmic divisions: the realm of the sea deities, that of the mountain deities, and the mundane world. Meanwhile, (3) and (4) imply at least superficially a cosmic dichotomy, the mundane world being left behind. In (3) the *nuru*, the supervisor of the cult of the community deities, looms large as the representative-in-chief of the mountain deities. The case (4) is rather exceptional in that a village—now split into two villages—contains unusually numerous hamlets and there are several *nurus*; the *ni-gamis*, who are in a more intimate relation with the community deities, mostly represent the mountain deities; moreover, after having seen off the sea deities at the seashore, all these priestesses representing the mountain deities had been used, until relatively recently, to change their clothes—ideally seven clothes each with different colours—one after another, thus, ideally seven times. This would possibly imply their coming back to the mundane world left behind, as it were, in the ritual drama where the two kinds of visiting deities appear on the stage.

The trend toward the tripartition hidden in the ritually manifest bipartition seems also to be observed here and there in other part of the Ryukyus. We shall exemplify this by referring here to the masked deities in a sub-area of Yaeyama, namely, the *akamata* and *kuromata*, the former being the male deity or deities and the latter the female. They are often believed to come from a subterranean world or the “bottom of the earth” through a cave close to the hamlet, to bless the people. In the hamlet Komi, the *akamata* and *kuromata* come respectively from the two hills somewhat far behind the hamlet which faces the sea on the east, while a boat-rowing ritual is held on the same day presumably to welcome the overseas deities as mentioned above. Here too, the mundane world remains rather latent. In the islet Kobama it is told that the cave, from which these masked deities appear, connects with the two subterranean roads, one leading to the seashore and another to the top of a hill overlooking the hamlet.

This tale from the islet Kobama would be of suggestion when trying to trace the shift in local variation with regard to whence the visiting deities come. The shift concerned would be comparable with

that in the case of the overseas deities. On the one hand, the bottom of the sea, a holy land beyond the horizon (on the direction of sunrise, perhaps ideally), or the sky, and on the other, the bottom of the earth, a cave close to the hamlet, or some hills behind the hamlet. In reconstructing Ryukyuan cosmology, we have perhaps very little to do with the "horizontal line versus the vertical one", but far more with an oblique or arched line as it were, along which the important figures of the grand rituals shift the location of their "headquarters" as apparent in the local variation mentioned. In this connection, it may be added here that the heavenly beings as such are sometimes told in myths or other tales, but are mostly negligible as an object of ritual cult.

In the ritual context of the Ryukyus, it is not rare that the sky is connected with the top of a mountain or a hill, even though the former is nothing but a passage through which the overseas deities visit the mundane world as we have observed. On the other hand, the overseas deities bring fertility along with them from the bottom of the sea, while the "bottom of the earth" is said to be filled with fertility which the *akamata* and the *kuromata* bring along with them to bless the people. In some hamlets situated along the north or northwest coast of Ishigaki Island, Yaeyama, the *mayu-n-ganasi* deities, disguised by young men, are believed to come from the sea (on the east or the northeast) and return there. In the hamlet Kabira where the ritual is still performed, the people are devoid of such a belief and they say that these deities came originally from a well (Mabuchi 1968: 130-158).

It would deserve notice that one and the same word is employed to denote the bottom of both the sea and the earth in Yaeyama and Miyako, while its cognates imply the overseas holy land in Okinawa and Amami, irrespective of whether or not it is located in the bottom of the sea. However, the bottom of the earth is at the same time conceived generally as the place where the souls of the dead go to stay, perhaps for some duration of time as will be discussed below.

We are still far from definitely saying that the bottom of the earth is the place where the souls of the dead and the source of life dwell together. We are not yet certain about whether the belief of rebirth, for instance, was prevalent among the Ryukyuan people. At least for the moment, we are more concerned here with the fate of the souls in the realm of the overseas deities.

### III

In connection with those what we have discussed above, we shall make here observations of the time perspective as reflected in the rituals

relevant to the souls of the dead and the deified ancestors.

Such rituals in the Ryukyus have much in common with those in Mainland Japan and China, indicating after all a diffusion from the Continent. A noteworthy example is the so-called *bon* ritual of which the climax is on the 15th day of the 7th Month of the lunar calendar, also of Chinese origin. At least in contemporary China, an emphasis seems to be laid on the feast outdoors for the ghosts who are devoid of descendants serving them with meal, and otherwise they would bring some disasters to the living. In both Mainland Japan and the Ryukyus on the other hand, people intend to invite the souls of the dead and the "ancestors," to serve them with dishes indoors and politely to see them off. In both of the latter two areas too, some people put a small amount of meal on a rack close to the gate so that such ghosts would partake of it.

Another cultural trait of Chinese origin is the tablet on which the name of the deceased is recorded. In the Ryukyus, as we have seen, such tablets are arranged on the altar of the second parlour. However, the people celebrate the 33rd anniversary of one's death, when the soul of the dead loses its personal identification to unite with the deified ancestors as a mass as it were. The soul of the dead having transformed at least theoretically into an ancestral deity, its tablet is withdrawn from the altar. A similar belief and the custom concerned are occasionally found in Mainland Japan too. In Toku-no-shima, the largest island of the Southern Amami Archipelago, the people erect a tall pole of tree and occasionally burn rice straw in addition in the house-yard at the 33rd anniversary mentioned, so that the soul of the dead would ascend to the sky along the pole and smoke. A similar belief, if not the custom concerned, seems to be prevalent rather sporadically in both Amami and Okinawa.

Generally speaking, Ryukyuan people do not worry about whether or not the deified ancestors come to join the *bon* feast. On the 7th day of the 7th Month, they weed and sweep the graveyard and invite the souls of the dead and "ancestors" to come to visit the living on the 13th day when the *bon* ritual begins. Most people are not cognizant of the reason why the *bon* ritual is announced to these beings on the 7th day. However, some people of the Southern Amami Archipelago tell that it takes "seven days as well as seven nights" to come from the world of the dead. Here and there in this area, it was customary in former days to erect in the house-yard a tall bamboo with its branches, where to suspend several slips of paper each with different colour—ideally seven colours, though depending on the kinds of the dye available.

Apart from such rituals as the *bon* which are performed on a given



day of a given month, there are three ways of consulting the lunar calendar to fix the date of other rituals: (A) to refer to the zodiac cycle of days; (B) to the cycle of the Five Elements (each subdivided into the "elder" and the "younger"); and (C) to a combination of both cycles. In (A) a given day comes round twice a month and in (B) thrice a month, whereas in (C) once two months. These three ways are found side by side with each other in all the four archipelagoes and either is employed according to the kind of ritual, though (C) is the least conspicuous in Okinawa, that is, the central Ryukyus.

Though such ways of reckoning the dates are not specific to the Ryukyus, the problem here would be to what extent it was possible to harmonize the lunar calendar with the seasonal cycle, especially the agrarian one, of these archipelagoes. Provided that the harvest of main crops, possibly accompanied by a series of rituals that ensues, marks the turn of the year, the lunar calendar of Chinese origin would be more harmonious with the agrarian cycle in the Temperate Zones than in the Subtropical Zones such as the Ryukyus where main crops are harvested in the Spring or in early Summer, not in the Autumn. On the other hand, if the souls of the dead, deified ancestors and the like are to be invited to partake of the first fruits or at least the first ripe ears in such ways as the Ryukyuan rituals indicate, the date of the *bon* ritual, roughly equivalent to mid-August in the solar calendar, would hardly be harmonious with the agrarian cycle in the temperate zones.

While taking into account these situations, we shall start here with discussing about the date of the "New Year's Day" in connection with the so-called "water for rejuvenation". The latter is a special category of fresh water, drawn from a more or less sacred well very early in the morning on the 1st day of the 1st Month of the lunar calendar (approximately, early February in the solar calendar), which the people drink or by which they take a cold bath, with a view to rejuvenate themselves. The date of such performance, along with the belief concerned, is common to both Mainland Japan and the northern part of the Ryukyus, namely, Amami and Okinawa. In the southern Ryukyus including both Miyako and Yaeyama, on the other hand, the people draw the water concerned not on the 1st day of the 1st Month, but some day in the 4th-6th Months in Miyako and in the 8th-10th Months in Yaeyama. Here the people consult the lunar calendar after the (C) way mentioned, though the "good day" fixed by referring to both the zodiac and the Five Element cycle is fairly variable according to the locality. Meanwhile, the conspicuous shift of the date between Miyako and Yaeyama seems largely to depend on the kinds of main crops in the prewar period: in the former the barley or wheat and millet (*Setaria*

*italica*) whose harvest rituals are held respectively in the 2nd or 3rd Month and in the 4th or 5th Month, whereas in the latter, as in Okinawa, the wet-rice, the ritual concerned being held in the 6th Month.

Moreover in Yaeyama, the house building, utensils, boat, well, etc. are purified and exorcised on the day celebrating the water for rejuvenation. It is on this "folk New Year's Day" that the people bring home the fragments of coral reef stone from the seashore to put these in the parlours and to sprinkle in the house-yard. They say, these fragments came from the "bottom of the sea" and therefore, are filled with fertility. It is interesting to note here that a special meal of what the people call the "dishes for seeing off the old year out" is prepared at each household on the "folk New Year's Eve".

A few folklorists already pointed out the possibility that the New Year's Day was formerly celebrated sometime in the Summer also in Okinawa. Besides some historical documents alluding to this, they refer to a certain Summer ritual still held in Okinawa, presumably for re-assuring a mystic tie between the holy water of a definite well and the members of the community, notwithstanding the people nowadays draw the water for rejuvenation on the New Year's Day of the lunar calendar (Miyagi 1954: 31-46). Informations from Miyako and Yaeyama seem to support their view, even if indirectly. In this connection, we have to remember that, even in Yaeyama, cultural elites of Ishigaki City, Ishigaki Island, drew the water for rejuvenation and sprinkled fragments of coral reef stone on the 1st day of the 1st Month of lunar calendar and prepared the "dishes for seeing off the old year out" on the 30th day of the 12th Month, until recently. The City of Ishigaki, primarily an aggregate of four hamlets, had been an administrative as well as cultural outpost of the Ryukyuan Kingdom whose capital was situated in Shuri, now a part of Naha City, southwestern Okinawa. The Dynasty culture represented an elaboration or refinement of the indigenous culture by digesting cultural traits diffused from both China and Mainland Japan. However, the elites of Ishigaki City seem to have simply conformed to the Shuri culture as far as the dates of the New Year's Day and Eve were concerned, while well retaining the traits of their own island culture.

Leaving aside the discussion as to whether the *bon* ritual includes more folk-Taoist elements or more Buddhist ones, we shall have to take here into consideration the still persisting traits of Ryukyuan culture which abounds in local variation. Some sophisticated elites of Ishigaki City insist that the 7th Month when the *bon* ritual is held is the month for the dead and accordingly, rituals for deities should not be held. However, such beings as the deified ancestors and the visiting deities

mentioned seem to make frequent appearances in this month and even on the days of the *bon* ritual, though often in different forms and with different degree of emphasis.

First, we shall have to mention here about the figures called *anggama* which appear on the days of the *bon* ritual in Ishigaki City. They are a group of disguised young men visiting house after house. Two among them disguised themselves as a couple of the forefather and "foremother" and others are their children. This may be called a sort of drama centering around a comic dialogue, often about the prolificacy of the couple, presumably alluding to the prosperity of their descendants as a whole. The *anggama* appear also in the two hamlets (Ohama and Miyara) to the east of Ishigaki City, and the performance seems to be somewhat more ritualized. Many old men disguise themselves to represent the *anggama*. While they appear on the 16th day of the 7th Month, on the day subsequent to the *bon* ritual, they are "piously" entertained by the priestesses of high class as if they were deified ancestors. According to Mr. Kentei Miyara, an excellent folklorist of Ishigaki City, this kind of *anggama* seems to have diffused from Arakawa, the westernmost division (formerly a hamlet) of the City, where the song of the *anggama* refers to the boats of the deities loaded with seeds of crops, coming from the overseas holy land far on the east. In Hateruma, an offshore island to the south of Ishigaki City, the *bon* ritual includes semi-dramatized procession in which some figures of the visiting deities come to appear. In other localities of Yaeyama, however, this kind of procession is usually performed at the wet-rice harvest ritual held in the 6th Month.

Somewhat comparable with the *anggama* of Ishigaki City and the *bon* ritual procession of Hateruma is the "village (hamlet) drama" in the northern part of Okinawa. In contrast with the Yaeyaman folk drama, the drama in rural Okinawa is much more sophisticated under the influence of the classic drama primarily elaborated by the Dynasty culture. The village drama has been performed by rural amateurs once two years or more years, but the recent trend is increasingly to employ professional actors or actresses of cities so as to fill vacancies caused by the decrease of volunteers among the villagers. In any case, the drama is always preceded by an act in which an actor disguised as an old man, representing the forefather (but, no "foremother" here), plays an important role, accompanied by a number of his children. In the drama of a few hamlets, he receives the seeds of crops, especially of rice, as it is told in the myth (Mabuchi 1964a: 6-18). The date when the village drama is performed is fairly variable according to the locality—somewhat later than the *bon* ritual, subsequently to the ritual for wel-

coming the visiting deities, or around the 10th of the 8th Month.

It would deserve notice that in some localities of northwestern Okinawa the members of the patrilineage or patri-clan visit the house of their "stem family" on the 10th day of the 8th Month to make an offering to their remote ancestors. It is also around this date that the ghosts and goblins come to prowl and the people try to exorcise them by various devices, a situation somewhat reminiscent of the Chinese *bon* ritual mentioned above.

In usual cases, souls of the dead or "ancestors" have their own natal family or descendants whom they may visit at such a ritual as the *bon*. Sooner or later, however, the family ramifies to bring forth branch families at various levels, while the original family continues to remain as the stem family along the primogenital male line. In Okinawa, the patrilineage or patri-clan, which is an ancestor cult group par excellence, is organized centering around such a stem family. It is not rare in Okinawa that such a kin group is expanded and its members are distributed widely in various localities, both rural and urban. Meanwhile, the kin group is segmented to form subgroups of various grades so that there are several kinds of stem house: the stem house of origin and the stem houses of middle and lower grades. The older the family line, the greater the generation depth of the ancestors involved. The house of the stem family is the place where remote ancestors are invited to come at such a ritual as the *bon*. Meanwhile, one may visit some stem house of lower grade in the vicinity on the days of the *bon* ritual performed at every household, but it would be oftentimes hard to pay a visit to the stem house of higher grade in the distance. On the 10th day of the 8th Month, one may observe several buses chartered transporting the members of representatives of a given kin group from Naha City to the stem house of origin situated far in the northwest.

In other archipelagoes than Okinawa, on the other hand, patrilineal principle is fairly fluctuating and it is often hard to bring forth kin groups with a well-defined boundary. Nevertheless, we find here and there a sort of ambilineage, rather of smaller size, organized centering also around a stem family which is continued here again along the primogenital male line (Mabuchi 1972a). In the hamlet Urukawa, southern Miyako, which includes a number of ambilineages, some stem families had performed, until recently, the *bon* ritual in such a way as follows: in the night they performed the ritual for the souls of the dead and some ancestors in the same way as in ordinary families, while in the daytime the ritual for remote ancestors whom they offered the rice or millet wine specially brewed and sang a song with rhythmic clapping of hands. Offering and singing in such a way are usually for

deities at the shrine or sanctuary, not for the dead.

As compared with this, informations from Toku-no-shima, Amami, are interesting. Several days after the *bon* ritual, selected by referring to the Five Element cycle of days mentioned, the people of each hamlet come down to the seashore where there are fixed sites for stone hearth allocated respectively to various groups of "those descended from a common ancestor". People prepare the feast to welcome the deities coming from the sea. The newly born children should touch the sand of the seashore with bare feet so that they are introduced to the deities who would bless them. Generally speaking, however, more emphasis seems to be laid on the fertility of crops among the people of the west coast and they simply say that the deities come from the sea. In contrast with this, the people of the east and south coast emphasize the implication of ancestor cult as an important aspect of the ritual concerned. They say, the overseas deities together with the deified ancestors come from the overseas holy land to celebrate the prosperity of the living and possibly, of the crops. They tend even to identify the overseas deities with the deified ancestors. Though we are still far from clarifying the nature of "those descended from a common ancestors" (presumably along the male line), the fact that the ritual is held respectively by such groups would suggest an ancestor cult involved (Matsuyama 1967: 55-68; Sugimoto 1972: 47-62).

In Toku-no-shima, as mentioned above, the souls of the dead are expected to ascend to the sky to become the deified ancestors, but they visit the living from the overseas holy land, not from the sky, as we have just seen.

The information from Toku-no-shima would be comparable with that from Iheya, an offshore island to the northwest of the main island Okinawa, where the ritual concerning the overseas deities is held on the 17th day of the 7th Month, that is, two days after the finale of the *bon* ritual. Here too, the deified ancestors are classified with the overseas deities who come from somewhere far on the east. In this ritual an emphasis is laid on seeing off such deities who seems to have already visited the living, side by side with the souls of the dead coming from the graveyard, as far as the ritual context suggests (Ogo 1966: 128-157).

Before summarizing our discussion relevant to the deified ancestors and the visiting deities, we had better make brief observations of the dates of rituals concerned in other areas, to get somewhat wider perspective. In the northern part of the main island Okinawa, the visiting deities come to appear rather shortly before or after the *bon* ritual, the date fluctuating from the latest part of the 6th Month (roughly contemporaneous with the wet-rice harvest ritual) to the early 7th Month in

the hamlets along the east coast and mostly to the later half of the 7th Month in those along the west coast. On the east coast of central Okinawa and some adjacent islets, the ritual concerned seems to be fairly fragmented and is held in the 8th or 6th or even the 3rd Month. The latter case might be of some relation with the ritual celebrating the harvest of barley and wheat or the ripening of the millet ears. In the areas of the main island Okinawa, the deified ancestors as such seem hardly to appear in the ritual itself.

In Yaeyama, the visiting deities come to appear mainly either on the occasion of the wet-rice harvest ritual or on the "folk New Year's Day". The former date is fixed within the 6th Month by referring to the zodiac cycle of days, whereas the latter one is some day coming round in the 8th-10th Months as we have mentioned above. In Miyako, on the other hand, the folk New Year's Day has very little to do with the visiting deities who make frequent appearances in the 8th-10th Months as in Yaeyama. In some hamlets of southern Miyako, the fluctuation of the date is even of a wider range covering more months for some unidentified reason. In any case, such fluctuation ranging two months or more would imply a deviation from both the agrarian cycle and the date of the *bon* ritual. In both Yaeyama and Miyako too, the deified ancestors as such rarely appear in the ritual itself.

In Amami, the ritual for the deified ancestors seems to be more complicated. On some day in the 9th-10th Months, there is held another ritual for such deities, perhaps inviting a comparative study of wider range at least involving the southwestern part of Mainland Japan (Shimono 1969: 95-103).

So far we have talked rather at length about such beings as the souls of the dead, deified ancestors and the like, with regard to the dates of their appearance and the people's ways of dealing with them. Surely the local variation concerned seems tremendous and even chaotic. Nevertheless, such variation would be valuable as an indicative of a series of shift and change which the people have undergone respectively in various localities and in various periods.

In order eventually to get a view of the "time perspective" latent in the folk cosmology—that is our purpose here—, we shall focalize our summarizing discussion on a few points, against the background of the local variation mentioned.

First, we shall deal with the process of what may be called the "growing deification", starting with the souls of the dead. The theory that the souls of the dead loses its personal identification on the 33rd anniversary of one's death to unite with the deified ancestors and the practice of withdrawing its tablet from the altar are not particular to the

Ryukyus, as these are still found here and there in the rural area of Mainland Japan. It might be possible that both are of a relatively later introduction to the Ryukyus, though these are now deeply rooted in the culture almost everywhere. By the way, it would deserve notice that the people are still devoid of such belief and practice in a few hamlets of the northern tip of Miyako where the *bon* ritual is not held and the tablets for the deceased are rarely found. In any case, there seems to be prevalent among the Ryukyuan people a dimly conceived distinction between the dead whose memory is still vivid and those died long ago, even though the 33rd anniversary is nothing but a business-like-procedure by which to dispose of a distinctino that was primarily gradual and relative. It would be rather natural that no clear distinction is drawn between the souls of the dead and the deified ancestors at the *bon* ritual. On the other hand, we shall have to postulate a vaguely defined distinction between the earlier ones and the later among the deified ancestors about whom we shall discuss just in the below.

Second, we shall consider the sociological aspect of the "ancestor cult". Irrespective of whether or not the ancestors are deified, ancestor cult flourishes to involve a number of ascending generations in the case when the kinship framework is clearcut and solid as it is often found along with the unilineal institution or the like. The ritual hierarchy centering around the "stem family", as we have exemplified by the cases from northwestern Okinawa and from the hamlet Urukawa, southern Miyako, would be furthermore effective in this regard: while the deified ancestors are classified into the earlier ones and the later in parallel with the distinction between the stem family and the branch families, the hierarchical order of the ritual repeated every year would pave the way to a systematized memory of ancestors on the one hand and re-strengthen the ties interwoven among the kinsmen on the other. However, such are not the case with the bilateral institution in which the kinship relations are much dispersed and it is hard here to develop an ancestor cult involving a number of ascending generations. In a word, the kinship system in the Ryukyus fluctuates between the unilineal (here patrilineal) and bilateral, the actual situation being fairly variable according to locality. On the other hand, we cannot neglect another kind of the deified ancestors far more vaguely conceived, that is, those of the community a whole, either the hamlet or the village. As we have seen, they appear in both the more or less secular drama and the ritual performance, irrespective of whether or not such "community ancestors" would be traced back to the ancestors of some kin group who originally founded the community.

Third, we shall have to be confronted with a subtle problem as to

where the deified ancestors are supposed to stay. Though the souls of the dead are often believed to dwell in the graveyard or somewhere underground, such souls belong to the Other World just as the deified ancestors do. At the same time, the deified ancestors are situated far more away from the living in terms of time and the memory. Moreover, they are deified. It would be rather natural that such a situation of the deified ancestors are correlated with the ritual behaviour of the people. It seems that the deified ancestors are vaguely supposed to visit the living at the *bon* ritual side by side with the souls of the dead. As we have observed, however, some rituals for welcoming the overseas deities include the deified ancestors, while neglecting the souls of the dead, and in a few cases, such ancestors are believed to come from the overseas holy land along with the visiting deities. Here, we shall have to take into consideration a trend in which the deified ancestors are pushed more and more to a distance in the geographical sense too.

Fourth, we shall finish our summarizing discussion by considering the place of the *bon* ritual in correlation particularly with the community rituals as mentioned. The *bon* ritual, as a later introduction with a definite date of its performance (the 13th–15th days of the 7th Month), should have had pushed itself, as it were, amid a series of preexisted rituals, bisecting the latter into the pre-*bon* rituals and the post-*bon* ones. Meantime the *bon* ritual could not remain exempt from the partial fusion of such beings as the deified ancestors and the visiting deities, notwithstanding the *bon* ritual would have been primarily a ritual for the dead. It is interesting to remember here that in the main such beings as the visiting deities, here and there in accompany with the deified ancestors, appear approximately within the two weeks before or after the *bon* ritual in Okinawa, during the 8th–10th Months in Miyako, and during the 6th and the 8th–10th Months in Yaemaya. Such a fluctuation of date ranging from the 8th Month to the 10th might represent an “overmanipulation” of the lunar calendar among the local intellectuals, leading to a considerable degree of deviation from both the agrarian and ritual cycle inherent to the Ryukyuan culture. By taking into account the beliefs and customs still persisting among the people, we might postulate that the 6th, the 7th, and the early 8th Month—the period when the reckoning of the dates starts with after the (C) ways mentioned—, were the season of welcoming the souls of the dead and the deities who came to partake of the newly harvested rice and that, toward the end of this season after a series of rituals relevant to the harvest, the folk New Year’s Day was celebrated to secure the fertility and prosperity for the coming year by appealing to the visiting deities and partially to the deified ancestors, rather than



to the souls of the dead whom the people had more to appease. If so, the *bon* ritual would have been charged, in the result, with the task to control the traffic of such beings, though rather unsuccessfully.

All in all, the perspective of both the space and the time latent in the folk cosmology seems to be reflected in an simultaneously inferable from the rituals relevant to such beings as were dealt with in the above. It would deserve notice here that the time perspective tends roughly to correspond to the space perspective on the one hand, and to be manifest at least partially in the field of kinship and community organization on the other.

#### IV

The instances we have discussed about involve some aspects of culture change which the Ryukyuan people have undergone. The so-called modernization would represent the latest phase of such a series of culture change. For many years, the Ryukyuan people have been under the cultural influence from both China and Mainland Japan. Nevertheless, the indigenous culture abounding in local variation had remained impact in the main until relatively recently. Though the diffusion would have led considerably to cultural fusion which in turn resulted in confusion, the people seem to have adjusted themselves fairly successfully to the external influences, perhaps with an astonishing flexibility.

Each historical period has its own modernization which is destined to be labelled semi-classics or simply classics in the later period. However, the "contemporary modernization" seems to be not only far more speedy and all-embracing but also multidirectional, especially in the overt aspects of cultural behaviour of the people. Meanwhile, it is hard directly to make observations of the modernization in the field of folk cosmology which is to be reconstructed by scrutinizing the covert aspects of culture. What we are able to start with is to investigate the change in religious practices and beliefs concerned behind which the folk cosmology is searched for.

Leaving aside various shocks caused by the World War II and the situation that ensued, the trend toward what may be called the modernization seems to have become manifest mostly in the 1960's. There are two conspicuous changes in the socio-economic field to be taken here into consideration. First, the main crops were replaced by cash crops such as the sugar-cane and pineapple so that the ritual cycle conforming to the agrarian one in former days is destined to become meaningless. Second, an increasing flow of rural population into urban

areas. Various reasons are involved here: unprofitable situation of agriculture, repeated calamities by typhoon and drought, job-hunting in cities, and so forth. In cities, there are now living, along with their families, many of priestesses and religious functionaries who have preserved most of the ritual tradition of rural communities. Some of them still return to participate in the rituals performed in respective communities, but others do not. It is often hard for them to find their successors among the younger generation already "educated" and imbued with the modern atmosphere of life, along with the way of thinking concerned. The traditional ritual is now undergoing a rapid decay and in the not very far future, it will be hopeless a task to reconstruct the Ryukyuan folk cosmology.

However, this does not presumably imply the disappearance of Ryukyuan religion. A series of anxieties widespread among the people during the years subsequent to the war period seems to have stimulated the revival of the "sophisticated shamanism" on the one hand and the acceptance of the "new religions" or sects derived mainly from the postwar Mainland Japan on the other. The most penetrating seems to be the sophisticated shamanism which enriched itself by absorbing various streams of religious thought, either inland or overseas, sometimes to such an extent that its shamanistic feature is fairly evaporated. While living in cities, priestesses and religious functionaries from rural areas are often in contact with the new "philosophy" of such streams of shamanism and they tend even to try to innovate the ritual of the rural community by referring to such philosophy when they return there to participate in the ritual.

On the other hand, the "ancestor cult" centering around the stem house tends to be re-strengthened here and there in Okinawa. Some professionals representing the sophisticated shamanism are skilled in forging a genealogy extended along male line often by tracing back to some figures who are famous in the local history or legend. Sometimes the people ask such professionals to forge this kind of genealogy with a view to organizing or endorsing a patrilineage of a considerable size. This would imply re-interpretation or re-utilization of old thing in the modern—if not necessarily modernized—society in which the people tend often to feel isolation and disorder. Indeed, such an organization as the patrilineage or patri-clan is now of utility value, with regard to election, job-hunting, and some kinds of mutual aid. By an advice of shamans or shamanesses, people occasionally start a cult group centering around some ancestral or prominent figures who are now deified and worshipped by patrilineal kinsmen or other volunteers. Ryukyuan religion will continue to function, even though in a

transformed style. However, one cannot yet prophesy what kind of cosmology will come into being in the future.

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