Whale and Fish Cult in Japan: a Basic Feature of Ebisu Worship

By

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In his article *The Ebisu-gami in fishing villages*[1] Sakurada Katsunori describes a deity of a very complex character. Though "Ebisu-gami is probably the most widely revered kami of the fishing industry and fishing villages in present-day Japan", this deity assumes many different aspects. Depicted as a fisherman with a red *tai* (a kind of perch or sea-bream) under his arm and holding a fishing rod he is well known in his capacity as one of the Seven Deities of Good Fortune. But besides this Ebisu of a rather late tradition we find that Ebisu sometimes takes the shape of a human corpse floating on the surface of the sea, sometimes of a shark or a whale, sometimes even of a float—the Ebisu-*aba* or Ebisu-float—and sometimes Ebisu is just an ordinary stone drifted or brought ashore.[2]

"No one can explain", Sakurada writes, "what relationship exists between any of these particular objects and this kami of

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1. Sakurada Katsunori, *The Ebisu-gami in fishing villages.* In: Studies in Japanese Folklore [=SJF], ed. Richard M. Dorson, Bloomington 1963, pp. 122–132. See also Sakurada Katsunori, *Gyorô no dentô.* Minzoku mingei sôsho 桜田勝徳：漁撈の伝統・民俗民芸双書
[=MMS] 25, Tokyo 1968, pp. 200–222.

2. Sakurada 1963, 122 ff.; cf. Sakurada 1968, 200 ff. See also *Minzoku-gaku-jiten* [=MGJ], ed. Yanagita Kunio, Tokyo 1951, pp. 68–69; Yanagita 民俗学辞典・柳田国男監修 Kunio, Kurata Ichirô, *Bunrui gyoson goi.* 柳田国男・倉田一郎：分類漁村語彙 Tokyo 1938, pp. 338 ff.; Makita Shigeru, *Umi no minzokugaku.* 牧田茂：海の民俗学 MMS 11, Tokyo 1966, p. 51.

good fortune and wealth. Again we must admit that we are at a loss to explain what the name refers to when fisherman repeat 'Ebisu! Ebisu!' while they kill fish by beating them on the head. The one conclusion that we can draw is that Ebisu, as fishermen worshipfully call him, is the power who, they believe, grants them successful catches. Consequently we may assume that a stone picked up from the sea bottom, a corpse, a shark, or any object believed to have power over the catch, has the potentiality of becoming Ebisu."[3]

This statement leads to questions which are not yet solved. Sakurada points out that we cannot determine historically whether the practice of calling by the name of Ebisu any power helpful to fishing appeared *after* the image of Ebisu Saburô with a red *tai* under his arm came to be worshipped and the belief of Ebisu-gami had pervaded the fishing villages. It seems possible that there had already been in existence throughout the country a belief in a deity named Ebisu, from whom arose the entire Ebisu complex. The solution of this question is hampered by the fact that nowadays the Ebisu to whom fishermen are praying for a good catch while fishing as well as the Ebisu-sama enshrined on the beaches of fishing villages or in the Ebisu altar in each fisherman's household (regardless of the actual shape of the enshrined object of worship) is looked upon as one of the Seven Deities of Good Fortune by the fishermen themselves.[4]

In spite of these reservations, selection and interpretation of the material by Sakurada point but into one single direction, which is shared by the other Japanese folklorists. Legends of stones drifted ashore and venerated as Ebisu, seasonal rites of fishing villages including the diving for a stone which is made the object of Ebisu worship—beliefs and customs prevailing in South Kyûshû—represent, according to Sakurada, the older custom compared with the worship of the large central float (sometimes of the corresponding sinker too) of the dragnet as personification of Ebisu. The worship of the Ebisu-float or

3. Sakurada 1963, 122 f.; Sakurada 1968, 200 f.
4. Sakurada 1963, 123 f.; Sakurada 1968, 202 f.

the Ebisu-sinker is met with in the large net-fisheries along the coasts of the Sea of Japan and the Inland Sea. Yet "there are no clues", as Sakurada remarks, "as to how these two incompatible practices of Ebisu worship are related to each other or how they originated".[5]

Nevertheless, Sakurada tends to take the worship of shark or whale as Ebisu for the basic motif of Ebisu worship. It is by the features of this worship rather than by the manifestation of Ebisu in stones drifted or brought ashore that the character of Ebisu as a "visiting deity" becomes visible. Many legends connected with shrines and the festival days of these shrines tell of certain sacred fishes—a seven-tailed shark for instance, a salmon or even a whale—visiting the village or the shrine on the festival day. Sometimes these fishes are regarded as offerings to the deity, but there is copious evidence of examples where the visiting fish must be explained as a personification of the deity himself, visiting his shrine.[6] In this way, Sakurada places the Ebisu worship as a whole into the frame of the complex of visiting deities. This complex with its basic motif of the belief in deities who make regular appearances at festivals, emerging from a far-away Other World and bringing about happiness and wealth, is often held responsible and frequently referred to by Japanese scholars in explaining various customs.[7]

Sakurada is the outstanding expert on Japanese fishery-folklore. To my knowledge, no new facts concerning Ebisu worship have been published since this article has appeared,

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5. Sakurada 1963, 124 ff.; Sakurada 1968, 206 ff.

6. Sakurada 1963, 128 ff.; Sakurada 1968, 215 ff.; cf. Nakayama Tarô, *Ebisu-gami i-kô.*: えびす神異考。 In: Nakayama Tarô, Nihon minzokugaku, rekishi-hen. 中山太郎: 日本民俗学。歴史篇 Tokyo 1930 [=a], pp. 234 f.; Nakayama Tarô, *Kita-gami kô.* In: Nakayama Tarô, Nihon minzokugaku, shinji-hen. 気多神考。中山太郎: 日本民俗学, 神事篇 Tokyo 1930 [=b], p. 316.

7. Sakurada 1963, 131; Sakurada 1968, 218 f.; see also Makita 1966, 51. Regarding "visiting deities" see for instance Hori Ichirô, *Mysterious visitors from the harvest to the New Year.* In: SJF, pp. 76–103. See also Hori Ichirô, *Waga kuni minkanshinkô-shi no kenkyû,* 堀一郎: 我が国民間信仰史の研究 Vol. I, Tokyo ²1960, pp. 308 ff.; Ogura Manabu, *Drifted deities in the Noto Peninsula.* In: SJF, pp. 133–144; MGJ 666.

and no criticism or correction of Sakurada's interpretation has been attempted to. So we may assume that this article still outlines the present state of research. It would be difficult to disprove Sakurada's supposition that first of all Ebisu means the reverential designation of that power who grants the fishermen successful catches. Yet his scepticism concerning the different aspects of this power called Ebisu seems to be premature, while the investigation is rather handicapped than advanced by the presumption that these different aspects should be thought of as having the mentioned complex as their common denominator.

Cults and conceptions concerning Ebisu we can regard as complex formations wherein several components have grown together to show superficial unity. To disentangle this skein must be left to an investigation of greater scope. This paper attempts only to lay bare one compact and sharply marked set of conceptions out of the material offered by Sakurada and other Japanese folklorists, conceptions which, though not by means of historical dates yet on the strength of their phenomenological peculiarities, may be attributed to an early phase of Ebisu worship.

It seems to point to a slightly strange custom of Buddhist origin at best when, within the coastal area of the former whaling districts of Japan, first we find erected in the cemeteries on the shore old memorial stones dedicated to whales and bearing as an epigraph the Buddhistic formula of redemption *Namu Amida Butsu* or other Buddhistic sayings, which implore the rebirth of the whale as a Buddha, or when we hear that there were held Buddhistic Masses for the dead on behalf of killed whales.[8] But when again we learn that the fishermen who

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8. Nakayama 1930 a, 279 ff., 283; Nakayama Tarô, *Nihon minzokugaku-jiten.* Tokyo ³1941 [=a], p. 564; Nakayama Tarô, *Hoi Nihon minzokugaku-jiten.* 中山太郎: 補遺日本民俗学辞典 Tokyo ²1941 [=b], p. 30; Yanagita Kunio, *Kujira no ihai no hanashi.* In: Teihon Yanagita Kunio shû 柳田国男:鯨の位牌の話。柳田国男集 [=YKS], Vol. 27, Tokyo 1964, p. 415. See also MGJ p. 172. There are, for instance, regulations, which say that after killing 10 resp. 35 or more whales a memorial grave has to be constructed and masses for the dead have to be held or that the killed whales have to be worshipped. The *Kumano no*

witness the death-struggle of the huge animal, in front of the dying whale recite *Namu Amida Butsu* three times in chorus, and after that proceed to sing one of the so-called whale-songs in order to "pacify his soul",[9] or when we are informed that whale embryos found in the womb of their parent are extracted with the greatest care and interred like a human being with due respect and under special ceremonies,[10] or that in certain places the bones of the killed whale, too, are deposited in the vicinity of a shrine,[11] then we start to doubt about the Buddhistic character of these phenomena.

Nearly 40 years ago Nakayama Tarô has pointed out that on the basis of these phenomena there could be found the same conceptions, which underlie the *goryô*-cult,[12] a cult devoted to the revengeful spirits of those having died an untimely or accidental death, the intention being here to appease the vindictive soul of the whale. And as, out of the endeavour to propitiate the much feared spirits of vengeance, there arose a cult for rendering worship to these spirits now raised to the rank of deities, so likewise, out of the endeavour to propitiate the soul of the whale, there arose the worship of the whale as a deity.[13]

When, at last, we are told that even the treatment of quite small fish was guided by similar rules—that, for instance, a feast had to be given and a stone or a post had to be erected

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Daiji—Kujira ni idomu machi, Tokyo 1965, p. 143 gives a picture of such memorial stones. The above cited sources mention also Buddhist temples as well as Shintô shrines whose legends of origin seem connected with the killing of whales.

9. Nakayama 1930 a, 238; MGJ 172. Several whale-songs are recorded in *Kumano no Daiji...* pp. 177 ff.

10. Nakayama 1930 a, 280 ff.; MGJ 172. Sometimes the interment takes place in the vicinity of the Ebisu-shrine.

11. Nakayama 1930 a, 282; cf. also p. 238.

12. For information about the *goryô*-cult see Hori Ichirô, *Folk religion in Japan*. Chicago-London 1968, pp. 42 ff., 71 ff., 112 ff.; Hori 1960, II, 457 ff., 660 ff., 740 ff., see also Nelly Naumann, *Yama no kami—die japanische Berggottheit*. Teil II: *Zusätzliche Vorstellungen*. In: Asian Folklore Studies [=AFS], Vol. XXIII, 2, pp. 115 ff.

13. Nakayama 1930 a, 269 ff.; see also pp. 279 and 281 where curses by killed whales are mentioned.

if within one year a certain number (1000 or 10000) of salmons, bonitos, mullets, tunnies or the like had been caught"—then we must admit that there seems to lie even more behind these customs than only the dread of the vindictive soul of the individual mighty animal.

We gain still clearer a picture if we include a further fact in our reasoning. It is (or was) the custom that the first catch of the year was celebrated in a special way. This holds partially for every-kind of fish caught in large quantities. Although the local customs differ to some extent, the essential points are everywhere the same: the First Fish is roasted on a fire newly lit by striking a flint; after this the fish is first offered to Ebisu and then consummated by a certain group of persons. There are places—said to take the old customs seriously—where it is held absolutely necessary that the fish is carefully wrapped in paper while it is prepared so as to avoid any damage to the fins, that while eating the fish nobody should break any of the larger bones, and finally that after finishing the meal the bones have to be brought to the fishing place where they are worshipped and ceremonially thrown into the water.[15] There are

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14. Nakayama 1930 a, 242 f., 271; Nakayama 1941 a, 291; Nakayama 1930 b, 319; Yanagita/Kurata 1938, 330 ff.

15. MGJ 477; Yanagita/Kurata 1938, 326, 329; Makita 1966, 164, 236 ff.; Seki Keigo, *Gyorô to shukusai.* In: Kaison seikatsu no kenkyû 関 敬吾: 漁撈と祝祭・海村生活研究[=KSK], ed. Yanagita Kunio, Tokyo 1949, pp. 303 ff. In some laces the master of the boat and his crew eat this first fish, in other places it is reserved for the old men of the village or for the *kashiki,* the young men whose task it is to prepare the food on the fishing boats, or it is given to the *kamiire,* the girl or woman who gave some of her hair to be enshrined in the boat as embodiment of Funadama-sama, the deity of the boat, or it is distributed to the whole village (but it may never be eaten by pregnant women or women in childbed). In many places this special feast has changed to the simple offering of the first fish to Ebisu or Funadama (see for instance Nakayama 1941 a, 285; Nakayama 1930 a, 304, 307 ff.; Seki 300; Makita 1966, 50); when the first whale of the year was killed in Muroto-machi, Kôchi prefecture, husked rice and purified rice-wine were offered on his back (Nakayama 1930 a, 274); the offering of some parts of the flesh of the whale is mentioned by Nakayama 1930 a, 282. Mogami Takayoshi, *Genshi gyohô no minzoku* 最上孝敬: 原始漁法の民俗 MMS 21, Tokyo 1967, pp. 210 f. tells of offering to Ebisu a certain part—called Ebisu-*hire* (Ebisu-fin)—of the fish caught first when someone for the first time attends at the fishing

still other places—Fudai-mura in Iwate prefecture, for instance —where the liver is taken out of a living bonito every time the bonito fishing boats return from a catch. This liver is first offered to Funadama-sama, the deity of the boat, worshipped and then thrown into the sea.[16]

Even this small part out of the customs of Japanese fishermen gives us the impression that we meet her with parallels of hunting customs. Like the hunting and killing of the whale, the killing of the bear, the biggest hunting animal of this country, is followed by certain rites. As long as there were bears in North Kyûshû it was the custom there to worship the bones of the killed bear, buried behind the house. The ceremonies concerning the killed bear were especially extensive in North Honshû where sporadically the bear is found until to-day. To mention merely one: secret incantations or spells were recited over the dead bear, sometimes directly into the ears of the animal; some of the spells now become known express the wish for an early rebirth of the bear as a Buddha. In Gumma prefecture there are small shrines built of stone or just ordinary stones bearing the inscription *Yama no kami*, "deity of the mountains (or woods)". They were erected after the killing of a bear.[17] This Yama no kami is the owner and master of the hunting animals; it is he who grants or refuses the game to the the hunter. Now and then he himself appears in the shape of an animal, so the Japanese myths already relate his appearance in the disguise of a white stag as well as of a huge bear or of a boar.[18] When formerly the hunter had killed 100 stags or 100 wild boars whose skulls he kept he had to give a special

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caught first when someone for the first time attends at the fishing by diving in Ôshirasawa (Niigata). In Miyakejima the refuse (fins, entrails) of the first fish is buried so that nobody may tread upon it and it may not be eaten by cats or dogs (Makita 1966, 164).

16. Seki 1949, 305; Makita 1966, 236 ff.

17. For the conceptions and customs relating to the hunt in Japan see Nelly Naumann, *Yama no kami—die japanische Berggottheit.* Teil I: *Grundvorstellungen.* In: AFS XXII, 1963, pp. 150–199 (with reference to Japanese sources). Here esp. pp. 172 ff. See also Yanagita 1964, YKS 27, p. 414.

18. Naumann 1963, 148 ff.

feast and he had to erect a memorial stone. A similar feast took place after the killing of 1000 wild boars. Apart from this the killing of big game such as bear, stag, or boar was always connected with certain rites including the offering of certain parts of the killed animal—small cuts of the coat from several parts for instance, but especially portions of the gralloch, of the heart, and particularly of the liver—to the mentioned deity of the mountains. The liver is held to be the seat of life. Again it is important that the thanksgiving, which forms part of the rites, is always combined with the prayer for further good bag.[19]

The corresponding cases of hunting and fishing customs are not limited to the few facts mentioned above. We refer only just to the ideas of taboo valid for hunters as well as for fishermen. The requirement of cultic purity, for instance, forbids the attendance at fishing or hunting for a fixed period in case of death, pregnancy or confinement in one's family. Not only certain objects, but even certain questions and answers (for instance about the hunting or fishing ground) and the use of certain words are taboo. The latter must be substituted by partially newly invented words forming the so-called sea or mountain language. The big hunting animals of the woods may no more be called by their real names than may be the big oceanic animals. While using the mountain language the bear is called "master" or "man of the mountains"; whale, dolphin, and shark are styled "Ebisu" in the sea language of fishermen.[20]

The investigation of the hunting customs preserved in Northeast Japan until recently showed that the basic ideas from which these customs sprang are to be found in the mental attitude of genuine hunters.[21] Similar hunting customs have been preserved among the hunting peoples of North Eurasia

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19. Naumann 1963, 167 ff.

20. For hunting customs Naumann 1963, 175 ff.; for fishing customs Yanagita/Kurata 1938, 340 ff.; Ôtô Tokihiko, *The taboos of fishermen.* In: SJF, pp. 107–121; Segawa Kiyoko, *Kaijô kinki* and *Chi no imi.* 瀬川清子: 海上禁忌・血の忌。In KSK, pp. 348–373.

pp. 348–373.

21. Naumann 1963, 183 f.

and North America[22] in forms of much greater purity and distinction than those we met with in Japan, whose economy is based on agriculture since nearly two milleniums. It stands to reason that in Japan we also have to consider additions and alterations caused by Buddhism. If, therefore, we find that the conception of the revival of the killed animal out of its bones (thought to be the seat of life—but on behalf of the totality of the animal to be revived there are often deposited not only the bones but also small cuts of the different organs) holds the central place within the hunting customs of North Eurasia and North America, and if again we find that the reverential treatment of the killed animal required by religious prescriptions is mostly directed by the belief that the properly treated animal in its next existence gladly will place itself at the hunter's disposal,[23] then it seems but consistent that the Japanese hunter offers the liver—thought to be the seat of life —to the master and owner of the animals, while on the other hand the wish for a rebirth of the animal in a new existence as a Buddha only comes forth as a distortion of the old wish for a rebirth of the animal to the advantage of the hunter, though clad in a Buddhist garb.

It is significant that within the North Eurasian and North American area we find this idea of revival of the killed animal, which is "sent home" only to return anew to the hunter's benefit,

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22. For further information see Eveline Lot-Falck, *Les rites de chasse chez les peuples sibériens.* Paris 1953. Uno Harva, *Die religiösen Vorstellungen der altaischen Völker.* Folklore Fellows Communications No. 125; Helsinki 1938, pp. 406 ff.; Ivar Paulson, *Die Religionen der nordasiatischen (sibirischen) Völker.* In: Ivar Paulson, Ake Hultkrantz, Karl Jettmar, Die Religionen Nordeurasiens und der amerikanischen Arktis [=RNAA] (Die Religionen der Menschheit 3), Stuttgart 1962, pp. 64 ff.; Ake Hultkrantz, *Die Religion der Lappen* [=1962 a] and *Die Religion der amerikanischen Arktis* [=1962 b]. In: RNAA, 288 ff. and 382 ff.

23. Cf. Harva 1938, 434 ff.; Hultkrantz 1962 a, 289; Karl Meuli, *Griechische Opferbräuche.* In: Phyllobolia für P. von der Muehll, Basel 1946, pp. 233 ff.; Ivar Paulson, *Zur Aufbewahrung der Tierknochen im nördlichen Nordamerika.* In: Amerikanische Miszellen. Mitteilungen a.d.Mus.f.Völkerkunde in Hamburg, Vol. XXV, 1959; Hultkrantz 1962 b, 385 ff.; Karl Jettmar, *Die Aussage der Archäologie zur Religionsgeschichte Nordeurasiens.* In: RNAA, pp. 324; Leopold Schmidt, *Pelops und die Haselhexe.* In: Laos, Vol. I, 1951; cf. Naumann 1963, 187 f.

applied not only to the game but also to the marine animals, mammalia as well as fish.[24] The First Salmon ceremony[25] performed by a large group of tribes on the North Pacific coast and as far inland as the salmon runs offers an impressive example of this idea applied to fish. The essential parts of this ceremony correspond entirely with those of the Japanese ceremony of the first fish, i.e., in eating in company the especially prepared fish and in gathering carefully the bones, which are then thrown back into the water. There are some tribes where the entrails too are thrown into the water. The meaning of this action is absolutely clear: it is believed that the salmon comes to life again if the entrails or the bones are thrown into the water. The basic idea, therefore, lies in the belief in the immortality of the salmon whose own conscious will it is to be caught and eaten. The entire ritual is designed to honour the fish; or, as Erna Gunther points out: "In every salmon ritual it is clear that the welfare of the animal is most important and the taboos regulate conduct that his spirit may not be offended".[26]

The distribution of the salmon ceremony is not as wide as the occurence of salmon, but the area of the salmon ceremony is entirely within the territory covered by the bear cult, which spreads from Siberia through northern North America.[27] This cult derives from the same basic idea of the revival and the joyous return of the revived animal.[28]

The bear ceremonies of the circumpolar peoples remind us

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24. Cf. Hultkrantz 1962 b, 385 ff.; Meuli 1946, 235 Anm. 4.

25. Cf. Erna Gunther, *An analysis of the first salmon ceremony.* In: American Anthropologist [=AA], NS 28, 1926, pp. 605–617; Erna Gunther, *A further analysis of the first salmon ceremony.* In: University of Washington Publications in Anthropology, Vol. II, 1928, pp. 129–173. For similar conceptions in Siberia see Hans Findeisen, *Die Fischerei im Leben der altsibirischen Völkerstämme.* Berlin 1929, p. 49 f.; Paulson 1962, 163 etc.

26. Gunther 1928, 166.

27. Cf. Irving Hallowell, *Bear ceremonialism in the northern hemisphere.* In: AA, NS 28, 1926.

28. Gunther 1928, 166 f.

also of the Alaskan whale cult,[29] as Ivar Paulson remarked,[30] and the same correspondence of fishing and hunting customs we find again in the very next vicinity of Japan, among the Ainu. It is a well known fact that the famous bear ceremonies of the Ainu were intended as a "sending home" of the bear (then worshipped as a god) whose return was hoped for.[31] The facts are the same regarding the whale; moreover, it is the deity of the sea who appears in its shape.[32] Batchelor tells of the successful spearing of a sword-fish who was first decapitated and then worshipped. "The fish itself was greatly praised for suffering himself to be caught—so big and so toothsome a creature—and asked to come again at some future date".[33] Other kinds of fish, too, were treated to special worship;[34] and, as Batchelor reports, the fisherman always had a thick stick of willow by his side, which was called "head-striking-stick", and with this he killed his catch by knocking it on his head. Chief Penri told Batchelor "that these fish liked being struck on the head and thus killed". It was the orthodox way of "sending the divine creature away". Having been thus "sent off" to their ancestors and their flesh having been disposed of, they would return later to be caught and killed again.[35]

Here we may add another observation. In salmon-catching as well as in celebrating the first catch of other kinds of fish

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29. Cf. Margaret Lantis, *The Alaskan whale cult and its affinities.* In: AA, NS 40, 1938, pp. 438–464. See also Hultkrantz 1962 b, 386 ff.

30. Ivar Paulson, *Schutzgeister und Gottheiten des Wildes (Jagdtiere und Fische) in Nordeurasien.* Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis—Stockholm Studies in Comparative Religion 2. Stockholm 1961, pp. 265 f.

31. Kindaichi Kyôsuke, *The concepts behind the Ainu bear festival.* In: Southwestern Journal of Anthropology 5:4, Albuquerque 1949; cf. Paulson 1962, 74.

32. Paulson 1962, 70 ff.; Paulson 1961, 69 ff. with reference to John Batchelor, *The Ainu and their folk-lore,* London 1901, and John Batchelor, *Ainu life and lore,* Tokyo 1927.

33. Batchelor 1927, 298 f.

34. Batchelor 1927, 297. Cf. also the story on salmon worship reported by Basil Hall Chamberlain, *Aino folklore.* In: Folklore Journal [before 1905], 33–35.

35. Batchelor 1927, 400. According to Nakayama 1941 a, 291, in the Sannohe district (Aomori) the stick for killing the salmons by knocking their head is called Ebisu-*tsuchi* (Ebisu-mall).

caught in large quantities in certain regions of Japan it is the first fish only, which gets that special treatment. This fish stands for its entire species, whereas in case of the whale as in case of the bear it is the soul of every individual animal to which attention is paid.

Ivar Paulson who dedicated a voluminous study to the guardian-spirits and guardian-deities of game and fish in North Eurasia talks of the soul of the individual as a guardian of this individual, and of collective guardian-spirits or species-spirits ("Artgeister") of each species. To him it seems possible to form a bridge, and this "eine genetisch-psychologische—wenn nicht entwicklungsgeschichtliche Brücke", from the conception of the animal soul to the conception of the collective guardian-spirit.[36] The mighty hunting animals like bear, tiger, wolf, whale, and sword-whale, often provided with individual traits, are frequently regarded as supernatural beings themselves: the conception of the individual and the conception of its individual guardian-spirit blend with one another.[37] But the spirit of the species, though derived from the conception of the soul, is not necessarily some kind of spirit-animal comparable to the conception of the soul. It can be represented by a real animal, conspicuous, for instance, by its enormous size in striking white colour.[38] From here a line can be drawn to some higher and more universal deities of game, i.e., guardian-beings of a larger range of animals, bearing personal appearance and name. Moreover, functionary deities of the hunt as well as different nature-beings may also act as "master" or "owner" of the game.[39]

The investigation of the Japanese material regarding game shows that the conception of spirits of the species has mostly faded out.[40] Here the dominating figure is represented by Yama no kami, the mountain deity, a nature-being appearing as Lord (or Lady) of animals within the hunting range. Maybe we are permitted to take the sometimes theriomorphic appearance

36. Paulson 1961, 228 f.
37. Paulson 1961, 231.
38. Paulson 1961, 234.
39. Paulson 1961, 118 ff., 227 ff., 249 f.
40. Naumann 1963, 187.

of this deity as a reminiscence of his former character as a spirit of game. But while nearly the entire folklore of hunting has concentrated upon this deity, hereby almost eliminating the direct bending to the individual animal, the aspect of a Lord (or Lady) of animals plays but an inferior part within the total complex of this deity, conceptions out of other spheres of life having won the upperhand at quite an early time.[41]

But how stand matters regarding the marine animals?

There is no difficulty to recognize in the conceptions and customs surrounding the whale the worship of the individual animal as well as of its surviving soul. The customs concerning the salmon, on the other hand, suggest the conception of a spirit of the species. This conception we find, for instance, in northeastern Honshû where the salmon is caught when running upstreams in order to spawn. It is said that whosoever hears the calling of the salmon king coming upstreams on the 15th day of the 11th month, leading his subjects, shall die within three days. That is why on this day everybody is busy pounding rice-cakes so that nothing may be heard from outside.[42] The conception of a spirit of a species who acts as a guardian-spirit and at the same time appears to be the owner and master of the fish in a certain pond or stream is also present in stories, which tell of the visit of an unknown man who admonishes his host to drop fishing by poisoning the pond or stream as the host was preparing to do on the following day, or he asks to spare a certain big fish when fishing in a certain place. When acting against this advice it is found that the biggest fish caught is nobody else but the visitor of the day before, his belly still full of the food given to him on that occasion. And in some instances it is said that the rash deed was followed by a curse of the killed fish.[43]

Whales and sharks are said to chase shoals of small fish

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41. Naumann 1963, 199–366; see also Naumann 1964, 48–199.

42. Sakurada 1963, 130; Sakurada 1968, 217 with further details. See also MGJ 234.

43. Cf. Yanagita Kunio, *Gyoô gyôkotsu no tan.* 柳田国男: 魚王行乞譚 In: YKS, Vol. 5, Tokyo 1962, pp. 269–287. The big fish appearing in these stories is mostly an eel.

toward the shore if treated reverentially. But if made angry by shouting aloud or by bad behaviour on the contrary they will chase away the fish or do great damage.[44] In this case whale and shark appear as master or owner of the marine animals. And here, at last, we have come back to Ebisu worship, for these are the very facts held to be responsible why whale or shark are called Ebisu or are identified with Ebisu.

We wonder whether here the original relation has not been reversed. In his study on Ebisu forgotten for a long while, the above mentioned Nakayama Tarô has tried to show—although with poor arguments and taking as basis an unsustainable line of evolution—that the worship of a god Ebisu has emerged from the worship of the whale called Ebisu.[45] The question whether or not we can share his opinion should remain open as long as the etymology of the name Ebisu has not yet become clear. I think, however, that from the examples cited above the parallelism of customs and conceptions relative to hunting and fishing in Japan as well as in the areas consulted for comparison has become evident. The mental basis of these conceptions can—seen from the angle of cultural history—only be found in a layer of a genuine hunters' culture. The conceptions and customs surrounding the whale and the shark, the king of salmons and the first catch of the year thus prove to be elements of popular belief, which lead us temporally as far back as the corresponding conceptions relative to the hunt, that is, into prehistoric and protohistoric periods when we may assume a culture of hunters and fishermen still existing in Japan. Therefore we are permitted to interpret unconditionally Ebisu as a functionary deity of fishing[46] who has been associated with conceptions sprung from the mentality of genuine hunters and fishermen. That these conceptions temporally precede the idea of the "visiting deities" in the above mentioned form follows from the fact that the complex of these visiting deities is rooted in a cultural layer of agriculture. We may presume that they also precede the

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44. Sakurada 1963, 128; Sakurada 1968, 215 f.; Yanagita/Kurata 1938, 165; Nakayama 1930 a, 240 f., 301 f.

45. Nakayama 1930 a, 288 ff.

46. The character of Ebisu as a functionary deity of fishing becomes very

conceptions around the Ebisu-float and the Ebisu-sinker, which are bound to fishing with the large dragnet. The attempt at an explanation of the Ebisu-stone and its worship, however, can only prove possible in connexion with an investigation of the entire complex of stone worship in Japan.[47]

Thus what Ivar Paulson stated concerning North Eurasia[48] seems equally true regarding fishery and Ebisu worship in Japan: that the animals themselves—individual beings provided with souls as well as collectives of the species under the protection of the species-spirit—were the oldest object of worship of the hunter and fisherman.

The above investigation enabled the isolation of a basic component of Ebisu worship; in addition, within conceptions and customs till recently alive, we can recognize fragments of very old popular beliefs leading back into a period of hunters and fishermen long past. It proved, too, that the comprehension of the manifold phenomena of Japanese popular belief can not easily be attained by their isolated observation alone.

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lucid especially when comparing the features of Ebisu with those of the several deities of the sea. Cf. for instance Makita 1966, 134.

47. Another problem not easily to be solved consists in the question why a corpse floating on the sea is called Ebisu and is believed to bring good catches while on the other hand pollution by death is strongly avoided. Though aware of the weighty differences I should nonetheless point for further investigation to the interesting parallel to the Alaskan whale hunters' practice of using the corpses of former successful whale hunters to secure a good catch (cf. Lantis 1938, 443, 451 ff.; Hultkrantz 1962 b, 387 f.).

48. Paulson 1961, 293; Paulson 1962, 69.