EAST ASIAN THEMES IN FOLKTALES OF THE FORMOSAN ABORIGINES

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I. *Introduction*

This paper is based on two collections of tales: The *Myths and Traditions of the Formosan Native Tribes* (Tokyo, 1935), by Naoyoshi Ogawa and Erin Asai, and *The Mythology of the Formosan Aborigines* (Taihoku, 1923), by Yukichi Sayama and Yoshihisa Ōnishi. Both volumes derive their materials from fieldwork among all the Formosan native tribes, namely Atayal, Saisiyat, Paiwan, Puyuma, Rukai, Ami, Sedeq, Bunun, Tsou, Saaroa, Kanakanabu, and Yami (see Map 1).

The total population of the Formosan aborigines is around 150,000. They are physically Mongoloid and culturally Malaysian. Linguistically they are of the Malayo-Polynesian family. It is to be expected that the people in these racial, cultural, and linguistic circles will possess certain inherited tale themes in common.

This paper will first attempt to ascertain the characteristic tale themes, general or special, current in Formosa. Then it will analyze the significant aspects of those themes shared by the Formosan aborigines with other East Asian peoples. Finally I propose the use of the "theme" as a new classificatory unit larger than the motif but smaller than the tale type. Such a proposal seems justified by the fact that the motif is too frequent

and general in distribution, and the type too limited and infrequent to permit fruitful comparative study of nonliterate traditions. Further studies should crystalize the theme concept as a useful one, and perhaps a theme-index should be made. A good beginning for such an index would be the tales of Formosan aborigines, because of the high proportion of original Indonesian culture traits they still preserve. Careful examination of the rest of Sutheast Asia and adjacent areas, however, seems mandatory.

II. *Division of Tales*

The tales of the Formosan aborigines reveal three major divisions: (1) strictly Formosan tales, (2) East Asian tales, and (3) world-wide tales. The native Formosan tales are mostly legends which explain the origins of place names or of particular religious ceremonies, or which describe the history of clans, villages or tribes. About 6.6% or 19 of the tales in the Ogawa and Asai collection are of this kind. It is sometimes difficult to draw the line between East Asian tales and world-wide tales. The East Asian tales comprise almost 33% of the total of 284 tales. Among this group more than 25 themes are commonly East Asian, with particular concentration in Southeast Asia. Some of these themes have spread to Oceania and even to the New World. The world-wide tales comprise more than 60% of the 284.

III. *East Asian Themes*

The present discussion will concentrate on traditional East Asian narrative themes. From 25 themes in this category I have selected for analysis four of the most remarkable examples. Two concern mythological and two, physiological marvels. These are: (1) Several suns and moons appearing in the sky, (2) New race arising from incest after deluge, (3) The land, or island of women, (4) Vagina dentata. My reason for selecting these specific themes is that they seem unique enough to preclude the possibility of their independent invention from universal human experience.

1. Several Suns and Moons Appearing in the Sky.

The theme follows this general outline: In former times there existed several suns and moons. Their great heat and extreme cold caused great distress to mankind until a culture hero killed the superfluous suns and moons.

In Formosa, a total of thirty-four versions is reported from eight ethnic groups, and the hero usually is an archer.[1] A similar version of a culture hero shooting down the sun with an arrow appears among the Nabaloi of the Philippines.[2] The hero of the Dusun of northern Borneo cures his wife's overheated stomach by shooting six of the seven suns with his blow-pipe arrows.[3]

Similar versions appear in southwest China among the Ch'uan Miao[4] and the Lolo,[5] the former with the substitution of a crossbow as the weapon to relieve the parched earth. In a tradition from the Lepcha of Sikkim, a toad archer shoots the elder of two sun brothers.[6]

Many versions are known in northern Asia.[7] The Golds in the Amor region tell of three suns and three moons. A culture hero shoots down the superfluous suns and moons with arrows.

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1. Naoyoshi Ogawa & Erin Asai, *Taiwan Takasagozoku densetsu shū (The Myths and Trraditions of the Formosan Native Tribes,* Tokyo, 1935), pp. 372-374, 390-391, 566-568, 577, 593-595, 607-616, 653-656, 729-731. Yukichi Sayama & Yoshihisa Ōnishi, *Seiban dentsu shū (Mythology of the Formosan Aborigines,* Taihoku, 1923), pp. 492-495, 499-513.

2. C. R. Moss, "Nabaloi Tales," *University of California Publications, American Archaeology and Ethnology,* XVII, (1924), 233.

3. I. H. N. Evans, "Folk Stories of the Tempassuk and Tuaran Districts, British North Borneo," *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland,* XLIII, (1913), 433.

4. David Crockett Graham, *Songs and Stories of the Ch'uan Miao* (Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections, Vol. 123, 1954), pp. 172-173.

5. *Folk Tales from China* (Foreign Language Press, First Series, Peking, 1957), pp. 66-76.

6. Joh. Warneck, *Die Religion der Batak* (Leipzig, 1909), p. 54. Cited by Rudolf Rahmann, "Quarrels and Enmity between the Sun and the Moon," *Folklore Studies,* XIV (1955), 205, footnote 13.

7. Uno Harva, *Die religiösen Vorstellungen der altaischen Völker,* (Helsinki: Folklore Fellows Communications, CXXV, 1938). Cited by Gudmund Hatt, "Asiatic Influences in American Folklore," *Det kgl. Danske Videnskabernes Selskab Historisk-Filologiske Meddelelser,* XXXI (1949), 76.

The Buryats of Siberia also have a similar theme. The Torguts of western Outer Mongolia say that the devil made three suns in order to burn up the earth created by God. In answer, God released a flood and hurled the superfluous suns into the bottomless pit.

A parallel to the East Asian versions is found among the Shasta Indians in California. The whole world is dying from the heat of ten suns and the cold of ten moons. Coyote kills the extra suns and moons and thus rescues mankind from being alternately burned and frozen.[8] The sun archer also is known in Mexico.[9]

A different episode of plurality of suns and moons is reported from the tribal area of central India. A version from the Kond tells of seven sun brothers who almost melted the world. The moon took pity on mankind and lured one of the suns into eating his own brothers.[10] A similar version is known among the Semangs of the Malayan peninsula[11] and the Batak of Sumatra,[12] differing only in that the fratricidal cannibalism of India is replaced by the sun eating its own children.

From the versions cited above we see that the theme of plurality of suns and moons falls into two clearly marked groups. In one group a culture hero shoots down superfluous suns and moons. In the other group a cannibal sun eats the other suns. However, the similarity of elements common to the two groups exceeds their differences. The tales' basic outlines are much alike everywhere. The essential component motifs[13] in this theme are: (1) Several suns or moons appearing in the sky simultaneously (F961.0.1), (2) Formerly great heat of suns and great cold of moons caused distress to mankind (*A720.2), (3) A culture hero kills superfluous suns and moons (*A716.1), (4) Sun as a cannibal (A711.2.).

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8. Stephen Powers, *Tribes of California. Contributions to North American Ethnology,* III (1877), 251.

9. Andrew Lang, *Myth, Ritual and Religion* (London, 1887), Vol. I, p. 41.

10. Verrier Elwin, *Myths of Middle India* (Madras, 1949), p. 41.

11. P. Schebesta, *Bei den Urwaldzwergen von Malaya* (Leipzig, 1927), p. 101. Cited by Hatt, 74-75.

12. Joh. Warneck, pp. 43-44. Cited by L. W. Benedict, "A Study of Bagobo Ceremonial, Magic and Myth," *The Annals of the New York Academy of Science,* XXV (1916), 47, footnote 102.

13. Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature,* 6 vols.

Geographically this theme appears in Formosa, Borneo, Sumatra, the Malayan peninsula, India, southwestern China, northeastern China, Manchurian marginal area, Siberian area, central Asian steppes area, North America and Central America (see Map 2). A continuous chain of development can be traced. Several Chinese literary works as old as the fourth century B.C. mention a similar theme,[14] establishing it as at least twenty-four hundred years old.

From what we have found of the similarities of structure in the geographically dispersed variants of the myth, and from historical references, we may reasonably assume that all the versions recorded above have a genetic relation and that China probably was the point of origin, or at least an important center of dissemination for this theme.

2. New Race Arising from Incest after Deluge

The general outline of this theme is that the world once was destroyed by flood, with only one biologically related couple surviving. After the flood settled they looked for mates but could find none, so they became man and wife. All people descend from this incestuous union.

In Formosa seven versions of this myth come from three ethnic groups.[15] A version from the Ami says that when the flood came, a sister and brother were saved by a wooden mortar which floated them to a mountain. They looked for mates but could find nobody except each other. They became man and wife. When children were born they were all snakes, frogs and the like. The sun god took pity on them and taught them how

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14. Sources:
    (a) *Shan-hai-ching* (Land and Water Classic), "Hai-wai-tung-ching";
    (b) *Chuang-tzŭ*, "Chi wu lun" by the Taoist Chuang Chou (369?-286?);
    (c) *Ch'u tzŭ* (Elegies of Ch'iu), "Tienwen" by Ch'ü Yüan (died c. 288 B.C.);
    (d) *Lü-shih ch'un ch'iu*, (Spring and Autumn Annals made by Lü Pu-wei (died 235 B.C.);
    (e) *Huai-nan-tzŭ*, by the guests attached to the court of Liu An (died 122 B.C.).

15. N. Ogawa & E. Asai, pp. 194-196, 245-248; Y. Sayama & Y. Ōnishi, pp. 10-14.

to conduct a religious ceremony. From then on they bore healthy children and became the ancestors of the tribe.[16]

In the Philippines, brother-sister marriages after a flood are reported from the Ifugao,[17] Isneg and Igorot.[18] The Mandaya of Mindanao say that many generations ago a great flood occurred which caused the death of all the people of the world except one pregnant woman. She gave birth to a son. When the son grew up, he took his mother for his wife and from this union all the people have sprung.[19] In Borneo, a version of brother-sister marriage after the deluge is known from the Murut.[20]

Two versions are reported from the Miao[21] and Yao[22] of southwestern China. A version from the Ch'uan Miao says that there was a flood, and only a brother and sister survived. When the waters subsided they practised a divination about their union. First they each rolled a stone from opposite sides of the mountain. The two stones rolled down and fell together. Next the brother released a thread on one side of the mountain and the sister threw away a needle from the other side of the mountain. To their surprise the needle was threaded. Thus they became man and wife. The next morning they gave birth to a deformed son. They cut the son into many pieces and threw him away. From these objects plants and men were created. Many versions of brother-sister marriage after the deluge are found from the Bhuiya, Maria, Bondo, Gadaba, Kond, Saora and Kol among the tribal area of central India.[23] A version of mother-son marriage after the deluge is known from the Gadaba of the same area too.[24] A story of mother-son marriage

16. Y. Sayama & Y. Ōnishi, pp. 10-14.

17. R. B. Dixon, *The Mythology of All Races, Oceanic,* Vol. IX (Boston, 1916), pp. 170-172.

18. Morice Vanoverbergh, "Isneg Tales," *Folklore Studies,* XIV (1955), 14-15.

19. Fay-Cooper Cole, *The Wild Tribes of Davao District, Mindanao* (Chicago Field Museum of Natural History, Publication 170, Anthrc. Ser. XII, 1913), p. 173.

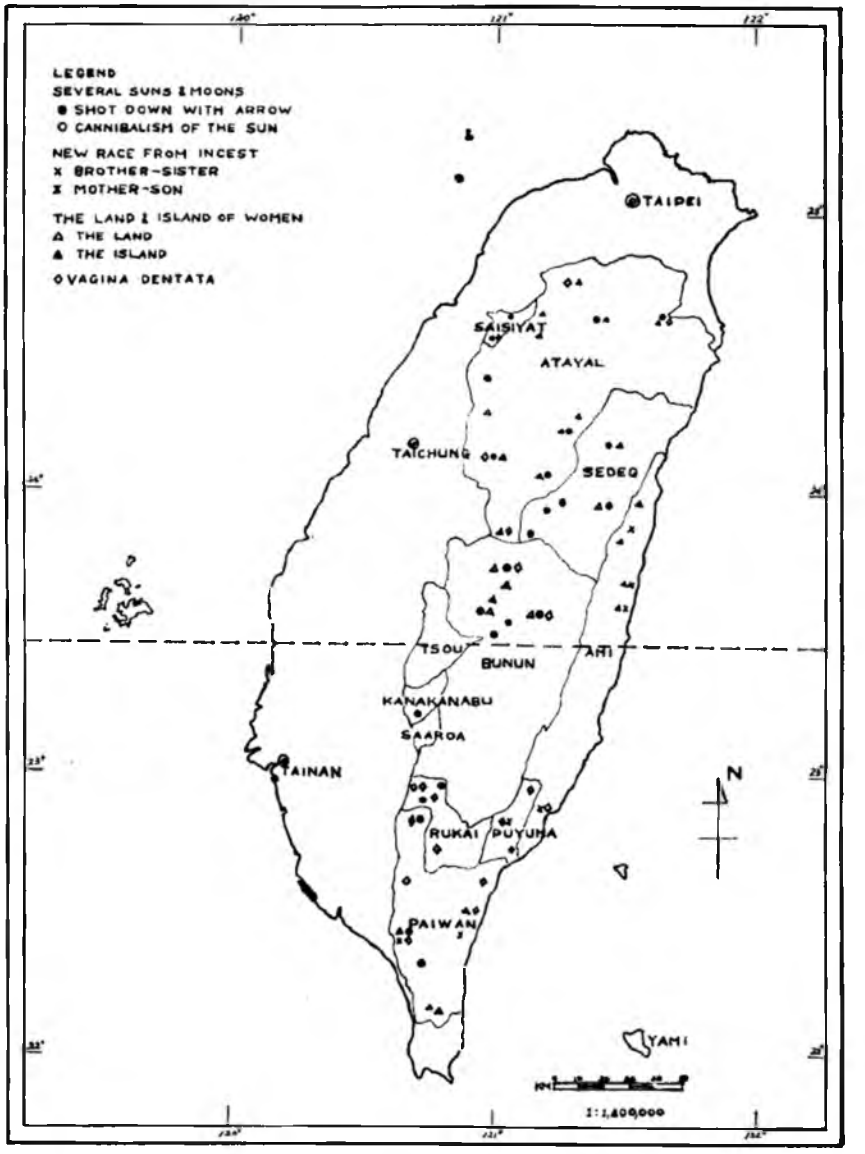
20. O. Rutter, *The Pagans of North Borneo* (London, 1929), pp. 248-249.

21. D. C. Graham, pp. 179-180.

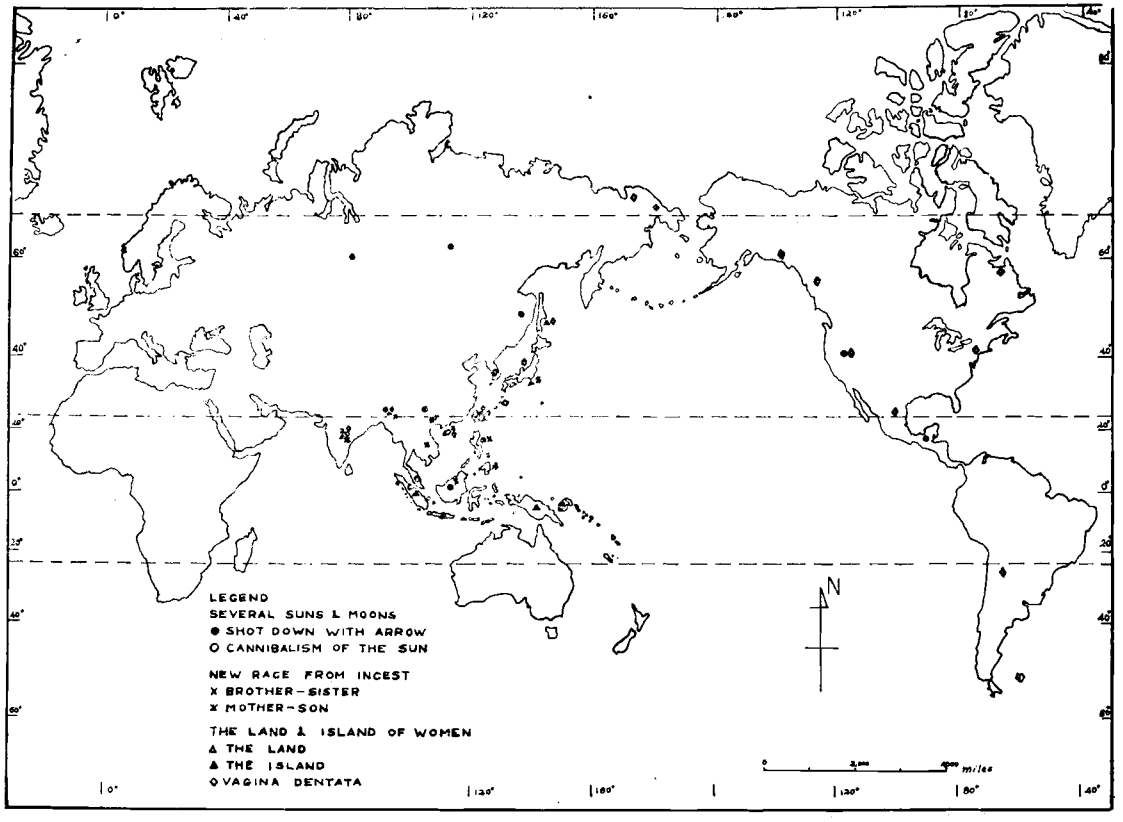
22. Hsi Sung-shih, *Yueh-chiang liu yu jên-min-shih* (*History of the People of the Yueh River Valley,* Shanghai, 1924), p. 128.

23. V. Elwin, pp. 29-50.

24. V. Elwin, p. 36.



MAP 1: SHOWS A DISTRIBUTION OF THE THEMES AMONG FORMOSAN ABORIGINES



MAP 2: SHOWS A DISTRIBUTION OF EAST ASIAN THEMES IN FOLKTALES

after the deluge is also reported from Hachijo Island in Japan.[25]

From the versions dealt with above we see that the theme of incestuous union after the deluge falls into two distinct groups, one involving brother-sister incest, the other mother-son incest. However, the two variations show much more similarity than difference. The essential component motifs are: (1) Deluge (A1010), (2) Escape from deluge (A1020), (3) Brother-sister marriage (T415.5), or mother-son incest (T412), (4) Monstrous births (T550), and (5) New race from incest after world calamity (A1006.2).

Geographically this theme appears in Formosa, the Philippines, Borneo, southwestern China, India, and Japan. (See Map 2).

3. The Land or Island of Women

The general outline of this theme concerns a man who comes to a land or an island of women by accident. Intruders are killed or captured unless they manage to escape. The women there become pregnant through the wind or in some other curious way. They raise only female children.

A total of twenty-two versions is reported from six ethnic groups of the Formosan aborigines. Fifteen versions are related to the land of women myth and seven versions to the island of women.[26] A version from the Bunun tells of a village of women only. They climbed up on a roof and were impregnated by the wind. Female babies were kept, but males were destroyed.[27] The Ami say that a person floated to an island of women where he was seized by them. The people of the island had never seen a man and thought his penis was a tail and hence kept him in a pig pen. A woman who fed him every day became fond of him and slept with him. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son. The villagers pulled the child's penis and the child became sick and died. One day the man heard that the villagers would butcher him. He found a piece of iron and used it to cut a hole to escape from the pen.

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25. Gyofu Doi, "Hachijô jima no hito no hajime" (The Origin of Man in Hachijo Island), *Kyôdo Kenkyû* IV (1916), 124.

26. N. Ogawa & E. Asai, pp. 92-98, 209-210, 405-410, 538-544, 572-575, 640-641; Y. Sayama & Y. Ōnishi, pp. 591-595, 600-605.

27. N. Ogawa & E. Asai, pp. 640-641.

He ran away to the beach where a whale took pity on him and carried him home.[28]

The same theme occurs in tales of Sumatra and Java reported by sailors of the sixteenth century.[29] A story from New Britain tells of a man revealed hiding in a tree by his reflection in a spring beneath him.[30] In Polynesia, a version of the land of women is reported from the Tuamotus.[31]

A text from the Naga says that somewhere there is a village of women and in that village there are no men. If a male child is born, the women heat water and pour it on him. Hornets surrounding the village wall come flying and suck the women's breasts to make them pregnant. In this way they have made a village without taking husbands.[32]

Several versions about the land of women are reported from the tribal areas of central India.[33] One from the Kamar tells of the kingdom of women in the east. If any man enters the kingdom by accident, the women will seize him and by their magic change him into an ox. During the day they use him in their fields, but when darkness falls they make him back into a man and force him to do their pleasure all night long. If any woman there bears a male child, they kill it, but they preserve female children. Sometimes if a man escapes from that country he carries the ox marks on his buttocks to the day of his death.[34]

Another version of the island of women myth and of conception by the wind is reported from Hachijo Island, Japan.[35] A similar theme appears further north among the Ainu of Karafuto.[36]

The land or island of women stories are known among Indians of North and South America in connection with Amazons

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28. N. Ogawa & E. Asai, pp. 538-544.
29. Pigafetta, *First Voyage round the World,* Hakl, Soc. edit. p. 154.
30. R. B. Dixon, pp. 140-141.
31. Martha W. Beckwith, *Hawaiian Mythology* (New Haven, 1940), p. 503.
32. J. H. Hutton, "Folk Tales from the Naga Hills of Assam" *Folk-Lore* XXXIV (1923), 234.
33. V. Elwin, pp. 458-468.
34. V. Elwin, pp. 467-468.
35. Bakin Takizawa, *Chin setsu yumi hari zuki* (The Crescent Moon), 1811.
36. B. H. Chamberlain, *Aino Folk-Tales* (The Folk-lore Society Publications, XXII 1888), pp. 37-39.

or women warriors. Women rebel against men and set up their own anti-male society. However the characteristic motif of miraculous conception is lacking.

The earliest Chinese reference to the land of women dates from the fifth century A.D. A literary work describes the holy spring which causes conception.[37] The earliest Indian reference to a country of women is in the story of the fifth adventure of the horse released at the Aswamedha rite in the *Mahabharata*,[38] fourth century B.C. The tale is close to the Amazon theme.

From the versions dealt with above we can see that the theme under discussion falls into two characteristic groups. One group deals with the Land of Women. This group appears in Formosa, Assam and central India. Another group deals with the Island of Women. It appears on the islands of Formosa, Sumatra, Java, New Britain, Karafuto and Japan (see Map 2). However, elements common to the two groups loom larger than the dissimilarities, for example, conception from wind, and the raising of only female children. The essential component motifs in this theme are: (1) Journey to the land of women (F112), (2) Conception from wind (T524) or Conception from bathing (T523), (3) All new-born male children slaughtered (S302.1), (4) Men held captive in the Land of Women (R7), (5) Ogre defeated (G500), (6) Escape from sea on fish's back (B541.1).

4. Vagina Dentata

The general outline of this theme is that dangerous women with a toothed vagina kill all their husbands. The hero grinds or breaks off the teeth of the women and enjoys normal intercourse.

A total of fifteen versions[39] is reported from seven ethnic groups of the Formosan aborigines. A Paiwan version says that formerly there lived a woman who married and had intercourse, during which her husband's penis was bitten by her vagina, and he died. She married five men, but they all died. Her mother thought something must be wrong with her. When she checked her private place she found a tooth there, so she cut it off. This tooth later changed into a bead, which still exists

37. *Ho han shu* (*History of the Later Han Dynasty*), "Wu-tsu."

38. *Mahabharata*, cited by V. Elwin, p. 459.

39. N. Ogawa & E. Asai, pp. 193-194, 269-271, 360-361, 377, 389 554-555; Y. Sayama & Y. Ōnishi, pp. 707-709.

today.[40] The Apayao of the Philippines tell approximately the same story except that the woman was so ashamed that she turned into a bird and flew away.[41]

Versions of the vagina dentata theme also are reported from Okinawa[42] and from the Li of Hainan Island[43] and from Marquesas and Tuamotu in Polynesia.[44] Twenty-seven versions appear in the tribal areas of central India.[45] Vagina dentata themes also are reported from Korea[46] and from Noto of Japan.[47] The same themes appear among the Ainu of Karafuto and the Chukchee, and the Yukagir in the Paleo-Siberian area.[48]

An Ainu version says that in ancient days an Ainu chieftain of Iwanai went sea fishing with his two children. A sudden gale carried them away and they floated to the land of women. They dwelt there and the chief married a villager. When spring came, the chieftain's wife said to him, "We women of this country differ from you. At the same time as the grass begins to sprout, teeth sprout in our vaginas, so our husband cannot stay with us."[49]

Among the Indians of North America, the vagina dentata theme is widely spread, appearing along the whole of the west coast as well as in the Great Plains, North Woodland and Southwest.[50]

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40. N. Ogawa & E. Asai, pp. 193-194.

41. Laurence L. Wilson, *Apayao Life and Legends* (Baguio, 1947). pp. 105-106.

42. Makōei Saki, *Nantō setsuwa* (*Tales from South Islands,* 1923), p. 109. Cited by Eiichiro Ishida, *Momotarô no haha* (*Mother of Peach Boy*) Tokyo, 1955, p. 205.

43. Takeo Kanazeki, *Kei kai zatsu shin* (*News from the Hainan Island*), 1942. Cited by Eiichiro Ishida, 1955, p. 205.

44. E. S. Craighill Handy, *Marquesan Legends, Bernice P. Bishop Museum Bulletin* LXIX (1930), 100; M. W. Beckwith, p. 289.

45. V. Elwin, pp. 373-387.

46. Sohn Jin-tae ed. *Myong-yuh chi hae* (1932), p. 73. Cited by Eiichiro Ishida, 1955, p. 205.

47. Yorisuke Ōta, *Noto mei seki shi* (*Places of Note and Historical Interest in Noto,* 1777). Cited by Eiichiro Ishida, 1955, p. 205.

48. Waldemar Bogoras, "The Folklore of Northeastern Asia, as compared with that of North-Western America," *American Anthropologist,* new series IV (1902), 667-668.

49. B. H. Chamberlain, pp. 37-39.

50. Stith Thompson, *Tales of the North American Indians* (Cambridge, Mass. 1929), p. 309, note 115.

Vagina dentata themes also appear in South America. The Mataco in Grand Chaco say that all of the women had toothed vaginas. A bird warned the people, but one person would not hear its advice. This one copulated with a woman who cut off his penis. The person replaced his missing member with a piece of bone and looked for the same woman. This time he threw a stone and broke all the teeth of her vagina. Then the men were able to copulate with the women.[51]

From the versions cited above we can clearly find ample evidence of geographical continuity as well as similarity of structure. Both kinds of evidence suggest that these themes come from a common origin. The characteristic motifs of this theme are: (1) Vagina dentata; woman kills her husbands with her toothed vagina (F547.1.1), (2) Vaginal teeth broken (A1313.3.1), (3) Transformation: object to another object (D450).

IV. *Conclusion:*

This study of four selecated themes found in folktales of the Formosan aborigines may be summarized as follows:

1. The variants of each of the four themes reveal considerable internal similarity and uniformity in tale structure.

2. Each of these themes is composed of many specific motifs as elements which seem unlikely to be explained by independent invention in a number of places.

3. The distribution of each theme clearly indicates continuity and co-existence of two or more of the themes in one area.

4. Many of the themes appear in early works in China and India, proving that they existed in Asia quite early.

From a structural, psychological, geographical and historical examination of the tales, it seems safe to conclude that these themes originated from one source and then diffused. The

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51. Alfred Métraux, *Myths of the Toba and Pilagá Indians of the Gran Chaco.* (Memoirs of the American Folklore Society, XL, Philadelphia. (1946), p. 105.

present study suggests that China or India is the probable place of origin for these East Asian themes.

For clarification of the problems of origin and diffusion more studies of East Asian themes are needed. Particular attention should be directed to the topics of race, culture, and language affinities.

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