

global levels, or give new insights into those with which they are familiar. Although the excitement of this quest is conveyed throughout the text, college undergraduate instructors may wish to first ground students in the relevant essays on the three interpretative approaches noted above that appear in *Teaching Oral Traditions*. A visit to the nicely-crafted companion web-site (<http://www.oraltradition.org/>) will also increase student interest in and understanding of some of the traditions discussed by engaging in oral poetry via the medium of virtual reality.

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## JAPAN

EMIKO OHNUKI-TIERNEY. *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002. xvii + 411 pages. Illustrations, appendix, bibliography, index. Paper US\$20.00/£14.00; ISBN 0-226-62091-3. Cloth US\$45.00/£31.50; ISBN 0-226-62090-5.

To learn why people must evanesce (die after living but briefly), a European might turn to the universal chronicles of the Old Testament. A premodern Japanese might turn to the universal chronicles of Japan: the *Koji-ki* and the *Nihon Sho-ki* (PHILIPPI 1969; ASTON 1956).

According to the anthropogonic myth in the Japanese chronicles, the progenitor deity Ninigi descends from heaven (ecumene of the spirit) to earth (ecumene of the flesh), mantled in a coverlet and bearing with him seed rice. The coverlet symbolizes the spirit-mantling flesh (METEVELIS 2002; 76-78, 81-82). The rice symbolizes food, in order to satisfy the first of two fundamental needs of the flesh: refection and reproduction. The second fleshly need is satisfied by matrimony.

So, unsurprisingly, upon alighting on earth the first thing Ninigi does is erect a wedding palace. Next, he spurns an ugly rock and weds a beautiful flowering tree.<sup>1</sup> The type of tree goes unspecified in the chronicles, just as the type of Eve's arboreal fruit goes unmentioned in the Genesis of the Old Testament. Today Europeans often claim Eve's fruit came

off the apple tree; in the same way, Shinto priests, according to hieratic tradition in recent centuries, say Ninigi's tree is the *cherry*.

Ostensibly Ninigi marries only the tree by mistake, for had he been good enough to marry the rock also, his offspring should, like the rock, never perish (PHILIPPI 1969, 144–145; ASTON 1956, I: 84–85; METEVELIS 2002, 21–23). By contrast, the tree ceaselessly puts forth blossoms in their time—and every time the blossoms fall and die. The floral cycles clearly represent the mortal generations in the Japanese anthropogony.

Thus, in Japan there are two possibilities for people's immortal soul: unmantled eternal life, or else generational life (generational metempsychosis being assumed). Ninigi's "mistake"—actually a sacred trespass—corresponds precisely to the biblical "original sin," and it establishes the second possibility as the ordained mode of life in the ecumene of the flesh.

The chronicled Japanese myth system seems to evoke a pathos of evanescence (what in India would be called *samsara*), and yet at the same time actually celebrating that evanescence. With the spread of Buddhism in Japan, however, the pathos came to dominate over the celebration. In any event, the mantle of evanescence has been ordained for us by the gods, and cannot be cast away without also casting away our carnal life (METEVELIS 2002, 76–80). This is the starting point of Japanese culture, and therefore an important topic for the Japanologist, culture historian, historian of religion, and folklorist.

It is also the point at which anthropologist Ohnuki-Tierney's book opens.

Ohnuki-Tierney's book makes a good companion to John BROWNLEE's *Japanese Historians and the National Myths*. The latter scrutinizes the scholarly rationalization and secularization of Japan's foundation myths and determines why, until the end of World War II, modern Japanese historians caved in to the ultra-nationalists. The former studies how the nationalist government manipulated native cultural symbolisms and aesthetics—specifically those of cherry blossoms and the emperor system—in order to convince the populace that willingly dying for the emperor was a huge honor, and to encourage patriotism and generally support nationalist militarism. The blossoms and emperor were time-honored symbols harking from a mythical age, but into the brew the militarists also threw in the newly acquired and refashioned ethic of the samurai (popular Bushidō had been propagated in Japan only since 1908, when Nitobe Inazō's *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* [Philadelphia 1899] was translated into Japanese). In the newly-fashioned militarist ideology, budding cherry blossoms became the souls of soldiers and sailors, and their falling petals became symbols of the servicemen at the time of glorious death. The means of spreading "cherry-blossom propaganda" varied from songs and poems to books and films to military insignia to nationwide plantings of cherry trees to government control of religious rituals. (Of course, the government also employed other forms of propaganda, such as exploiting anti-Western sentiments, promoting an ethnocentric pan-Asianism, and reapplying myths from the universal chronicles.)

Through her groundbreaking research, Ohnuki-Tierney explores how such government propaganda might have influenced *tokubetsu kōgeki tai* (*tokkō-tai*, known outside Japan as kamikaze) pilots of World War II to "volunteer" to die "for emperor and country." She concludes that the pilots, far from the popular image of being crazed ultra-nationalist zealots, went to their deaths reluctantly, haunted by dread, and that none actually went out to die for their emperor. The pilots were, however, quite patriotic. Though some thought that they were dying for their country, others that they were dying for nothing, all dutifully went out on their fatal sortie.

The shallow cherry-blossom aesthetic of the militarists seems, in Ohnuki-Tierney's estimation, to have been less influential than intended:

What is certain is that despite the songs and other means by which the state tried to indoctrinate the soldiers, few soldiers or survivors referred to cherry blossoms as the souls of the fallen soldiers. In other words, even those who saw an analogy between soldiers and cherry blossoms did not envision the men being reborn as cherry blossoms at the Yasukuni Shrine, as the military ideology had it. (184)

In surviving writings, at least, *tokkō-tai* pilots seem to mention cherry blossoms in their more traditional meanings rather than in their militarized ones.

The book is well researched and has an enormous bibliography. The author strives to be fair to history. But of special concern here, cherry blossoms are such a potent cultural symbol in Japan that a book treating them in relation to a topic in the lives and history of Japanese people should certainly make it of interest to folklorists.

## NOTES

1. Underlying the Japanese textual statements on human origins, we can discern Motif A1236, “Mankind emerges from tree” (THOMPSON 1975), or more generally the motif of man’s descent from a plant species (ELIADE 1958, 300–303), tree-goddess Ko-no-hana no Sakuya Hime serving as the plant-ancestor.

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## CHINA

BAMO QUBUMO 巴莫曲布嫫 (2001). *Yingling yu shihun, Yizu gudai jingji shixue yanjiu* 鷹靈与詩魂, 彝族古代經籍詩学研究 [Golden Eagle Spirit and Soul of Poetry: A Study of Yi Nationality Ancient Poetic Texts]. Beijing: Shehui kexue yuan chubanshe. 702 pages. Appendices, bibliography.