

IWASAKA, MICHIKO and BARRE TOELKEN. *Ghosts and the Japanese: Cultural Experience in Japanese Death Legends*. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1994. xx + 138 pages. Plates (color and b/w), bibliography, index. Paper US\$22.95; ISBN 0-87421-179-4.

This small book introduces the reader to an understanding of Japanese culture by focusing on customs related to death and the ghost legends of Japan. As David Bufford states in his forward to this book, the merit of this endeavor lies in its description of Japanese death customs, translation of various ghost legends, and introduction of many illustrations of ghosts in Japanese art. He goes on to say that in this way the road is opened to an understanding of Japanese culture in a cross-cultural approach because the important conception of death lying in the background of Japanese everyday life is brought to the surface.

The approach taken by the authors, that of relating ghost legends to death customs and from there going on to offer an interpretation of contemporary Japanese and their culture, may be baffling for Europeans and Americans alike. It could be seen negatively as nothing more than the quaint introductions to Japanese culture presented during a bygone era. For Japanese, however, this point of view is proper and for the most part very persuasive. If the book were translated into Japanese, the majority of Japanese readers would not find anything surprising or out of the ordinary. Its pages contain motifs that are familiar to them, things they have grown accustomed to seeing and hearing from their childhood. This is precisely the point that caught the eyes of the authors, who were looking for a way to understand Japanese culture from without. By examining the attitude toward death created over a long span of time, they attempt to abstract the Japanese worldview. Consequently, this book deals, historically and culturally, with a theme appropriate for developing a deeper cultural theory of Japan. Iwasaka and Toelken clarify their position as follows:

For Europeans and Americans, death has been until recently a relatively touchy subject, one that is not publicly very popular or comfortable.... To get old, to decompose, to disappear from the scene are realities that many Westerners have had trouble confronting.... Fear and apprehension about it are found in Asia as well, the difference being the varied ways in which death can be viewed; thus, in Japan, death can be a symbol of the transience of life, although the soul is perceived as not transitory; death even constitutes a kind of aesthetic, in spite of one's abhorrence of the process; it can inform a sort of romanticism, especially as expressed in the Edo Period (one finds it even today). (6-8)

Most Japanese would agree with this. As the authors point out, there exists a dialectic tension between the philosophical and everyday perceptions of death in Japan, but many of the legends concerned with death and "ghosts" are part of a symbolic system in which the territories of the living and dead support each other. Relationships between mother and child, sin and revenge, and debt and its settlement, common relationships in the social system of the living, are often mentioned in accounts of what goes on with the living and dead. Research by folklorists in Japan like Yanagita Kunio and his successors leads to the conclusion that in traditional Japan the dead do not live so very far from the world of the living, and once a year, during the summer *obon* rites, these separated *tamashii* (souls, spirits) visit their descendants. Such attitudes toward the dead were not born under the influence of Buddhism or Confucianism but existed long before in *sorei sūhai* (ancestral spirit veneration or worship). Belief in *yūrei* (spirits, "ghosts") was born from beliefs surrounding Japanese ancestral spirits. This belief has dictated to the Japanese their conception of the relationship between the liv-

ing and the dead and between social organizations and the nature of death, and it continues to do so at a very deep cultural level in today's Westernized Japan.

Drawn to this view, the authors reconfirm it throughout their observations of *yūrei* legends. Unlike so many superficial inquiries that produce popular stereotyped images of the Japanese, their efforts succeeded in describing, in a very short space, the Japanese people within a cultural, historical, and vernacular context. For this reason, this work offers European and American readers a fresh and interesting introduction to Japanese culture.

This said, it is necessary for me, a Japanese and folklorist, to point out some problems that emerge upon a closer reading of the text. My remarks are based on the research I have done on Japanese customs surrounding death, *yūrei*, and *yōkai* (malicious supernatural beings). The first problem is that the authors use the word "ghost" as a translation for the vernacular *yūrei*. Although the two words overlap in part, there are large differences in meaning between them that must be recognized. Japanese scholars have made numerous attempts to clarify the *yūrei* concept, and there should have been a discussion of these at some point in the book. References are made to Ikeda Yasaburō and Suwa Haruo, both prominent authorities on *yūrei*, but unfortunately there is very little discussion on their research in connection with the work of Yanagita Kunio, because it is the latter that forms the framework of theirs.

Japanese use *yūrei* in referring to the spirit of a dead person that appears to people in the form it had when alive. It is very similar to the "hitchhiker ghost" described by Jan Harold BRUNVAND in *The Vanishing Hitchhiker* (1981). When the dead do not show themselves in this way but exercise a mysterious power over people and things in the world, *yūrei* is not used. Therefore, of the death legends introduced in part 3, "*Ubume, kosodate yūrei*" and "Ghosts in the Sea" are typical *yūrei* legends, while "*Nangakubō, The Mountain Hermit*" and "The Blind Monk with the Bamboo Staff" are stories of *tatari* (curses) resulting from the mysterious power of dead spirits. Clearly the authors are aware of the vernacular differences, which is why they carefully entitle part 3 "Japanese Death Legends and Vernacular Culture." The term "ghost" is simply a strategy the authors use in referring to the Japanese worldview of death. The real purpose of the book may be to reveal that worldview through this vernacular medium of expression; actually, the stories deal with a range of topics, from the Japanese view of spirits and wandering spirits to relationships between the living and the dead.

Even so, many Japanese would find using *yūrei* as an approach to their worldview a very narrow position to start from, because it is too human-centered. Vernacular Japanese culture has over time accepted Buddhist and Confucian elements, but at its root is an animistic belief present from ancient times to the present. It is true that, as history progressed, a tendency toward human-centered ideas appeared, but in general humans are seen as but a part of nature and all living things; even tools and other things made by people are regarded as having spirits. Furthermore, these are thought to be as capable of *jōbutsu* (Buddhist salvation) as people are. Japanese always feared the wrath of these spirits and took care not to stimulate it. Misfortunes in the form of natural disasters, disease, and the like have been seen as the result of mysterious punishments or attacks by angry spirits. Of course, a large proportion of these come from human spirits. To control and prevent attacks, the Japanese have developed rituals with accompanying tales that reflect those ideas.

If I were to choose key words properly grounded in the conception of spirits in the Japanese worldview, words that simultaneously cover a broad scale of the culture and its history, they would be *chinkon* (appeasement of the spirits) and *irei* (propitiation of the spirits). It is not enough to focus on the worlds of the living and the dead—the activities of nonhuman spirits must be included as well. By so doing it finally becomes possible to position human *yūrei* within the structure of the spiritual world. Unless this approach is taken, it is impossible to explain fully the "Kiyō and Anchin" motif, in which the dead Kiyō's spirit takes

the shape of a great snake to chase her beloved Anchin and kill him. A local version of this story, translated and quoted in the section “Kiyo and Anchin” and depicting Kiyo as a ghost, would cause most Japanese to shake their heads in wonder.

About ten years ago, in my own study of legends about monks, pilgrims, and other “outsiders/strangers” killed when traveling through villages, I made the point that their murders at the hands of villagers were due to their possessing large sums of money. “The Blind Monk and the Bamboo Staff” falls within this class of tales. The meaning these very distinct legends contain, as I see it, is that in those committing the murders the desire for money was stronger than the fear of revenge from the spirit of the person killed, something that would be inconceivable unless a deeply rooted currency economy existed in those societies. In this story we can see a connection with the historical situation and at the same time a separation from the former socioeconomic period. By not including these aspects in their analysis the authors stray from their original purpose, and this book comes dangerously close to falling into the trap common to so many mediocre accounts of Japanese culture.

Another problem is with the *yūrei* art included with the text. All of the pieces come from the Zen temple Zenshō-an in Tokyo, and are originally from the collection of San'yūtei Enchō, a *rakugo* artist (traditional storyteller) famous for his *kaidan* (horror stories). When introducing these prints into the discussion, one must be cautious of the fact that they are from the late Edo and Meiji periods, when *eshi* (popular artists) produced them in huge numbers to answer the needs of a public caught up in a *kaidan* boom centered on kabuki and the contemporaneous world of entertainment. These prints were heavily influenced by the conventions of kabuki and must be treated as a specialized genre. It is difficult to tie them directly to the vernacular *yūrei* legends that the book wishes to introduce.

In certain pre-Edo period stories the *yūrei* appear in the same form they had when alive. Most of these *yūrei* visit a particular relation, such as a spouse, to speak of their sorrow or to deliver an important message. Very few come back to exact revenge. When the spirits of the dead (animals or other beings) wished to avenge a wrong, they would most often become *oni* or *tengu*. In other cases they were perceived as formless powers bringing *tatari* upon those who had done them wrong. Very seldom were *yūrei* depicted in drawings, but there are many reports of people seeing them. Thus the appearance of *yūrei* in pictures and in kabuki and *rakugo* is a special feature of late Edo-period culture. This is not to completely deny the possible influence of the late Edo-period entertainment world, centered in the capital (present-day Tokyo), on legends from earlier rural culture. I must, however, caution that the unqualified juxtaposition of *yūrei* prints in a discussion of *yūrei* and death legends in the vernacular culture of Japan can easily lead to misunderstanding.

Several errors I noticed in the text must be mentioned. The authors, when referring to the spirit of a living being, use the terms *seiryō* and *shōryō*. These terms actually refer to spirits in general; the correct term to use is *ikiryō*. In Japanese the homonym *minzokugaku* is used for both “folklore” and “ethnology,” the distinction between the two being made by using different characters for *zoku*—not for *gaku*, as the authors state. Elementary errors of this nature are very distressing to the Japanese reader. On examination of the original sources referred to, some mistakes were discovered. For example, in the sources cited by the authors for *Nangakubō*, “*Hidarugami* in Town,” “The Hunting Dog’s Revenge,” and “Kiyo and Anchin,” I was unable to locate any of these stories. In view of the fact that one of the authors is Japanese, these shortcomings stand out all the more.

I must say, however, that this work deserves high praise for its successful attempt to introduce readers to Japanese culture. At present the discipline of Japanese studies is tragically deficient in synthetic conceptions of the Japanese and their culture, and the publication of this book, which provides a cross-cultural inquiry, is great reason for joy. My hope is that

the authors continue their research by coming to Japan to conduct fieldwork from deep within the culture, fully utilizing the vast amount of available research by Japanese and foreign scholars. Research relationships will become even more necessary, and the cooperation needed for this will be happily provided. I for one look forward to the authors' next publication.

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NAUMANN, NELLY, Translator and Annotator. *Die Mythen des alten Japan*. München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1996. viii + 231 pages. Map, illustrations, bibliography, glossary of Chinese and Japanese terms, index. Cloth DM 48—: ISBN 3-406-41147-9. (In German)

Nelly Naumann, a German Japanologist well known to readers of *Asian Folklore Studies* through her contributions on Japanese folklore and other topics, has published an introduction to ancient Japanese mythology. After an introductory chapter in which the author presents her understanding of the concept of "myth," describes the ancient Japanese mythology and the history of its research, and explains the aims of her book, three chapters present translations by the author from the first parts of the *Kojiki* and the *Nihonshoki*, two historical works compiled in the early eighth century. The texts are followed by the comments of the author.

The author divides the mythological sequence into three chapters: 1) "Theogony, Cosmogony, Cosmology," covering the period from the beginning of the world to Izanagi's visit to his dead wife Izanami in the afterworld and the birth of their three illustrious children (the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, the Moon God Tsukuyomi, and the Storm God Susano-o); 2) "The Mythical World Order," covering the period from the installation of the three children in their respective domains to the myths of Ohokuninushi; 3) "The Political Myth," covering the period from the subjugation of the Central Land of Reed Plains to the founding of the Yamato kingdom by the first emperor Jimmu. The author is inclined to prefer the *Kojiki* texts to those of the *Nihonshoki*; for example, she places the birth of the three illustrious children after Izanagi's visit to the afterworld, and she gives much weight to the myths of Ohokuninushi.

The present book is not a handbook, surveying major results of research by many scholars, but rather a summary of the author's own research. Works by Japanese scholars referred to are in the main only those published up to the 1960s. Recent works by French Japanologists, e.g., François MACÉ (1989), are ignored.

The translation is well done, accurate, and written in a readable style. In the comments Naumann presents some interesting observations, e.g., that the names of deities in the cosmogony have a *kami*-ending in the *Kojiki* and a *mikoto*-ending in the *Nihonshoki* (30). She pays due attention to the structure of mythic sequence. She gives, for example, a schematic description at the opening of the chapter "The Mythical World Order":

- a Susano-o receives the Land of Root as his domain to rule.
- b Susano-o goes up to the heaven. Procreation of children.