

BOOK REVIEW

Suto Isao: *Nishiure no Matsuri* (The Nishiure Festival) 須藤功. 西浦のまつり. 230 pages, including 172 photo plates with 275 pictures. Tokyo, Miraisha, Showa 45 (1970). Price: Yen 4.00 or \$20.00.

Although this book is already six years old, a review may still be worthwhile for our readers abroad who have no easy access to Japanese publications. The book is written in Japanese and English, the English text having been written by Frank Hoff. Also the explanations of the photos are bilingual. Why we find the Nishiure Festival so interesting is that Nishiure is one of those remote mountain villages on the boundary between the prefectures of Aichi, Nagano and Shizuoka, where almost archaic forms of festivals were, and are still, celebrated in order to secure and increase the fertility of agricultural activities. Nishiure is situated on the Toyo river which is a branch river of the Tenryu river which flows into the Pacific near Hamamatsu, having its source in lake Suwa in the mountains in Central Japan. Nishiure nestles in a small valley of the Toyo river. It is located in Shizuoka Prefecture, Iwate District, Misakubo Town. Nishiure lies just at the confluence of the Tenryu river and the Toyo river.

In old times the village could be reached only by rugged roads over mountain passes. In the Meiji era a road for motor traffic was built, and the Iida railroad was opened from Toyohashi along the Toyo river to the upper reaches of the Tenryu river. The town Misakubo has a railway station, and from Toyohashi it now takes only one hour and a half to travel there. But in spite of the formidable access to Nishiure in former times it was not so isolated as its geographical situation makes us first think. The village and the surrounding area were once part of large manors (*shôen*) belonging to Emperor Go-Shirakawa (1156–1158). Silk was produced there as well as paper and timber for building, important commodities in the economic life of the aristocrats in Kyoto. Agricultural activities consisted in slash-and-burn farming along the mountain slopes, and in gatherings fruits from the trees such as *tochi* and *kuri*, both types of chestnuts, and *kaki*, that is persimmon. Farming in the burnt fields (*yakibata*) yielded *awa* and *hie*, two types of millet, and *soba*, a kind of buckwheat.

But unexpectedly the dramatic performance of *dengaku* ("field music"), normally found only among wet rice farmers, was discovered there. This is a refined form of fertility rites, in which the agricultural cycle of the year is imitated as an act of sympathetic magic and of worship, which includes the use of musical instruments. This refined form of worship is an import from centers of higher culture with which the remote village had contact. Players who specialized in *dengaku* were the so-called *dengaku-hôshi* or *dengaku* monks. They were first active in the Kyoto area, but due to the political turmoil in the capital during the thirteenth century dispersed all over the country, bringing their art even to small mountain settlements like Nishiure. Eventually the Nishiure *dengaku* became widely known.

In a subsection of Nishiure a simple Kannon shrine was built after the Buddhist goddess Kannon had become popular in the countryside during the tenth century. The unpretentious Kannon temple is the center of the Nishiure Festival. Incongruous as it may look, the mountain god Tengu is at the same time the chief

object of worship. There was a time when the *yamabushi* or mountain ascetics, were in charge of the festival. They were worshippers of the mountain god primarily concerned with magic and not with doctrinal congruity.

The *dengaku* festival is held on the 18th of the first lunar month and is essentially a spring festival for dry field cultivators. To it were added dramatic performances with masks which were considered sacred and treated with religious reverence. The performers belong to the upper class in the rural society. Their role in the festival helps them to maintain their status. An analysis of the festival shows that we have here to do with a very complex unit of religious, economic, and social aspects, a kind of a repository of Japanese religious history.

The plentiful photographic documentation describes step by step the many stages of the festival and the implements used in it. The book is an outstanding example of an ethnographic treatment of an important and typical festival of rural Japan.

M. E.

Niwa Motoji: *Kamon* [Family Crests] 丹羽基二・家門 Tokyo, Akita Shoten, 1976, 22nd edition (first edition 1969), 294 pages, 1,500 cuts. Price: Yen 1,200.

We have carried already a report on the book by the same author, namely *Shinmon* [Shrine Crests], in A. F. St., Vol. 34, 1, p. 120, f. (we regret the error in the transcription of the author's family name). The newly printed book on family crests of which 22 printings were made within eight years, shows how closely related to the Japanese cultural history, and how popular, family crests still are. The anthropologist looks at them as documents of the peculiarity of the Japanese people. In the family crests a strong family consciousness and refined esthetic sense are manifest. Japanese heraldry, first developed by the nobility in Heian time (794-1192), was further enriched and diversified by the many warring clans during the Middle ages. When finally peace had been brought to the country by the establishment of the Tokugawa reign (1603-1867) the prerogative of having a family crest was also claimed by the merchant class and other ambitious families. There were special designers (*uwa-eshi* 上絵師) in the cities, but only few of them are said to exist nowadays in Tokyo and Kyoto. The first book on family crests appeared during the Ashikaga time (1386-1573) when 250 different crests were known. In the Sengoku period (1490-1573) it was Uesugi Kenshin, a mighty warlord, who in 1561 brought out a book with 251 drawings of family crests. They were used on weapons, ornaments of horses, flags, military camps, and, since Toyotomi Hideyoshi, also on houses. The Imperial court granted to Hideyoshi the privilege to use both the chrysanthemum and the *kiri* or paulownia (*Paulownia Imperialis*) as crest patterns. In 1870 (Meiji 3) the chrysanthemum pattern was strictly reserved for the Imperial house.

The history of the Japanese family crests is about 800 years old, as we learn from the Introduction of Niwa's book. And now, what are the patterns of Japanese family crests. The book under review indicates that there is the respectable number of 1,500. Niwa arranges them into the following groups: heavenly bodies and terrestrial phenomena (mountains, snow, etc.)—plants—animals—hardware, household utensils, weapons—buildings—patterns of stylized things not specifically defined—ideograms from the Chinese script. There seem to be overlappings, but the Japanese preference of things of nature, especially flowers, and charmingly executed objects belonging to daily life is evident. One who is not a botanist will

be put to a hard test if he wants to identify from their Japanese names the many flowers and plants which in a stylized form are found in family crests.

In a closing chapter the author informs us of the present status of heraldic research in Japan. He finds that it cannot be compared with that of European heraldry which had already long ago become an auxiliary science in the study of history. The author intended the present book for the general reader; those who want more, he refers to the more pretentious, however scarce, literature existing so far.

Here one is tempted to draw a parallel between the European and the Japanese heraldry. If this reviewer refrains from doing so, it is not only the time honored "lack of space", but also his lack of competence and knowledge which keep him back from giving in to this temptation. To what extent is there a parallel between the Western and the Japanese family crests when their functions are concerned? The esthetic moment seems to be given more attention in Japan than in Europe. In Japan however the use of mottoes, so important on European coats of arms, is missing. The use of plant patterns is certainly much more frequent and diversified in Japan. Niwa's book may perhaps stimulate somebody to look deeper into the functions of family crests in the course of history and into the legal aspect of them. In modern times the ancient heraldic is given ample opportunity to develop further in the interest of business companies, schools, and associations of all kinds. Niwa Motoji has to be thanked for his guidance for all those who want to take another step in learning more about Japan, Japanese and foreigners alike.

M. E.

Otto Bischofberger: Heil und Unheil. Gebete und Riten der Amis von Formosa.—*Studia Ethnographica Friburgensia* 5. Freiburg/Schweiz, Universitätsverlag 1976, 2 maps, 20 photos.

The author, a member of the (Catholic) Mission Society of Bethlehem, Switzerland, did research work on the Amis from November 1969 to August 1970 and from October 1971 to June 1972. His research project was prompted by the need to fill the gaps which previous fieldworkers, Japanese and Chinese, had left open in the field of religion. He first outlines the history of the Amis as a proto-Malayan tribe and their social organizations, such as kinship and village community. He then enters into a discussion of their supernatural world and how they communicate with it. He finds that there are high gods, spirits and ancestor souls to be worshipped, and souls of people who have died tragically, to be feared. The high gods are beyond reproach; man's fate, good and bad, is decided by them; man simply has to submit himself to them. The supernatural powers manifest themselves in omens and oracles. In urgent and important cases the bamboo oracle is performed by specialists.

Some rites can be performed by any individual. Especially rites in the interest of the community have to be carried out by specialists. There are no shamans in the strict sense, but ritual specialists. Among them those who possess a guardian spirit are more powerful and more important for the community. They act in the service and by order of a family or a larger kinship group. As things stand now, there seems to be no supernatural calling when a person becomes a village ritualist. By virtue of his or her guardian spirit, given him or her by the instructing master, the ritualists can say the prayers which bring cure of sickness and protection against social disturbances and natural disasters, such as bad crops.

It is from a rich collection of recorded prayer texts that the author outlines the structure of the religious world of the Amis. The annotated translation and interpretation of the recorded prayers out of the whole context of the social, economic and cultural life of the tribe are the core of the monograph which the author presents. "Heil und Unheil", or good and bad fate, he chose as the title of the book. We might also say harmony and disharmony of life. People fight sickness and death, but if death comes after sickness, it is a fate to be accepted. The soul then joins the ancestors and is worshipped with them. If properly worshipped, the ancestors are happy beings and helpful to their kin. Only a sudden and unnatural death is an absolute evil. Astounding is the severity and length of the seclusion of a widower or widow after the death of his or her marital partner.

For several decades already have the Amis as well as the other mountain tribes been exposed to alien influences inimical to their traditional ways of life. The Chinese Taiwanese are steadily encroaching on their territory, and during the Japanese administration some religious customs were found harmful to economic life, as for instance the long and severe mourning periods for widowers and widows. Christian missionary activities also ran counter to established customs. There are many instances in his book in which the author had to try hard to find the genuine meaning of words in the prayer texts by consulting and interviewing a few old people who still remember the old traditions. In view of the rapid modernisation process with all the political and social changes the author's task was difficult but urgent, and he carried it out with the best of his ability. His outlook into the future is not all together negative. The Amis still stick to their traditional rites as long as these fulfill their expectations. They turn to the Christian churches or to the Taiwanese folk religion when they find the rituals of them better corresponding to their social and religious needs in a changed world. We can say that Bischofberger has closed the gap in the ethnography of the Amis and he did this with a sound methodological approach.

M. E.