

Some Features of the Domestic Cult Organisation in the Southern Ryukyus and Taiwan

By

WILLIAM H. NEWELL
University of Sydney

It has been estimated that at the conclusion of the last war 12,000 Americans had died on Okinawa, 94,000 Japanese and locally mobilised Okinawans including local defense corps, student volunteers and nurses (28,000) and about 94,000 civilian Okinawans. 1978 is the 33rd year since the ending of the Battle of Okinawa and Okinawan families have to make a decision this year whether to retain the tablets of the dead permanently on their altars (following Japanese custom) or to remove them when they become part of the collective god pantheon (*kam*) according to the custom of certain southern islands of Okinawa. This dispute is being fought out between the various mediums (*yuta*).

I intend to describe the situation in one southern island, Tarama, where there are no mediums concerned with ancestral behaviour and where tablets are removed at 33 years and then to pass on to a short description of other neighbouring islands where difficulties occur between the living and the dead.

The island of Tarama is half-way between the larger islands of Ishigaki and Miyako south of Okinawa in the area loosely described as Sakeshima, the forward isles. It has an area of 22.39 sq. kms. (2,256 ha.) including its small dependent island of Minnajima. 851 ha. of these two islands are cultivated. Both islands are surrounded by a reef which at low tide is above the sea but at high tide flooded to a depth of about 8'. This reef protects the islands from the worst excesses and violence of the sea during the typhoon season (middle of June till the middle of September). There is now only one family which makes its living from the sea but the villagers are primarily agriculturalists as indeed are most Okinawans. The island is more or less completely flat except in one corner near the village which has a small mountain which is used as a site for graves and for established public property

(such as a reservoir) and a TV broadcasting relay station. There are no rice fields of any sort and the main crops now are sugarcane and tobacco and various forms of subsistence crops such as sweet potatoes. Till the end of the war the island was regarded as very poor and on a number of occasions during the nineteenth century, a majority of the inhabitants had had to leave the island because of the failure of the subsistence crop. Now every family eats imported rice twice a day. There were also 570 cattle, 234 pigs, 167 horses, 2,502 goats and 884 hens on the island at the end of 1974. In this year also the island had a population of 2,045 in 458 households. 80% of these (366) depend totally on agriculture. The population has been dropping fairly consistently during the war and at one period there must have been over 5,000 persons on the island. I will now discuss only the main island of Tarama as Minnajima had a totally separate ecological and human system and was not integrated to any extent into the Tarama system. The population of Minnajima now consists of about 3 households.

At the present time there is a single administrative system which was introduced in 1928 in Tarama headed by an elected mayor. Prior to that date the residential area consisted of two *aza* called Shiokawa and Nakatsuji. Although adjacent to each other divided by a common road each were separate from each other religiously and administratively and both have a history stretching back several hundred years. Each *aza* is today divided into four *ku* with Japanese names (with the no. of households in brackets).

No. of households

Nakatsuji	Shiokawa
Ishihara (59)	-Minema (187)
-Miara (57)	-Yoshigawa (163)
-Amegawa (143)	-Ōmichi (225)
-Tsugawa (137)	-Ōki (291)
396	866

The lines joining the *ku* together represent the traditional pairing for performance of the *honensai* ceremony and certain other communal ceremonies.

Prior to 1926 however it appears that each of the four *ku* in both the eastern and western side had four Okinawan names representing certain zodiacal signs so that Shiokawa and Nakatsuji were structurally similar. Although I cannot prove this by documents it also appears that each house site has a special Okinawan name, the meanings of which



are unknown at the present time for the most part. They do *not* however represent the names of the families who occupy the sites and if a family moves, the house site names do not move with them but remain in the same relative position to the other sites. They are clearly connected with the territory of the *asa* and not with the occupants for the most part. I still do not understand the relationships but it is clear that some cosmological principles are involved.

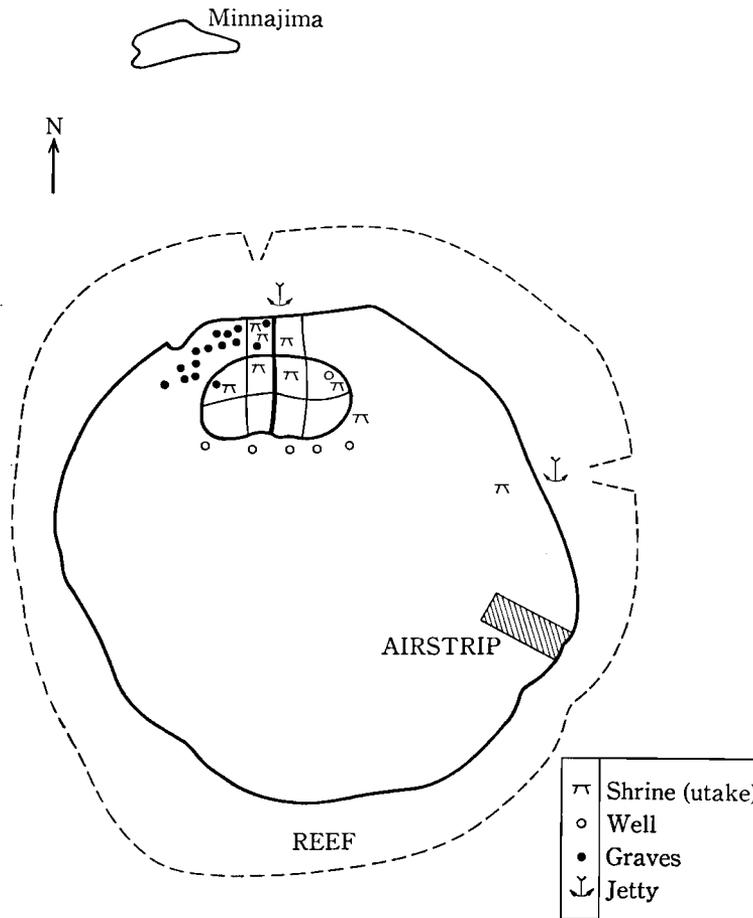


Diagram 1 Tarama Island

The whole of the two *aza* are covered with various places as caves or wells in which the *kam* (divinity) have broken through to the visible world. These places are connected with individual households, with neighbourhood groups, with *ku* and with Nakatsuji and Shiogawa. There is however no special site connected with both *aza* other than a newly created Shinto shrine forced on the villagers by the pre-war Japanese government who thought of Okinawan religion as a sort of undeveloped Shintoism. The most important shrines are termed *utake* which are ranked in order as follows; Ungusku, Tomari, Shiogawa, Tarama, Futema and Minema. Each one has a priestess (*tskasa*) and two assistant male priests. There are 3 of these shrines in each *aza*. There are thus two *ku* which have no special shrine, one in each *aza*.

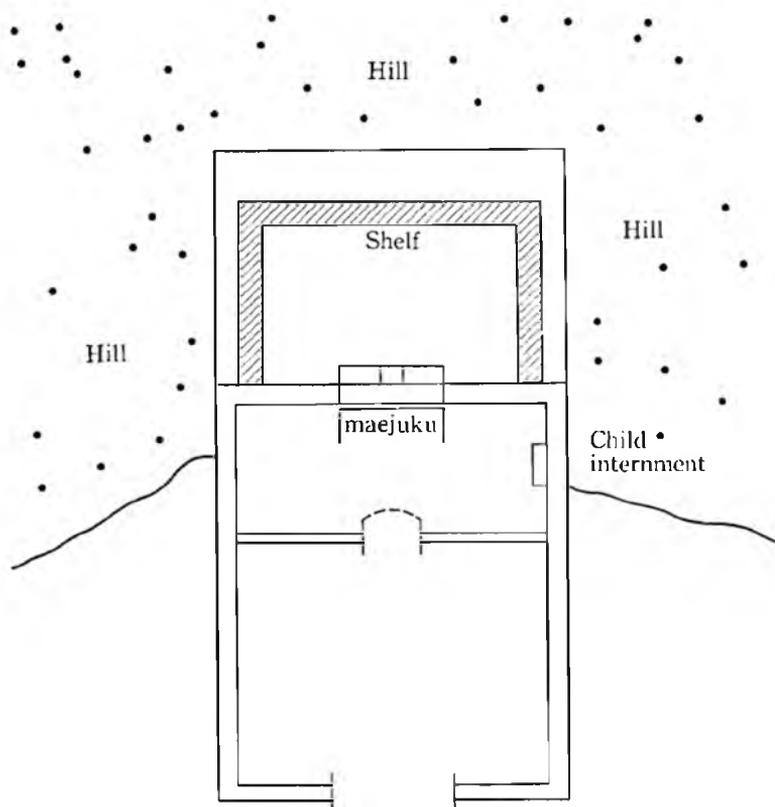


Diagram 2
Typical Tarama Grave

The island and the two *aza* (now called a village) are arranged on strict cosmological principles. The village is to the *north* of the island. Every one of the traditional houses is arranged east to west with the altars having their backs to the north and the kitchens to the west. The house, the *aza* and the arrangement of the island itself all reproduce the same pattern. All *aza* shrines (*utake*) are to the north or to the east, the direction of the gods. There are no shrines or sacred places to the south of the island other than the beach to the south is itself dedicated to the dragon king (*ryugyu*). Beneath the ground is *nila*, the home of the dead, a sort of shadowy area to which persons go. There is a confusion between this land and *gūsho*, sometimes placed to the east from whence the sea ancestors come once a year bearing gifts. There is little information about *nila* other than that three earthly objects have access to this land, pigs, cats and a certain form of local tree termed *gajimaru*. When cats become old they are usually abandoned in the woods because it is

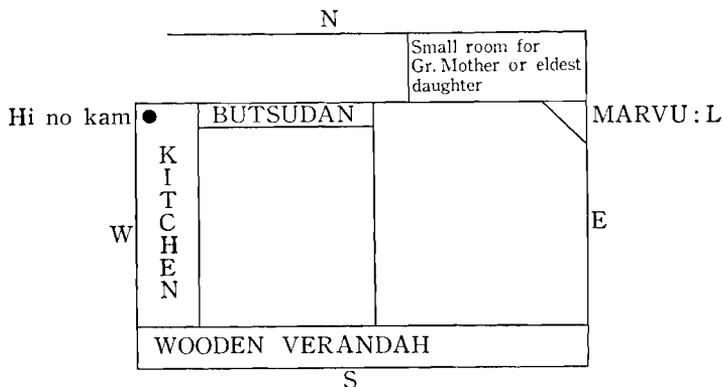


Diagram 3
Typical Tarama House

thought they may drag people below when they die.

There are three different sorts of worlds based on the same cosmology, the world bounded by the island, the world outside and the world of the home, Man is associated with all three of these worlds and all three operate on similar principles. The north and east are favourable, the south and west unfavourable; shrines are sited in the appropriate positions overlapping usually the three worlds. Within each world there are several dualities of which in the island sphere the most important are

Land	Sea
Mountain	Strand
North/east	South/west

Various natural objects especially wells, mountains, caves, certain plants and animals form part of a natural order which is the same in which Man lives. The basic principle is one of identity of the three superimposed worlds of island and universe and cosmology and natural order. I now wish to proceed to the local organisation of households dealing specifically with houses and their extensions, graves. I wish first to draw your attention to graves and will then work back to local households.

As far as I can tell there are 61 used graves on the island (excluding graves built by the government to war dead). They are all concentrated to the north of the island on the one mountain available. They are surrounded by trees and are often very close to some of the most sacred shrines (*utake*). Unlike the situation in Japanese Shintō where graves are impure relative to shrines and never associated together there seems

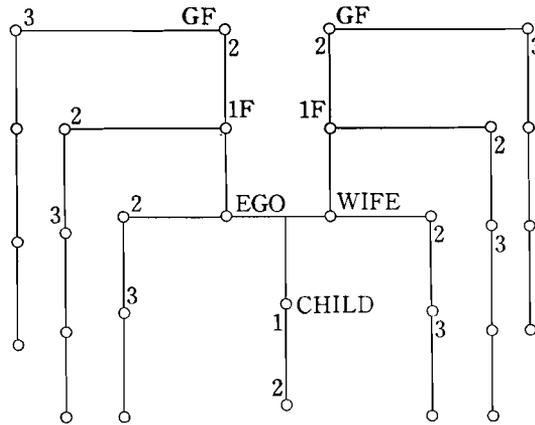


Diagram 4 Shinto System

no conflict between the two. That they are sited to the north/east from whence good things come is no accident and is common elsewhere in the Okinawan islands. (It may be of relevance that all typhoons are from the south).

The graves are a major architectural work, for the most part made of heavy stones and limestone, dug well into the hillside in the form of caves from which they clearly originated both in the statements of the villagers and also in the fact that some of the graves are caves. In local language they are called *baka* (or *haka*) and in their ideal form consist of three parts, a mausoleum in which the bodies are finally placed sometimes with a platform around the sides, an inner courtyard in which there is an altar (*maejuku*) and an outer courtyard. Between the inner and outer courtyard is a high fence with a door and between the inner courtyard and the cave is a square door which remains closed except for the purpose of passing in corpses. There are various technical terms for the different parts and there are restrictions on children entering the inner courtyard during the process of internment, not for ritual reasons but from fear that a portion of the dead spirit may enter into them. I mention this here because there is a strong sense of solidarity between grandparents and grandchildren, the latter often taking over the former's personal name. The *maejuku* is regarded as identical with the house altar.

The corpse is carried in a special sedan chair (*gan*) inside a rough coffin (*kan*) 4'2" × 1'2" × 2' made of poor quality wood to the grave after an elaborate funeral. In the procession is a special object called a *tengai* shaped something like a dragon and which is identified with the dragon king to the south of the island. I will not deal with the ritual

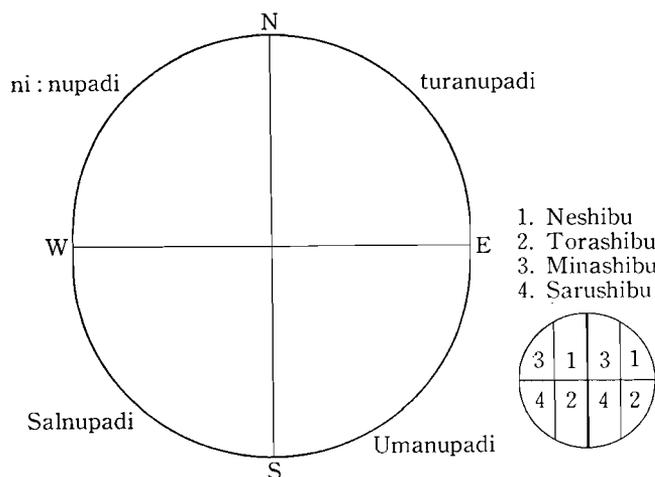


Diagram 5

Original notional form of the paired system.
The western and eastern sides were governed separately in traditional times.

here except to mention that *nothing* but one of the paper tablets is taken back to the house from the grave. Two paper tablets are made for the deceased. One is brought back to the house and the other ultimately destroyed at the grave. The carriers of the corpse who are non-relatives have to wash themselves thoroughly and burn their sandals after the funeral.

At the end of the funeral ceremony the door of the mausoleum is opened; the corpse placed inside or on one of the platforms to the right or left. The grave must never be swept to receive the coffin. The corpse is always inserted head first but is carried on the *gan* feet first. From one to five years later, or earlier if the mausoleum becomes too crowded from new later occupants, the dried up corpse is removed, the bones washed and placed in a pot which is then replaced in the mausoleum on one of the slots on the side gradually moving up to the back. In some parts of the main island of Okinawa the bones are finally thrown in a heap at the very back of the cave but this does not seem to be the case here. I entered a small grave myself without any special objection when the entrance stone was removed and there is certainly none of the sort of spooky or dangerous feeling one gets in some societies. One feels that graves are very friendly places without any ghost stories that I was able to discover.

The villagers themselves divide up their graves into three main types which they themselves call family *baka*, *pis̄cu baka* and *kyōdo baka*.

By this classification there were 15 of the first, 17 of the second and 28 of the third. A family *baka* is one where all the persons buried together come from one common ascendant not more than three generations back and usually consist of recent immigrants (within 100 years) who in some cases bought the grave, or else occupied a spare grave where the line of the previous owner had disappeared. They are usually small graves and make up only 15 of the total. The second type is called a *pisçu baka* and consists of different households jointly sharing the same grave knowing that they are relatives but in some cases being unable to describe the exact relationship. These families today have no mutual responsibility for each other but know they are relatives because their fathers often have a similar middle name which only overlords were able to use in feudal Okinawa. Today with the compulsory use of Japanese surnames many people no longer remember these names unless they become included in the middle of the Japanese name. Of the 17 *pisçu baka* graves, 8 had the patronymic Shun, 3 had Cho, 1 had Gen and one Jo. I am deliberately not referring to these groups as clans as their internal structure is not clear and although the villagers knew of more general Okinawan terms such as *hiki* or *mutsu* they seemed to be much more similar to cognatic descent groups with a patrilineal bias than an unilineal corporate group. Nakane Chie for Amami-Oshima Island has compared these groups to the Maori *hapu* in structure. The third group *kyōdo baka* is the most frequent, 28 out of 61 consisting of both big and small graves. *Kyōdo* means co-operative and the graves are of this type, a co-operative for burying people in common. The people in such a grave are unrelated to their knowledge and do not necessarily have any common neighbourly or descent interests in common other than periodical joint workbees to keep the graves in good condition.

The members in all three of these grave types (which are indistinguishable architecturally) are equal in respect to procedure of burial, place of burial, genealogical position or household head or not. Many of the graves have specific names connected either with a particular *pisçu* or have the same name as the particular house site (even if the family has moved) from which it might reasonably be deduced that the grave and the house were connected in the past. However no new grave has been built for at least the last 100 years and it is clear that one enters the mausoleum as an individual, not as a group representative. There are two group graves reserved for lepers and strangers. There are a series of rites for the dead person which stretch up to 33 years from burial but in the case of lepers all the rites are carried out on the one day so that it is clear that lepers have always been recognised members of the community.

In traditional Okinawan society there were at least two classes of nobles and commoners, only the former of whom had surnames and lived in large "clan like" units tracing descent through a common name. It is thus likely that at the time these graves were built the ruling class (caste?) identified by these patronymics were buried in graves with the clans having unilineal descent. However the commoners probably were organised into cognatic groups so their graves were really *kyōdo*. With the abolition of the distinction between nobles and commoners and intermarriage within Tarama the "clan?" organisation became more cognatic-like, whereas in some other parts of Okinawa especially the main island, the *mutsu* as a patrilineal oriented group became the more common model of descent. I would like now to pass on to the houses. The standard house is shaped like diagram 3. Without exception the houses back north with at least three rooms; the most easternmost is termed the *ichibanza* (No. 1 room) in which there may be a shrine termed a *marvu:l*; the middle room is termed the *niibanza* (No. 2 room) in which there are the ancestral tablets; the westernmost room is the kitchen with the firegod next to the stove. Inside the house these are the only three types of gods. Along the front is a verandah and when one approaches a house as an honoured guest, one always enters the *ichibanza* to the east, then moves to the centre. Once there one moves to the division between the verandah and the straw matting (*tatami*) not close to the altar as in Japan. I have translated the word altar as *butsudan* here but this is really a misnomer as there are rarely any Buddhist statues there and certainly no one except members of the new Sōka Gakkai sect would call themselves Buddhist. I append here a table showing the distribution of these three ritual places of worship in the village. I am for simplicity omitting door gods, garden gods, well gods, etc.

No. of households in the village	No. of households surveyed	No. of <i>butsudan</i>	No. of <i>marvu:l</i>	No. of kitchen gods
417	146	118	108	135

I was not able to survey the whole village but I have no reason to think that the 146 households surveyed were unrepresentative.

The most universal domestic *kam* is the fire god (*hi no kam*). It consists of three stones usually near the stove, is worshipped by the cook usually on the festival days and is identified with the sun rising from the east. It is *not* a god similar to the Chinese kitchen god, which is a sort of local spy resuscitated each year, but remains permanently in the house. Practically every household which cooks has this god called

a fire god.

The *marvu:l* consists of a *koro*, an incense holder without any object behind it. There are a variety of explanations about its existence but in most cases it is worshipped exclusively by the mother-in-law after her daughter-in-law takes over the running of the house and sometimes also her husband. It represents her own personality (*tamashii*). It is not exactly a god and according to several elderly informants whenever the husband leaves the house the old lady asks the *marvu:l* to guarantee his safe return. Naturally those houses which marry neolocally and have no mother-in-law do not have a *marvu:l*. But it is significant that just behind the *ichibanza* is a small room which is usually occupied by the eldest daughter or sometimes by the old retired couple. Although Tarama does not today openly claim to have a *bunarigami* system where the sister is ritually superior to her sibling nevertheless there is a distinct feeling that the eldest sister and then her successor, the daughter-in-law is in a way the priestess of the household. Mabuchi describes a situation during the last war in which when a person went off to the war, his sister presented him with a talisman to protect him. There is some similarity to the situation in the islands of Tonga in which the sister is always ritually superior to her sibling to such an extent that they cannot reside in the same house together after about the age of 8 and a brother always traditionally bowed to his sister when he met her as one bows to a chief (*ei*). In the neighbouring island of Hateruma, Ouwehand has this to say, after giving credit to the earlier work of Mabuchi.¹

“*Religiously*, the centre of gravity of the *bigiri-bunari* group is located very distinctly in the *bunari*, the sister. There is not only a mythical and legendary ‘spiritual predominance’ of the sister, of a ‘sister-deity’, but also in the practice of religious life it is in principle the *shâbubari* (*shijâbunari*), the oldest sister who as *bunari nu kan* (sister-deity) fulfills throughout her life the religious duties of the house into which she is born while the eldest daughter (ego’s eldest sister, *boma* of the house) is regarded as *kandaka* (J. *kamitakai* “divine”) because it is she who at the proper time will become the *bunari nu kan* of her house”.

In the genealogical records owned by some members of the *pisçis* group it is the eldest sister of each generation whose marriage is very carefully documented although the other sisters and younger brothers

1. Mabuchi Toichi, “Okinawa-Sakijima no onarigami” *Nihon Minzokugaku* vols. 2/4 and 3/1, 1955 pp. 49–57 and 63–80 respectively. Also Cornelius Ouwehand, “The Ritual Invocations of Hateruma” p. 64, *Asian Folklore Studies*, vol. 26–2, Tokyo, 1967.

are often not fully described or even omitted from the genealogy.

Thus it is clear that the *ichibanza* room is not only the furthest to the east because it is most closely connected with the eldest daughter or the eldest couple who are closest to death (and becoming an ancestor) but that on Tarama it represents not special gods, but female ritual superiority of which the *marvu:l* is only a manifestation.

What is called the *butsudan* in Japanese is predominantly concerned with the arrangement of former tablets of dead members of the household within the household. The common word for it is the godshelf using the word *kam*. The only houses having a *butsudan* will be those households having tablets to look after. A younger son forming a new household will have no dead ancestors and will hence not require a *butsudan*. In fact the population of Tarama is shrinking so that very few totally new households are being formed. Still 28 of the 146 households surveyed had no *butsudan*. A *butsudan* is usually arranged with a number of shelves. On the top shelf there is usually a tablet to the grandfather and grandmother. In Tarama, the tablets are not usually placed in the slotted Japanese type of tablet container one behind the other but consists of a separate piece of paper with the person's real name written on it. Not being Buddhists naturally there is no special Buddhist religious name. In Tarama also there may be some other person's name also for whom the family feels responsibility, even a non-relative. In one typical case reading from west to east we have father, older brother's wife, founder grandfather, mother, older brother's child, older brother. In this case we have the senior generation in the centre and the shrine was looked after in the household of a younger brother since the older brother had died first. In Tarama there are absolutely no restrictions on brothers being placed on the same altar (as on the main island of Okinawa where this is forbidden, *chōdō kasabai*) and the order varies sometimes alternately to the centre and sometimes in order of age from east to west. In this instance the older brother had been killed in the war as had the children. Below the tablets are at least two *koro* (incense holders). One *koro* to the east is allocated to the gods in general including ancestors who have passed over and who no longer have an independent tablet. Each additional *koro* is allocated to each descent line counting mother's parents and father's parents as two groups which will become separated by allocating different children of the householder to be responsible for each line. In this instance, for example, the eldest son will be responsible for providing a son to worship his father when he dies and the second son will be responsible for providing a son to worship his father's eldest brother since both he and his son are dead.

However, in the Tarama system, this responsibility lasts only for

three generations during the period when the dead person has not become fully identified with the collective gods. The worshipper is responsible for the ceremonies associated with the *rites de passage* but not with continuing a descent line indefinitely. I will briefly explain this.

After death, the main commemorative ceremonies are held on the third day (*mscadxi*), seventh day (*patsananka*), fourteenth day (*furananka*), twenty-first day (*mⁿ nanka*). The tablet which has been placed separately on the west side of the altar till this day is elevated to the main altar. The family or some representative visits the grave to burn the grave *ihai* and other objects which have been left there such as food. At the home, vegetarian food such as beancurd is presented to the tablet in the fourth week (*yonanka*), fifth week (*itsunanka*), sixth week (also called *mⁿ nanka*), fortyninth day (in Japanese *shijugonichi*), 100th day (*pyakunits*). Bone washing, *shinuwa*, sometimes done at this time or at OBon. It is forbidden to use red *kanekobu* as a presentation food). After the first year, it is stated that special ceremonies must also be held on the anniversary on the first year (*yuno^r kōgu*), third year (*m^{nti} kōgu*), seventh year (*nanati kōgu*), thirteenth year (*tourti mrti kōgu*) and at the thirtythird year (*sanjusan ninkts* and also called more commonly, *upuninki* or *upunaka*). In Japanese all these ceremonies are called *nenki*, commemorative ceremonies but in Tarama dialect only the final one is called *nenki* and the remaining ones are called only by the number of days which have elapsed since the internment.

There is also a custom in Tarama termed *yuai*, a large ceremonial feast given by a household. *Yuai* are given when a child is eight days old and also when a couple reach 73 years of age (and sometimes 61, 85 or 88, and 95 or 99 years old). A *yuai* is also held when a dead person has died 33 years earlier or 13 years earlier if the dead person has had a grandchild. The guests invited to a *yuai* are as follows: (a) the immediate physical neighbours of the house performing the *yuai*; (b) all relatives of a wife and husband to the *san shinto* (one *shinto*=children, parents, h-w; two *shinto*=siblings, grandparents and grandchildren; three *shinto*=siblings' children. See Diagram 4);² (c) friends.

In actuality I never found any person in the village who had attended a 33rd year memorial service. The thirteenth year marks the final ceremony of a *yuai*. Those persons invited are those representing any of those present at a previous *yuai*. A small donation is made to the host which is recorded and it is my belief that the list of previous

2. The following are some commonly used descriptions of groups of relatives or kin or friends. *sani, taraki*, blood relatives; *siti ka ho*, those speaking the same language; *tunari*, neighbours; *ututa*, relatives; *dusu*, friends; *idipai*, junior line; *zakata*, father's side; *n'mkata*, mother's side; *utukata*, husband's side; *tsukata*, wife's side.

attendees is made the basis of a subsequent invitation. The counting of thirteen years is not begun to be counted until the death of the surviving spouse so that it is joint commemoration of both husband and wife. Also if one's children do not have any children themselves then the ceremony is not held and in the absence of a grandchild some one must be adopted first if it is likely that no natural children will have been borne. However after this final ceremony the tablet is destroyed by burning and the dead person at this ceremony is worshipped as a god joining the anonymous tablet to the east which represents all *kam*. This last stage is termed *ubudatte*, the raising up of the dead person to godhood. The transfigured tablet is offered only fruit, fish, *tempura*, etc. and *not* pork, which the tablet has received previously; silver money is burnt instead of gold; a travelling robe (*yugata*) and a stick are placed against the altar with (formerly) a hat and straw sandals. The *tempura* is twisted into different flying objects. For example one termed *ebigatta* is in the form of a pair of wings. The altar has two or four incense sticks placed on the *koro* (censer) instead of the one or three formerly presented to the normal ancestors. The only memory of the dead person which may remain is the name which is usually written in the *kezu*, a sort of written genealogy which is kept in a box under the altar.³

As I mentioned earlier, there is always a minimum of *two koro* on the domestic altar. The incense holder to the east is to gods in general but most informants also claim that this includes unidentifiable ancestors. The central *koro* is to the named ancestors. The whole process of *ubudatte* can be regarded as a shift to the east, the direction of gods in general. Thus the domestic and island cosmology are reunited by becoming integrated into one system.

Let us look back at *yuai* for a moment. The word *yuai* has the meaning of friendship group. A *yuai* group is called together at the time of the baby becoming 8 days old when a child is given an adult name. (Prior to eight days of age, the baby has a ceremonial baby name chosen from a list of three which is not used again.) But a *yuai* was again traditionally called together at the time of marriage (say about 25 years old) when husband and wife were made a single unit and traditionally it is this same group equally from both sides which may be called together again at ages 61, 73, 88 and 99 and then finally when a person loses his separate identity 13 years after death. From marriage till after death, a period of perhaps 70 years, this group of neighbours, friends

3. The *kezu* is not just a genealogy but seems to have some sort of mystical significance as it cannot be removed and can only be looked at in front of the altar after a prayer or divination. In one case known to me illness was ascribed to the *kezu* being looked at without proper precautions.

and specified relatives (or their nominees) of both husband and wife continue to meet together periodically asserting their concern with the person for whom the *yuai* is called or to their tablet. After this final *ubudatte* ceremony presided over by his grandson, the group becomes dissolved and the grandson heir's *yuai* becomes the centre. It is not unusual for the grandson to inherit a *dead* grandfather's name although in traditional Tarama society one may change one's name several times in one's lifetime. The *yuai* group is clearly an ego-centred group based on kin on both sides and other non-kin categories.

In Okinawa in general there is another type of group which is called the *munchu*, usually defined as a patrilineal group tracing descent from a common ancestor. I had extreme difficulty on the island in finding out how the villagers distinguished the terms *munchu* and *pisçu* and I came to the conclusion that for the most part they used the terms interchangeably. In the second type of collective grave mentioned earlier, the *pisçu baka* a more common word was *munchu baka*. The only time the *munchu* seemed to meet together was on the occasion of visiting graves in which only one line is buried. But on other occasions the villagers referred to a *munchu* as including relatives of both husband and wife.

It is noticeable that those families who owned a *munchu* grave were persons who had one of the seven middle names, Gen, Cho, Shuin, etc. If I were to make a conjecture about the previous grave history of the area, it would appear that at the time the big graves were built about 180 years earlier, they were built by an upper class from the equivalent of a Ryukyu *samurai* class. Each of these groups competed to build bigger and better graves. The lower class however probably did not have an agnatic but a cognatic system. In the course of time as the former upper class became indistinguishable from the ordinary people, the movement was towards an ego centred *yuai* system from a traditional *munchu* system. So today we have *munchu* graves still consisting of only one descent group where there are sufficient people to maintain it, and where this becomes impossible they asked others to share it with them. In some cases we have an actual story which relates how a certain rich family asked one of their servants to share the grave with their own ancestors as he had lived in their house during their lives. In the absence of any written records this is only speculation, but in some other parts of Okinawa many of the ceremonies to do with the worship of ancestral tablets on the domestic altar is confined only to members of the household and all commemorative services are confined only to descendant in the male line and their affines.

In short I am arguing that within Okinawa there are two descent

systems through time, an agnatic *munchu* group especially connected with the former upper class, and a bilateral plus neighbourhood group associated with a *pisçis* which by virtue of its ego-centredness needs to be reorganised every 70 years or so when the dead grandparents' place is taken by his grandchildren. Because in the course of time the economic difference between the upper and lower class on the island became slight, the *pisçis* became the standard form of household continuity. Under this system, however, it became necessary to remove the ancestral tablet as an exclusive object of worship from the altar and in Tarama this was done most logically not at the end of 33 years but after a grandchild had been born and responsible thirteen years after the older grandparent's death.

It is possible that other parts of Okinawa also had a sort of cognatic and patrilineally oriented *munchu* system operating at the same time in the not so distant past.⁴ It appears that in some neighbouring islands the emphasis on continuous patrilineal descent is being fought out by *shamans* at the present time. Whereas in Tarama there are no *yuta* concerned directly with illness at the present time, in the neighbouring island of Yonaguni it has been estimated by a competent anthropologist that about one-third of all women were *yuta* and that at least 60% of all illnesses were ascribed to the ancestral dead. On this island the *yuta* are carrying out a major campaign to prevent persons of different descent lines being buried in the same grave; they will not even allow two wives of one husband to be buried together but each wife has to be buried with her own children. On the *butsudan* they will not allow two brothers to be on the same altar, a custom long practised on the main island of Okinawa. Yonaguni is an island which is so close to the Taiwanese mainland that it may sometimes pick up transmissions from the Taiwanese TV stations and until the rescission of Taiwan to a Chinese government, used to carry out a great deal of trade and fishing with Taiwan. Many of the older islanders have a good understanding of Taiwanese customs. Yet for various reasons including emigration and the existence of war dead it is not uncommon to find two or three lines on the same altar separated by different *koro*. On Yonaguni there are very few mausoleum type graves (which are universal on Tarama), and where they exist now, only those in the direct descent line are buried within. New graves are being built for all those who are not in the direct

4. Among a number of other examples, see the article by Tsunemi Junichi "Kunigami *mura* Aha's *munchu* system changes" on pp. 25-28, *Okinawa Shakai to Hensu*, Tokyo. Also the article by Makio Matsuzono "A note on the enshrinement of ancestral tablets at Zamami island, Okinawa" in *Ancestors* (ed. W. H. Newell), Mouton, The Hague, 1976.

line. 33 years after a person's death the *ubudatte* ceremony should be held. Last year was the anniversary of the Battle of Okinawa. These ceremonies are being held but after the ceremony the tablets remain on the altar. I asked one of the persons I visited why he had so many dead relatives on his altar and he explained that he was intending to buy a Japanese style tablet holder in which all ancestors are stacked neatly one behind the other, so consequently emphasising the unilineal nature of descent and taking up less space. In time each male child in the family will be responsible for adopting one of those lines, gradually becoming more and more alienated from his brothers as the descent continues. The *yuta* are at present "correcting the system" where they think persons are buried together where it should not be allowed.

Yet the system is not a Japanese system. On the fringes of the main township are a number of small houses about ten feet square containing a tablet to some person who has passed through the 33 year ceremony and whom the former family could not keep in their house because of conflict with other lines or because the parent line had emigrated to Naha. The tablet is deceived into thinking that this is its permanent house. Yet in Yonaguni there is still a strong sense of household consciousness which is clearly exhibited in respect to the care of children who die before they are seven years old. In China such a person especially a female is not entitled to a tablet but many Yonaguni citizens compared their own beliefs with that of the Taiwanese to the detriment of the latter. In Yonaguni it is not uncommon to find a tablet belonging to an unmarried or divorced woman's child standing to the side of a main altar with a special *koro* and there is no discrimination against a females' tablet by virtue of the fact that she remains unmarried.

According to Emily Ahern⁵ in her description of descent in SanHsia in northern Taiwan the main reason why unmarried women are deprived for the most part of permanent ancestral status on the main altar is because they do not bring property into the family. Some men who do not own property may be on the altar because they often inherit through their elder brothers and they have the possibility of bringing property with them but women may never have that chance. Thus families are in a sense split between those who can contribute to the continuity of the clan and those who cannot. In Yonaguni it is still the personal nature of the dead person which is emphasised and the idea that certain persons should be totally excluded from identification with the *kam* still seems abhorrent. Dead souls may show their dissatisfaction with

5. Emily M. Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village*, Stanford University Press, 1973.

the living in some practical way such as causing some person to become ill but in Yonaguni there do not seem to be souls which may become "orphan spirits" by virtue of not having a successor or by being excluded through not being able to continue a property line. Unlike Okinawa main island and Yonaguni there are no illnesses resulting from ancestral problems and no divinatory *uta*.

In Taiwan, each dead person is on his own after death with his own individual grave, even husbands and wives being, for the most part, separately buried. Some of the dead are lucky enough to be reburied in a jar after 10 to 13 years. In Tarama the community of the living is reproduced after death in the group mausoleums and there appears to be no dissatisfied dead coming back to plague the living. Even children and lepers are members of the community having recognised rights after death. Yonaguni is an intermediary case with certain group graves confined now only to those of the same descent line but with all members of the society having the right to be raised to godhood after 33 years at least. The dissatisfaction of the dead to cause illness seems to be a result of quarrelling between the dead, one group trying to dominate a certain group of living because of trying to force an unilineal pattern on what was previously a cognatic type system.