

THE STRUCTURE OF THE  
PANTHEON AND THE CONCEPT  
OF SIN IN ANCIENT JAPAN

I. INTRODUCTION

Ever since the pioneering works by Chogyū Takayama and others in 1899 Japanese scholars have endeavored to elucidate the structure, meaning, and genetic connections of Japanese mythology, which was systematically described in the volumes on the "Age of Gods" of the *Kojiki* (compiled in 712 A.D.), the *Nihon Shoki* (720), and other works. In recent years the research has experienced a remarkable development, which owes much of its stimulation to the epoch-making studies of Indo-European mythologies by Georges Dumézil. For Japanese mythology betrays much in common with the Indo-European ones not only in its motifs but also in its basic structure, as we shall shortly see. In order not to be misleading, however, it should be stated here that analogies to Indo-European mythologies are but one aspect of the Japanese tradition, which comprises many other components, especially South Chinese and/or Southeast Asian components, and current researches on Japanese mythology are not restricted to comparisons with the Indo-European mythologies, but are undertaken through a variety of approaches, in-

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cluding those of the historian, the philologist, and the ethnologist.<sup>1</sup>

In the following pages I will discuss some traits of Japanese mythology which bear marked resemblance to the trifunctional system of the Indo-Europeans, as worked out by Dumézil.

### II. THE HEAVENLY DEITIES AND THE EARTHLY DEITIES

The first problem we shall deal with is the structure of the ancient Japanese pantheon.<sup>2</sup> The society of Japanese deities was made up primarily of two groups of deities, i.e., the Amatsukami (the heavenly deities) and the Kunitsukami (the earthly deities), just as the ancient Nordic pantheon consisted of the Ases and the Vanes, and the legendary Roman society was composed of the people of Romulus and the Sabines.<sup>3</sup> The Japanese divine moieties stood in complementary relation to each other, and each of them represented one or two different social functions, which was also the case with the European ones.

<sup>1</sup> Important studies of Japanese mythology published in European languages include: Nobuhiro Matsumoto, *Essai sur la mythologie japonaise. Austro-Asiatique*, Tome II, Paris, 1928; Eckart Franz, *Die Beziehung der japanischen Mythologie zur griechischen*, Bonn, 1932; Franz Kiichi Numazawa, *Die Weltanfänge in der japanischen Mythologie, Internationale Schriftenreihe für soziale und politische Wissenschaften, Ethnologische Reihe*, Bd. II, Paris-Luzern, 1946; Atsuhiko Yoshida, "La mythologie japonaise: Essai d'interprétation structurale," in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, 160: pp. 47-66, 161: pp. 25-44, 163: pp. 225-245, 1961-1963; Nelly Naumann, *Das Umwandeln des Himmelspfeilers. Ein japanischer Mythos und seine kulturhistorische Einordnung. Asian Folklore Studies—Monographs*, No. 5, Tokyo, 1971. Some of the results of my researches on Japanese mythology have been published in European languages: "Die Amaterasu-Mythe im alten Japan und die Sonnenfinsternismythe in Südostasien," in *Ethnos*, XXV: pp. 20-43, 1960; "Origins of Japanese Mythology. Especially of the Myths of the Origin of Death," in *Monumenta Nipponica Monographs*, No. 25, pp. 1-15, 1966; "The Origins of Japanese Mythology," in *Acta Asiatica*, No. 31, pp. 1-23, 1977.

<sup>2</sup> For sections 2-7 see my *Nihon Shinwa no Kōzō* (The Structure of Japanese Mythology), pp. 4-71, Tokyo, Kōbundō, 1975 and Atsuhiko Yoshida, *Nihon Shinwa to In-ō Shinwa* (Japanese Myths and Indo-European Myths), pp. 63-105, Tokyo, Kōbundō, 1974.

<sup>3</sup> Georges Dumézil, *Les dieux des Germains*, pp. 16-23, 36, Paris, 1959; Dumézil, *Mythe et épopée*, I: pp. 288-192, Paris, 1968.

### III. THE FUNCTIONS OF THE HEAVENLY DEITIES: SOVEREIGNTY AND WARRIOR

We have two kinds of excellent clues to determine the social functions of the heavenly deities, namely the myths recorded in the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki* on the one hand, and the classification of families as adopted by the genealogical work *Shinsen Shōji Roku*, compiled in 814, on the other.

The heavenly deities play their parts mainly in the myths focusing on the Takamaga-hara (the Plain of High Heaven), according to the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki*. Two major mythic events which occurred there are the retreat of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu into the Heavenly Rock Cave and the descent of her grandson Ninigi onto earth. The dramatis personae are by and large the same in both events, and they are either of the sovereign (priestly and government) or warrior function. First of all, the chief deities of the Plain of High Heaven, Amaterasu (Sun Goddess) and Takamimusubi (one of the Trinity of Creators) are rulers there and the representatives of the function of sovereignty. Other figures include the so-called Itsu-tomonowo (the deities of "five corporations" or the "five attending deities"), i.e., Ameno-koyane, Futotama, Ameno-uzume, Ishikoridome, and Tamanoya, all of whom are deities who carry out cultic service or prepare ritual paraphernalia. To this list may be added Omohikane, a deity in charge of political matters. Moreover, there are also deities belonging to warrior functions such as Ameno-tajikarawo, Ameno-ihatowake, as well as Ameno-oshihi and Amatsukume.

In this way all the heavenly deities who play active roles in the myths of the Plain of High Heaven are those of the first (sovereign) and the second (warrior) functions in Dumézilian terms.

The legend of the eastern expedition of Jimmu, the first emperor, furnishes us with another instance of the warrior function of heavenly deities: Nigihayahi displayed a heavenly arrow and a quiver to Jimmu as the evidence of his status as a descendant of heavenly deities. Significantly enough, Nigihayahi was the ancestor of the Mononobe, a famous warrior family.

The descendants of the heavenly deities play the part of con-

querors in the political events in the Age of Gods, and at the time of the first emperor. They forced the earthly deities of Izumo to transfer the government of the earth to Ninigi, the grandson of the Sun-Goddess; an indigenous god offered his land to Ninigi after his descent from Heaven onto the earthly world; Emperor Jimmu subjugated or slaughtered local chiefs to create his new kingdom in Yamato.

Another body of evidences is furnished by the *Shinsen Shōji Roku*, the Book of Genealogies. The *Shōji Roku* registers the families dwelling in the capital and the suburbs at the beginning of the Heian era. The classification of families as adopted by the *Shōji Roku* is more ramified than that of the above discussed pantheon, which certainly reflects the development of Japanese society, especially the increase in power of the Imperial family since the days when the mythology was transmitted from generation to generation and finally edited into the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki*. The classification includes the category “Shinbetsu” which means the descendants of deities.

The majority of the Shinbetsu families was made up from the Tenshin (descendants of the heavenly deities), in which the families of the Mononobe (warrior) were the strongest in number, next come the families of the Nakatomi (priest), and then the families of the Ohotomo (warrior). The overwhelming part of the Tenshin consists thus of the families belonging to either the military or priestly functions.

Although the heavenly deities include deities of the first function and second functions, the two seem to be separate and distinct within the heavenly deities, a point which was made by my colleague Atsuhiko Yoshida in his “Japanese Mythology and the Indo-European Trifunctional System” (*section 3*) which is to be found elsewhere in this issue. The warrior gods Ameno-wohabari and his son Takemikazuchi reside in an inaccessible cave upstream of River Ameno-yasu, separated from the deities of priestly functions; the versions of the descent of Ninigi onto the earthly world attest also the separatedness of the two functions. Some versions mention either priestly deities or warrior gods only as the retinue of Ninigi, while the *Kojiki* states that the two warrior gods went ahead of Ninigi as his avant-gardes, and the deities of sovereignty went in the company of Ninigi.

#### IV. FUNCTIONS OF THE EARLY DEITIES: FOOD-PRODUCTION, FERTILITY, AND AUTOCHTHONY

The social functions fulfilled by the earthly deities consist primarily in being autochthons or lords of the earth, that of being food-producers and that of insuring fertility, functions which can be subsumed under Dumèzil's concept of the third function. As the representatives of autochthony the earthly deities are described sometimes as fierce and evil adversaries of the conquering heavenly deities as seen from the Plain of High Heaven, the Central Land of Reed Plains (Ashiharanonakatsukuni, that is, the earth or Japan) teemed with fierce, unlawful earthly deities. Amewakahiko and other heavenly deities were assigned to pacify the earthly deities. On the other hand, the heavenly deities also encountered submissive earthly deities such as Kotokatsukunikatsunagasa and Isetsuhiko and *inter alia* Ohokuninushi, the leader of the earthly deities, who were willing to transfer the government on the earth to the descents of heavenly deities. Also, Saruta-biko, an earthly god, showed Ninigi and his followers the way from the heaven to the earth, and Uzuhiko served as a pilot for the fleet of Emperor Jimmu on his expedition to the east.

The function of food-production or fertility of the earthly deities is exemplified by those whom Emperor Jimmu met during his eastern expedition: the just mentioned Uzuhiko was angling at a bay, and the Son of Nihemotsu was trapping in the lower reaches of the Yoshino River. The most prominent illustration, however, is Ukemochi who is slain by the Moon-God: Ukemochi is a food and crop deity and described as a resident of the Central Land of Reed Plains.

In short, the earthly deities are those of the third function *par excellence*. The heavenly deities and their descendants, however, are also engaged in productive activities, as agriculture and weaving are mentioned in the myth of the Heavenly Rock Cave, and fishing, hunting, and agriculture in the myth of the Prince Sea-Luck and Prince Mountain-Luck. Yet this does not mean that the proper function of the heavenly deities is that of food-production and fertility, since the myths deal only with events within the circle of the heavenly deities or between their descen-

dants, and not with the functional contrast between the two divine moieties. Indeed, the first and the second functions of the heavenly deities and the third function of the earthly deities always come to fore, when the one divine moiety confronts itself with the other, or when the deities appear on stage in the expressed quality of either "heavenly deities" or "earthly deities."

The *Shōji Roku* verifies again this conclusion. In this "Book of Genealogies" far fewer "chigi" families (i.e., the descendants of the earthly deities) are registered than "tenshin" families (i.e., the descendants of the heavenly deities), reflecting the probability that some "chigi" families became absorbed into either "tenshin" families or "kobetsu" families, descendants of emperors. Be that as it may, the fact remains that most of the "chigi" families claim as their ancestors Ohokuninushi (Ohonamuchi), the Lord of Earth, Watatsumi, the Sea-Lord, or Shihinetsuhiko (Uzuhiko), the pilot-god. Besides, some families are said to have descended from the earthly deity Ihika or the earthly deity Ihaoshiwaku, indigenous beings of the province of Yamato, both of whom surrendered to Emperor Jimmu. All in all, the *Shōji Roku* suggests that the earthly deities are in one sense or another the Lords of Earth or the Lords of Sea, thus setting their autochthony in relief.

A sector of the universe is attributed to each of the divine moieties as their proper fields of activity: the Plain of High Heaven belongs to the heavenly deities, and the Central Land of Reed Plains to the earthly deities. These cosmically separated habitats do not hinder, however, occasional marital bonds between the two moieties, especially when the maintenance of friendly relations between them is at stake and needs to be reinforced: to cite only two examples, at the transference of the earthly government from Ohonamuchi to Ninigi, and at the encounter of the heavenly descended Ninigi and the native chief. In the former instance, Ohonamuchi marries Mihotsuhime, a daughter of Takamimusubi; in the latter Ninigi marries Konohana-sakuyabime, a daughter of Ohoyamatsumi, the Lord of Mountain. In both cases it is expressively stated that endogamous marriage or sexual relations among the earthly deities is injurious to the friendly relationship between the two divine moieties.

These circumstances strongly remind us of the relationship

between the Ases and the Vanes in Nordic mythology and that between the people of Romulus and the Sabines in the Roman legends. In both cases the first mentioned group is the representative of the first and second functions, and the last mentioned group represents the third function; and both groups come into connubium with each other only after the initial struggles to establish the order of the total society (See Yoshida, "Japanese Mythology and the Indo-European Trifunctional System," *section 8*).

#### V. THE CLASSIFICATION OF DEITIES IN ANCIENT JAPAN: MAN AND NATURE

The principal divinities of the ancient Japanese pantheon can be classed in one or the other of the divine moieties, each of which represents functions complementary to one another. Yet the *Kojiki* and the *Fudoki* mention some other deities, who cannot be classed with either moiety but constitute a group in their own right. Consequently, the structure of the pantheon is not exhausted with a dichotomy pure and simple, but consists of a threefold division of divinities.

According to the *Kojiki*, Emperor Sujin ordered that every deity be worshipped, and consequently *nusa* cult-wands were offered to not only the heavenly deities and the earthly deities, but also "down even to the deities of slope-ends and of river-beds". Also Empress Jingū received a divine order through Takeshiuchi-no-sukune, who served as the medium, telling her to launch the conquest of Silla, a kingdom in southern Korea. In compliance with the divine instructions she paid homage not only to the heavenly deities and the earthly deities but also "down even to the deities of mountains, sea, and rivers", by offering them *nusa* cult-wands before she embarked on her expedition. The Izumo *Fudoki* (compiled in 733) tells us of another example. In 674 a daughter of Kataribe-no-Omi Wimaro was devoured by a *wani* (a sea animal, possibly a crocodile) on the shore of the Izumo province. Some days after the burial her father prayed to a vast number of deities: fifteen million heavenly deities, fifteen million earthly deities, as well as 399 deities

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resident in this province, as well as an unknown number of sea-deities. Obviously, the 399 divinities are the heavenly and earthly deities resident in the province, while the sea-deities stand apart from the members of the divine moieties. We can conclude from these examples that there were also beings of nature in addition to the divine moieties in the ancient Japanese pantheon.

The heavenly deities and the earthly deities are considered to be ancestors of "shinbetsu" families. In other words, they have the appearance of "human" deities, who took human shape and behaved as "human" beings so as to become ancestors of certain historical families. On the other hand, minor deities of the sea, rivers, mountains, and slopes (not the Lord of Earth and the Lord of Sea, who belong to the earthly deities) are beings of nature, who are mostly anonymous in contrast to the heavenly and earthly deities, and often take zoomorphic shapes and behave in ways inimical to mankind. The dichotomy of Man and Nature holds good here.

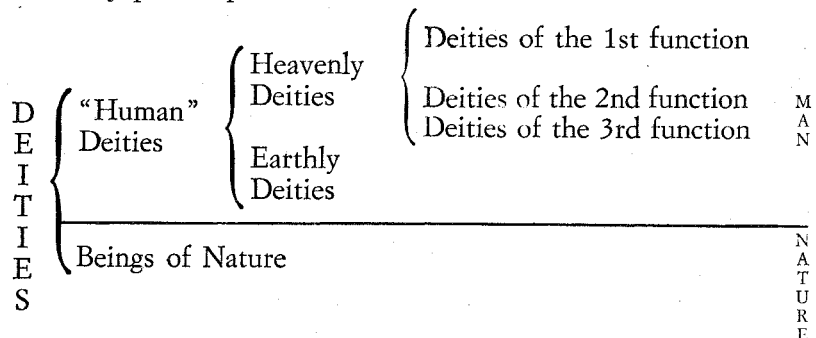
Some core examples will suffice to make this point clear. The *Nihon Shoki* relates that the two envoys from Heaven, Futsunushi and Takemikazuchi, executed vicious and unsubmitive deities and "beings like grass, tree, and stone" after they had the earthly government transferred from Ohonamuchi to Ninigi. Here, we recognize again the beings of nature such as grass, tree, and stone set apart from the "human" earthly deities. The legend of the eastern expedition of Prince Yamatotakeru mentions a "deity of slope" in the shape of a deer and a "deity of mountain" in the shape of a white boar.

These fierce, vicious, and/or unsubmitive beings of nature do not represent domesticated nature, but nature beyond the control of man. On the contrary nature under the control of man is called "kuni," a word which makes up part of the expression "kunitsu-kami," earthly deities. When Ukemochi, the deity of food, turned his head and faced the "kuni," cooked rice came out of his mouth, when he turned his head and faced the mountain every kind of animal came out of his mouth, and when he turned his head again and faced the sea, every kind of fish came out of his mouth. The concept of "kuni" is here clearly contrasted with the sea and the mountain. The "kuni" represents the agricultural field, that is, nature under the control of man, while the



sea and the mountain the wild nature beyond the control of man.

Thus, we can now delineate the following scheme in the ancient Japanese pantheon:



As pointed out by Yoshida, a similar structure is to be discovered also among the Indo-Europeans: in ancient India, for example, two *varnas* (the Brahmans of the first function, and the Ksatriyas of the second function) make up the upper social strata, which, in combination with the *Vaisyas* of the third function, constitute the category of the "Twice Born," that is the truly human beings, while the *Sudras*, the *parias*, stand outside the trifunctional system and are conceived of as subhuman.

#### VI. THE HEAVENLY SINS AND THE EARTHLY SINS

The dichotomy of "heaven" and "earth" is not restricted to the classification of divinities in ancient Japan, but finds application also in the classification of sins into heavenly sins (*Amatsu-tsumi*) and earthly sins (*kunitsu-tsumi*). We may expect that the same principle lies at the bottom of the two dichotomies, an expectation which turns out to be true.

The terms "heavenly sins" and "earthly sins" appear first in the religious records of the early Heian era, namely in the "Ceremony Book of the Imperial Shrine" (804) and the *Engi-shiki* (compiled in 927). However, the dichotomy itself dates back most probably to the Nara age, i.e., 8th century, because the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki* contain lists of sins which betray

the existence of the dichotomy at that time if not yet the terms “heavenly sins” and “earthly sins”: the unruly acts of Susanowo at the Plain of High Heaven coincide substantially with the heavenly sins as listed up in the Ohoharahi no Norito of the *Engi-shiki*. The sins are closely connected with heaven, since they were committed in Heaven and the offender, Susanowo, a heavenly god, was banished from Heaven to earth by dint of his sins. The *Nihon Shoki* records that Ohonamuchi and Sukunabikona established taboos in order to expel the vicious influences of birds and animals. These taboos correspond to a part of the earthly sins registered in the *Engi-shiki*, and are closely related to the category “kuni” (earth), for they were established by the earthly deities to protect the common people on the earth. The *Kojiki*, in the section on the reign of Emperor Chūai, lists sins which comprise both the heavenly and the earthly variety. Yet both categories were recorded not in a motley fashion but in a fixed order: first, the sins corresponding to the heavenly sins; then the ones corresponding to the earthly ones, a fact which suggests that the two categories were already firmly established at the beginning of the 8th century. Taking into consideration the fact that the divine moieties of the heavenly deities and the earthly deities were also attested at that time, it would not be surprising if the dichotomy of sins also existed by the beginning of the Nara age.

Let us now examine the concepts of the heavenly sins and the earthly sins in more detail. The heavenly sins are sins committed against productive activities such as farming and weaving, in other words, against the activities of the third function. The offender does not, however, belong to the earthly deities, i.e., the representatives of the third function, but to the heavenly deities, the representatives of the first and second functions, as is the case with Susanowo, a warrior god *par excellence*. As both the heavenly deities and the earthly deities are “human” deities, the heavenly sins are those which are committed on the level of “humanity” and within the frame of human culture.

On the other hand, the earthly sins signify acts which degrade deities and men into the “subhuman” level, such as incest, bestiality, and cannibalism. Albinos and horrible skindiseases (leprosy?) as well betoken the forfeiture of normal human shape and

consequently the degrading of human dignity. The cursing of others' cattle and acts of sorcery are atrocities which could be committed only by a beast-like man. Death by drowning and that by burning are "bad deaths" by which the deceased is denied the right of a happy after-life warranted to those who die normal deaths. He who dies by a "bad death" is disqualified as a human being in the after-world. Mishaps by insects and those by birds in the Norito denote perhaps the death by these animals, which constitutes another kind of "bad death." To sum up, we may safely conclude that one is degraded by an earthly sin from the level of humanity into the subhuman or animal level, a level which is represented by the minor beings of nature outside of the divine moieties in the pantheon.

Now we are in a position to recognize the close relationship between the classification of sins and that of deities. The classification of deities does not exhibit a mere juxtaposition of categories of deities, but a hierarchic superposition of groups of deities: from top to bottom the heavenly deities with the first and second functions, the earthly deities with the third function, and lastly the miscellaneous beings of nature. The first two groups constitute "human" deities, while the last one stands for "nature."

The classification of sins indicates a structure which parallels that of the classification of deities, although we deal here with a dichotomy, not a threefold division. The sins denote also a hierarchic superposition: first, the heavenly sins, and then the earthly sins. It is pivotal for the understanding of the concept of sin in ancient Japan to realize that a sin denotes an act by which a member of the pantheon or human society deranges the hierarchic order of functions and degrades himself into a level below that proper to his own function. Accordingly, the heavenly sins are sins which are committed by the members of the heavenly deities or their descendants against the agricultural or other productive activities, which belong to the function of the earthly deities. The heavenly deities lose by the heavenly sins since they compromise their lofty identity and degrade themselves into the level of the earthly deities. The earthly sins are characterized in the *Kogo Shūi* (edited in 807), as "sins committed by the common people of the 'kuni' (country under

the control of human culture)” and consist of incest, bestiality, and other subhuman acts.

Therefore, the earthly sins denote acts by which the earthly deities or the common people of the “kuni” degrade themselves into the subhuman level, which corresponds to the minor beings of nature in the pantheon; they thus behave like animals or put themselves under the control of animals and birds. There is, as we shall see, even a case on record in which a princess committed an earthly sin. In this case a descendant of the heavenly deities degraded herself into a level which lies two levels below that to which her function belongs.

#### VII. THE DISTURBANCE OF THE COSMIC EQUILIBRIUM

The heavenly sins and the earthly sins are not sins against the profane worldly order, such as theft, murder, and others, but rather sins against the sacred order itself, which, as suggested already by the epithets “heavenly” and “earthly,” is a cosmic one. Indeed, the violation of the sacred order by committing a heavenly sin or an earthly one results in an event of grave consequence: the disturbance of the cosmic equilibrium. When Susano no committed the heavenly sins at the Plain of High Heaven, the horrified Sun-Goddess hid herself into the Heavenly Rock-Cave, and the universal darkness dominated the Plain of High Heaven, as well as the Central Land of Reed Plains (earth), setting all the evil beings free.

The consequence of the earthly sins is illustrated by the following two examples. The *Nihon Shoki* reports of the diurnal darkness which lasted for many days during the reign of Empress Jingū. The mysterious phenomenon was caused by the sin of *azunabi*, namely sodomy: two priests who had been in homosexual relation were buried together in the same grave. After the grave had been excavated and the corpses had been buried in separate graves, the sun regained her light, and the division of day and night returned.

Another instance is that of incest between two full siblings. In ancient Japan the royal pedigree records many cases of marriage between a brother and his half sister. These cases are

nothing other than “royal incests” and are similar to those reported from kingdoms such as that of the Inca, ancient Hawaii, Thailand, and others. However, a marriage or a sexual relationship between a brother and his full sister was strictly forbidden. According to the *Nihon Shoki*, Emperor Ingyō one day wondered at the served soup which was frozen although it was summer, and asked for the reason. A diviner construed it as a result of an incest, which turned out to be a relation between the crown prince Kinashi-karu and his full sister Princess Karu-no ohoiratsume. Since Kinashi-karu was the crown prince on whom no punishment was to be imposed, his sister alone was sent in exile to the province Iyo. Thus, in this case of incest, which should be taken for an earthly sin, the cosmic equilibrium was disturbed and an unusual phenomenon of nature occurred. In order to restore the cosmic order, the guilty princess had to be banished from the royal court, just as Susanowo was banished from the Plain of High Heaven because of his heavenly sins.

#### VIII. THE THREE SHRINES

In the foregoing two sections we have seen that the ancient Japanese concept of sin is yet another expression of the trifunctional system revealed in the structure of the pantheon. But the trifunctional system is also attested in cultic activities.<sup>4</sup>

Kōjirō Naoki, the historian, who investigated the terms and ideographs for shrines in the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki*, came to the conclusion that the ideographs “yashiro” 杵土 or “kami-yashiro” 杵申土 are used for the majority of shrines, with the exception of three major “kamino-miya” 杵申宮 shrines of Ise, Isonokami, and Izumo.<sup>5</sup> The fact that the dignified term “kamino-miya” is applied solely to these three shrines testifies to the special recognition which they enjoyed in the early 8th century among the royal court and its chroniclers.

The three shrines in question exemplify the trifunctional system in a fashion analogous to the three *flamines maiores* in

<sup>4</sup> For section 8 see my *Nihon Shinwa no Kōzō*, pp. 83-87.

<sup>5</sup> Kōjirō Naoki, *Kodai Nihon no Shizoku to Tennō* (“Uji” Kin-Groups and Emperor in Ancient Japan), pp. 283-291, 307-308, Tokyo, Hanawa Shobō, 1964.

ancient Rome.<sup>6</sup> The shrine of Ise was devoted to the worship of the Sun-Goddess Amaterasu. Amaterasu is the ancestress of the royal family and represents the function of sovereignty. Accordingly, the Ise shrine represents the first function. The Isonokami shrine stands for the second (warrior) function, because in it were hoarded many weapons, *inter alia* the divine sword of Futsu, which had been sent down from heaven by Amaterasu and Takamimusubi to assist the conquering army of Emperor Jimmu. The shrine was worshipped by the Mononobe families, which were leading warrior families. The last shrine, that of Izumo, is dedicated to Ohonamuchi (Ohokuninushi), the representative god of the third function. Consequently the Izumo shrine typifies the third function.

#### IX. THE TRIFUNCTIONAL SYSTEM IN KOREAN MYTHOLOGIES

So far we have discussed some aspects of the trifunctional system in ancient Japan. In Eastern Asia, however, the system is not restricted to Japan, but is also found in Korea.<sup>7</sup>

According to the annals, the *Ku Samguk-sa* and the *Samguk-sagi*, the first three monarchs of the Koguryō, an ancient kingdom situated in northern Korea and southern Manchuria, acquired one or more regalia respectively. These regalia represent the three functions. Chumong, the first monarch, procured a drum and a horn—musical instruments for ritualistic use—to be played on the occasion of the arrival or departure of an envoy from a foreign country. Accordingly, these instruments embody the function of sovereignty. Yuri, the second monarch, found a sword, which clearly represents the warrior function. In the case of Taemushin, the third monarch, the regalia are threefold: first he gained a tripod kettle that “became warm of itself, without using fire, so that food could be cooked in it, and moreover could be used to cook enough food to satiate the

<sup>6</sup> Dumézil, *Mythe et épopées*, II: pp. 366-367, Paris, 1971.

<sup>7</sup> For section 9 see my “Kodai Nihon, Chōsen no Saishono San-ō no Kōzō” (The Structure of the First Three Monarchs in Ancient Japan and Korea), in Atsuhiko Yoshida (ed.), *Hikaku Shinwa-gaku no Genzai* (The Present State of Comparative Mythology), pp. 46-89, Tokyo, Asahi-Shuppan, 1975.

appetite of a whole army in one kettleful." The kettle obviously stands for the third or fertility function. In addition to the kettle he later acquired a golden seal (the function of sovereignty) and some weapons (the warrior function). To sum up, the first monarch represents the first function, the second monarch the second, the third monarch the third as well as the first and the second. The reason why the third monarch came in possession of the regalia for the three functions is not difficult to infer: it was Taemushin, the monarch, who, according to the Korean annals, conquered the rival kingdom of Puyo and Chinese colony Rak-rang-kun, and thereby firmly established the Kingdom of Koguryō.

In the case of the Kingdom of Silla, the ancestors of the three royal families there, that is Pak Hyokkose, Jok Talhae, and Kim Alchi, are also representatives of the three functions. Pak Hyokkose stands for the first function; Jok Talhae represents the second, and Kim Alchin the third, according to my analysis of the accounts in the *Samguk-sagi* and the *Samguk-yusa*.

These Korean cases have parallels not only in ancient Japan, but also in the Indo-European world. Three emperors and an empress of ancient Japan are in my opinion "first monarchs" who exemplify the trifunctional system: Emperor Jimmu represents the second (warrior) function, Emperor Sujin the first (priestly), and Empress Jingū and her son Emperor Ojin the third (fertility). These examples from East Asia correspond closely to what Dumézil demonstrated in his *Mythe et épopée*, I, in the chapter on the first four monarchs of ancient Rome: the first monarchs and ages were conceived in accordance with the Indo-European trifunctional system, and they have counterparts in Greece, Scandinavia, Iran, and elsewhere in the ancient Indo-European-speaking domain.<sup>8</sup>

So far we have called attention to the existence of the trifunctional system in the ancient Far East, i.e., Japan and Korea, a system which bears a marked resemblance to that of the ancient Indo-Europeans. However, the question now arises as to how this similitude is to be explained. It is hardly explainable by mere chance or convergence, since the resemblance

<sup>8</sup> Dumézil, *Mythe et épopée*, I: pp. 261-284.

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is far-reaching, and it rather suggests the diffusion of the trifunctional system from the Indo-European world to the Far East.

The ethnogenesis of the Japanese people is a much debated question, and as yet there is no final solution to the problem. Yet most leading authorities on the subject assume that one or more Altaic groups made a major contribution to the culture and language of Japan. Indeed, some scholars go so far as to assert that the culture characteristic of the ruling elite of ancient Japan was especially composed of elements derived from the Altaic pastoral culture, which came to Japan via the Korean peninsula.<sup>9</sup> The Altaic peoples of Inner Asia—Turks, Mongolians, Tungus, etc. — developed their pastoral cultures on a base already prepared by Iranian-speaking pastoralists such as the Scythians and the Sarmatians. In other words, they inherited the cultural legacy of the Iranian steppe nomads and were additionally influenced by Indo-European high civilizations, such as those of the Iranians, Greeks, and Indians.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, there have been ample opportunities for the Altaic peoples to accept, presumably from the Iranian nomads, mythic elements and the trifunctional system of Indo-European provenance and to transmit them from west to east, i.e., to Korea and Japan through the hinterlands of Inner Asia, where movements of peoples and interchange among cultures have been thriving for millennia. To be sure, much work remains to be done in tracing the Inner Asian paths along which these Indo-European mythic motifs and the trifunctional ideological system in which they were couched diffused to the easternmost extremity of this vast continent. However, a start has indeed been made, and in the near future, as more data come to light, we should gain a much better understanding of this complex but highly significant historical relationship.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Masao Oka, "Nihon-bunka no Kiso-kōzō" (The Basic Structure of Japanese Culture), in *Nihon Minzokugaku Taikei* (Outline of Japanese Folklore), II: pp. 5-21, Tokyo, Heibon-sha, 1958; Namio Egami, *Kiba-minzoku Kokka* (States Founded by Horse-Riders), Tokyo, Chūōkōron-sha, 1967; Shichirō Murayama and Taryō Obayashi, *Nibongo no Kigen* (Origins of the Japanese Language), Tokyo, Kōbundō, 1973; cf. also Gari Ledyard, "Gallop Along with the Horseriders: Looking for the Founders of Japan", in *The Journal of Japanese Studies*, I: pp. 217-254, 1975.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Joseph Wiesner, *Die Kulturen der frühen Reitervölker* (*Handbuch der Kulturgeschichte*), Frankfurt am Main, 1968.