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The *ie*-earth-god-community-line

In the following I will be concerned with the rather local cult of one kind of "earth-gods", called *ji-no-kami*, as I had the chance to study it in Morimachi, Shuji-gun, Shizuoka-ken, located close to the middle of Honshu in Japan. The worship of the *ji-no-kami* is a part of a set of interrelated aspects of Japanese folk-religion that, as far as they are the products of a given society and its cultural history, give ideally an outlet for a whole range of values and beliefs invested in the ideology of a transcendence of individuality within the traditional Japanese "kinship-group" (the *ie*). To start with, it will therefore be useful to recall the fundamentals of this social context, where this divinity played its traditional role. Within the social structure of Japanese society, clan-formations as in China and Korea did not develop in historical times. Social history in Japan has on the other hand been interpreted in terms of two different, successive but partly overlapping evolutionary processes of structural principles called *uji* and *ie* ('Bunmei to shite no *ie* shakai' M. Yasusuke, K. Shumpei, S. Seizaburo, 1979).

When studying village-life in Japan, one is constantly met with customs and patterns of organization that have survived upto modern times from the traditional *ie*-society. The term "*ie*" signifies both "a house", the physical object, and the sacrosanct social institution enveloping it, the property and the people managing it at any given moment in its history, as well as the succession of past generation of ancestors and futur successors. What has been abstracted by scholars as "the *ie*-principle" laid out the idealized ways for assuring succession, normally through a line of fathers to eldest sons, "primo-geniture". Succession to the officially recognized position of the head of a family through this kind of filiation is though by no means "the corner-stone" of the *ie*-complex since occasionally different kind of choice-motivations permit to set it aside. The *ie* has as a matter of fact been painted as a sort of "an enterprise" organized after kinship principles of stem-linearity. The responsibility for securing the back-bone of the *ie*, the stem-linearity, —which equals past, present and futur survival with given, and when ever possible, growing means of production and stable relations to the natural surroundings,— often took precedence over strict kinship considerations (Chie Nakane, *Kinship and Economic Organization in Rural Japan*, 1967: 8). While the father-eldest son succession was the social norm under "normal" conditions, when that choice was judged contrary to the interests of the *ie*, or when sons failed to be born at all within the family, a developed alternative system of strategies for adoptions and continuity through fictive kinship was there to help straighten out irregularities. Some of the dynamics of the *ie*-system, such as the relative number in each locality of available candidates for adoption has suffered a serious setback in Japanese rural communities of today. But that aspect of cultural asphyxia (social change) —even though in some ways it affects the "live-expectancy" of the *ji-no-kami*— is beyond the

subject of this paper.

The *ie*-principle, some of what has been described above, that historians trace back to the formation of the Japanese samurai-class went through several changes in content and in extent of application along its history. During the remarkably long (1603–1868) era of the Tokugawa Shogunate, in cultural isolation and minimal social mobility, this so-called *ie*-principle was the blue-print of a samurai social and ideological super-structure of the Japanese society that was meant to govern the masses, the productive forces of farmers organized on village basis, artisans and merchants in the cities.

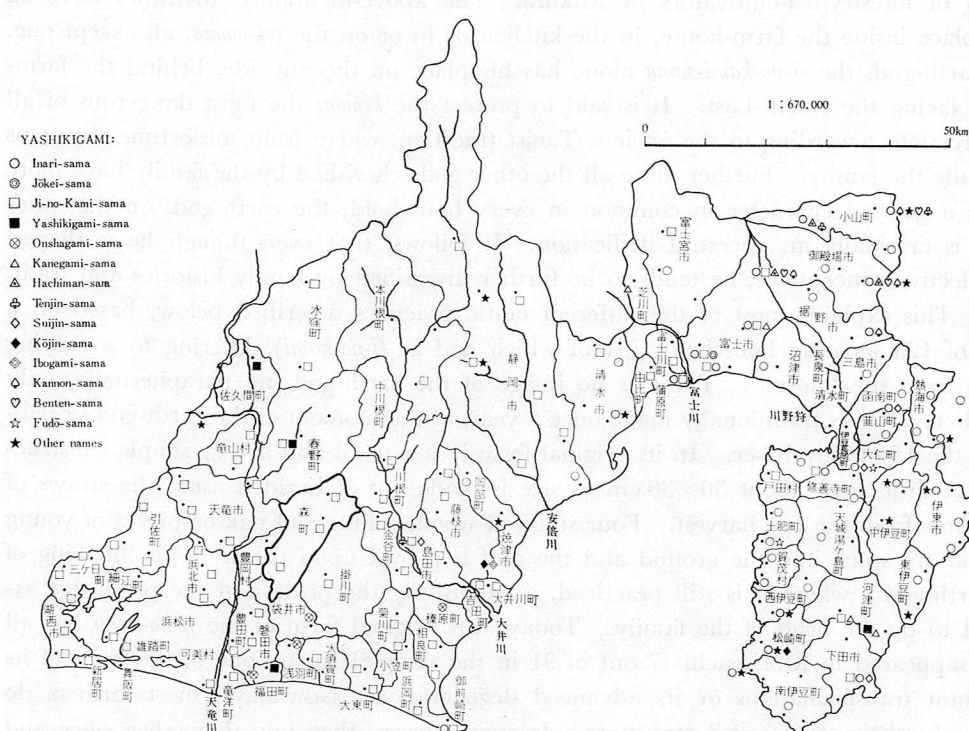
With the Meiji-Restoration and the ratification of its Civil Code in 1898 set in a kind of “samuraization” of the common people in Japan. This was caused by the indiscriminate nature of the law incorporating some of the essentials of the *ie*-principle. The concept of “the family” in a corresponding article in the new Civil Code was in fact a mixture of the samurai-*ie* concept and the modern concept of individual property rights. “On the one hand, the family head (*koshu*) was granted substantial control and responsibility over family members and there was a hierarchy within each family according to the order of succession to the *koshu* status. The samurai notion of family was thus extended to farmers and merchants” (Murakami Yasusuke, 1984: 346). Upto that time the families of the common people of Japan had not had their own names for the sublimation of their individual identity. “On the other hand, the Meiji version of the family did not guarantee any hereditary social position or source of income. In accord with Western property right concept, the Meiji Civil Code granted property rights only to the individual. Each individual could dispose of his or her property... For example, the second or the third son could have an occupation and property of his own, and live an independent new life in a different place such as a big city. As industrialization as well as urbanization continued, this trend was strengthened, the result being that lateral lines became new independent families” (Murakami Yasusuke, 1984: 346).

It is within the boundaries of rice-growing farmer-families, organized and idealized according to the *ie*-principle since the Meiji-era, that our study of the earth-gods, *Ji-no-kami*, takes place. Within the family limits, in the sense of an *ie*, can be situated furthermore everything that has to do exclusively with contemporary Japanese ancestor worship. Anyhow, whatever form the demarcation of the family domain took before and after Meiji, the boundaries not only gave meaning to the succession within the family, but also, and just as much, connected it with the wider surrounding world. There seems to have been the general tendency among the common people through the different historical epochs in Japan, as the family gained depth in community history, its ancestors rose and developed in a process of deification, in a process of ever growing identification with the *kami*, the tutelary god of all the local community.

Turning to our subject, the *ji-no-kami*, it can be assumed, setting aside all its idiosyncracies, that it belongs to the biggest and maybe the oldest “family” of supernatural powers in Japan, commonly called *yashikigami*. It is a collective name used by Japanese folklorists for the earth/house-gods that have been worshipped all over Japan essentially as family tutelary deities whose additional characteristics vary greatly with each different locality. The study of the most basic principles underlying the cult and the concept of *yashikigami* must be considered of primary importance, it being so generally present

in Japanese rural culture at the level of the most deep-rooted folk-beliefs and practices. "If the significant problems concerning this deity could be solved, various aspects of the original beliefs among the Japanese people would be clarified" (Naoye Hiroji 1977: 1). At least in some places, as in Morimachi, the aforementioned process of apotheosis of passed generations in the stem-linearity of the *ie*-family was manifested at two levels: within the boundaries distinguishing family-time/space and within the boundaries distinguishing community-time/space. The former manifested itself in the worship of *ji-no-kami* in Morimachi or in similar cultic practices elsewhere in the country ("We presume that there formerly existed a common belief among the Japanese people, that the purified spirits of the dead became *yashikigami*, family tutelary deities". (Naoye Hiroji, 1977: 8)). The second in the community worship of a tutelary divinity of the locality. The former appears furthermore in the traditional belief-system as a mediator between family and community levels of existence. The proposition that is thus advanced and hopefully demonstrated on the following pages through a limited case-study (*ji-no-kami*) is, that in spite of all the local particularities in customs and traditions relating to the *yashikigami*, certain fundamental, unifying denominators can be extracted from its structural composition (analysed below) and its general position within the traditional world-view that still reigned in Japanese agricultural communities at least upto the second world war. Briefly stated, beyond the heterogeneity of local variations in cultic practices, the *yashikigami* appears everywhere as the focal-point for ancestral deification as well as a prime mediator with

Names used for deities worshipped by the farm-houses in Shizuoka-ken.



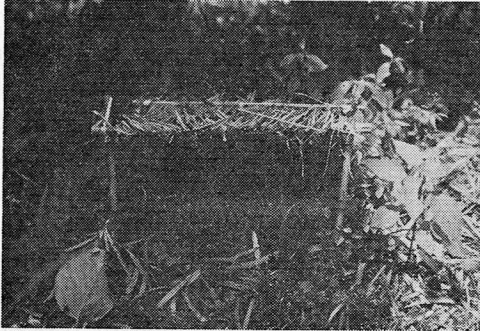
the higher supernatural *kami*-powers. As such, in its most important and enduring aspects, *yashikigami* was a family tutelary deity in the broadest sense of the word. It not only protected the family and its house, but also its material subsistence, the fertility of its land and of its women-folk.

As one last note of introduction, it is worth recalling to what measure the actual names employed by the rural people in Japan for *yashikigami* vary according to locality. For the demonstration of this fact (as an indicator for all the other surface-differences!) in Shizuoka alone, the prefecture of Morimachi, where I conducted field-work of and on over a period of two years from 1982–1983, the following redistribution of appellations appeared in the results from a recent (1976–1977) research on local traditions carried-out by the Prefectural Board of Education (see the map at the bottom of the preceding page)1):

The modern-day cult of the *ji-no-kami* in Morimachi

Nearly every farm-house in Morimachi has its own *ji-no-kami*. He is one of a host of supernatural family-protectors that normally figure the highest god (a *kakejiku* or an *ofuda* with the name of a major Shinto-divinity) in the *tokonoma*, the place of honor in the house, a *takagami-sama*, who is a sacred protector of the farm-house installed in a tiny shrine up under the roof-top when the house was built, *Ebisu* and *Daikoku-sama*, the gods of wealth and prosperity and the *kojin*, the god of fire. In the agricultural communities in Morimachi, the *ji-no-kami* is traditionally worshipped separately by each family, be it among rice cultivators down on the lowland along the banks of Odagawa, or up in the mountain valleys of forestry/tea-cultivators in Mikura. The above-mentioned divinities have all their place inside the farm-house, in the kitchen or in or on the *tokonoma*, all except one. The earth-god, the *ji-no-kami-sama* alone has his place on the out-side, behind the farm-house, facing the North-East. It is said to protect the *kimon*, the most dangerous of all the directions according to the ancient Taoist tradition, where from misfortune threatens to invade the family. Further more all the other gods cherished by the family have more or less a general character in common in every household, the earth god, on the other hand, is originally an ancestral deification. It follows, that even though he is shaped by collective conceptions, he tends to be further diversified by family histories and traditions. This explains most of the different cultic practices described below, based on a study of 123 separate households (91 of which had a *Ji-no-kami*) differing to a varying degree from the “norm”. There is no image of the earth-god, no paraphernalia, only its shelter. It was traditionally made once a year, at the moment of the earth-god’s celebration the 15 of November. In its original form it is a small and a very simple construction. A little roof, about 30×30 cm in size is made out of braided *wara*, the straws of rice-plants from the last harvest. Four sticks of wood, splinters of oak or pieces of young bamboo are stuck into the ground and the roof is placed upon them. This “making of the earth-god”, where it is still practiced, is exclusively the pride and the privilege attended to by the head of the family. Today, this original form of the *ji-no-kami* has all but disappeared in Morimachi (7 out of 91 in the sample!) being one of the signs of its important transformations or its advanced degeneration. Nowadays, most farmers do not “make their earth-gods” any more. In recent years, they buy themselves once and

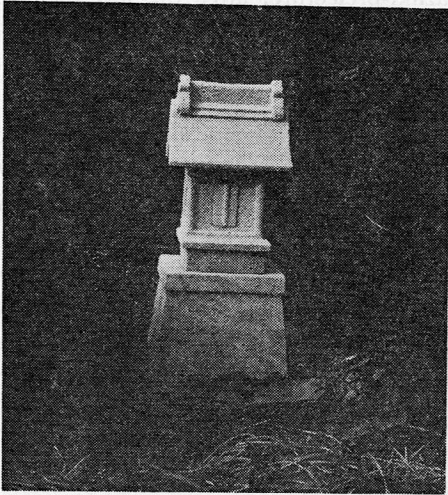
for all small prefabricated shrines in special shops in the nearby villages and towns, selling everything from incense sticks to grave-stones. These new shrines for the earth-gods are made out of wood, ceramics or stone. Inside there is a small space behind miniature doors. Traditionally, the earth-god was renewed every year by the head of the family out of elements symbolizing the earth's fertility, nowadays the earth-god is normally renewed by the replacement of a talisman, a paper-*ofuda* obtained from one of the major shrines or temples of the region.



rice-straw



pottery



stone



wooden

If a new branch of a family was established in a hamlet by a second or a third son, normally they shared the *Ji-no-kami* with the main-family. It was not until the third generation of the branch-family that it acquired its own earth-god. In one family of an informant, when it established its earth-god generations ago a rock that was there already at the moment of the ritual purification of the farm-house's building-site was used as a foundation. On it they raised a small shrine built out of wood. In several other cases, it was explained, the families being third or fourth generation-*bunke*, or branch-families, they had transported a stone from the land of the *honke*, the main-family, on which

they had raised their new *Ji-no-kami*. Then there were others who recalled that the inauguration of a new *Ji-no-kami* at a branch-family was formerly ratified by transporting a shovelful of earth from the *honke's* land and place it behind the *bunke's* house under the newly made miniature straw-roof. Nowadays, that the *Ji-no-kami* has lost most of its former vigor it is rarely taken to represent the ancestors (see Appendix) and its role has been reduced to that of an "ordinary" tutelary *kami*. So people are still, being true to this part of the tradition, installing a new prefabricated *Ji-no-kami* at the moment of the building of a new house.

When asked about what the *Ji-no-kami* stands for, the few in Morimachi that did not answer that he was just a part of an old tradition handed down to them from the past (maintained because it is a "kokoro no mondai", "a sentimental thing"), explained most often that he protected the family and some added that he also assured the fertility of the family-land and the succession of the family-line. In this disappearing old belief-system this relationship is seen as brought about by a reciprocal exchange: the family generates its god as the god maintains the family and its lively-hood. When people died, as mentioned earlier, they were believed to be attached to the mountain sides or the family graves and to progress spiritually from one memorial service and death anniversary to another, but finally after the last one, they were believed to be absorbed into the beneficial, tutelary *Ji-no-kami*. In Morimachi, the belief in this passage has had as far as it is known no ritual manifestation, but else-where such as in Ino-cho in Miyazaki-prefecture, after the last memorial service of an ancestor, his mortuary tablet, *ihai*, is taken from the family altar, the *butsudan*, and carried into the back-yard and placed in a small shrine consecrated to *Yashikigami*, protector of the family (Naoe 1972: 101).

In the small hamlet of Otamaru in Morimachi I came across one unique case where the earth-deity was seconded in protecting the farm-house by another god, *Iwaiden-sama*. This latter was particularly said to protect against burglars. When the house had twice been broken into in the time of my informant's grandfather, the old man went down to the river-side found a rock and brought it up to the house and placed it in the steep slope directly behind it, close to the *Ji-no-kami-sama*. It was to be the abode of the *Iwaizen-sama*. From then on, it was worshipped at the moment of the *Yama-no-ko*, the mountain cult in November and January. *Sekihan* and a branch of *sakaki* (see below) are then offered to it on the stone.

***Ji-no-kami*: Cult, myth and customs**

Traditionally the cult of the earth-god takes place but two times a year (nowadays only once a year in most families): The fifteenth of November at the time of its annual celebration and at New Years, then included into the general worship of all the supernatural powers supplicated for yet another cycle of predictable seasons and family prosperity. The 15th of November, locally known as *Ji-no-kami-no-matsuri*, is thus the focal point of the cult, concerning the family on two different levels of its existence. First and foremost, on the 15th of November the families celebrate separately their private earth-god, protector of the fertility of its members and of its land. This identity and meaning of the earth-god is still the most widely recognized and celebrated in Morimachi. But there is also a sup-

plementary version, added as an extension to the first one by some informants. This latter interpretation was told by people with a detached, amused air about them, as a *mukashibanashi*, a folk-tale. When they were growing up, the old people explain, the month of November was called *Kanatsugi*, or "the month without a god". Then the celebration of the earth-god consisted of sending him away, *kamiokuri*. According to this belief, all the earth-gods of the different families in the district were said to assemble on the 15th of November, normally at the most conspicuous border-line place in the hamlet, on the top of a hill, by the bridge-head etc. and travel together to Izumo-taisha in Tottori-Prefecture, one of the most sacred "cross-roads" of the *Kami*-ways. Still other people said it was the first of November that used to be called *kamiokuri*. In this version too all the Shinto divinities are said to be summoned once a year to Izumo for an assembly. On that occasion people prepared *sekihan* (see below) and place it on a special plate, *tsutokko*, made out of braided straws of rice-plants from the last harvest. The *tsutokko* was placed in front of the earth-deity's shelter. In both this one and the former way of attending to the earth-god, during his supposed absence the *Daikoku-Ebizu-sama*, the gods of wealth and prosperity are said to take over his role as protectors of the family. When the *kamiokuri* occurred the 1st of November, *Ji-no-kami* was said to return on the 15th of the same month for his own celebration. Then the 20th of November there was another traditional folk-celebration for the *Ebizu*-god, called *Ebisuko*. That custom has now practically dis-appeared. The god enshrined at Izumo is Okuni-nushi-no-kami, a descendant of Susanno-O-no-mikoto the brother of Amaterasu-O-mikami, the Sun-goddess. All the common Earth-gods were said to take to the road for the purpose of participating in the yearly gathering of all the myriads of the *kami* pantheon. This seasonal, extraordinary event, a kind of mythological *bōnenkai*, "a year-end-party, was believed to be held in a commemoration of the most dramatic episode depicted in Shinto mythology, regenerating this event's live-giving impact upon the univers. It is reported in Kojiki, "Records of ancient matters", the oldest (A.C. 712) extant historical document in Japan, that Susa-no-O-no-mikoto in his younger age behaved so very badly and committed so many outrages, that the Sun-goddess, his sister became angry and hid herself in a celestial cave which caused heaven and earth to become darkened. All the other gods were in utter desperation trying to restore the luminious center of the universe. Then after having tried everything else, the gods decided to put on a major entertainment in front of the cave with singing and dancing and all kind of merry-making. One of the goddesses started the most astonishing, obscene dance: "Then she became devinely possessed, exposed her breasts, and pushed her skirt-band down to her genitals". The myriad of attending gods burst out laughing, crying out: "*Omoshiro!*" "*Omoshiro!*" "Funny!" "Funny!" This was too much, even for an outraged Sun-goddess. She came out and brought back the light to the world. For his misdemeannor the brother was banished to the lower world on earth where his good behaviour helped him to return to the favor of the other *kami*. His descendant at *Izumo* became a very benevolent *kami* who ruled over the Great Eight Islands of Japan and blessed the people 2).

The Earth-gods who every year took part in this commemorial resurrection were said to bring back with them a divine blessing on their return home.

The expressive nature of offerings

If the culturally determined relationships among members of society are reflected in ideology and belief-systems as stated above, the economical foundations of social life and the distinctive features of the eco-system where social life is implanted find their expression in the language of offerings. As mentioned earlier, the worship of the earth-deity in Morimachi is normally limited to one or two occasions of the year, the 15th of November and the New Year. The actual cult has thus its very modest manifestations in the annual (nowadays disappearing) fabrication of a shelter and the following offerings. These latter, even though varying widely from one community to another and even from one neighbour to another, indicate where to look for clues to the understanding of the complex nature of the earth-deity. In what follows, I will try to present some of my field-material relating to the subject and attempt to point out where its analysis leads to.

91 out of 127 families in the three communities studied had a *Ji-no-kami* at the North-East corner on the grounds of the family-house. 57 out of these 91 (62.6%) celebrated it specifically at least once a year, the 15th of November. In all, the 57 families taken together, 105 items belonging to 11 different categories of offerings were mentioned in answers and when counted, their frequency and fundamental characteristics are seen to be arranged in a certain pattern:

Table I

Kinds of offerings	No. of families pr. kind	
Sekihan	35	Cooked/cultural
Azukigohan	8	
Mochi	23	
Shirumochi	7	
Sake/Water	6/2	Brewed/liminal
Semai	7	Raw/natural
Vegetables	4	
Salt	3	
Fish	2	
Total	97	

Sekihan=rice (*mochigome*) and red beans (*azuki*) cooked together, "red-rice".

Azukigohan=red beans cooked with ordinary rice.

Mochi= cooked rice (*mochigome*) pounded into a homogenous, sticky mass, shaped into small cubes or rounded cakes. When eaten in a pure form often fried before consumption.

Mochi is also served in a soupe made from soy-beans or red beans. In some cases these latter are made into a kind of a paste envelopping a *mochi* core.

Shirumochi= ordinary rice ground and mixed with water to make rice cakes. These are then cooked or fried before eating. Normally served in a soy-sauce.

Sake/water= rice-wine is one of the principal offerings to *kami*, the traditional gods of Japan, but it is also offered to certain of the family-dead, the *hotoke-sama*, at their death-

anniversaries. For those who were known to have been fond of liquor during their lifetime, their descendants place cups of *sake* in front of the memorial tablettes and even pour large quantities over their tomb-stones. *Sake* is water magnified by the supernatural powers of rice. Water, on the other hand, being one of the elements, is equally apt for offering to *kami* or *hotoke* be it in a pure form or for brewing tea or *sake*.

Semmai= uncooked, washed rice. Another one of the main offerings for the *kami* in Shinto rituals.

Vegetables= fresh products of the earth all figure among traditional offerings to the (Shinto) *kami*.

Salt= a key element in Shinto tradition where it stands for ritual purity in a wide range of ritual context.

Fish= a whole, fresh fish, representing the products of the sea, is one of the usual offerings to the Shinto *kami* at the time of the yearly festival of the whole community.

In addition to this list of offerings, in eight families people decorate the place of worship with *Sakaki* (*Cleyra ochonacca*). *Sakaki* is a mountain tree sacred in Shintoism. Sprigs from it have a multiple ritual importance in Shinto- and folk-tradition.

Among the 57 families respecting the tradition, 14 pay ritual respect to *Ji-no-kami* as a part of the New Years festivities. Then they decorate its dwelling with *shimenawa* and *gohei*, traditional rope prepared out of straws from the last harvest's rice-plants and white zigzag-cut paper. These ropes are profoundly rooted in the Shinto tradition where they designate a sacred place or a person (e.g. *Yokozuna*, a grand-master of Sumo-wrestling) where *kami* is believed to present itself. Most of these 14 households offer also some *mochi* made for the occasion of New Years, *kagamimochi* or "Mirror-mochi". An old man explained that his father used to prepare special offerings for the *Ji-no-kami* at New Years. For that purpose he used a kind of container called *ohitsu*. It was wooden with two interlocking parts, a bottom and a top piece. In the top piece he put washed rice, one *sho*, two *go* (about two liters) and in the bottom piece he arranged some vegetables, radishes, potatoes, carrots, green leaves etc. and put by the *Ji-no-kami*.

In spite of these reported cases of worship of the Earth-deity at New Years, its primary importance is centered on the celebration the 15th of November. Then are manifested all the nuances of its character through local variations in legends and cult.

Those who related the *Ji-no-kami* to *kamiokuri* mentioned earlier used to arrange the offerings into small rucksacks made out of rice-straws. It was said to be the *obento*, the travel-provisions for the earth-god. But this custom has completely disappeared from Morimachi after World-War II.

Today, the offerings are laid either on special plates, *tsuto*, prepared specially from rice-straws as most other things concerning this cult, or arranged on ordinary kitchen-plates. Then the offerings are placed under the roof of the earth-god. If on the other hand the shrine is made out of wood or stone, before making the offerings, the tiny doors of the shrine are opened and the plates put in front of it. Two short descriptions of *Ji-no-kami-sama-no-matsuri*, the celebration of the earth-deity, given by two persons living in the same village as next-door neighbours will suffice here as an example.

Toyoko Tomida, now 80 years old, is the only person left of her (husband's) *ie*-family still living in the village. Her husband died 10 years ago. They had no child of their own so they adopted one girl from the family of a relative. To assure the succession of the family-name, the minimum respect for the ancestors, when she got married the husband had to be adopted. In other words, she got married to somebody that was ready to give up his own family-name for the "benefits" of becoming a successor, *atotsugi*, in his family of adoption. All the same the young couple went to live in the big city of Hamamatsu about 50 km away. Toyoko Tomida's birth-place was in a neighbouring village. When she came as a young bride into her husband's family she had to get used to many new ways of doing things. As an example she recalled that as long as her parents-in-law lived, on the 14th of November, they made 12 cakes of *shirumochi* from grained, ordinary rice. When they were ready, they were brought into the main room of the house and put on the *tokonoma*, the place of honor where they waited until the following day, the 15th. Then at day-break one of these went into a soup from soy-sauce and was offered to the *Ji-no-kami-sama*. The other 11 *mochi* were used for offerings in front of the family-altar for the ancestors and the *Ebizu-Daikoku-sama* in the kitchen. Furthermore, the family prepared dishes with *shiru-mochi* and *sekihan* on a low table-tray, *ozen*, and carried it over to the of distant relatives living next-door. Later the same day, that same family sent somebody over with a similar tray laid out with identical offerings. This custom of symbolic reciprocity was common in the village at that time among the old families, giving expression for their *honke-bunke* relationship. When Toyoko Tomida's parents-in-law had both passed away, she and her husband talked it over with the neighbours and they decided to give up this custom as everybody else were doing little by little in the village. In the house of Toyoko's neighbours, also Tomidas, the family still prepares 12 *shirumochi* rice-cakes the day before the celebration of the *Ji-no-kami*. As before they are made out of powdered raw rice mixed with water. 3-4 of these are placed in a small wooden box, *masu*, normally used for drinking rice-wine and as a unit of measurement for rice, one cup one *go*, ten *go* one *sho*. The *shirumochi* is thus carried to the Earth-deity's shrine behind the house. There, with the help of chop-sticks specially made for this occasion from oak the head of the family cuts a little bit from each *shirumochi* and places it under the straw-roof on a *tsuto*-plate. Then the rest of the *mochi* is carried back into the house where it is prepared, cooked or fried to be consumed by all the members of the family.

Finally one remarkable example revealing the farmers' conception of their relationship with the earth-god. Several informants recalled, that until the post-war period when children were born and their mothers were still breast-feeding them, if they produced more milk than needed, they emptied their breasts in a bowl and put it in front of the *Ji-no-kami-sama*. By looking at the TABLE I above one remarks immediately that the offerings presented to *Ji-no-kami* in modern times in Morimachi belong mainly to two different classes as if they were meant for the appreciation of non-identical spiritual powers:

A)

On the one hand we have below the horizontal line some of the most important examples in common with the general tradition of offerings presented to Shinto deities at their shrines. The *kami* is here a life-force and it is celebrated and worshipped by offer-

ing life-sustaining products of the earth with those representing its purity: *Sakaki*, washed rice, vegetables, salt and fish. At the moment of the annual festivals that flourish all over Japan, these are the ritual offerings to the *kami* containing the expression of communal gratitude for divine generosity. It is a demonstration of natural riches as they come, before they are transformed and further “translated” through cuisine into innumerable combinations of cultural meanings. The rice-wine is a single exception from the rule of fresh, natural products being laid for the Shinto god, but *sake*, because of its unique quality to elevate the spirits beyond the state of every-day life, has been considered to be a godly substance in Japan as in so many other places.

So all these offerings situated below the line in TABLE I seem to point to a certain degree of identification of the *Ji-no-kami* with a Shinto-like conception of a super-natural agency.

B)

On the other hand we have the four categories of offerings above the line in TABLE I. All of them are products of rice, rice cultivated and transformed by farmers. What we have in this instance, —still the most common and in all likelihood the most original form of the practice of the cult of the *Ji-no-kami*— is a highly developed, multiple symbolic expression of life in communities that once, not so long ago, conceived of the rice-plant as the prime value in society, measure of heaven and earth. And what is more, here we are faced with traditional Japanese symbolism where the celebration of the earth-deity constitutes but one of its multiple applications. In fact it is central, indispensable at the moment of most festivals, all rite de passage and at the New Years celebrations. The symbolism in question is made possible by a binary-supplementary opposition between two extremely important constituents of the Japanese age-old traditional mode of subsistence: rice (*mochi*) and beans (*azuki*). The rice is the pivot, emphasized symbolically by combining it with another important agricultural product, beans. These are not “just another important element in the Japanese diet”, they are also in this floral marriage its “colorant”. In being united with rice, or *mochi*, the purest form of rice, it gives it a festive red color.

The multiple combinations in the preparations and presentations in Japan of these two signifiers —in themselves apriori the very life-sustaining material— for the expression of extraordinary meaning of certain moments in social life is worth a much more detailed analysis than the brief sketch of this present paper.

First of all, there are three main combinations, or classes of variables:

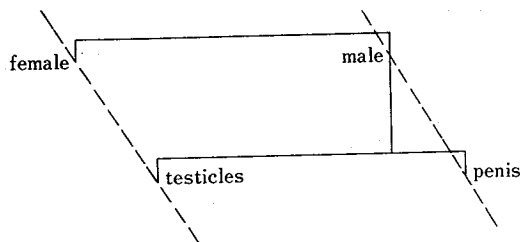
—rice	=	red beans	→ mixed
—mochi	+	azuki	→ juxtaposed
—mochi	×	—	→ pure

At every ‘rite de passage’ celebrating the growth of life, at the moment of birth, at the first presentation of the baby to the tutelary deity at the local shrine, at the first feeding of the infant of people’s food (rice), at its first anniversary, at the first time a girl has her period, at the first time a boy wears the clothes of adult men, at marriages —just to give some far from exhaustive examples, people prepare “red-rice”, *sekihan*, a cooked mixture

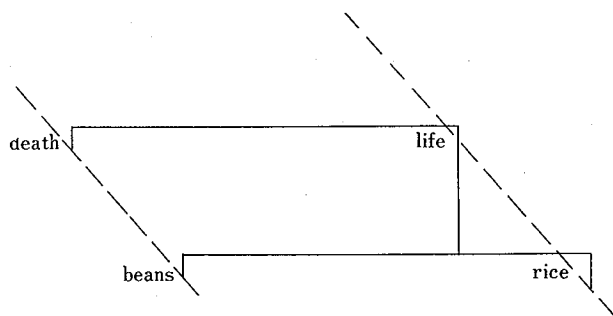
of *mochigome* and *azuki*. These two elements, (it should be remembered, that in pre-modern times, even ordinary rice was a rare luxury in the diet of the common farmers, producers of rice) representing two phases, before and after, are combined permitting the expression of a happy colorful continuity. Then at the midsummer festival for the dead and at *higan*, the spring and autumn traditional celebrations also for the family-dead, in many families people prepare *ohagi*, balls of *mochi* envelopped in a red paste of *azuki*-beans. The *mochi* as a core and the *azuki* as a covering form two distinct layers. Finally at the New Years, the Japanese engage in the most generalized *mochi* fiesta. Around that time all over Japan people, older and younger, can be seen ceremoniously but joyfully tapping the *mochigome*, making their cherished glutinous *mochi* then often called *kagami-mochi* or *dangomochi*. It is offered to the ancestors at the family-altar, to the Shinto-god worshipped in the home and then consumed together as it comes pure and unmixed by all the family members. New Year's rituals in Japan are characterized by the supplication for continuity, for the absence of rupture: "May the cycle of the seasons and the fruits of the earth follow their natural course during the year to come as during the one that just passed" seems to be implied in the Japanese New Year's prayers. The examples just noted should give an idea of the extensive application of this kind of symbolism in Japanese culture.

Without attempting a deeper analysis of the color-symbolism expressed by the opposition of "white-red" in Japanese culture, in the most general terms white is associated with spiritual purity as can be best observed in all Shinto rituals and in the black and white decorations of Japanese funerals. These, —exactly because they mark the very height of pollution that begins with death (black) evoke the beginning of a future purification exceeding all earthly manifestations (white). Red on the other hand symbolizes the cheerful irresponsibility of youth, it designates ideally the two "happy" periods in life, before the coming of age and after the retirement into "idle authority" or a "second childhood". In between, the essence of life should be hard work, excluded from all agitating association with red. This symbolism is then the most strikingly expressed in the Japanese national flag: a red rebellious drop floating in a peaceful sea of white.

While on the subject, it is worth recalling a short article in a recent collection of essays by Claude Lévi-Strauss (Lévi-Strauss 1983: 263) where he develops briefly but convincingly the cross-cultural symbolism relating to the semantic combination of "beans-cereals". There we learn that beans have been conceived of symbolically in their relation to cereals (such as rice or maize) as testicles are to the penis. These latter taken separately tend to be assigned a relative male and female attributes:



One of the arguments of Levi-Strauss for this supposition is based on a personal communication from Professor Yoshida Teigo of Tokyo University recalling that in Japan *mame* which means "beans" commonly designates also "clitoris". In the course of this same article Levi-Strauss then draws up a second semantic model of binary oppositions supported by Japanese as well as other ethnaphic material:



Both these symbolic patterns appear in the cult of *Ji-no-kami* as I have had the privilege to observe it in Morimachi. The earth-deity protects the fertility of the soil and of the women-folk and traditionally he was at the other end of the 33 or 50 years it took to die in Japanese world-view: he made up the life/death two sides of the same coin. This nature of his is thus reflected in the offerings deployed before him. Above the line in TABLE I we have these four classes of offerings that belong to the popular Japanese tradition of celebrating events in social life. In the combinations/separations of their constituent elements is invested the fundamental cultural readings of events: passages between stages in the life-cycles within the family (dying to one and being reborn to another) or the passage between one imperturbable round to another in the life-death generating cycles in nature. In the analysis of the offerings for the *Ji-no-kami* first we distinguished the two elements and their respective features apprehended simultaneously in nature and in culture:

rice-plant	beans
oblong	round
white	red
mochi	azuki

Secondly we noted their different combinations as observed in three separate places in Morimachi, Shizuoka-ken:

Offerings	compositions	Number of families-officiants:	
		November 15	New Years
SEKIHAN	mixed	35	—
AZUKIGOHAN	mixed	8	—
MOCHI	pure (rice-cakes/—)	6	17
SHIRUMOCHI	juxta-posed (mochi/soy-sauce)	7	—

Azukigohan and *shirumochi* are offered to the *Ji-no-kami* by 13 out of the 35 families living in the small hamlet of Otomaru to the North-West of Morimachi. There, lowland for rice cultivation is very limited, barely sufficient for satisfying local consumption. *Mochigome*, the festive kind of rice that gives the glutinous base to *sekihan* has traditionally never been produced in the hamlet and is consequently inappropriate for the celebration of its Earth-deities. *Azukigohan* and *shirumochi* are therefore prepared out of ordinary rice. The *Ji-no-kami*, because of his mediating position between nature and culture, because he represents both at the same time, is ideally worshipped with offerings representing his double nature: with *sekihan* (or *azukigohan*) at his yearly festival, since then he is growing in the dead as well as the living members of the family, and with pure *mochi* at New Years since then he should represent the desired imperturbability in nature.

[Notes

- 1) This map, showing the redistribution of names applied for "Yashikigami" in the prefecture of Shizuoka-ken, is one of the results from a research on regional customs carried out by the local Board of Education in 1976. I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the permission to translate it and use it for demonstration in this paper.
- 2) Kojiki, transl. Donald L. Philippi, University of Tokyo Press, 1983, p. 85.

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Appendix

From a questionnaire taken to some 127 families in three places in Morimachi, two agricultural hamlets (Nakagawa-Shimo and Otomaru) and one neighbourhood (Amenomiya-Honcho) in Mori, the small city, center of the region, the following results can be seen as directly relevant to the subject of this article:

C-1

Which of the following things are to be found in your house?

Cult	Nakagawa: 53	Amenomiya: 39	Otomaru: 35	Total: 127
Kamidana	50	32	35	117
Butsudan	34	27	28	89
Ji-no-kami	46	19	26	91
Ebisu/Daikoku	49	31	32	112
Inari	6	6	6	18
Other places of cult	10	4	10	24

D-5

Do you believe in the existence of ancestral spirits?

	Nakagawa: 53	Amenomiya: 39	Otomaru: 35	Total: 127
Yes	39	20	21	80
No	3	6	5	14
Dont know	11	13	8	32

D-6

If you believe in the existence of ancestral spirits, when do you think a dead person becomes an ancestor?

	Nakagawa: 39	Amenomiya: 20	Otomaru: 21	Total: 80
Immediately after death	21	6	13	40
Little by Little	15	4	5	24
Don't know	3	10	3	16

D-9

If the souls or the spirits of the dead were to be situated somewhere, where would you expect to find them?

	Nakagawa: 53	Amenomiya: 39	Otomaru: 35	Total: 127
In the mountains	2	—	—	2
On the other side of the sea	2	—	—	2
In the sky	13	4	1	18
In the under-world	3	2	1	6
In their graves	30	17	22	69
In the butsudan	28	11	11	50
<i>With the Earth-god</i>	6	1	1	8
In the Buddhist Temple	5	3	3	11
With the uchigami	10	—	2	12
Else where*	+	+	+	27
Dont know*	+	+	+	12
				Total: 217

* Every where/part of the univers/non-localized.....	8
In our children.....	1
In the hearts of living people	9
<i>In the family-house and on its land</i>	3
With God in Heaven (a Christian).....	1
There are no souls or spirits	2
Where ever people go they are surrounded by their guardian-spirits	1
With the Kami-sama (Tenri-kyo)	2