

The Ethnology of Okinawa: Between Folklore Studies and Social Anthropology.

沖縄の民族学：民俗学と社会人類学のはざま

Patrick Beillevaire (French National Center for Scientific Research – Japan
Research Center, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris)

With a population of slightly over 1,300,000 people, Okinawa must be one of the regions of the world that has received the greatest attention from scholars, be they historians, folklorists, anthropologists or linguists, although this is hardly common knowledge outside Japan. Any systematic attempt at reviewing the scholars and literature concerned with folklore studies and anthropology would assuredly prove tedious and of little interest in comparison with various sources, of which, I am sure, you are already aware.¹

Here I would like to take a more casual approach based on my personal experience of Okinawan studies. But, first, let me introduce myself briefly. My interest in Okinawa arose from the reading of Mabuchi Tōichi's and Muratake Seiichi's papers when I was a student of Louis Dumont, a specialist on India and a prominent figure in French anthropology. His teaching at the time, which developed new perspectives on socio-symbolic order and hierarchy, provided immediate connections with what I was starting to learn from Mabuchi Tōichi and Muratake Seiichi concerning Okinawa. My first visit there took place in March 1977, and I started doing fieldwork on Tarama-jima the following year, while I was attached to Ryūkyū Daigaku as a *kyakuin kenkyūsha*. My stay on Tarama-jima lasted one and a half years. Since then I have been visiting Okinawa at least once a year. From around 1990, I gradually turned to history, with a special focus on the 19th century. However, I always maintained an interest in folklore and anthropological studies, as well as in the evolution of Okinawan culture and society. Only two years ago I published the notes of Charles Haguenaer (シャルル・アグノエル), a French specialist on Japanese culture and language, and an acquaintance of Iha Fuyū, who did a remarkable fieldwork in Okinawa in 1930. Editing his notes and drawings took up a huge amount of my time over a ten-year period and plunged me back into the publications of the 1920s. Since my first steps in Okinawa I have received assistance from many people, but in particular, for what concerns anthropology, from the late Yohena Kenji, who welcomed me at Ryūdai, from Mabuchi Tōichi and Higa Masao sensei, and today I am much indebted to Akamine Masanobu, professor at Ryūdai.

Questions of terminology.

As this presentation is about ethnology, folklore studies and social anthropology, we are expected to have a clear notion of the concerns associated with each of these disciplines. In actual fact, though, it is quite difficult to differentiate them precisely.

¹ Such as 野口武徳『南島研究の歳月：沖縄と民俗学との出会い』東海大学出版会 1980年；渡邊欣雄「沖縄の宗教と社会」『日本民族学の現在：1980年代から90年代へ』ヨーゼフ・クライナー（編）新曜社 1996年：202-223；金城朝永「沖縄研究史」『民族学研究』15 (2), 1950年：2-14.

On the one hand, folklore studies refer to the study of traditions, which includes daily life practices, rituals, tales, oral history, artifacts, music and songs, etc. In encyclopedias the discipline is often defined as a branch of anthropology. Folklore studies tend to specialize in regional cultures or minority groups within national entities. However, as evidenced by George Frazer's famous *Golden Bough*, the term folklore could also apply to beliefs and customs of so-called primitive societies until the early 20th-century. But, generally, its geographical scope is limited to western societies, if one sets aside the case of Japan. The activities of folklore societies are usually confined within national boundaries, when they are not confined to much smaller areas. Laurence Gomme in England, whom Yanagita Kunio had read, and the French Arnold Van Gennep, not to mention any other European, have been leading figures in that research field. To many people, folklore seems to be something from the past, although, if it is equated with popular culture in general, there is no reason to deprive it of its potential creativity.² Actually, the present status of folklore studies differs greatly from one country to another. In Britain and in the USA, for example, there are still active folklore societies and journals, while in France, where folklore studies — also called “study of popular traditions” — had found institutional recognition in the first half of the 20th-century, societies or journals of national standing no longer exist. Even the fine museum of popular traditions that stood in the Bois de Boulogne (ブローニュの森) in Paris has closed its doors.³ The word folklore itself nowadays most often carries a pejorative meaning.

In Japan, of course, *minzokugaku* 民俗学, folklore studies, or the study of popular traditions and customs, have gained a very different status. It is an incredibly rich and active research field, which partly encompasses what would elsewhere be called religious studies. Through the *Nihonjin-ron* and *Nihon-bunka-ron* literature, elements of its production reach a wide readership. It is true that modern Japan has preserved a wealth of rituals and traditions, in face of which no western country can compare. More specifically, Japanese folklore studies appear to fulfill a permanent and somewhat anxious quest for national cultural and social markers of singularity. In other words, they are a national cause. Because of their intimate involvement in the formation of Japan's 20th-century national culture, Japanese folklore studies, *minzokugaku* 民俗学, would actually be better rendered, as some Japanese scholars occasionally did, by the German word *Volkskunde*.

On the other hand, in contrast with the thematic and fragmented approach of Folklore studies, social anthropology tries to apprehend societies as wholes in order to understand their working principles. Essentially, it aims at revealing the organizational and mental structures

² See, for instance, Marian W. Smith, “The Importance of Folklore Studies to Anthropology”, *Folklore*, vol. 70 (1), March 1959: 300-312.

³ The meaning attached nowadays in Europe to the notion of “people” (*peuple* in French, *Volk* in German) is a politically sensitive issue. This was evidenced by the placing, at the very entrance of the Paris Museum of Popular Traditions, of a signboard warning visitors that the phrase “French people” should not be construed as carrying any racial or ethnic meaning, in that there had been a constant miscegenation of populations through history. Implicitly, it was understood that “the French people” could only have a political dimension and only refer to citizenship.

that govern collective or individual behavior in all sectors of activity. Research material is in part identical to that used by folklorists, but in the first place it is collected by means of participant observation, often on a long-term basis. For decades, in the wake of Lewis Morgan's *Ancient Society*, kinship has been a central focus of social anthropology, as it appeared to be the backbone of many non-western societies. The conceptual tools produced by social anthropology allow comparative and theoretical insights into human behavior, whereas folklore studies do not go much beyond classifying data and making them available for other disciplines. Although it was not quite true, social anthropology has long been synonymous with the study of what Westerners and Japanese alike at first called "primitive societies", then "societies without writing" or "stateless societies". But since the 1950s and '60s, many corners of old or new nation-state societies have also entered into its scope.

I do not want to go into designation issues here, such as to know whether social anthropology and cultural anthropology — the latter term being now favored in Japan as in the USA —, cover the same concerns. In the tradition of French and British anthropology, it seems rather futile to conceive of culture and society separately, although personally I would not mind adding the adjective "cultural" to "social". It should also be clear that the specialized branches of anthropology which have arisen since the 1970s, such as symbolic, cognitive or ecological anthropology, stemmed in some ways from previous social anthropological research.

Now, I come to the third term in the title of my lecture, "ethnology". It is intended to stand as a midway expression between folklore studies and social anthropology, but I must admit that the choice is not satisfying. The "Study of Okinawan culture and society" or, although more inclusive, "Okinawan studies", *Okinawa-gaku*, would have surely been better choices. "Ethnology", *minzokugaku* 民族学, is in fact largely synonymous with social anthropology, *zoku* 族 (meaning *yakara*) being indicative of a primary concern with family and social organization. It is also closely associated with prewar research on overseas ethnic groups, as the *Japanese Journal of Ethnology*, *Minzokugaku kenkyū*, launched in 1935, bears witness. In French too, until today, ethnology and social anthropology remain largely interchangeable terms. In my defense, however, I could say that, from a historical viewpoint, the term ethnology may refer to an early and less theoretical stage of social anthropology that corresponds to a period of accumulation of data.

The ambiguous positioning of Okinawa-gaku.

Okinawa-gaku, which is also comprised of history, linguistics and archaeology, is an interesting term to consider. It is found as an entry in many reference books, and I wonder if there is any other example of a Japanese name suffixed with *gaku* that is so ordinarily used. On the database Nacsis-Webcat I counted no less than 35 books carrying *Okinawa-gaku* in their title — and there are probably more — whereas I found only 4 titles with *Ainu-gaku*. Such a specific designation is obviously a double-edged sword: on one side, it establishes *Okinawa-gaku* as a sub-field of Japanese studies, which covers just about the same disciplines

as the latter on a regional scale, on the other, it puts them and their object outside Japanese studies.

That ambiguous positioning is well reflected in the fact that you can find about as many articles on Okinawa in the *Japanese Journal of Ethnology*, *Minzokugaku kenkyū* — now renamed the *Japanese Journal of Cultural Anthropology* — as in *Nihon minzokugaku* (or *Nihon minzokugaku kaihō*), the journal of the Folklore Society of Japan. The former carries articles that deal mostly with foreign countries, while the latter specializes almost exclusively in Japan. Looking at their contents over the past fifty years, I have tried to see whether it was possible to identify the kinds of article published in the one or the other journal. As expected, many of the articles in *Nihon minzokugaku* are concerned with beliefs, cults, rituals, *onarigami*, *utaki*, *nenjū gyōji* or cosmology. The descriptions they contain remain close to indigenous concepts, or, if you want, to the “emic” level. Those in *Minzokugaku kenkyū* are more often concerned with kinship and descent, in particular with kinship terminology, *munchū* groupings or *noro* succession, as well as with economics, linguistics and present-day questions of memory and identity. Their analytical tools are also more abstract, or, in other words, these articles are more likely to aim at an “etic” level of description.

But these are only global tendencies. In fact, there is no clear-cut distinction between the two journals as regards Okinawa, and the same author can contribute to both. You have articles on kinship terms, *munchū* and succession in *Nihon minzokugaku* and articles on *yuta*, cosmology, rituals or *utaki* in *Minzokugaku kenkyū*. Moreover, one can hardly say that the articles in the latter journal adopt a more comparative perspective, apart from the fact that they approach their subject with concepts more likely to be familiar to western social anthropologists.

Concerning the approach of each journal to kinship questions, the November 1967 issue of *Nihon Minzokugaku*, contains an interesting article entitled “The structure theory in the studies of the family and kinship system in Japan and Okinawa: Yanagita (Kunio)’s folklore studies and social anthropology 日・琉族制研究における構造論：柳田民俗学と社会人類学”, in which the author, Muratake Seiichi, introduces social anthropological concepts to revisit important notions of family organization discussed by Japanese folklorists.

Now, we can have a larger view of the scholarly approach to Okinawan culture and society during the past century by taking a look at two special issues of the journal *Minzokugaku kenkyū* devoted especially to Okinawa. The comparison between them can give us an idea of the transformations that took place in that research field after World War II.

The first issue, published in 1950, gathers some of the most important folklorists and historians of the first half of the century, the “old guard” of Okinawan studies if one may say: Yanagita Kunio, Orikuchi Shinobu, Yanagi Sōetsu, Shimabukuro Genshichi, Kinjō Chōei, Higaonna Kanjun, Higa Shunchō, Nakahara Zenchū, Ōtō Tokihiko, among other contributors. A striking feature shared by all of the articles on folklore and language — not to mention prehistory — is that they remain tied into the prewar problematics of Okinawa as a conservatory of ancient Japan. For folklorists, in particular, research on Okinawa should help

reconstruct primitive shintō⁴ and shed light on the origins of the Japanese culture. Therefore, comparisons only serve the purpose of identifying influences from neighboring Chinese and Korean cultures. However, it should be noted that, in his foreword, Ishida Eiichirō, the editor-in-chief of the journal, quite clearly advocates the extension of comparative research on Okinawa to regions beyond the vicinity of Japan. Although he, too, takes for granted the cultural affinity between Okinawans and Japanese — summed up in the phrase *dōso dōkei* 同租同系 — he thinks that this is too-narrow a perspective to do full justice to the specificity of the Okinawan “ethnos”.

The second special issue of *Minzokugaku kenkyū*, published twelve years later — in 1962, the year Yanagita Kunio died — offers a contrasting picture in several respects. Significantly, it is introduced by Nakane Chie, a social anthropologist. It also gathers, among other specialists, Itō Mikaharu, Noguchi Takenori, Ogawa Tōru, Josef Kreiner, Seki Keigo and Ōgo Kinichi. Compared with the previous special issue, three main differences appear. Firstly, most of the contributions are based on intensive fieldwork in a local community or a limited area. Secondly, the issue is almost entirely devoted to questions of kinship and social organization. Thirdly, the articles contain both formal comparisons with societies other than Japan and quite a few references to the publications and vocabulary of western social anthropologists.

A chronological outline of Okinawan ethnology.

Now, I would like to give a rough outline of the evolution of Okinawan ethnology as I see it. First of all, I must allude to the invaluable material contained in pre-Meiji literature: the *Sappōshi-roku* 冊封使録, the *Ryūkyū-koku yuraiki* 琉球国由来記 or the *Irōsetsuden* 遺老説伝, among tens of other sources, including, of course, the *Omoro-sōshi*, an object of special study. On everyday life and material culture, the notes of Nagoya Sagenta 名越左源太, entitled *Nantō zatsuwa* 南島雑話, are an outstanding source of detailed information. Nagoya Sagenta, a Satsuma officer who sojourned in Amami-Ōshima between 1850 and 1855, should be properly considered as a forerunner of modern folklorists. Pre-Meiji observations by Westerners are of no importance here.

Starting from the Meiji era, or more appropriately from the end of the *Ryūkyū-shobun*, I would distinguish three phases, which are separated by the publication of Iha Fuyū’s *Ko Ryūkyū* 古琉球 in 1911 and by the ending of the Pacific War.

The first phase is one of discovery. It follows the creation of Okinawa Prefecture, and corresponds to the *kyūkan onzon* 旧慣温存 interlude and to the period of administrative reforms. During the first two decades of the Meiji era, the Japanese authorities themselves launched several surveys, known as *kyūkan chōsa* 旧慣調査, on the customs in the newly integrated territory.

⁴ See, in particular, Yanagita Kunio’s interest in the spiritual power of women and in *nirai kanai* as a reminiscence of *tokoyo no kuni*.

Apart from newspaper articles, reports on Okinawa appeared in scholarly journals such as *Jinruigaku zasshi*, *Tōkyō Jinruigaku zasshi*, *Chigaku zasshi* or the local *Ryūkyū kyōiku*. In 1896, the popular magazine *Fūzoku Gahō* 風俗画報 put out a special issue on the customs and rituals of Okinawa.⁵

Collecting data on Okinawan customs and manners (*fūzoku* 風俗, *shūzoku* 習俗) in that period seems to have been a concern limited to mainland Japanese. The two most famous of these curious visitors were Tashiro Antei and Sasamori Gisuke.⁶ The former stayed in Okinawa from 1885 to 1887. He was born in Kagoshima and was commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture. The latter, who originated from Hirosaki 弘前 in Tsugaru *han*, today's Aomori Prefecture, stayed in Okinawa and Amami-Ōshima from 1893 to 1898. He, too, was concerned with questions of agricultural development, and he assumed official responsibilities while he was in Amami-Ōshima. A third visitor of note, Katō Sango, curiously also hailed from Hirosaki. He was a natural science teacher at *Okinawa-kenritsu chūgakkō* from 1900 to 1903. All three were interested in every aspect of Okinawan culture and paid much attention to the southernmost islands of the prefecture (Sakishima). Today, Sasamori Gisuke's *Nantō tanken* 南島探験, published in 1894, which is in the form of a travel diary, remains the best known work of that period. Yanagita Kunio wrote that it was *Nantō tanken* that first aroused his interest in Okinawa. Tashiro Antei published several articles on religion in *Jinruigaku zasshi* and *Tōkyō Jinruigaku zasshi*. In his *Ryūkyū no kenkyū* 琉球の研究, Katō Sango had a more methodical approach, which heralds the practice of later folklorists.

Among the foreign visitors who published notes on Okinawan customs, one may name William Furness and, more importantly, Basil Hall Chamberlain. The latter was a British professor of Japanese and philology at Tokyo Imperial University and the grandson of Captain Basil Hall who came to Okinawa in 1816. B. H. Chamberlain spent no longer than one month in Okinawa in 1893. Apart from his well-known study of language, in which he highlights the affinities between Ryukyuan and ancient Japanese, he gave several interesting lectures on Ryūkyū at the Royal Geographical Society in 1895.⁷

I believe that Chamberlain's observation on the difficulty of defining where Ryūkyū stands exactly in relation to Japan can also account for a similar perception by Japanese visitors: If one takes language and customs as "guides", he wrote, "it is by no means easy to

⁵ For the most part, that special issue was translated by Douglas G. Haring under the title *Okinawan Customs. Yesterday and Today* (Charles E. Tuttle, 1969).

⁶ On the life and work of Tashiro Antei, see 中生勝美「田代安定伝序説：人類学前史としての応用博物学」東洋英和女学院大学『現代史研究』7, 2011年 3月: 129-164.

⁷ B. H. Chamberlain, "The Luchu Islands and Their Inhabitants", *The Geographical Journal*, vol. V (4, 5, 6), April, May, June, 1895: 289-319, 446-462, 534-544. He also published two articles in the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*: "Two Funeral Urns from Loochoo" (vol. 24, 1895: 58-59), and "A Quinary System of Notation Employed in Luchu on Wooden Tallies Termed Shō-Chū-Ma" (vol. 27, 1898: 383-395).

say in each case whether similarity between Ryūkyū and Japan arises from original identity or from borrowing, or whether, on the other hand, differences should be ascribed to original unlikeness, or to the fact of one or other country having preserved intact features of the common past which the other has let drop.”⁸

But doubts were soon to be dispelled. The title of an article published in 1914 by the German Edmund H. Simon, who visited Okinawa in 1910, set the tone for the coming time: “*Riukiu. Ein Spiegel für Alt-Japan*” (Ryūkyū. A Mirror of Ancient Japan. 古代日本の鏡としての琉球).

The second phase of Okinawan ethnology is dominated by the figures of Iha Fuyū, rightly designated as “the father of Okinawan studies”, Yanagita Kunio, himself called “the father of Japanese folklore studies”, and Orikuchi Shinobu, who had also some serious claims to fatherhood. It is the period when the first generations of Okinawans educated in modern institutions become involved in research activities. The sheer volume of Iha Fuyū’s publications prevents any attempt at presenting them here, even from the limited angle of folklore studies. Several biographies can be found on him. To his seminal *Ko Ryūkyū*, already mentioned, I would only add *Onari-gami no shima* をなり神の島, published in 1938, because of the significance of its title. Yanagita Kunio visited Okinawa during the first two months of 1921, and his *Kainan shōki* 海南小記 soon appeared afterwards as a series of articles in the *Asahi Shinbun*. Orikuchi Shinobu traveled three times to Okinawa: in 1921, 1923 and 1935. His short essay *Ryūkyū no shūkyō* appeared in 1923. As it is well known, his notion of *marebito* owes much to Okinawa’s *raihōshin* 来訪神 traditions. Other titles in the monumental bibliographies of these two foremost scholars mention Okinawa or Ryūkyū, but it is, in fact, their entire works which are filled with references to these islands. Yanagita Kunio expressed the opinion of many other scholars when he defined the study of Okinawa as a crucial task for the understanding of Japanese culture.

Judging from these scholars’ approach, the second phase of Okinawan ethnology appears to be characterized by extensive surveys of short duration, accumulation of data, internal comparisons or comparisons with Hondo. But the whole picture is much at variance with that impression. Considerable numbers of Okinawan researchers, often teachers, devoted themselves, sometimes for the most part of their lives, to the study of a small area. Neither were they inclined to draw comparisons with mainland Japan. Let me quote two names: Shimabukuro Genshichi, the author of *Yanbaru no dozoku* 山原の土俗, who studied villages in the western part of Kunigami, and Kiyomura Kōnin, the author of *Miyako shiden* 宮古史伝, for Miyako Island. Many other examples could be given.

The great number of specialized journals in that period is something to be noted. They were often linked with scholarly associations. I will merely mention the society founded in 1922 on Yanagita Kunio’s initiative, the Nantō danwa-kai 南島談話会 — renamed Nantō bunka kyōkai in 1931 — which gathered folklorists, historians and linguists from both the

⁸ “The Luchu Islands and Their Inhabitants”, *op. cit.*, vol. V (4): 317.

mainland and Okinawa. Among the Okinawans, one finds Iha Fuyū, who moved to Tōkyō in 1925, Higa Shunchō, Nakahara Zenchū, Kinjō Chōei, Shimabukuro Genshichi, Miyanaga Masamori. The society had its own collection of monographs entitled *Rohen sōsho* 爐邊叢書, and it later published a journal, *Nantō danwa*, as a supplement to *Tabi to densetsu*.⁹

In Okinawa as in mainland Japan, the development and social recognition of folklore studies is accompanied by a sort of standardization in the designation of the research topics. The distinction between folklore studies and history would however always remain blurry: folklorists and historians often work closely together, when it is not the same person who wears both hats, for example Iha Fuyū, Sakima Kōei and many others. Folklorists — certainly more than social anthropologists — have a natural disposition to turn to the past in search of original or purer forms of traditions.

This whole period was infused with the quasi-official tenet of the common origin of Okinawans and Japanese, *Nichi-Ryū dōsoron* 日琉同祖論, which had received the scientific backing of physical anthropology in the person of Torii Ryūzō. The elites and a large share of the population made it their own and strove to conform to the Japanese model. But if Okinawa had preserved essential aspects of Japan's ancient culture, as scholars liked to see it, it was now lagging far behind Japan in terms of development. The historical gap also fed suspicion about its inhabitants' qualification to be true and loyal nationals, and this would justify the implementation of a resolute policy of Japanization of manners and language. In other words, although the inhabitants of Okinawa were recognized as ethnic Japanese, they were nonetheless compelled to undergo a process of "assimilation", *dōka* 同化.

Folklorists most likely felt a sense of urgency as regards the collection of material on rural traditions that were on the verge of disappearing, either as a consequence of socio-economical transformations or because now they were simply prohibited. It is the case, for instance, of the evening gatherings of young people called *mō-ashibi* 毛遊び, which not infrequently gave occasion for sexual intercourse. As in Europe, students of tradition often happened to be, at the same time, supporters and agents of modernization policies at a local level. A school head and a mayor of Chinen, Arakaki Magoichi is a good example of that ambiguous positioning. Through their work, I think, Okinawan scholars of the 1920s and 30s, following Iha Fuyū himself, and in common spirit with mainland scholars like Yanagita Kunio, Yanagi Muneyoshi and many others, aspired to make Okinawa fully a part of Japan and conceived of a national culture that would not reject the originality of its cultural heritage.

Two foreign scholars deserved to be mentioned for the period now under discussion. Both were linguists, with an excellent command of Japanese, and folklorists, close to Yanagita Kunio's circle: My countryman Charles Haguener, already mentioned above, who visited many places on Okinawa Island, and the Russian Nikolai Nevsky, who undertook intensive

⁹ On the intimate connection between folklore studies in mainland Japan and in Okinawa, see 屋嘉比収「郷土研究の興隆」『沖縄県史・（各論編5）近代』2011年：305-327.

research on Miyako Island, but whose very rich material still awaits publication for the most part.¹⁰

The coming on stage of social anthropology marks the third phase in the evolution of Okinawan ethnology. It begins in actual fact in the early 1950s and extends, with palpable changes, to the present day. As everyone knows, following Japan's defeat, Okinawa Prefecture was placed under U.S. Administration. During that period, which lasted until 1972, it was renamed the Territory of the Ryūkyū Islands.

Within the framework of the research project entitled Scientific Investigation in the Ryukyu Islands (SIRI), sponsored by the Pacific Science Board of the National Academy of Sciences and the U.S. Army, a number of American anthropologists carried out fieldworks in various village communities from 1950 and into the early 1960s, but mostly in the early 1950s. Clarence J. Glacken, who was trained as a geographer, Forrest R. Pitts, William P. Lebra and Wayne P. Suttles did field research on Okinawa Island, William W. Burd and Allan H. Smith on Karimata in Miyako and on Kabira in Ishigaki, respectively.¹¹

Their surveys follow a holistic approach that comprises every aspect of village life, including economic and political aspects. Family relations, child education and land tenure receive much attention. Some of these surveys concern several villages for the sake of comparison.

There are also two PhD dissertations written in the same years: Richard W. Lieban on the land tenure system on Kudaka Island, and Thomas W. Maretzki on Taira, whose research focused on childhood and education.¹² Douglas G. Haring is another American scholar who should be mentioned. Born in 1894, and familiar with prewar Japan, he studied *noro*-related cults and kinship in Amami-Ōshima.

One may surmise that these studies, which could find a model in John F. Embree's prewar study of the village of Suye in Kyūshū,¹³ have in fact had little influence on Japanese scholars. Today, William P. Lebra remains known for his general study of religion in Okinawa Island, which he carried up to 1961. It appeared as a book in 1966. As the title of its Japanese translation, *Okinawa no shūkyō to shakai kōzō*, makes explicit, the author describes religious beliefs and practices from a perspective that differentiates between levels of social

¹⁰ See Alexander Kabanoff, "Unpublished Materials by Nikolai Nevsky on the Ethnology of the Ryūkyū Islands", *Nachrichten der Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens*, Heft 153, 1993.

¹¹ C. J. Glacken, "Studies of Okinawan Village Life", SIRI Report 4, 1953 (published as a book: *The Great Loo-Choo: A Study of Okinawan Village Life*, University of California Press, 1955); F. R. Pitts, W. P. Lebra, W. P. Suttles, "Post-War Okinawa", SIRI Report 8, 1955; W. W. Burd, "Karimata, a Village in the Southern Ryukyus", SIRI Report 3, 1952; A. H. Smith, "Anthropological Investigations in Yaeyama", SIRI Report 1, 1952 (the study resulted in an article: "The Culture of Kabira, Southern Ryūkyū Islands", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 104, 2, 1960).

¹² R. W. Lieban, *Land and Labor on Kudaka Island*, Ph.D. diss., Columbia Univ., 1956; T. W. and Hatsumi Maretzki, *Taira, an Okinawan Village*, New York, Wiley, 1966.

¹³ John F. Embree, *Suye Mura. A Japanese Village*, University of Chicago Press, 1939.

organization, from the top of the State to the domestic and individual levels.¹⁴ Lebra may also be most likely credited for having introduced the term shaman to designate the *yuta*. Sakurai Tokutarō's book of 1973, *Okinawan shamanism*, would then confirm and establish that usage. Less remembered than Lebra's book, the slim publication edited by Allan H. Smith in 1964, *Ryukyuan Culture and Society*, presents contributions by American and Japanese authors which convey original insights into the subject.¹⁵

In mainland Japan, where the question of the cultural and social identity took on a new importance after the loss of overseas territories, the discipline of social anthropology gained much influence in the community of social scientists throughout the 1950s and 60s. Obviously that evolution resulted from both the refocusing of former overseas ethnological research on domestic issues and the extraordinary development of social anthropology in the West. Save for the Amami-Ōshima archipelago, the administrative separation of the Ryūkyū Islands from Japan made it difficult for mainland scholars to resume field research there before the 1960s. Mabuchi Tōichi, a veteran of overseas anthropology influenced by the Leiden school of structuralism, managed, however, to visit Okinawa as early as in 1954. (That outstanding scholar of international repute would deserve to have an entire lecture devoted to his achievements.)

Faced with a tremendous diversity and richness of publications, I will limit my comments to pointing out three general aspects of these studies which indicate, in my opinion, a renewal of Okinawan ethnology under the influence of social anthropology. 1) A tendency to do long-term research based on a pattern of village study and participant observation. Noguchi Takenori on Ikema-jima, in Miyako Islands, or Cornelis Ouwehand on Hateruma are perfect examples. But the study has often a narrower focus, like the rituals or the descent groups in a village community. Countless examples could be given. It would be otiose to tell you that the experience of participant observation differs when you are an Okinawan-born scholar and when you are a mainland scholar.¹⁶ 2) A strong focus, at least until about 1990, on kinship issues, such as systems of terminology, concepts of descent, or social and ritual functions of kin groups. The reform of genealogies toward patrilineality also received a great deal of attention. Among so many possible examples, allow me to quote a few names only: Ogawa Tōru, especially on kinship terminology, and someone who also turned to historical sources, Higa Masao and Muratake Seiichi on *munchū* and community rituals, and Tanaka Masako, whose 1974 dissertation concentrates totally on kinship and descent in one village, Inoha, in

¹⁴ W. P. Lebra, *Okinawan Religion. Belief, Ritual, and Social Structure*, University of Hawaii Press, 1966. 翻訳 W. P. リーブラ 『沖縄の宗教と社会構造』 弘文堂 1981年.

¹⁵ A. H. Smith (ed.), *Ryukyuan Culture and Society. A Survey*, University of Hawaii Press, 1964.

¹⁶ 野口武徳 『沖縄池間島民俗誌』 1972年; Cornelis Ouwehand, *Hateruma. Socio-religious aspects of a South-Ryukyuan island culture*, Leiden, 1985.

Motobu.¹⁷ 3) An interest in comparisons between Okinawa and societies other than Japan, which concerns mostly kinship, myths, beliefs and rituals. With Korea, Taiwan and China, comparisons may reveal ancient influences, as exemplified in Kubo Noritada's publications, but comparisons are also made with societies in South-East Asia and Oceania from a formal or structural viewpoint.¹⁸ I have in mind, for instance, the comparisons drawn by Mabuchi Tōichi between Okinawa and societies in Oceania, with an allusion to Africa, concerning the spiritual predominance of the sister, or the comparison made by Yoshida Teigo and Andrew Duff-Cooper between Okinawa and Lombok in Indonesia.¹⁹ Mabuchi Tōichi could also be quoted for his detailed analysis of tales about the origin of grains in insular Eastern and Southeastern Asia, or for his comparison of cult group affiliation among the Miyako Islanders and the Puyuma.²⁰ Comparative research may even lead much further, as shown by the late Higa Masao's interest in cave-related beliefs of Southeastern France. Of course, all those studies implicitly reinforced the originality of Okinawan culture, which is now no longer riveted to mainland Japan for comparisons.

Ten years after the 1962 special issue of *Minzokugaku kenkyū* mentioned before, the Japanese Society of Ethnology edited a book that epitomizes these orientations: *Okinawa no minzokugaku-teki kenkyū* 沖縄の民族学的研究 (The ethnological study of Okinawa), with the subtitle "Traditional society and the representation of the world" 民俗社会と世界像.²¹ The book, prefaced by Kubo Noritada, notably contains a comparative analysis by Nakane Chie of the *dōzoku* and *munchū* types of grouping in Okinawa, Hondo, Korea and China. But one has to admit that it also gives clear evidence that social anthropology in Okinawa depends deeply, in most cases, on the bountiful material gathered by folklore studies.

Now I would like to mention, briefly, a particular topic that owes much to the social anthropological approach of small societies as microcosms. It is the description and analysis of the symbolic order 象徴的秩序, also called world-view or cosmology, *sekaikan* 世界観, at the village level. The material itself was already known to folklorists, but scholars like Mabuchi Tōichi and Muratake Seiichi brought to its treatment a specific attention to

¹⁷ 小川徹 『近世沖縄の民俗誌』 弘文堂 1987年; 比嘉政夫 『沖縄の門中と村落祭祀』 三一書房 1983年; 村武精一 『神・共同体・豊穰』 未来社 1975年; Tanaka Masako 田中真砂子, *Kinship and Descent in an Okinawan Village*, Ph.D. diss., Rochester, 1974.

¹⁸ 窪 徳忠 『中国文化と南島』 第一書房 1981年.

¹⁹ 馬淵東一 「姉妹の靈的優越」 1964年; 「おなり神をめぐる類比と対比」 1968年; Teigo Yoshida 吉田禎吾 and Andrew Duff-Cooper, "A Comparison of Aspects of Two Polytheistic Forms of Life: Okinawa and Balinese Lombok", in Glenys Davies (ed.), *Cosmos 5: Polytheistic Systems*, Edinburgh University Press, 1989: 213-242.

²⁰ 馬淵東一 「沖縄の穀物起源説話」 1964年; "Optional Cult Group Affiliation among the Puyuma and the Miyako Islanders", in W. H. Newell (ed.), *Ancestors*, The Hague, Mouton Publishers, 1976. On Mabuchi Tōichi and Okinawa, see 赤嶺政信 「馬淵東一の沖縄研究: 沖縄民俗研究における民俗学と民族学」 『琉球に魅せられた人々: 外からの琉球研究とその背景』 琉球大学公開講座委員会 1996年.

²¹ 日本民族学会 (編) 『沖縄の民族学的研究: 民俗社会と世界像』 1973年.

hierarchical constructs, dualism 二元論 and ritual reversals.²² Suzuki Masataka and Watanabe Yoshio undertook research in the same vein on Hateruma and in Higashi, respectively. On Hateruma also, the exceptional monograph — the result of twenty years of work — published in 1985 by the Dutch scholar Cornelis Ouwehand is almost exhaustively concerned with symbolic orientations and ritual movements.²³ However, that former structuralist, Leiden style, totally abstained from implementing any structural analysis, lest it could tarnish descriptions that he deemed more important than any theoretical and precarious considerations.²⁴

Conclusion.

I will not go further with this chronological outline. Since the 1980s, there has been no let-up in the dismantling of traditional communities. *Kami* and ancestors may well still roam the sacred groves (*mui* 森), *norō* and *tsukasa* have become extreme rarities, while *munchū* and *yuta* have adapted to the urban environment. Modern ways of communication, if it is not the brutality of war itself and the U.S. occupation, have long challenged the age-old *sekaikan*. One may thus wonder what has now become of Okinawan ethnology? The replacement of “social anthropology” by “cultural anthropology” (witness what happened to the venerable journal *Minzokugaku kenkyū* in 2004²⁵) indicates the likelihood that the old social structures have been replaced by forms of organization and types of activity that need new tools, and new concepts to be apprehended. Remnants of the past are still there for those who want to study them, but they do not account for much in the lives of today’s Okinawans.

The range of the individual existence, the *Umwelt*, to borrow from the German, has obviously widened in physical space, of course, but even more so in the *semiosphere*. Today, anthropologists eager to understand what matters in a developed society such as Okinawa turn their eyes toward new objects of study such as individual involvement in political issues or campaigning, attitudes toward the U.S. presence, the evolution of religious practices, health care workers, healers, the aged, tourism, and so on, including new meanings deriving from the folklorization of traditional festivals. If one aims at understanding individual behavior in today’s context, notions of psychology and cognitive science are certainly more appropriate than a detailed diagram of the socio-symbolic order. Identity is no longer seen as something that is given by birth once for all, but a construct resulting, supposedly, from personal agency,

²² 馬淵東一「琉球世界観の再構成を目指して」1968年; 村武精一「南部琉球における象徴的二元論」1964年.

²³ See above.

²⁴ See his article “Some notes on the god Suza-no-o”, *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. XIV (3-4), 1958-59, and his book *Namazue and themes. An interpretative approach to some aspects of Japanese folk religion*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1964.

²⁵ In passing, let us note that no more than four or five articles on Okinawa have appeared in *Minzokugaku kenkyū* or *Bunka jinruigaku* since 2000.

and which can be questioned repeatedly during a lifetime. Memory, likewise, is now evoked to bring flesh and meaning to history when not simply to rewrite it.

Concerning Okinawan identity, it clearly appears that prewar folklore studies gave implicit countenance to the policy of Japanization, whereas postwar studies, and in the first place social anthropology and history, by contrast helped the Okinawans to discover the originality of their cultural and historical heritage and to take pride in it. But “identity” is not an easy notion to handle. In that respect, there was an interesting issue of the late *Minzokugaku kenkyū*, published in 1996, in which, on the one hand, Higa Masao questioned the constituent elements of that identity from a territorial viewpoint, and, on the other, Tsuha Takashi, of Ryūdai, explained that a shared non-Yamato consciousness goes together with a self-identification as being Japanese, on what I would call the political plane.

Although I have pointed out new orientations brought by social anthropology into Okinawan studies, my overall impression, I must confess, is that it does not make much sense to look for essential differences between folklore studies and social anthropology within the Okinawan context. For one thing, Japanese publications and authors make these designations quite approximate, if not confused. But also, contrary to their western counterpart, Japanese folklore studies have been so intimate with their object, and for a long period of time, that, whatever methodical or conceptual difference with social or cultural anthropology they may evince, there is actually no room for the two disciplines to develop apart from each other or to specialize, for the one, on what lingers from the past, and for the other, on what innovation arises from tradition. If any *hazama* really exists between folklore studies and social/cultural anthropology in Okinawa, as in mainland Japan, it is indeed of the very narrowest nature!