

# Religious Function and Modality in Community Life

— Kamusu: the Ritual of Visiting Gods in Irabu Island Okinawa —

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First of all, in this paper, the three types of Okinawan religious roles-- priestess' (Noro and Yukiuma) and shaman (Yuta) will be introduced. Then, an actual example of the *kamusu* ritual from the Irabu Islands, Miyako Archipelago, Okinawa will be examined, as well as the function of the folk religion and the way priestess' and shaman's work will be discussed. Also the nature of the group and participants who support the *kamusu* ritual, and the process of the *kamusu* ceremony are explained. Music and dance; and their creation mythologies are also analyzed. Through those examinations, the significance of the *kamusu* ritual in community life is revealed. In conclusion, *kamusu* is the ritual which is reflected by and composed of gender roles, as well as political and economical life.

## I Outline of Okinawan Priestess and Shaman

### 1. Prototype Classification

Because each of the islands have diverse historical backgrounds and geographic conditions, religious practitioners who live in Okinawa are not easy to classify. Nevertheless they can be divided into three broad categories as follows;

(1). Priestess' who preside over the community ceremonies including *kamusu* : namely Noro, Negami in Okinawa main island, and Tsukasa in Miyako Islad.

They are usually chosen from distinct families. In certain districts, Tsukasa are elected by ballot. Unlike shaman, they do not go into trance, and refrain from any activities associated with death or blood. They have a higher status among other Okinawan religious practitioners.

(2). Priestess' who preside over ancestral souls are namely; Yukima, Kudii, Munchugami, Umuringua or Kankakariya. They perform rites in honor of the ancestral souls, pray for happiness of kinfolk, and join in the community ceremonies. They practice possessions by spirit, and under the leadership of Noro, they sing chants.

The qualifications to become such priestess are to be born of the same kinfolk, and to be able to be possessed by spirits. Therefore, some shamanic traces can be recognized in them.

Their social status is the highest after Noro. They also refrain from death and blood impurities. They do not preside over funerals but may worship ancestral souls and can hold death memorial services for the dead.

(3). Shaman are called Yuta, Kankakariya, and other various names. The qualification

to be a shaman is to have ability to be possessed by spirits. Their social status is lower than Noro and Yukima. Unlike Noro and Yukinma, they deal with family or individual problems, they are paid by their clients. Noro used to be paid by the Ryūkyū government in the olden days.

The above three categories are the prototype classifications, in actuality, their roles are often mixed. For instance, Noro is sometimes asked to work as a Yuta shaman by clients, Yuta and or Kankakariya can also observe community ceremonies.

## 2. Classification by Occasion

Even though concepts of trance and possession can be applied, these mental attitudes should be interpreted differently in each case. A Japanese scholar, Masanobu Akamine, points out that it is a different phenomenon when a priestess acts as a god during the occasion of a ceremony than when a Yuta shaman are possessed by gods in every day life. (Akamine 1997)

### II **Kamusu**

*Kamusu* is one of the largest annual rituals held in the Irabu and Nakachi villages which are located in the Irabu Islands, Miyako Archipelago. The emphasis of the ritual is for asking for good fortune from the major god, *To*, plus many other gods, and to show their feeling of thanks to the gods. There are over twenty gods, and their names are enumerated in a chant. *Kamusu* is observed during the first five days of lunar calendar in November and December.

The other terms for *kamusu* are *kamusuori* and *kanmuri*, which literally means 'descending of the gods'. It is believed that the god *To* visits the Island led by the North wind and stays there for three days, then returns by taking a ship sent by the South wind. When god *To* returns, forty members of women called Yukiuma act as the sailors.

These women are named as Yos-no-Funako-no-Oba [literal translation : 40 women sailors]. On the fifth day, the other minor gods also return to the other world. That ceremony is called Kamusunori.

### III **The Organization**

#### Priestess and village women

1. Tsukasa: Three Tsukasa preside over the annual rites. They are elected by ballot from women who are between fifty to sixty-five years of age.
2. Yukiuma, Yos-no-Funako-no-Oba: Forty priestesses chosen from the kinship. They serve a life long membership, and in the case of death, are replaced by a successor chosen by ballot from kinship, in front of the Buddhist altar. Their only responsibility among annual rites is *kamusu*. They serve the god *To*, and ask for good fortune for the village. At the present time, the number of Yukiuma has decreased, because of a shortage of descendants and a refusal to do the work.
3. Ayagutatsu: Two singers who lead singing, chosen from Yukiuma.
4. Sara-no -uma: A singer who sings a chant «Sarapayashi» are chosen by ballot from women aged fifty-five to sixty-five.
5. A group of village women

### Village Men

As stated before, men participate only before the ceremony, as helpers to prepare for the ceremony. At the very last day of the ceremony, a representative Shiju-nare comes to the entrance of the sacred precinct, and express a gratitude for the end of the ceremony.

1. Cho-no-shu: Set the dates of the ritual. Men aged fifty to fifty-five are chosen by ballot. The period of the duty is three years.

2. Ogan shu: Men aged thirty-three years old, help the priestess and his status is the highest among the male age groups. He does not join the ritual.

3. Shiju-nare: Men who are twenty-eight years old are servants who serve priestess.

4. Ugandumu: Men who are twenty-eight years old are savants who serve shiju-nare.

5. Kanisazu: A boy who is seventeen years old, does liaison contact work.

### IV Process of November Kamusu

#### Process of November Kamusu

Date	Time	Ritual	Place	Role	Chant
Oct.		Settings of dates	House of Cho-no-shu	Cho-no-shu	
2-3days before the ritual		Making of sake			
Oct.	a.m.	Preparation of Kamusu	Kamusha	Tsukasa	none
Nov. 1st day	p.m.	Kamusuori	Nakadozu Utaki	Tsukasa	none
			Adanni Utaki	Yukiuma & Tsukasa	Chant I, Chant II, Kannagi Ayagu
			Katamuni	Yukiuma & Tsukasa	Chant II, Kannagi Ayagu
			Sumui	Yukiuma & Tsukasa	Chant II,
	Night	Okoma Negai	Okoma Za	Yukiuma & Tsukasa	Musi & Dance
2nd day	Dawn	Morning dance	Odori Za	Yukiuma & Tsukasa	Chant I, Chant II, Kannagi Ayagu
	a.m.	Uikaza	Odori Za	Yukiuma & Tsukasa	none
	p.m.	Nanusu	Putoki Za	Tsukasa of Noshi Utake	none
	Eve.	Evening dance	Odori Za	Yukiuma & Tsukasa	Chant I, Chant II, Kannagi Ayagu
	Night	Ceremony of Thanks	Okoma Za	Yukiuma & Tsukasa	none
3rd day	Dawn	Morning dance	Odori Za	Yukiuma & Tsukasa	Chant I, Chant II, Kannagi Ayagu
	a.m.	Prayers	Okoma Za, Odori Za Putokiza	Yukiuma & Tsukasa	none
	p.m.	Prayer for family prosperity	Nushi Shrine	Yukiuma & Tsukasa Sara-n0-uma	Kanna-gi ayagu, Sarapayashi
		Acting of large catch of fish	Southern entrance & Kamusha	Tsukasa	Izutoubudur
			Front road of Kamusha	Tsukasa	Kuicha of Kannagi Ayagu
	Eve.	Evening dance	Odori Za	Yukiuma & Tsukasa	Chant I, Chant II, Kannagi Ayagu
	Night	Yonaha-ugan	Front road of Kamusha	Yukiuma & Tsukasa	Funausage, Chant II
Infront of Kamiya entrance			Yukiuma & Tsukasa	Kannagi Ayagu	
4th day	Same as 2nd day				
5th day	Dawn a.m.	Morning dance	Odori Za	Yukiuma & Tsukasa	Kannagi Ayagu
		Bow to Mansan	Odori Za	Yukiuma & Tsukasa	none
		Kamusu-nori	Village entrance	Yukiuma & Tsukasa	Kuicha of Kannagi Ayagu
			Kai	Yukiuma & Tsukasa	Kannagi Ayagu

## V Music and Dance

Music and dance are interwoven in the *kamusu* ritual. In fact the core of the ritual is music and dance. Before discussing *kamusu* music, how human behaviors deal with religion will be clarified.

The components of religion are the ideas and actions that are related to divine supernatural beings. Taking an example of actions from Shinto ritual is as follows: ①fasting, purifying oneself; ②preparing an altar: opening the door from which a god comes, and invitation of a god; ③making an offering of food and wine; ④reciting a prayer; ⑤performing a theatrical play, dance and or music; ⑥offering a branch from the sacred tree to a god, and making a bow; ⑦removing the offerings; ⑧closing the door, after the returning of god; ⑨holding a banquet.

The main substances of ceremonies are body movements: actions, dance; and sound phenomena, music.

Now revert to the subject, during the five days of ritual, from early morning to midnight, the priestess' sing and dance. Nevertheless, the number of chants are not many, and only seven kinds are used. These are (1) two types of short phrases of shoutings; (2) Kannagi Ayagu; (3) Sarapayashi; (4) Izutsubuduri; (5) Kuicha; (6) Funausagi; and (7) Kannagi Ayagu.

*Shouting* 【Ex.1】 The constant rubbing sounds of tree branches, and the repetitious shouts produce a strange atmosphere: 'Yakuyo yakuyo hoi hoi hoi' which is intended to invite the gods in. As it is repeated persistently for a long time, it may be heard as the voice of the gods themselves. The priestess' may feel as though the gods appear among them. After the gods have descended, the priestess' (together with the gods) march to the shrine, Kamusha. During the procession, they chant the Chant II. A high falsetto voice of 'u rururu' is an exclamation of warning not to come near. Nobody, especially men should encounter them or even be seen by them. Otherwise misfortune will fall upon them.

*Kannagi Ayagu* 【Ex.2】 is the song which is sung many times during the ritual. The text of the song is an enumeration of the gods' names, and a prayer for good fortune. The number of gods are twenty-six.

The music is constructed of 7-tones, and the tone system is B flat major and la mode. There are 3 short phrases, and the register of the melody is low which makes them easy to remember in order to sing.

*Sarapayashi* 【Ex.3】 is sung on the third day. The meaning of the text is "We offer sake, therefore please listen to our prayers."

The music is constructed with 5-tones, with an interval of a major 6. The tonal system is an anhemitonic pentatonic scale, which is a very common tonal system found in Japanese folk songs. The singing style is responsorial, and the chant is sung in alternation between a leader soloist called ayagutatu in Japanese, and the other members of the group. Hand gestures mimic an offering of food and sake and in receiving presents from the gods. Sarapayashi uses a 3 stanza unit, and after singing each unit, they drink sake. There are 10 units in all, therefore the priestess must drink 10 times.

【Ex. 1】 Chant I Yakuyo

$\text{♩} = 80 \sim 84$

(2 measures = 4beats, or 4measures = 8beats) Ya ku yo Ya ku yo Ya ku yo

8 Ya ku yo (10 measures = 22beats - 15 measures = 30beats) Ho

leader

15 members  
15 i Ho i Ho i

【Ex. 2】 Kannagi Ayagu No.13 ~ 14

$\text{♩} = 100 \sim 104$

Ba shi nu \_ \_ ka \_ nu o ka gi n ya gu \_ myu \_ i \_ \_ no o ka gi n \_

he ga yo no yu ya na o re O zu \_ no \_ shu \_ \_ o ka gi n ya ku \_ myu \_

11 i \_ \_ no o ka gi n \_ he ga yo no yu ya na o re

*Izutsubuduri* [Ex.4] The title is literally means "catch fish dance". This song is sung on the third day. The meaning of the text is to pray for a large catch of fish. The melody is borrowed from folk song Komi no Shu. The music is constructed with 4-tones, with an interval of a major 6. The melody is structured with 3 phrases. This transcribed melody is sung by an 80-year-old woman in a very vague way.

*Kannagi Ayagu no Kuicha* [Ex.5] is also sung on the third day. Unfortunately, the recording which was taken by Hatakeyama some twenty years ago, has lost its quality of sound, therefore it was not transcribed. The tonal system alone is shown in Ex. 5. At the end of each stanza, the priestess' laugh for joy.

*Funausagi*: [Ex.6] is presently an extinct song as the present priestess' do not know how to sing it, they have replaced it with Kannagi Ayagu. A retired priestess, Mrs. Kani-mega IKEMA, an old woman, sang it by our request. The singing might not be accurate. The tonal system is rather awkward.

*Kagitabiga Ayagu* [Ex.7] is sung on the harbor road, on the third day. The meaning is "God, we will accompany you on your voyage, may our voyage be a beautiful one. God, Please come back again". The music is constructed with 7-tones, with an interval of an octave and perfect 4th. The tonal system is an anhemitonic pentatonic scale. The melody is structured with 4 phrases.

We know that the characteristic of the most of Okinawan folk songs are in a unique scale as shown at the end of the musical Examples. But none of the chants sung in *kamusu* are in that scale. The Okinawan scale has 2 hemitones. Only one song, Kannagi Ayagu, is structured of an hemitonic scale.

The tempo is m.m. ♩ =60 to 104, at a rather moderate speed. The rhythmic pattern is not vigorous. As a whole, the construction of the melodies are simple and short. These melodies are repeated numerous times. This construction is the typical form of music performed in shamanistic rituals all over the world.

The dance movements are simple. The typical dance movements that are performed in every songs are as follows. The priestess' hold two branches of Ryoukyu Aoki (a type of laurel tree) one in the right hand and one in the left hand; they alternately move them up and down, making a rustling sound many times. The priestess' stand up straight and make a circle, facing to the center, and dance in a counter clockwise direction.

The dance and music are most effective for creating the intense trance-like state of the women. And the significance and purpose of the ritual will be imprinted vividly in their minds by the singing and dancing.

As stated before, the *kamusu* ritual is restricted to females only and men are excluded. Being male researchers, this information about the music and dance was not acquired by attending the actual ritual, but acquired by the explanations by some *kamusu* women members. When Hatakeyama made a study some twenty years ago, the most important chants, Funausagi and Kagitabiga Ayagu were not offered, because these chants are too divine to reveal to an outside researcher.

In June 2001, the authors of the study visited Irabu Island, and we were lucky in that these secret songs were offered by two old ladies who retired from the *kamusu* ritual a

long time ago. One of the retired priestess', before she sang songs to us, prayed to the gods most reverently at the household shrine alter and asked for the god's permission. We both joined her in prayer and received a good answer from the gods.

The whole *kamusu* ritual displays pseudo mass hysteria and mass hallucination. Shamanic elements can be seen in not only individual behaviors but also in collective behaviors. Originally the *kamusu* ritual must have been shamanistic, but over many generations, it has become more stable and fixed in style. Even so, clear examples of its shamanistic roots can still be seen today in the way they perform the ritual.

Within shamanistic rituals, elements of formalities are inevitably contained, and they might develop into fixed stable styles. Shamanistic elements, even though vague, have remained in Christianity, Buddhism, Shintoism, and other world religions. The *kamusu* ritual may be one of the good examples that contains both elements clearly.

### 【Ex. 3】 Sarapayashi

♩ = 80

Leader

Members

Ti n ga \_ na su u i \_ \_ ga na su u \_ ka \_ gi n yo Ti n ga \_ na su

u i \_ \_ ga na su u \_ ka \_ gi n yo To yo mu \_ bya zu o bu \_ \_ yu no su

Members

To yo mu \_ bya zu o bu \_ \_ yu no su u \_ ka \_ gi n

yo N ma nu \_ pa nu n ti \_ \_ yu nu su u \_ ka \_ gi n yo

Members

Leader

N ma nu \_ pa nu n ti \_ \_ yu nu su u \_ ka \_ gi n yo U ya gi yu ma sa rya

Members

Leader

Members

ga U ya gi yu na u rya ga

【Ex.4】 Izutsubuduri

♩ = 60

Ba no no ka mi ka mi \_ ya yo do nu ri ya ga nu nya ga yo ha i shu no ka \_ mi ya  
 ya i ma no shu do yu su ma no shu A ra pa na no nu su \_ ya yo pa su mi te no  
 nu zu ya yo ha i shu no ka \_ mi ya ya i ma no shu do yu su ma no shu

Takefusa SASAMORI · Atsushi HATAKEYA Music EX. p.2

【Ex.6】 Funausagi

♩ = 76

I ra u ka \_ ra na ka tsu ka \_ ra i ra ba ryo \_ fu na ko no yu na \_ o re  
 nu ma no a \_ ra ko mi no a \_ ra i ra ba ryo \_ yo fu na ko no yo

【Ex.7】 Kagitabuga Ayagu

♩ = 60

Ka gi \_ ta \_ yu \_ bu no \_ yo ne ga i so o o de hi ya ru \_ ga \_ \_ he  
 chu ra \_ yo ta bi \_ no yo \_ \_ ni ga i \_ so \_ yo ka ri u sha yo \_ hi \_ ya ru ga \_ \_  
 he No no \_ ya \_ yo \_ pa i \_ yo o to \_ mo \_ so de hi ya ru \_ ga \_ \_  
 he i cho \_ ya yo pa \_ i yo \_ \_ o to mo \_ so \_ yo ka ri u sha yo \_  
 hi \_ ya ru ga \_ \_ he

Tonal systems of *Kamusu* Music

Ex.1 Ex.2 Ex.3 Ex.4 Ex.5  
 Ex.6 Ex.7 Okinawan scale

♩ = 60 ~ 104

Takefusa SASAMORI · Atsushi HATAKEYA Music EX.



## VI Creation Mythology

There are several mythologies related to the Nushi Shrine and the origin of the *kamusu* ritual.

### (1) Oldest mythology related to Nushi Shrine.

There was a beautiful maiden named Tamamega. When she was fifteen or sixteen years old, she went to the beach to draw water from the sea, and disappeared. Three months later, she appeared at the Nushi mountain, and told a villager that, she would become the guardian goddess for the island, and left her sleeve as a keepsake. Her parents and the villagers buried it and made a shrine there.

### (2) Recent mythology related to Nushi Shrine.

A husband and wife named Obukani had a beautiful daughter Tamamega. She was so beautiful, that after she was fifteen years old, in order to disguise her as being ugly, she had to put pan soot on her face when she went out. One year, the island met a drought.

Villagers did not know how to pray to the gods for rain. Obukani went to the other island Yaeyama to learn the prayer. The North wind sent his boat to Yaeyama, and when the South wind would blows, he would come back. The day the South wind started to blow, Tamamega was very happy and went to draw the water from the sea. Using the water, she intended to make tofu (bean curd). She was in hurry that she forgot to put soot on her face. She was then lost. Villagers searched after her but were not successful. Three month later, the sounds of handloom-weaving were heard at Nushi mountain. That night, she appeared there. Her parents hung on to her sleeve, but she disappeared tearing off the sleeve and became the guardian goddess of the island. Her parents and villagers buried the sleeve and worshiped her as a shrine goddess.

### (3) Mythology related to Kamusu.

During the time the Miyako archipelago were governed by the Ryukyu Kingdom, the islanders were ordered to pay a tributary. Since nobody wanted to go to Ryukyu, forty sailors were chosen by ballot. Before the journey, they prayed for fulfillment at the Noshi-Utaki (Nushi Shrine). They arrived safely to Ryukyu, but on the way back they met with a storm and the ship drifted. A Chinese ship later saved them and took them to China. Then they were able to return to Irabu Island. It was thought that the divine protection by the shrine kept them safe on their journey, and so a “thanking ritual” was held at the Nushi shrine.

Originally, the mythologies on the *kamusu* and Nushi Shrine were independent stories. The first one is the oldest creation mythology of Nushi Utake written in the book Ryukyu-koku Yurai-ki [Origin of Ryoukyu Kingdom] (1712). The second one is the present oral tradition, and must have developed from the first mythology. And from it, the third mythology must have developed, which was that of the safety prayer for sea navigation. Those mythologies mingled together and developed to present *kamusu* ritual mythology.

## VII Discussion and Conclusion

### Presiding priestess' become ritual priestess'

The Tamamega mythology tells that, Tamamega was the servant, or supposedly a wife

of a god, then afterwards became a goddess herself.

The person who serves the god, and tells the god's oracle to villagers will be accepted by the villagers as a living god. Tamamega was a priestess who prayed for her father's safe voyage and her prayer was fulfilled. Then she became the guardian goddess of the village. The same situation applies to Yukiama in the *kamusu* ritual. They send off the god *To*, pray for the god's safe journey, and at the same time, they become the living god Sailors, "Funako gami", blessed by the god Tamamega; each of forty priestess becomes Tamamega.

#### Participation of Male

The male age groups are blessed by priestess' and they support the ritual, even though they do not actually attend the ceremonies. Before the ceremony they donate money, prepare for this and that. Even though these errands are their duty, women in the family do the work taking the place of men. The mythology tells that the cooperation between the women and men will make a good ritual, and will lead to the village's prosperity.

#### The forming of the Mythology in Kamiya

These mythologies must have been gradually made up by the forty-three priestesses. Separated from their village, forty-three women crowd into a small room, and stay for four nights, and five days. Without much sleep, and strenuous tension. They say that they are so tired and after the ritual, they stay in bed for several days. Those conditions may have originally helped to create the mythology. The segments of the story are, the concept of visiting gods, mythology related to the shrine near by, the Okinawa Kingdom and its power, experience of being drift at sea, and the geographic intimacy with China. These components have well put together by the priestess'. It is not certain whether there were original set texts of the mythology, or when the mythology had actually formed, but the above condition may reflect the forming of the mythology.

The secret ritual and exclusion of any male participants reflects a social construction based upon the islander's ideas of gender. And the ritual reinforces the traditional island social order. Even though the ritual is in danger of diminishing, because of rapid social changes, the islanders are still happy to hold the ritual. And just holding the "form" of the ritual itself has become their enjoyment.

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