
Association of the Sun and the Rice in Japanese Myths and Rituals

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Summary: The Sun-goddess Amaterasu, being the supreme deity of Shintô, is closely associated also with the rice crop throughout the mythology as well as in her cult celebrated at the Inner and Outer Shrines of Ise. She even obviously shows some of the characteristic traits common to the rice deities of the East Asian rice cultivators. A similar tendency to connect a solar deity with the rice is found also in folk beliefs and lores all around Japan; one of the conspicuous examples being the Tentô festival of the island of Tsushima, in which a straw bag containing grains of a special kind of holy red rice is most solemnly revered as an incarnation of a solar deity.

The most prominent figure of Japanese mythology is the resplendent Sun-goddess Amaterasu (Glorious-Shiner-of-Heaven). She is claimed to be the divine ancestress of the Imperial Family and to rule universe sovereignly and magnanimously from her realm, the Plain of High Heaven (Takamagahara), where eight millions of celestial deities submit themselves willingly to her command. According to one version of the myth, she is one of the three last born and noblest children of her divine father, Izanagi. This god was sent down in primordial times from Heaven with his sister, the goddess Izanami, who became also his wife, on their arrival to the lower world. They gave birth first to the islands of the Japanese archipelago then to a large number of deities of various kinds. But the birth of the god of fire, Kagutsuchi, burning the genitals of the mother goddess, proved fatal to Izanami. Grieving at the death of his beloved wife, Izanagi pursued her all the way to Yomotsukuni, the subterranean realm of the dead, but finally failed, in spite of all his efforts, to bring back Izanami to life. After his solitary return to the upper world, Izanagi purified himself in a stream, in order to get rid of the pollutions occasioned by his contact with death. Many deities were produced from this lustration, and, in the very end, there came into existence three especially precious children; first, out of the left eye of the divine father, Amaterasu; then Tsukiyomi, the Moon-god, out of his right eye; then, an exceedingly powerful and impetuous god, Susanowo, out of his nose.

According to the myth recorded in the Kojiki (712 A. D.), Izanagi, rejoicing immensely at

their sight, declared: "After begetting a great number of children, now I have obtained at last three truly noble descendants". Then he took off his necklace of jewels, and bestowing it solemnly on Amaterasu, he ordered her to become the ruler of Heaven (Takamagahara). Tsukiyomi was entrusted with the dominion of the night; the realm allotted to the rule of Susanowo was the sea.

In one version of the myth in the *Nihonshoki* (720 A. D.), it is narrated that Tsukiyomi was at first associated with Amaterasu in the rule over Heaven. But this cohabitation of the two main heavenly bodies was not to last long, for soon a serious conflict had to occur between them.

One day the Moon-god was sent down to the earth by Amaterasu, to see what a certain Food-goddess Ukemochi was doing. Thereupon Ukemochi wished to entertain the heavenly visitor and, turning her face first toward the land, disgorged a plenty of boiled rice. She then faced the sea; there gushed out from her mouth various kinds of fish. And when she faced the mountains, games of all sorts came forth from it. Tsukiyomi however became so enraged, because the Food-goddess offered him provisions vomited from her mouth, that he slew her forthwith with his sword.

Then the Moon-god returned to Heaven and gave to Amaterasu a full account of what he had done on the earth. Upon this, the Sun-goddess was exceedingly angry, and said to Tsukiyomi: "I have no intention of seeing a wicked god like you any more". Thereafter the sun and the moon ceased to appear at the same time in Heaven so that the night became distinguished from the day.

After this Amaterasu dispatched a deity called Amanokumahito on reconnaissance to the earth. Upon his arrival, he found that out of the corpse of the murdered Food-goddess had emerged various useful stuffs, especially edible plants: the horse and the cow had been produced from her head; silkworms from her eyebrows; millet from her forehead; panic from her eyes; rice from her belly; wheat and beans from her genitals. Amanokumahito brought back all these things to Heaven and delivered them to Amaterasu, who was much rejoiced and declared that the millet, the panic, the wheat and the beans should be cultivated in the dry fields on the earth to become the food for the race of men. As for the rice, the Sun-goddess created for its first cultivation holy rice-fields in Heaven, where she obtained that very autumn a splendid crop that was exceedingly pleasant to look upon.

Amaterasu also instituted the art of silkworm rearing, putting the worms in her mouth and pulling out thread from them.

This myth indicates clearly a very close association of the Japanese Sun-goddess with the rice crop, which seems to constitute indeed one of her main concerns. This is also quite evident from the above-mentioned myth of the *Kojiki*. For after relating Izanagi's solemn conferment of the necklace of jewels on Amaterasu, the text adds that the name of that necklace is Mikuratananokami, that is to say a deity of the rice-grains in storehouses. Thus the insignia symbolizing Amaterasu's sovereignty over Heaven was itself a deity representa-

tive of the rice crop.

The closest ties Amaterasu has with the rice crop are accounted even more vividly in stories about her conflict with Susanowo. For the youngest brother of the Sun-goddess was exceedingly unruly. Instead of ruling the realm entrusted to him by his divine father, he caused every sort of calamities, so that Izanagi finally became enraged and expelled him. Thereupon he ascended to Heaven to take leave of his sister. Amaterasu, however, was convinced that her brother was coming up to usurp her dominion and met him, fully armed and with an extremely firm attitude. In order to testify to the goodwill of Susanowo, the two divinities agreed to exchange properties and thereby to beget children.

This dramatic encounter of the two great divinities took place on the banks of a heavenly river called Yasu. Amaterasu and Susanowo were standing, facing one another, on the opposite sides of that river, and first the Sun-goddess asked and obtained from her brother a sword he was wearing. Then she broke this sword into three pieces, washed them in a heavenly well, chewed them to pieces, and blew them out from her mouth. In the mist produced thereby, three goddesses were born.

Then Susanowo asked and obtained from Amaterasu, successively five strings of curved jewels (magatama). And washing them one after another in the heavenly well, chewing them to pieces and blowing them out from his mouth, he produced five male gods from them.

Amaterasu declared thereupon to Susanowo: "The latter-born male children, being begotten from my properties, are undoubtedly mine; the first-born female children are yours, because they came into existence from your property".

Thus the immaculate Sun-goddess became nonetheless the mother of three divine sons, while keeping forever her chastity. Through the first-born of these sons, the god Amenoo-shihomimi, whom she cherished, according to one version of the myth, so exceedingly, that she carried him always in her armpit, Amaterasu is mythically the divine ancestress of the Imperial Family.

On the other hand, by the birth of the tender maidens as his children, Susanowo succeeded in convincing Amaterasu of the affectionate sentiments he had toward his sister. Then exulting in this success, he started to indulge himself in all sorts of outrageous conduct, and went so far as to destroy the divisions and the ditches of the holy rice-fields, which Amaterasu was cultivating in Heaven. Moreover he defiled, scattering his own defecation, the building in which Amaterasu was to celebrate a sacrosanct ceremony of tasting the first fruits of her rice-fields.

Amaterasu's mercy was so immense that she made every effort to overlook these gravest blasphemies without reproaching. But this extraordinary benevolence of the Sun-goddess was of no avail to her unruly brother, whose misdeeds, instead of ceasing, became even more flagrant. Finally, making a hole in the roof of another building, in which the weaving of the divine garments was being executed under Amaterasu's personal supervision, he dropped a flayed horse in the midst of the holy work. Seeing this, a maiden deity, who was engaged in

the task, was frightened so much that she struck her genitals against the shuttle she had in her hand and died.

This last offense, because of its atrocity, was unbearable even for the mercy of Amaterasu, so that, without delay, the horrified Sun-goddess hid herself in a heavenly rock-cave, closing firmly its door. As the source of light had disappeared, the whole world became entirely dark and filled with all sorts of calamities.

So the eight millions of celestial deities assembled and, after deliberations, they decided to celebrate a grand festivity in front of the rock-cave, in order to lure out the Sun-goddess from there. First they gathered cocks together and made them cry. Then they produced two especially precious articles, a mirror and a string of curved-jewels (magatama), which they hung on a holy evergreen tree. And while one deity held it reverently in his hands and another deity recited a solemn liturgy, a beautiful maiden goddess called Amenouzume executed, before the door of the rock-cave, a dance making much noisy sounds by her footsteps. And while dancing, she fell into a trance and uncovered both her breasts and her genitals. At this unusual sight, the eight millions of celestial deities burst all at once into so uproarious a laughter, that the Plain of Hight Heaven trembled thereby.

Amaterasu, who heard this tumult in her hiding place, became curious to know what was going on outside, opened slightly the door of the heavenly rock-cave and asked Amenouzume why she and the other celestial deities could make merry and laugh so joyously, notwithstanding the retirement of the Sun-goddess, that should have plunged the whole world into an utter darkness. To this Amenouzume answered: "We rejoice and laugh because there is now among us a deity who is superior to you."

And while she was speaking these words, other deities extended the mirror hung on the tree toward Amaterasu, so that the Sun-goddess, seeing her own resplendent reflection in the mirror, became more and more curious and gradually came out of the door. Thereupon a strong male deity, who was standing hidden nearby, took her hand and pulled her completely out.

No sooner had the Sun-goddess reappeared, then the universe was brightly illuminated and disorder vanished therewith in a moment.

This story, which seems to refer quite evidently to such solar phenomena as the reappearance of the sunbeam after an eclipse or a storm, or as the annual rebirth of the sun after its provisional death at the winter solstice, has most probably also much to do with the rice crop. For as stated above, Susanowo's violences, that caused Amaterasu's retirement in the rock-cave, were directed above all against her holy rice-fields and the ceremony of tasting therefrom the first fruits. It seems probable that the weaving of the divine garments, as well as the construction of a special ceremonial building, was also a part of the preparation of that sacrosanct ceremony. For this ceremony, which was then being prepared in Heaven, obviously constitutes the mythical proto-type of one of the most important Shinto rituals called Daijōsai, in which each newly enthroned emperor offers to Amaterasu and tastes at the

same time also himself the first fruit of certain holy rice-fields consecrated by solemn rites of divination for that purpose. Each Daijōsai has to be celebrated in a ceremonial building especially constructed for the occasion, which one demolishes soon after the completion of the ceremony, and the wearing of the garments to be offered to Amaterasu forms indeed an important element in the preparation of this ritual.

Thus, as was pointed out by one of the eminent authorities on Japanese mythology Mr. Taryō Obayashi, this retirement of the Japanese Sun-goddess due to the violences against her rice crop and the ritual practices thereto related resembles quite obviously to the behaviour which is often attributed in Indo-Chinese myths to rice-deities. The inhabitants of the Indo-Chinese peninsula recount indeed often in their myths that a rice-deity was once gravely offended by an illtreatment or violences and took flight or retreated in some hiding place: in a hole made by a crab, for example, in a myth of the Karens of Burma.

Thus it seems assured that the Sun-goddess in Japanese mythology has at the same time the nature of a divinity of rice. Amaterasu's closest association with rice is quite evident also from her shrine of Ise at Uji-Yamada. For the main buildings, as well as the buildings attached thereto, of this head sanctuary of Shinto have manifestly a form resembling to Japan's traditional storehouse for the grain of rice. Moreover the shrine of Ise is constituted of two separate precincts about four miles apart from each other called respectively Naigū or the Inner Shrine and Gegū or the Outer Shrine. And while the Inner Shrine is Amaterasu's own sacred habitation, the Outer Shrine is dedicated to a goddess of food called Toyouke. Toyouke is, to be sure, another name of that goddess Ukemochi, whose corpse, according to an above-mentioned myth, had produced among other things the first rice, which Amaterasu cultivated in her holy rice-fields in Heaven. A tradition narrates that Amaterasu once ordered herself in a dream to Emperor Yūryaku to invite Toyouke by her side in order that this goddess might take care of her food, saying that otherwise she could not eat at ease. And this is why the Outer Shrine was founded by that Emperor in A. D. 478. This story shows particularly well Amaterasu's inseparability from the goddess, whose most important duty is the production of rice from her body, and who seems almost to be an alter ego of the Sun-Goddess.

To return to the mythology, after Amaterasu's reappearance out of the heavenly rock-cave, the celestial deities expelled from Heaven Susanowo, who, descending to the region of Izumo (present Shimane prefecture), killed there a huge monster serpent with eight heads and so many tails. From one of these tails, he obtained a marvelous divine sword, which he sent as a tribute to Amaterasu. This sword, together with the mirror and the string of curved-jewels produced by the celestial deities to lure the Sun-goddess out from the heavenly rock-cave, was to become one of the three divine regalia, called Sanshu-no-Jingi, of the Imperial Family.

By this exploit, Susanowo also saved from the mouths of that monster a maiden goddess, who became his wife. By far the most important of the numerous descendants of this divine

couple is the god Ôkuninushi (Great-Master-of-Land), who endeavoured to make the Japanese archipelago a fertile land suitable for the mankind. For this he was helped by a curious dwarf god called Sukunahikona, who came down one day all of a sudden from Heaven to become Okuninushi's brother and his dearest associate.

When this laborious task had been accomplished, Amaterasu, seeing from Heaven that the land had now become really suitable for yearly producing an abundant rice crop, desired to send there her beloved son Amenooshihomimi, commissioning him to become the sovereign ruler of the Japanese archipelago. The Sun-goddess had however much difficulty to persuade Ôkuninushi to submit the land, of which he was the master, to the rule of Amaterasu's son.

After successive failures of the two divine envoys dispatched from Heaven for that purpose, the Sun-goddess sent finally a powerful sword-deity called Takemikazuchi, whose irresistible strength prevailed over Ôkuninushi. He agreed to abandon the sovereignty over the earth, on condition that a magnificent residence should be constructed for him to retire thereinto. This is the origin of the grandiose shrine of Izumo, called Izumotaisha and dedicated to Ôkuninushi, which constitutes, after the shrines of Ise, the most important holy place of Shinto. They say that all the local deities of the Japanese archipelago assemble and reside therein annually during the month of October of the lunar calendar, doing homage to Ôkuninushi who remains ever the same their master, so that the majority of the Shinto shrines throughout the country become then vacant of their divine inhabitants.

As the long awaited report of Ôkuninushi's effective submission reached Heaven, Amaterasu commanded again her son Amenooshihomimi to descend to the earth and assume the sovereignty over the Japanese archipelago. At that very moment, however, a goddess, who had become the spouse of this deity, gave birth to a male child, called Hononinigi, so that the Sun-goddess instantly decided to send this newborn grandson to the earth in the stead of the latter's father, who was reluctant to leave the side of his affectionate heavenly mother.

It seems quite obvious that this child god inherited from his august grand mother not only the nature of a solar deity but also that of a deity of rice. For his name refers apparently to the beautifully ripen ears of rice plants and one can point out a number of detailed similarities between his descent to the earth and the appearance from the heavenly rock-cave of the Sun-goddess. The five celestial deities, indeed, whom Amaterasu appointed to be her grandson's escort throughout the latter's journey to the lower realm, were precisely the very deities who had played the most conspicuous roles during the bustling festivity celebrated in Heaven with a view to luring the Sun-goddess out from her hiding place.

Furthermore, one of the five attendant deities was none other than that strange maiden goddess Amenouzume, whose audacious exhibition of the breasts and the genitals had caused the tightly closed door of the heavenly rock-cave to be opened and the Sun-goddess to make therefrom her radiant reappearance to the universe. And it is recounted that on this occasion also she had recourse to similar sorts of gestures; this time to get rid of the

obstacles to the advent of Amaterasu's grandson to the earthly realm.

Indeed, while the party was about to take its departure, it was reported that a strange gigantic and luminous god with an abnormally long nose and huge round and ruddy eyes was standing at the crossing of all the heavenly roads leading to the earth, as if fiercely blocking the advance of the deities descending from Heaven. Thereupon Amenouzume made boldly her way to the presence of this horrific god and, facing him with a mocking smile, bared there again both her breasts and her genitals. And these gestures forthwith provoked the opposing god to speak, revealing his identity as a powerful earthly deity called Sarutahiko and offering to show the Sun-goddess's grandson the way of his descent, so that the latter together with his escort could proceed without a hitch, under Sarutahiko's vigilant guidance, all the way to the earthly realm, and alight a peak in the island of Kyushu.

The child god Hononinigi's closest association with the rice crop is plainly attested also by the very appellation of the locality of his arrival on the earth. For the peak concerned is called Takachiho, or High Heap of Thousand Ears of Rice. Moreover it is narrated in the Nihonshoki that, in addition to the above-mentioned three divine regalia, Amaterasu had conferred also upon him ears of rice from her own holy rice-fields in Heaven just before his descent.

Another version of the myth recounts that when this descent took place no heavenly body was as yet shining upon the earthly realm, so that there was no distinction at all between the day and the night and people were utterly at a loss because they could not distinguish things. Thereupon two local deities said to Hononinigi that in order to make the world bright he had only to pull out a thousand ears of rice and scatter the grains obtained therefrom in all directions. No sooner had Hononinigi put this advice into practice than the sky became brightening thanks to the sun and the moon making therein their appearance. The text adds that this is why that locality is called Takachiho from that time onward.

A strong tendency to connect a solar deity with the rice is often quite evident also in Japanese folk beliefs and lores. At a southernmost locality of the island of Tsushima called Tsutsu, for instance, a special kind of red rice is cultivated in a holy rice-field dedicated to a local deity called Tentô, the Sun. After the harvest, a straw bag containing its grains is brought to the dwelling of the villager acting during the year as priest and hung therein from the ceiling. This is considered to be an incarnation of Tentô and treated with the utmost care and respect. Annually in the middle of the night of the 10th of January, this divine straw bag is most carefully taken down and carried to the house, whose master is to assume thenceforward the priesthood. During the transportation the carrier has this divine object on his back and covers it with his own gown, as if it were a dear child. On its arrival the straw bag is again hung down from the ceiling and a banquet is held thereunder to close the solemn ritual.

日本の神話および祭儀に見られる、太陽と稲の結びつき

吉田敦彦

日本神話で太陽女神アマテラスは、同時に稲の女神とも見なせるほど堅密に、稲作と結びつけられている。この女神と稲の結びつきはまた、大嘗祭や伊勢神宮の祭祀にも、明瞭に看取できる。その上、天の石屋の神話に語られている、アマテラスの性質と振る舞いには、インドシナなどの神話で稲の神霊について語られていることと、明らかな吻合が認められ、そのことからこの女神

が、稲の神格化された存在ともみなせる面を、持っていたことが窺われる。このように太陽と稲を、同一の神格に結びつける傾向は、日本の民間の信仰や祭りにもしばしば見られる。その顕著な例の一つとして、赤米の種子扱俵を、天道と呼ばれる太陽神的神格の御神体として、丁重に取り扱いながら崇める、対馬の豆扱の祭りを、挙げることができる。
