# The Introduction of Plant Cultivation into Prehistoric Japan and related Magico-Religious Concepts.

Kokubu Nao'ichi

## 1

The Korean peninsula gives the impression of a gigantic hand reaching out from the Asiatic continent towards our islands.
Thinking in terms of cultural diffusion, it seems a foregone conclusion that in many cases continental cultures first entered Korea and then, nurtured in the peninsula, reached our shores.

There can be little doubt about the continental derivation of plant cultivation in peninsular Korea. Its introduction via diffusion routes leading from a) North China to the northeast and gradually seeping south, b) along the coast of Pohai Bay and c) from Shandong across the narrow stretch of the Yellow Sea can not only be envisaged, but are to some extent supported by archaeological data. Yet another route leading from South China via the river Huai to southwest Korea is also considered. There is archaeological evidence for the northern routes, but also for a southern route emanating from the Southeastern seaboard of China.

The second stratum of Sejugri(細竹里)in Pyongan Pu-do contains apart from plain pottery, black pottery, including tou(豆) vessels, and stepped adzes, stone sickles and stone knives. The stratum above it yielded bronze, iron, Chinese stamped (geometric) pottery and a pottery, presumably influenced by Han pottery, Bu-qian and Ming-dao-qian coins (布銭・明刀銭).
Stratum II indicates a plant cultivation culture of Southchinese deriva-

tion, appearing in the northern coastal area of the peninsula around the end of the Warring States period. It is not known whether wet-rice cultivation was at that time introduced to the northern coastal region, but there is a strong possibility that upland rice was among the crops cultivated in dry fields.

Evidence for a diffusion route leading from Southchina via the river Huai( 淮河 ) to the southwest of Korea is to be seen in the appearance of bronze swords of Chinese style, concentrated in coastal areas of Cholla-do (金羅道) as pointed out by Professor Cheon-You-Rae( 金栄来 ) who dates them to late Spring and Autumn, or early warring States.

The introduction of dry-field cultivation to the Korean peninsula is to be dated into later comb-pottery times, but in areas south of central Korea, rice cultivation dates to the plain pottery period.

In analogy with the cultural sequence in Korea, the beginnings of dry-field agriculture in Japan can be dated into late late Jomon, or latest Jomon, followed with some time-lag by wet-rice cultivation at the end of latest Jomon. This suggests to my mind that at least grain cultivation introduced through North Kyushu, came overwhelmingly via the peninsula, irrespective of an ultimate origin of the grains in either North, or South China.

Nevertheless, in recent years circumstances suggesting that on rare occasions, there might have been a direct route from Southchina across the East China Sea have come to light. What appear to be stamped Southchinese pottery sherds have been found at Fukue, Goto (五島, 福江 ) Nagasaki Prefecture and Hiji ( 日出 ) on Kunisaki Peninsula of Oita Prefecture. The later find has been dated latest Jomon on the basis of associated pottery finds.(trial excavation). Without anticipating the results of a future full-scale excavation, use of a direct route from Southchina, although probably rare, must be seriously considered, provided the above find situations are interpreted correctly. However, no associated additional Southchinese artifacts and/or elements, or evidence for plant cultivation are available from these sites at present.

2

An introduction of plant cultivation into Japan by the southern route is feasible. In recent years the vision of a movement out of the gigantic culture reservoir that is Southchina and Taiwan into the Yaeyama archipelago of the Ryukyu Islands has finally emerged. Its key elements are millet and tubers. As pointed out by Professor Sakamoto Yasuo (坂本寧男), not only are different varieties of millet planted on the Batan Islands, respectively Lan Yu (蘭嶼) and the upland regions of Taiwan, agricultural rituals of these areas differ as well. On the Batanes non-glutinous millet (uruchi awa) is planted, whereas glutinous millet is cultivated in Lan Yu and Taiwan. Although tropical varieties of Yam are cultivated both on the Batanes and in Lanyu and the upland regions of southern Taiwan, Yam is the focus of agricultural rituals in the Batanes, whereas in Lanyu and the entire area of Taiwan inhabited by ethnic minorities, not only the upland areas in the south, millet is the focus of agricultural rituals.
Professor Sakamoto therefore, suggested that glutinous millet was in early times introduced into Taiwan across the South China Sea from the moutainous regions of Southeast Asia or Southchina.

The Yami migrated to Lan Yu from the Batanes, but it is believed that they obtained glutinous millet through contacts with the ethnic minorities of southern Taiwan.

Mochi(rice cake) and sake is made from glutinous millet in an area extending from the Ryukyus to western Japan. Historical and cultural circumstances in this area strongly indicate that millet was an object of rituals.

In respect to tuber cultivation, the precedence of tropical Yam and Taro with diploid chromosome count over temperate Yam and Taro with triploid chromosome count has been confirmed on Iriomote.
Whereas there are abundant finds of stone implements thought to be agricultural tools, in the early prehistoric period of Iriomote (西表) (Yaeyama archipelago), pottery is extremely rare. Plentiful finds of

burnt stones indicate the use of earth ovens for the preparation of food. It may, therefore, be surmised that in early times, tubers were probably prepared for consumption by this method in island regions.

An early introduction or upland rice into the Ryukyu islands from islands to the south has recently been advocated by Professor Watabe Tadayo, but the present author believes that the introduction from Southchina, or Anam may probably not predate Ryukyuan-Ming trade relations.

3

Finally, I wish to note several magico-religious concepts connected with the cultivation of plants.

An elongated, narrow boat type with sharply curved bow and stern is seen on rock engravings at Pangu Dae, Ulju (蔚州, 盤亀台), South Korea. One boat is situated between animals which may be interpreted as gigantic whales. On this boat is a vertical pole furnished with a finial of bird feathers.

If this interpretation is permissible, it brings to mind the chinuri-kulan-boat of Lan Yu and its vertical pole furnished with a finial of bird feathers.

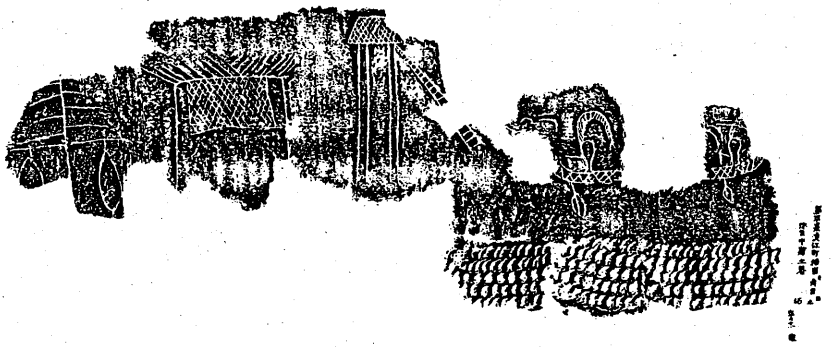

Fig. 1 A village and boatmen with feathered headdresses depicted on a Yayoi vessel found at Inayoshi, Yodoe-chō in Tottori Prefecture. Rubbing obtained from Sasaki.

Longboats of this presumably Southchinese type are also depicted on Yayoi time pottery found in coastal areas of the Sea of Japan and on bronze dotaku. Is it not entirely feasible that seafaring Yue who brought rice cultivation to the Korean peninsula, may have also entered the Sea of Japan?

Yayoi pottery excavated at Yodoe, Tottori Prefecture (see Fig. 1) is decorated with an incised longboat and a crew with feathercrowns, reminiscent of the boat-and-feathercrown motif so prevalent on Dongson and Shi-zhai-shan (石寨山) bronze drums. This motif has been interpreted by V. Goloubev as a funeral escort, as an indication of sun worship by M. Colani, and as send-off of the dead soul to the world of the setting sun by Matsumoto Nobuhiro (松本信広).

The present author inclines to agree with Matsumoto's view.

This same scene is also seen on murals in burial mounds in north Kyushu.

When escorting the ancestral spirits on the last day of O-bon, it is customary on some islands, to send them off on "bird-boats" set adrift on the western sea where the sun sets.

Boats depicted on the central decorative band of a bronze dotaku found at Inomuka, Fukui Prefecture (see Fig. 2) are propelled in exactly the same way as the chinu-rikulan of the Lan Yu Yami. The three boats depicted may represent a boat race in the context of a festival. The

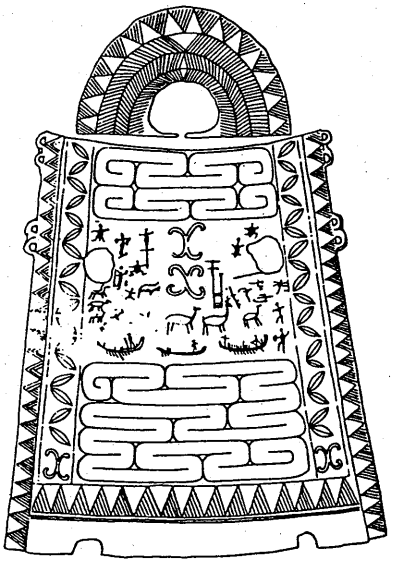

Fig. 2 Birds perched on poles and gondola-type boats on a *dōtaku* found at Inomuka in Fukui Prefecture (Sahara, 1979, p. 14).

illustration of a bird on top of a pole above the boats, is strongly reminiscent of the sacred bird-poles of the Korean peninsula which can possibly be traced back to the "soto" mentioned in the Han zhuan of the Wei chin (魏志韓伝). The present author agrees with Akiba Takashi (秋葉隆) that the "sottai" (蘇塗) as well as the later sacred poles are to be seen in the context of northern shamanism.

In recent years finds of small Korean dotaku in North Kyushu have significantly increased. In Takuda Nishibun, Saga Prefecture, a pottery taku (鐸) and a wooden representation of an aquatic bird were found with deer bones, presumably used for divination, in an early middle Yayoi context. Can it be that the bird was attached to the pole in the way of a "sottai" and the pottery taku added? The small dotaku of Korean derivation found in north Kyushu in recent years, were probably attached to vertical poles. These vertical poles, introduced from Korea, were originally an element of northern shamanism, used in the context of agricultural rituals.

The worldview of Southchinese rice cultivation was characterized by pronounced snake worship, as exemplified by scenes of human sacrifices to gigantic snakes (see Fig. 3), decorating the lids of shell containers found in Shi-zhai-shan. Human sacrifices to gigantic snakes were made in ancient Tien (滇) and customary in the rice cultivating societies of Southchina and the Huai drainage area. The concept of human sacrifices to the snake spirit probably entered Japan during the introduction process of Southchinese wet-rice cultivation in the form of a myth, later recorded in sources like the Kojiki and Nihonshoki.

Fig.3 Bronze cowrie-container decorated with drum and a scene of offering human sacrifice.