

JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY  
AND THE INDO-EUROPEAN  
TRIFUNCTIONAL SYSTEM

As I have pointed out in a series of papers, which appeared about fifteen years ago in the *Revue de l'histoire des religions*,<sup>1</sup> there are numerous resemblances between the ancient myths of the Indo-Europeans, on the one hand, and those of Japan, on the other. These resemblances, relating both to the fundamental structures of the two mythological systems and to a number of curious details, constitute an assemblage which seems too conspicuous to be regarded as either accidental or the result of a similitude of human mentalities, manifesting itself, so it seems, through the creation of a great many similar myths and legends throughout the length and breadth of the surface of our planet.

As we know today, thanks to the immense and really magisterial comparative studies of Georges Dumézil,<sup>2</sup> the Indo-Europeans had originally in common a peculiar conception of

<sup>1</sup> "La mythologie japonaise: essai d'interprétation structurale," *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 160, 1961, p. 47-66; 161, 1962, p. 25-44; 163, 1963, p. 225-240.

<sup>2</sup> See especially Dumézil, *L'idéologie tripartite des Indo-Européens*, Brussels, 1958.

the world based on a tripartite division of society: what Dumézil has termed the *Indo-European trifunctional system* or *tripartite ideology*. They thought that human society had to be composed, at least ideally, of three clearly distinct social orders, each assuming a different social duty: 1) priests and sovereigns; 2) warriors; 3) producers of food and riches. By extending this tripartite division to the whole universe, the Indo-Europeans deemed further that occult powers or fundamental principles corresponding to a great extent to the respective activities of these three social orders—that is to say the first, second, and third functions of Dumézil's terminology—were operating jointly in the world in natural as well as in supernatural phenomena; so that, among the Indo-Europeans, divinities also were divided into three classes: 1) first-functional or sovereign gods; 2) second-functional or warrior gods; 3) third-functional gods, whose actions were considered to extend over such various but obviously related matters as fecundity, wealth, health, physical beauty, sensuality, peace, etc.

In the Japanese myths recorded in the *Kojiki* and the *Nihonshoki*, we find a large number of expressions, in various forms, of a tripartite conception, which is very similar indeed to this *Indo-European trifunctional system*. In the above-mentioned series of papers, I presented a fairly large number of these expressions and proposed a hypothesis that they could be due to influences from Scythian myths, which might have diffused from the Asiatic continent to Japan via the Korean peninsula, probably at the beginning of the so-called *Kofun*-era (from the late 3rd to the mid 6th centuries A.D.), as a result of the migration of certain nomadic peoples of Central Asia. Thanks to some important discoveries made lately during the excavation of several Korean royal tombs, we know for certain today that the influence of the Scythian culture was really very conspicuous in ancient Korea. Indeed, an increasing number of Japanese scholars now assert that excavation of the huge tombs of the earliest Emperors of Japan, not allowed at present by the Imperial Household Agency, might produce results very similar to those obtained by their Korean colleagues.

Moreover, in a number of publications written mostly in

Japanese,<sup>3</sup> I have been endeavoring in recent years to enlarge upon the views previously expressed in the *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, while at the same time, an eminent colleague, Taryo Obayashi of Tokyo University, who can surely be deemed the best authority we have at present on Japanese myths, has been conducting from the same viewpoint some important analyses of both Japanese and Korean myths, and the results obtained by him,<sup>4</sup> seem largely to confirm the legitimacy of the above-mentioned hypothesis. The aim of this article is to recapitulate some of the main results of these ongoing inquiries, which are throwing an entirely new light upon the origins of Japanese mythology.

#### I. TRIPARTITE DIVISION OF SOCIETY

In the mythological sections of the *Kojiki* and the *Nihonshoki*, we find a tale which clearly purports to present a sort of mythical model of the society to be organized on the Japanese Isles under the rule of the Imperial House. It is the myth narrating the descent from heaven of the divine ancestor of the Tennô-family. This grand-child of the Great Sun-Goddess Amaterasu, accompanied in his descent by a number of heavenly deities, terasu, called Hononinigi, is said in the myth to have been whose mission was to found on earth the leading clans, which would constitute, with the Imperial family itself, the governing class of the Empire, by subjugating the indigenous population descended from earthly divinities. This escort of Hononinigi was composed, so narrates the myth, of two clearly distinct groups. First, there were five deities collectively called *Itsunotomonoo*, or "Five-Attending-Deities," who obviously formed the closest intimates of the Divine Child; they were preceded by an advanced guard consisting of two fully armed warrior

<sup>3</sup> E.g., *Girisha Shinwa to Nihon Shinwa* ("Greek Myths and Japanese Myths"), Tokyo, 1974; *Nihon Shinwa to In-ô Shinwa* ("Japanese Myths and Indo-European Myths"), Tokyo, 1974; *Nihon Shinwa no Genryû* ("Origins of Japanese Mythology"), Tokyo, 1976; *Chiisako to Hainuwele* ("Small Child and Hainuwele"), Tokyo, 1976.

<sup>4</sup> See especially T. Obayashi, *Nihon Shinwa no Kôzô* ("Structure of Japanese Mythology"), Tokyo, 1974.

gods. These latter are said to have become the divine ancestors of two major clans of warriors, the Otomo and the Kume, while the deities of the former group have manifestly strong ties with priestly functions: each of them had made an essential contribution to the important festival organized by the gods with a view to draw out Amaterasu from the Heavenly-Rock-Cave. And after their descent to earth, they became the founders of three priestly clans—the Nakatomi, the Imbe, and the Sarume—as well as two additional clans, the Kagamitsukuri or “Mirror-Manufacturers” and the Tamatsukuri or “Jewel-Manufacturers,” whose duties were to produce, under the supervision of the Imbe priests, the two kinds of sacred tools which were indispensable to the execution of Shintô rituals.

The mythical prototype of Japanese society we find in this tale is thus quite obviously conceived as being composed of two sharply divided parts: 1) the governing class, presented in the myth as issued from the heavenly deities who came to earth with the divine ancestor of the Imperial family, and 2) the common people, whose lot is to labor, just as these latter godheads do, to bring forth for their governors food and riches from the soil of the Japanese Islands. And as the first of these two social classes is further subdivided into 1) a group of priests surrounding a sovereign and attended by the manufacturers of their tools, and 2) a band of warriors, the society as a whole has a tripartite structure, which is apparently identical with the above-mentioned Indo-European scheme:

- A. Governing class (descendants of heavenly deities)
  - 1) priests with a sovereign and makers of sacred tools
  - 2) warriors
  
- B. Common people (descendants of earthly divinities)
  - 3) producers of food, etc.

## II. DIVINE TREASURES OF THE EMPERORS

A similar tripartite scheme is also expressed in the composition of a group of divine treasures mentioned in the same myth.

It is told that when the two supreme deities of heaven, Amaterasu and Takamimusubi, ordered Hononinigi to descend to earth, they bestowed upon him a set of three sacrosanct divine treasures, which still constitute the holy regalia of the Imperial House. These are: 1) a mirror called Yata-no-Kagami, 2) a sword called Kusanagi-no-Tsurugi, and 3) a curved jewel (or a string of such jewels) called Yasakani-no-Magatama. The significance of the mirror is plainly shown, for instance, in the following words, pronounced, according to the *Kojiki*, by Amaterasu when she gave this important article to her beloved grandson: "Consider this mirror as my own soul and worship it just as you would worship me." Thus there is no doubt that the mirror must have been the most sacred of these divine treasures; enshrined at Ise, as a substitute of the Great Goddess herself, it constitutes in fact the most valuable object of worship of the Shintô religion.

The jewel, needless to say, might be considered *per se* as a symbol of such virtues as beauty and riches, which belong to the third of the three functions of the Indo-European system. Moreover, the fact that the curved or crescent-shaped jewel called *magatama* which is described in the myth, was deemed by the ancient Japanese to be a symbol *par excellence* of fecundity is clearly attested by the existence of a special variety of this kind of jewel called *komochi*—or childbearing-*magatama*. It consists of a large jewel with a smaller one attached to its hollow or belly and having on its back and both sides a number of small lumps, the whole representing quite manifestly a mother jewel continuously bearing innumerable children. That the *magatama*-jewels worn by Amaterasu as symbols of her divine authority had precisely this kind of childbearing faculty can be clearly inferred from a myth. For according to the account of the birth of the father of Hononinigi, Oshihomini, this Divine Child of Amaterasu was brought forth, together with four other children, from the curved jewels Amaterasu wore when she encountered her unruly brother Susanô at the entrance of heaven.

The close relationship Amaterasu has with this kind of jewel dates back to an event which is said to have taken place immediately after her birth. The *Kojiki* recounts that when her

father Izanagi ordered his newborn daughter to become ruler of heaven, he took from his neck a string of jewels; and it was while giving with solemnity this holy emblem to Amaterasu that Izanagi declared to her: "You should rule over the High-Plains-of-Heaven." To this account the *Kojiki* adds an illuminating explanatory note, which seems to leave no doubt as to the extremely close ties these jewels had with agriculture: "The name of this string of jewels is Mikuratana-no-Kami." As this name Mikuratana-no-kami means evidently "a god who is worshiped on the shelves of granaries," we may infer from this, with safety and in accordance with the majority of specialists, that the string of jewels Amaterasu wore as an emblem of her divine authority was considered to be a deity, one whose power was concerned mainly with agricultural products, especially the rice stored in the granaries.

As was pointed out long ago by one of the erudite classical scholars of the Pre-Meiji era, Kamo-no-Mabuchi (1697-1769), there seems no doubt that the jewel or the string of jewels given by Amaterasu to her grandson as one of the emblems of his sovereignty on earth constitutes, so to speak, a copy or double of the Mikuratana-no-Kami, which she had previously received from her father as an emblem of her own sovereignty in heaven. So we may conclude from all these observations that the jewel, which is one of the three divine treasures of the Japanese Imperial House, was originally an emblem closely attached to various aspects of the third function of the Indo-European ideology.

As the connection of the sword with the second or warrior function is obvious, we find in these three divine treasures a set of regalia composed of the tools representing respectively the first, second, and third functions of the trifunctional system. Indeed, Dumézil and his followers have pointed out a fair number of such sets of trifunctional symbolical tools in the traditions of various ancient Indo-European speaking peoples.<sup>5</sup> From our point of view, an especially notable fact is surely the obvious correspondence between these Japanese Imperial treasures and the regalia of the ancient Scythian kings. According

<sup>5</sup> Cf. e.g., Dumézil, *op. cit.*, p. 25 and *Tarpeia*, Paris, 1947, pp. 207-246.

to a well-known account of Herodotus (IV, 5-7), these regalia, like their Japanese counterparts, were believed to have descended from heaven for the benefit of the founder of the Scythian royal clan and, as has been analyzed by Dumézil and E. Benveniste,<sup>6</sup> they were composed alike of three tools, symbolizing respectively religion, war, and agriculture.

### III. TRIPARTITE STRUCTURE OF THE PANTHEON

From the earliest period, the pantheon of Shintô has been conceived by the Japanese as being composed of two distinct categories of gods: 1) Amatsukami or "heavenly deities," and 2) Kunitsukami or "earthly deities." The expression "Amatsukami to Kunitsukami", meaning "heavenly deities and earthly deities," constitutes traditionally in the Shintô ritual an established formula used to designate in a mass all the gods.

In an important article first published in 1971,<sup>7</sup> Taryo Obayashi has made it clear that this bipartite division corresponds almost exactly in structure with the one we find in the pantheon of the Norse, who divided also their gods into two categories: the Aesir and the Vanir. As has been demonstrated by Dumézil, this latter classification is based manifestly upon the frame of the Indo-European trifunctional system: the Aesir group consists of the deities representing the two superior or nobler functions, while the Vanir are the fertility divinities of the third function. As has been clearly shown by Mr. Obayashi's penetrating analysis, the same principle applies quite evidently to the structure of the classical Japanese pantheon. For the heavenly deities relate exclusively to matters involving the first and second function—sovereignty, religion and warfare—while the earthly deities are considered to have a close relationship with the soil and its fecundity.

Moreover, those heavenly deities who were concerned with warfare apparently formed a separate subdivision within the society of the Amatsukami. We can infer this from two myths.

<sup>6</sup> "Traditions indo-iraniennes sur les classes sociales," *Journal Asiatique*, 230, 1938, p. 529-549.

<sup>7</sup> Obayashi, *op. cit.*, p. 41-71.

First, in the above-mentioned myth of the descent of Hononinigi, the two warrior gods who are said to have escorted the Divine Child to earth are described, as we have seen, as constituting effectively an advanced guard and are distinguished from the main body, which consisted solely of deities related to the first function. Further, an episode of another important myth, recounted as follows in the *Kojiki*, seems to confirm this view:

Hereupon Amaterasu said: "Which god would it be best for us to choose as a new envoy (to be sent on earth to negotiate with Okuninushi). To this the god Omoikane and other gods answered: "The god named Itsunoohabari, who dwells in heavenly rock cave beside the upperstream of the heavenly river Yasu, is surely the one who should be sent. And if not this god, then a son of this god, the god Takemikazuchinoo should be sent. However, as this god Amenoohabari is blocking the road to his dwelling by making the waters of the heavenly river Yasu flow backward, it would be impossible for other gods to go thither. Accordingly the god Amenokaku should especially be sent to ask his will." Thus the god Amenokaku was sent to ask the will of the god Amenoohabari, who replied, saying: "I will obey and am glad to be of service. For this errand, however, I would rather recommend that you send my son, Takemikazuchi." And with these words, he offered his son.

Both Amenoohabari and his son Takemikazuchi are typical warlike deities and are closely related to the swords. The former, being a deification of the divine sword worn by the god Izanagi when he created the Japanese Isles, is a sort of patriarch of a family of sword-divinities dwelling in heaven. So from the passage of the *Kojiki* just quoted, it seems quite obvious that the warrior gods were considered to dwell in heaven apart from the other heavenly deities, that is to say, the first-functional ones, and thus constitute a clearly distinct subdivision within the community of the Amatsukami. We can conclude therefore with safety that the classical Japanese pantheon had a tripartite structure, which is consonant with the tripartite social scheme we discussed in the first section:

A. Heavenly deities

- 1) first-functional (= sovereign and priestly) gods

2) second-functional (= warrior) gods

B. Earthly deities

3) third-functional gods of fecundity, etc.

IV. THREE MAIN DEITIES CONSTITUTING A TRIFUNCTIONAL TRIAD

Dumézil has shown that the Indo-Europeans used to express the tripartite structure of their pantheon through the medium of a well-organized group composed of a small number of especially important deities characteristic of the three functions. The simplest form of this *équipe des dieux des trois fonctions* is found most clearly in Rome and among the Norse, where the structure of the pantheon was epitomized by a divine triad consisting of a sovereign god (Jupiter; Ódhinn), a warrior god (Mars; Thórr) and a god of fecundity (Quirinus; Freyr). It seems quite obvious that we have precisely this type of divine triad in Japanese myths, where, as in Rome and Scandinavia, it occupies a central and pivotal position of the system. For after the completion of the creation of the world, nearly all of the tales—indeed, the bulk of classical Japanese mythology—center around three conspicuous figures: Amaterasu, Susanô, and Okuninushi.

The Great Sun-Goddess Amaterasu is of course the supreme deity *par excellence* of the Shintô pantheon. She is the holder of the sovereignty in heaven, and her royal authority also extends over the earth through the medium of the successive Emperors, who are naturally considered as her Divine Children. Moreover, in a myth about the outrageous actions committed by Susanô in heaven, we see Amaterasu acting apparently as a heavenly priestess. For the crimes attributed to Susanô in this tale constitute in fact a series of insolent profanations which spoil successive phases of an important Shintô ritual called *Daijôsai*, then being prepared and performed by Amaterasu. So there remains no doubt that this goddess is, so to speak, a sort of all-round divine supervisor of the first function, both in its royal and priestly aspects.

As for Susanô, who is also called by the longer appellation

Takehayasusanô (literally a “Strong-and-Quick-Male-of-Violence”), his principal characteristic is an extraordinarily immense physical strength combined with a hot and violent temper. This deity’s most glorious mythical exploit consists in the killing of a dreadful monster called Yamatanoorochi or “Huge-Eight-Forked-Serpent,” whose horrible appearance is described as follows in the *Kojiki*:

It has one body with eight heads and eight tails, and on its body grow not only moss but also cypress and cedar trees. Its length extends over eight valleys and eight peaks, and if one looks at its belly, it is all constantly bloody and inflamed.

It is from one of the eight tails of this monster that Susanô had obtained the sword, Kusanaginotsurugi, which, offered by him to Amaterasu, was to become later, as we have seen, one of the three divine treasures of the Japanese Emperors, and constitutes an obvious emblem of the second function in this set of trifunctional tools. From all these, therefore, it seems quite evident that we find in Susanô an example of a typical second functional god.

Okuninushi is called also Onamuchi. Both of these names are in fact synonymous and designate him as a “Great-Lord-of-the-Land.” As is indicated by these names, he is clearly the leader of the whole tribe of the earthly deities or Kunitsukami, who work for the fecundity of the land on which they dwell. He is said to have accomplished a laborious task, called *kunit-sukuri* or the “fashioning of the land,” which turned the Japanese Isles into a fertile land deserving to be called Mizuho-no-Kuni or the “Land-of-Rich-Rice-Crop.” In two *Fudokis* (ancient topographies of the provinces), those of the province of Izumo and Harima, we find tales recounting events said to have taken place while Okuninushi was travelling around the land to diffuse the cultivation of rice among its population. In the *Nikon-shoki*, he is said to have invented the art of healing diseases in both men and domestic animals; other *Fudokis* attest traditions attributing to him the discovery of the curing power of hot springs.

Another conspicuous characteristic of Okuninushi is his great physical beauty, repeatedly emphasized especially in the *Kojiki*;

this text narrates his numerous love affairs and in one passage, he is even said to possess a wife on every island-headland and on every beach-promontory of the country. Lordship over the land, patronage of agriculture and medicine, physical beauty, and sensuality—all these traits are manifestly characteristic of the third function according to the Indo-European ideology. So there remains no doubt that Okuninushi should be deemed, in all respects, an almost perfect divine representative of this fairly complex function. The triad this deity forms with Amaterasu and Susanô in Japanese myths is thus manifestly trifunctional, and it is therefore homologous in its structure with similar groups of principal gods representing the three functions we find among the Indo-Europeans.

#### V. EXISTENCE OF FOUR SUPREME DEITIES.

Dumézil has made it clear that in the primitive common pantheon of the Indo-Europeans the first function had been patronized by a well-articulated group of four supreme deities, whose respective successors were: among the Indo-Iranians, 1) Varuna, 2) Mitra, 3) Aryaman, 4) Bhaga; in Rome, 1) Jupiter, 2) *Dius Fidius*, 3) *Juventas*, 4) *Terminus*; among the Norse, 1) Ódhinn, 2) Týr, 3) Baldr, 4) Hödhr. In Japan, we find besides Amaterasu two other deities, who behave quite obviously throughout the myths as heavenly rulers of the whole universe; they are Takamimusubi and Kamimusubi. Moreover, in the opening of the *Kojiki*, where the successive birth of these two sovereign deities is recounted as having taken place at the very beginning of the world, they form obviously a triad with another supreme deity, who is presented here as being the eldest of all the gods:

The names of the deities who were born in the High-Plains-of-Heaven, when the heaven and earth began, were the god Ameminakanushi; then the god Takamusubi; then the god Kamimusubi.

The name Ameminakanushi signifies literally the “Ruler-of-the-August-Center-of-Heaven.” Although no concrete action is attributed in the myths to this mysterious primordial deity,

his sovereign nature seems quite evident from this solemn appellation, seemingly implying that he is indeed the highest god of Shintô. The fact that he actually plays no part in the later myths is probably due to the transcendental and very remote position he was believed to occupy in the divine world, which might have made his behavior esoteric and practically unknowable to the common people. Thus he has a marked resemblance to Varuna, whose most conspicuous feature in ancient times was, as Dumézil points out, his remote, transcendental, and mysterious nature.<sup>8</sup>

Compared to this inscrutable Amenominakanushi, the other three heavenly rulers, whose actions are described in the myths, Amaterasu, Takamimusubi, and Kamimusubi, although they also are regarded as supreme deities residing constantly in high heaven, are manifestly much more familiar with men and vice versa. Their relationship to the remote Amenominakanushi is thus comparable to the opposition we see in the *Rig-Veda* between the utterly transcendental and otherworldly Varuna, on the one hand, and Mitra, Aryaman, and Bhaga, on the other, who were believed to be much nearer to this world.

Moreover, Amaterasu has much in common with the original nature of Mitra. As we have seen, she, like Mitra, performs occasionally priestly actions in heaven. Also like Mitra, Amaterasu has an essentially lenient and merciful nature, which is most clearly exhibited in the myth about the violence committed by Susanô in heaven. The *Kojiki* recounts that when Susanô had devastated the heavenly ricefields administered by Amaterasu by destroying their divisions and ditches, and had even strewn excrement in a holy palace where Amaterasu had to conduct an important ritual, she did not want to reproach her brother, but pardoned him, pronouncing the following words:

What looks like excrement must be something that my divine brother has vomited through drunkenness. And as to the breaking down the divisions of the ricefields and filling up the ditches, it was surely because he wanted to make a more efficient use of the land that my divine brother has acted thus.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. e.g., Dumézil, *Mitra-Varuna*, Paris, 1948, pp. 75-85.

However, in exactly the same manner as Mitra, who is, as Dumézil says, “*hostile à toute violence, même sacrée, parce qu’il est ‘ami,’*” Amaterasu too, in spite of her extreme mercifulness, would never tolerate bloodshed. Her abhorrence of bloodshed is clearly seen in the sequel to the same myth. For the *Kojiki* narrates that when Susanô, continuing his evil acts, finally threw a flayed horse into a holy weaving-hall, thereby causing the death of a woman, who was weaving sacred garments under the direction of Amaterasu, the goddess’s reaction was immediate: terrified at the sight, she locked herself at once in the Heavenly-Rock-Cave, and thus deprived the world of sunlight. A similar aversion to murder is also attributed to Amaterasu in the *Nihonshoki*. According to a tale recorded in this text, another of her brothers, the Moon-God Tsukiyomi, once committed a murder on earth. When he returned to heaven and reported this event to Amaterasu, she became exceedingly angry and said: “You are a wicked deity. I don’t want to see you face to face any more.” And this, the myth concludes, is why the sun and the moon no longer appear in the sky at the same time.

It was moreover by means of an oath exchanged with Susanô that, without losing her virginity, Amaterasu could get her children from the *magatama*-jewels she wore, and thus became the divine ancestor of the Tennô clan; this recalls the close relation that Mitra, as the tutelary god of contracts and good faith, had with the oath. Finally the very fact that Amaterasu is a Sun-Goddess might not be utterly irrelevant to our viewpoint, for although in neither India nor Iran was Mitra originally a solar deity in the strict sense of the word, he had from the outset a marked affinity with the solar light; and subsequently he became closely identified with the Sun.

Takamimusubi is clearly a very close associate of Amaterasu. He is often at the side of the Great Goddess, and he summons other heavenly deities and gives them commands by the common authority of Amaterasu and himself. However, the mythical circumstances in which Takamimusubi cooperates in this manner with Amaterasu, acting as her indispensable adjunct, as it were, seem to be somewhat limited. In the long series of tales recounting the events that took place in heaven subsequent

to Susanô's arrival, Takamimusubi plays practically no role, even when both the sovereignty of Amaterasu and the very order of the universe are gravely endangered by Susanô's violence. Indeed, there are but three important myths in which Takamimusubi plays an active role as a sovereign deity; these concern: 1) the negotiations through which the heavenly deities obtained from Okuninushi the concession of the land for the benefit of the grandchild of Amaterasu, Hononinigi; 2) the descent of Hononinigi and other heavenly deities to earth; and 3) the expedition carried out by the Emperor Jimmu to extend the sovereignty of the Tennô clan over the main part of Japan. It seems evident that each of these three mythical events has to do actually with one vital issue: namely, the establishment of the rule of the descendants of the heavenly deities on earth. Takamimusubi can therefore be defined as a sovereign deity whose divine attention is concentrated almost exclusively upon matters concerning the so-called Tenson-Minzoku or the "People-Descendant-of-Heaven," to whom he had given, conjointly with Amaterasu, the vocation of becoming the rulers of the Japanese Isles. Thus there seems no doubt that Takamimusubi's mythical behavior remarkably resembles that of Aryaman,<sup>9</sup> who appears in the *Rig-Veda* as the closest associate of Mitra and functions principally as the tutelary deity of the noble people of *ârya*, whose mission is also to subjugate and rule over the indigenous populations.

In addition to this general resemblance, Takamimusubi's mode of action also seems to correspond to that of Aryaman in a number of particulars. Like Aryaman, he makes use of gifts and marriages to create and maintain peaceful relations and friendly ties. According to a tradition recorded in the *Nihon-shoki*, it was by virtue of many gorgeous gifts—a splendid palace, ricefields, a flying-ship, wharves, innumerable white shields, etc.—that Takamimusubi succeeded in obtaining the consent of Okuninushi to retire from the visible world and become thenceforward a divine protector of the Emperors. And later on, when Okuninushi, at the head of other earthly deities, came up to heaven to assure his loyalty, Takamimusubi is said to

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Dumézil, *Le troisième souverain*, Paris, 1949.

have married one of his daughters to Okuninushi, so as to ensure that Okuninushi, together with all the other earthly deities under his command, would continue to protect the Imperial House through all the subsequent ages.

In the sequel to the same account, Takamimusubi is also said to have created heavenly altars and to have celebrated a Shintô ritual for the sake of Hononinigi. And he ordered the divine ancestors of the two priestly clans, Nakatomi and Imbe, to bring these heavenly altars down to earth, so as to be able to perform the rituals for the same purpose. This episode reminds us of an old myth about Aryaman (cf. *Rig-Veda*, I, 139, 7): when the mythical priests Angiras had obtained from the gods a miraculous cow called Kâmadhuk, it was Aryaman who helped them to milk it for the celebration of the *Agnihotra* and other sacrificial ceremonies, and he continues to give his divine assistance to the priests for the performance of the rituals of the Aryan religion.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the fact that Takamimusubi is said to have sent a divine raven to the Emperor Jimmu, which conducted his army through the mountainous region of Kumano, makes us think of the marked concern Aryaman has about roads.<sup>11</sup>

As for Kamimusubi, there are also three myths, in which this deity plays an active role as one of the heavenly sovereigns: 1) when the first silkworms and the first seeds of the five kinds of cereals (rice, millet, barley, and two kinds of beans) were produced from the dead body of a goddess killed by Susanô immediately after his descent to earth, it was Kamimusubi, who, according to the *Kojiki*, caused these agricultural products to be brought up to heaven. 2) When Okuninushi had been killed by his ill-natured brothers, his mother, the goddess Sashikuniwakahime, went up crying to heaven and entreated Kamimusubi for mercy, and the deity at once sent two shellfish-goddesses to bring Okuninushi back to life. 3) When one of Kamimusubi's children, the god Sukunahikona, had arrived on earth, Okuninushi reported this event to Kamimusubi, who immediately ordered Sukunahikona to become a brother of

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84-87.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141-149.

Okuninushi and collaborate with him in the fashioning of the land. From these incidents, it seems evident that Kamimusubi, although residing constantly in heaven, is principally concerned with what happens on earth in relation to the third function, and, in particular, with the activities of its patron-god Okuninushi. In this, Kamimusubi resembles the Vedic deity Bhaga; as the divine distributor of the riches, this heavenly sovereign has intimate relations with such divinities as Pûsan, Puramdhi, Dhî, Aramati, and Sarasvatî, all of whom work on earth for the production of wealth.<sup>12</sup>

#### VI. TWO DISTINCT TYPES OF THE SECOND-FUNCTIONAL DEITIES

Conjointly with Stig Wikander,<sup>13</sup> Dumézil has made it clear that, among the Indo-Iranians, the second function was originally considered to be patronized by two gods, Vâyu and Indra. These deities differed markedly in their primary natures, and these differences are reflected, in the *Mahâbhârata*, in the tempers and behaviors of their respective sons Bhîma and Arjuna.<sup>14</sup> Bhîma is an extremely violent and quick-tempered warrior, and is characterized, like his divine father (who is a windgod), by immense speed and great physical strength. He is without peer in a close struggle, in which he fights either unarmed or with his favorite weapon, a club. Although he is usually good natured and makes many valuable contributions in a good cause, explosions of his anger and violence often prove extremely disruptive. In short, Bhîma is a wild and unruly hero and resembles in a great many respects the Greek figure Heracles. In contrast Arjuna, although he is also a consummate warrior and as brave and heroic as Bhîma, is in many respects the diametric opposite of his club-wielding brother. He never loses control of himself, and always acts in conformity with the will of his sovereign and elders. He has

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Dumézil, *Les dieux des Indo-Européens*, Paris, 1952, p. 51-54.

<sup>13</sup> *Vayu* I, Uppsala, 1941 and "Pândava-sagan och Mahâbhâratas mytiska förutsättningar," *Religion och Bibel*, 6, 1947, pp. 27-39.

<sup>14</sup> See Dumézil, *Jupiter Mars Quirinus* IV, Paris, 1948, pp. 62-73 and *Mythe et Epopée* I, Paris 1968, pp. 51-65.

an unparalleled skill in the manipulation not only of his favorite bow, but in practically every other sort of regular weapon, and this skill, as well as his bravery, is particularly exhibited during pitched battles, in which organized armies fight one other. Thus Arjuna is clearly a much more civilized and orderly hero than Bhîma, and he bears a striking resemblance especially to the Homeric hero Achilles.

In the light of these two distinct types of mythical warlike figures, there seems no doubt that Susanô, with his unruly and almost demonic explosions of hot temper and violence, is almost an exact homologue of Bhîma=Vâyû. He is not, however, the sole representative of the second function in Japanese mythology. For there is another very important god, one to whom the heavenly deities often have recourse, whenever they stand in need of the service of a powerful warrior. Thus, as has already been mentioned (section 3), it is this martial deity, Takemikazuchi, who was chosen by the heavenly sovereigns as the final and decisive envoy to be sent to Okuninushi. And it is mostly by the exercise of the power of his sword, which is his *alter ego*, that he succeeded in obtaining the cession of the land from Okuninushi. It was also the power of the sword of Takemikazuchi that saved the Emperor Jimmu from the gravest danger he encountered during his expedition to Yamato. When he and his army had lost consciousness, having fallen under the spell of a powerful indigenous deity, Amaterasu and Takami-musubi summoned Takemikazuchi; and according to the *Kojiki*, they gave him the following order:

The Central-Land-of-Reed-Plains (= one of the mythical appellations of Japan) is exceedingly uproarious and our children seem to be in distress. As the Central-Land-of-Reed-Plains is the land which you have previously subjugated, so you ought to descend there again.

To this Takemikazuchi is said to have replied:

I, who am your servant, will not descend myself. As here is the very sword I used to subjugate the land, I will send it down in my stead.

As soon as the Emperor Jimmu had grasped this divine sword thrown down by Takemikazuchi, all the evil deities of the surrounding mountains fell spontaneously, cut down by its miraculous power, while at the same instant, his own army awoke and rose up all at once.

Thus Takemikazuchi is clearly a typical second-functional deity of the sort who never makes use of his martial prowess to create disturbances, but always acts to render efficient services for the sake of the heavenly and earthly sovereigns and in conformity with their will. There seems no doubt therefore that he exemplifies a much more civilized and orderly type of warrior god than Susanô, and resembles, in a great many respects, Arjuna, as described in the *Mahâbhârata*. It is also worthy of note that the name of this deity Takemikazuchinoo, which signifies literally a "Brave-Male-God-of-Thunder," seems also to suggest an affinity with Indra, who has, as is well-known, a very close connection with thunder.

In contrast, Susanô generally has been regarded by specialists as a typical example of a storm-god. The fact that he is said in the myth to have been born from the nose of Izanagi, after the two eyes of this primordial deity had produced respectively the Sun-Goddess, Amaterasu, and the Moon-God, Tsukiyomi, seems to imply emphatically a special relationship with the wind. Thus we can see in Susanô an exact parallel of the Aryan Wind-God Vâyu, even in so far as his relation with natural phenomena is concerned.

#### VII. THE FRATERNAL PAIR OF THE MAIN THIRD-FUNCTIONAL DEITIES

Okuninushi, who, as we have seen, is the chief of the third-functional earthly deities, has a sworn brother called Sukunahikona, and the two gods form a very intimate pair. They collaborate in most things indeed; as the *Nihonshoki* puts it:

The god Onamuchi (= one of the many appellations given to Okuninushi) and the god Sukunahikona worked, with united strength and one heart, for the construction of this sub-celestial world. They

also instituted the method of healing diseases, both for the sake of men and for the domestic animals, and invented the art of exorcising the calamities caused by birds, beasts, and insects, so that the whole population of farmers regard them as their benefactors until the present day.

This reminds us quite naturally of the fact that the Indo-Europeans also placed the third function generally under the tutelage of a pair of twin deities, such as the Indo-Iranian *Aśvin* (= *Nâsatya*). However, unlike the *Aśvin*, who are usually regarded to be genuine twins and in all points similar to each other, *Okuninushi* and *Sukunahikona* differ in a great many ways. Above all, in contrast to *Okuninushi*, who is by nature an earthly deity, *Sukunahikona* is, as we have seen, the son of *Kamimusubi* and thus was born in heaven. This difference reminds us of the following verse of the *Rig-Veda* (1, 181, 4), which clearly establishes a very similar distinction between the two *Aśvin*:

Born in different places, the two flawless (deities) coincide both in their bodies and in their names. One of them, the triumphant lord, is considered as (son) of *Sumakha*; the other as the favored son of Heaven.

Thus it seems that one of the *Aśvin* was earthborn, while the other was born in heaven. The appellation, "the favored son of Heaven" (*divó ... subhágah putráb*), seems also to connect this heaven-born *Aśvin* very especially with *Bhaga*, in whom we have previously (section 5) recognized a homologue of *Kamimusubi*. For the epithet *subhágah* contains actually the very name of this sovereign distributor of riches.

Moreover, as a result of a close analysis of the respective characters of the twin sons of the *Aśvin* in the *Mahâbhâratha*, *Nakula* and *Sahadeva*, *Stig Wikander*<sup>15</sup> has clearly established some fundamental differences between the two *Aśvin*, at least in their primary definition: the earthborn *Aśvin* was believed to be somewhat warlike and exceedingly handsome, while his

<sup>15</sup> "Nakula et Sahadeva," *Orientalia Suecana*, 6, 1957, pp. 66-96. Cf. Dumézil, *Mythe et Épopée* I, pp. 76-86.

heaven-born brother was regarded to excel in wisdom and have a thoroughly peaceful temper. Curiously, these are in fact precisely the differences we can observe in the Japanese myths between Okuninushi and Sukunahikona. Okuninushi, though he is on the whole a meek and peaceful deity, is nevertheless not wholly averse to warlike exploits. For according to the *Kojiki*, in order to become the ruler of the land, he had to subdue numerous enemies, fighting them with the sword and the bow he had acquired from Susanô. What is more, as we have previously noted (section 4), the *Kojiki* frequently alludes to the unusual handsomeness of Okuninushi, a physical beauty that could captivate almost any woman at first sight. Sukunahikona, on the contrary, has no relationship at all either with battle or with love affairs. He is a perfectly peaceful god and gives assistance to Okuninushi mostly by virtue of his keen wisdom.

VIII. QUARREL AND RECONCILIATION OF TWO DIVINE RACES.

Thanks to Dumézil, we now know that the Indo-Europeans shared an important myth about a conflict between the functions,<sup>16</sup> which can be outlined as follows. In the beginning, the heavenly deities representing the two superior functions were separated even more sharply than at present from the third-functional deities residing on earth, and this separation finally led to an overt struggle between the two divine races. During the first stage of the conflict, the third functional deities were able to hold their own by creating, through the force of their riches or sensual charm, betrayers among their opponents. In the final stage, however, this predominance of the third-functional deities was overturned suddenly by the insuperable power of one of the heavenly sovereigns, who upset his earthly adversaries by throwing in their midst his all-powerful magic weapon. After these alternate exhibitions of the powers of their respective functions, the two parties finally became reconciled and concluded an agreement, wherein the third-functional deities submitted to the authority of the deities of the superior func-

<sup>16</sup> See especially Dumézil, *op. cit.*, p. 261-575.

tions, while the latter accorded to the former a full divine status. One or at most a few of the most influential third-functional deities were invited to occupy leading positions in the pantheon as equal partners of the chief representative deities of the superior functions. The existing pantheon, ideally composed of all the three categories of functional deities, thus came into existence as a result of this mythical conflict.

The scheme of this Indo-European myth is reproduced, almost exactly, in the Japanese myth about the conflict between the heavenly and the earthly deities. According to this tale, the quarrel between these two divine races broke out because Amaterasu and Takamimusubi wanted to obtain from Okuninushi the cession of the land for the sake of the divine ancestor of the Tennô clan. During the first stage of the conflict, the attempts of the heavenly deities to extend their authority over the earth were frustrated, because Okuninushi succeeded in corrupting successively two gods, Amenohohi and Amewakahiko, sent from heaven to subjugate the rebellious earthly deities. The means used by Okuninushi for this purpose were the sensual charms of the female deities under his jurisdiction and the power of his riches; for according to the ordinary version of the tale, found both in the *Kojiki* and the *Nihonshoki*, it was by marrying one of his daughters to Amewakahiko, so as to let him cherish the prospect of becoming, in due course, the owner of the fertile lands of his father-in-law, that Okuninushi was able to corrupt this heavenly envoy. According to a variant version, recorded in the *Nihonshoki*, Amewakahiko is even said to have married, after his arrival on earth, a great many daughters of the earthly deities.

The treachery of Amewahiko was so perfect that when the heavenly deities sent to earth a pheasant-goddess to inquire why he had given no report to heaven for eight years, Amewahiko killed the bird, using the very bow and arrow which had been conferred on him by the heavenly sovereigns. The arrow, stained with blood, eventually reached the dry bed of the heavenly river Yasu; and when Amaterasu and Takamimusubi saw it, the latter picked it up, and after recognizing that it was the arrow he himself had given to Amewakahiko, he hurled it down declaring:

If this arrow has reached here, shot by Amewakahiko at the rebellious deities in obedience to our command, let it not hit him. If he has a foul heart, let Amewakahiko be killed by this arrow.

The arrow struck Amewakahiko in the breast, while he was fast asleep in his couch, causing his death.

It was after this dramatic event that Takemikazuchi was chosen to be sent as the last envoy from the heavenly sovereigns to earth. As this deity is, as we have seen, actually a deification of a sword—which is in fact no other than his *alter ego*—we may safely say that his arrival on earth resembles very much the fall of a magical weapon. Thus it appears that, in Japanese myth, too, the temporary predominance of the third-functional deities at the outset of the conflict is finally upset by one of the sovereign deities, whose decisive actions consist primarily of throwing all-powerful magic weapons (an arrow and a sword) in the midst of the enemy.

In spite of this seeming defeat, the treatment Okuninushi is said to have received from the triumphant heavenly sovereigns after the cession of the land was amazingly cordial. As we have already seen (section 5), according to a tradition recorded in the *Nihonshoki*, Takamimusubi not only presented him with a great many gorgeous gifts, but he married also one of his daughters to Okuninushi, asking his new son-in-law to become in perpetuity the divine protector of the Tennô clan on earth. In the sequel to the same text, it is further asserted that the god Taokihoori was appointed hatter, the god Hikosashiri was made shield-maker, the god Amenomahitotsu was made metal-worker, the god Amenohiwashi was appointed fiber-maker, and the god Kushiakarudama jewel-maker to Okuninushi, and that the god Futodama was charged to assure thenceforward the celebration of the cult of Okuninushi in collaboration with all these specially designated divine artisans.

Thus in the Japanese myth, as well as in the Indo-European tradition, the conflict between the two divine races is said to have ended on a note of reconciliation, the net result of which was that the third-functional deities were obliged to recognize the sovereignty of the deities of the superior functions, while the latter, in compensation, acknowledged the main third-func-

tional god Okuninushi as one of the greatest deities of the whole pantheon. The Grand Shrine of Okuninushi at Izumo has been, together with that of Amaterasu at Ise, from time immemorial, one of the two most important sanctuaries of the Shintō religion.

\* \* \*

The detailed resemblances we have considered so far strongly support the hypothesis that the classical Japanese mythology we find in the *Kojiki* and the *Nihonshoki* is structurally almost identical to the trifunctional system that pervades the Indo-European mythological tradition. And as I said at the outset, I am, in accordance with my colleague Mr. Obayashi, of the opinion that this remarkable parallelism is almost certainly due, ultimately, to the impact of Scythian myths that had diffused to Japan via the Korean peninsula as a result of the migration of the nomadic peoples of the Eurasiatic Continent.

In conclusion, let me add that this hypothesis is also supported, in our view, by the following set of facts, which I have had no opportunity to develop in the present paper.

a) As I have attempted to demonstrate in some detail in another article,<sup>17</sup> we find in Japanese myths a number of curious correspondences with ancient Greek myths, which seem too peculiar to be dismissed as merely accidental. As has also been suggested by Mr. Obayashi, this resemblance between Greek and Japanese mythology may prove to be yet another dimension of this hypothesized Scythian influence, for as is well-known, the Scyths came into close contact with the Greek world through the medium of the numerous Hellenic cities constructed on the north coast of the Black Sea.

b) Not only in the previously mentioned fragment of the Scythian myth recounted by Herodotus, but also in the epic narratives of the Ossetes which, as most specialists would agree, contains a great many survivals of ancient Scythian myths, we

<sup>17</sup> "Some Parallel Motifs between Greek and Japanese Myths," *Bulletin of the Faculty of Humanities, Seikei University*, 9, 1973, pp. 1-14.

## *Japanese Mythology*

encounter an impressive mass of elements (motifs, mythical figures, entire tales, structures, etc.), whose apparent parallels can be pointed out in Japanese myths.

c) Some remarkable correspondences with Greek myths can be found in the myths of ancient Korea, in which, as Mr. Obayashi has recently demonstrated, there are also a number of expressions of the Indo-European tripartite ideology.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See especially Obayashi, "Kodai Nihon-Chosen no Saisho no San O no Kôzô" ("Structure of the three first kings in ancient Korea and Japan"), in: A. Yoshida (ed.), *Hikaku-Shinwagaku no Genzai*, ("The Present of Comparative Mythology"), Tokyo, 1975, pp. 46-89.