

English summaries

The Japanese and the Sea

AMINO Y.

The dominant representation of Japanese identity since the origin of the nation up until the 19th century has been that of an agrarian state founded upon the cultivation of inundated rice paddies. Thusly, they have ignored the importance of the sea and of the populations which lived off of it. However, the “sea people” constitute an element central to the social life of the archipelago. They have constantly been underestimated historically and dominated politically because they did not fit in with the structure of seigneurial domination which considered agriculture the essential element. The supremacy of the sedentary peasant over the nomadic merchant functioned as one of the main elements of social control in the framework of confucian society. Under these circumstances, written sources have deliberately favored the land to the detriment of other non-agricultural activities. These “sea people” often in rebellion against the agrarian states, are nevertheless at the origin of the development of commerce and industry. They played a direct role in the process of modernisation of the country.

The World as a Transposed Symbolic Representation: Japan under the Edo Dynasty and the Mitate Universe

TANAKA Y.

In her study of representations (transposed and in reduced model), the author presents a reconstruction of the world of symbolic imagination of a particular culture. From engravings of the countryside to material montages not to mention the tea ceremony and theatrical scenography, the Japanese social environment during the Edo dynasty functions like a symbolic universe: even the imperial authorities end up by putting their own power “on stage” in their processions of lords and ambassadors, visual representations of a universe which was designed, as it had been in ancient China, around the Eastern Capital.

Avoiding Impurity: Civilization in Ancient Japan

YOSHIE A.

Impurity and its rejection constitute one of the basic elements of the ideological and ritual universe of ancient Japan. They have often been studied from a purely anthropological point of view. Now, the strategies for avoiding impurity have a history as well. During the period in which new methods of social control were introduced into the archipelago from China, the imperial court of Japan developed rituals for avoiding impurity which functioned as instances in the process of legitimation of

the monarchy and of the role of the aristocracy. By showing how the gods fought the impurities of the world and eliminated them, the myths also partake of this strategy. On the earth, the emperor and the court in turn lead a permanent battle to rid the universe of impurities. While doing this, the governing bodies are presented as representing “civilization” confronted by a still “barbaric” rural society. The ritual rejection of impurity and the social discrimination which such practices imply can therefore be seen within the framework of a very structured mental universe, keystone to the ancient Japanese monarchy. The process by which such an ideology circulates from the period of the Codes until the rule of the Tokugawa shōgun shapes social centrality and determines the social statutes from the capital to the provinces and well into the far corners of the empire.

**“Strange-looking Strange People”:
Protest and New Values in Medieval Japan**

SATŌ K.

From the end of the 13th century, Japanese society entered into a period of instability which would soon pave the way to civil war. Social phenomena which played upon the same contradictions appeared with the rise of the “bandits” (akuto), the emergence of heretic monks and extravagant behavior (basara). These new attitudes which ignored the law and conformism little by little impose their ways on a society which seems to have lost its bearings. Harbingers of a new economic order, these “bandits” announce the subversion of the domains of the court aristocracy by the new warrior classes. The communities of heretic monks seek to offer an answer to the anxieties of the wretched and the parias, ignored by the old order. The new “extravagant” mentalities are at the origin of the most refined forms to be taken by the future culture of the end of the Middle Ages. These “strange-looking strange people”, pirates, beggars, penitents, reprobates, provocators sketch the broad outlines for a new political alliance which undermines the old social relations. The civil wars of the 14th century thus mark a serious psycho-cultural break with the ancient era while at the same time sketching the broad outlines for a new social order.

**Rituals of Modernity: Imperial Tours
and the Public Image in Japan under the Meiji Dynasty**

YOSHIMI S.

From the beginning of the Meiji dynasty, Japanese leaders set up new monarchic rituals designed to create a new bond between the emperor and his people. Little by little, the emperor is exposed to the public eye before a people in turn indifferent, festive, fervent or interested, while the local authorities offer up the image of a people in the process of becoming “civilized”. Through such official rituals, it is the very process of the creation of a State and of a modern nation which is being staged in which the role of the emperor is “invented” in its new function—he represents the legitimation of modernity.

Ikki, Leagues, Conspiracies and Revolts in Medieval Japanese Society

KATSUMATA S.

Throughout the Middle Ages new social organizations were born which were no longer founded on the basis of real or fictive blood relations, but rather upon solidarity linked to an objective to be attained that traditional forms of social organizations were unable to assume. These new societies were created upon the basis of sworn understandings that called upon the intervention of divine forces and involved rituals which brought man into communion with the gods. Such organizations, set up to function in perfect harmony, were founded upon new conceptions such as that of objectivity which transcended family or feudal relations. They inaugurated new democratic decision-making procedures to the extent that they guaranteed freedom of speech at the moment the decision was made; however, they were coercitive to the degree that the majority completely imposed its point of view, considered as a manifestation of the divine will. These practices which became the basis of the dynamics of social revolt in Japan, also resulted in an organizational cohesion which still functions in Japan today.

Sworn Villages and Armed Villages: Japanese Villages in the 14th-16th Centuries

FUJIKI H.

At the end of the Middle Ages, the Japanese village came to the fore both as an institution fundamental to the survival of its inhabitants and as a social structure whose authority continued to spread throughout the region. Village social practices reveal a strong capacity to resist seigneurial pressures: these can be remarked particularly in the symbolism of redistribution and reciprocity rituals during celebrations. The Japanese lord is supposed to assure the peace and to facilitate agricultural production, and his power is immediately threatened if he fails to do so. In such a case the village itself takes charge of its own affairs and establishes itself as an autonomous power. Defense against attacks by seigneurial armies, armed conflict with neighboring communities for the maintenance of rights over non-cultivated lands constitute basic elements in the rise of village communes in the 14th-16th centuries.