

The Janus Image in Funerals ***An Example of Cultural Substratum Common to Romania and Japan***

Shunsuke OKUNISHI
Osaka University

Abstract

In 2005, the head of a haniwa with two faces – both in front and on its back – was excavated in an ancient tomb in Wakayama. After the 6th century double-faced images, not necessarily clay figures, had already been known in Asuka, the southern part of Nara, some of the images displaying their private parts. At a close analysis of Japanese mythology, it was easy to infer the ritual of exhibiting women's private parts in front of the tomb.

In Romania's old funeral ritual at Nereju the condolence callers generally wear animal or bogeyman masks, while during the night vigil around the bonfire they leap over their leader props against a cane that has at the top an animal head with a face in front and one on its back. Double-faced images represent one example of cultural substratum, i.e. facts of culture with joint traits in olden times, in our case symbolizing the boundary between death and life.

Keywords

(cultural) substratum, Janus (image), funeral, Japan, Romania.

From the very outset I think I would rather point out that culture can be acquired only through learning, which leads to particular behavior resulting from knowledge. For example, “eating” is an instinctive action; it cannot be seen as cultural conduct. It is clear when observing animals. We cannot say they manifest themselves culturally when eating. In their case, it is a kind of “propagated attitude” based on instinct. But we cannot say the same when it comes to “boiling and eating”, since “eating” gains through boiling a kind of cultural value. The act of eating is not simply inherited in this case, it is obtained through knowledge. Thus, I would like to point out that while behavior subjected to instinct does not change, the one acquired through knowledge shows off peculiar differences which change quite easily. Even if we speak about the way of eating the same thing, it may differ greatly according to the area or to the times. To make the long story short, culture undergoes kaleidoscopic changes displaying amazing varieties in any field.

However, there are instances of strong resemblances between cultures in spite of the distance or the passage of time. Such particular examples of similarities are in many situations the result of exchanges between the regions under

discussion. To give only one such example, we come across the so-called Western-style clothes anywhere in the world as they have spread over a large area alongside with the extension of economic and / or political influence in modern times.

Such instances are easy to understand, but how can we account for the cultural phenomenon of “similarities” in remote areas, where there are no mutual exchanges? In such cases, transferring information from one region to another is out of the question. Well? Perhaps common ancestors have been inherited separately. I introduced a similar example here, in Romania, fifteen years ago.

At the end of the 19th century, as a step towards modernization Japan abandoned the former traditional calendar and adopted the Gregorian calendar, which explains why the New Year came to be celebrated on January the 1st. Nevertheless, the old New Year called *Setsubun* is still celebrated on February the 3rd almost in the same way as in the past. One of the rituals met with nowadays as well is “scattering beans” although it is now performed on some elevated grounds at Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples by famous artists or renowned people. While shouting “Out with the demons! In with good luck!” they take out parched beans from special boxes and throw them to the people who try to catch as many as they can. According to folk belief, the person who eats the number of the beans corresponding to his / her age + one is protected against illness and does not catch a cold. The ritual of spreading beans shows variations according to the ethnographic areas, but it is worth mentioning that it was originally held at home by the head of the family.

There is here a striking similarity with the custom of driving away the spirits of the dead in ancient Rome. In his work *Fasti*, written in the 1st century after Christ, Publius Ovidius mentioned a custom alike that took place during the festival called *Lemuria*. While spreading beans, the head of the house would shout: “Out with the spirits of the dead!”

Not only do the Japanese and the Roman rituals take place at home, performed by the heads of the families, but even the words uttered resemble very much. It cannot be pure coincidence. And yet, the similarity is not to be explained through cultural exchanges, as there were no such things at that time. This custom must have been widely spread in olden times and though it was completely forgotten in many areas, it survived in Japan as it was recorded in ancient Rome.

Such facts of culture with common traits well-known a long time ago, which have disappeared almost everywhere leaving behind only a few vestiges, belong to the *cultural substratum*. They are universal cultural phenomena not biased towards a certain region or a nation. However, I must admit that some of them are rather restricted, while others cover a larger area and several nations. If most nations all over the world had a common cultural substratum, human nature would reveal more easily. Starting from this premise, I would like to discuss a

cultural phenomenon in order to show a possible cultural substratum common to Japan and Romania.

A *Haniwa* which have two faces was exhibited in the Museum in Wakayama in December 2006. *Haniwa* are terra-cotta clay figures made in Japan from the 3rd to the 7th centuries, lined about the exterior of ancient burial mounds and buried afoot obliquely. According to the legend, nobles of high social status were originally followed into the grave by their faithful retainers, who were afterwards replaced by such clay figures. We cannot say the same about the oldest *haniwa*. They were simple cylinder-shaped ones, supposed to have been connected to the funeral rites, but they couldn't have acted as substitutes for retainers.

Haniwa came to enjoy all kinds of shapes: from humans to animals and houses, but we cannot speak of clay figures having at that time faces both in front and on their backs, except for the example in the museum I have just mentioned. It must have been the clay craftsman's whim.

However, there are examples of figures with second faces on their backs. If we are to give an example, we can speak about the four "monkey stones" (*saru ishi*) to be found near the tomb of Kibihime-no-Miko (Emperor Kinmei's daughter). The tomb is situated in Asuka, the southern part of Nara. They are four statues with monkey-like appearance that had been originally laid in Emperor Kinmei's imperial tomb (he ruled in the 6th century) and moved to the present place in 1872.

In the second half of the 18th century, Ugen Uemura, a local historian, thoroughly investigated the history and tradition of famous places and vestiges in Nara. His efforts resulted in a topographical survey written down in *Places of Scenic Beauty and Historic Interest in Yamato*. In his study it is mentioned that *saru ishi* were excavated out a paddy field in 1702 and laid in Emperor Kinmei's tomb. His assertion is considered to have been well-founded and recorded as a truth to be handed down to our days. The texts prior to his were not clear; nor did they mention whether the four monkey stones found near the tomb of Kibihime-no-Miko had been dug out at the same time.

In *Konjaku Monogatari* ("The Anthology of Tales from the Past"), compiled in the first half of the 12th century, and in *Yamato-shi* ("Records from Yamato") edited by Sokō Seki in 1731, it was mentioned that two *saru ishi* had been the objects of study from the very beginning. When examining the group of four monkey stones found later (embodying a woman, the Deity Sannō-Gongen, a priest, and a man), one perceives the two crouching figures have their heads covered with hoods and faces on the back of their heads, as well. They look like being a pair. They may have been the two *saru ishi* mentioned in *Konjaku*

Monogatari, to which the other two (the ones dug out of the paddy field) were added.

Examining the *saru ishi* closely, Hisaoi Arakida (a traditional Japonologist in Edo Period) noticed that one of them clearly exposed the private parts. He immediately associated it with Ame-no-Uzume in the episode of *Ama-no-Iwato* ("The Opening of the Rock Cave") in the Japanese Myth. It goes as follows:

The Sun Goddess Amaterasu hid herself in the cave called Ama-no-Iwato, i.e. she died and was interred in a burial chamber in order to escape from her brother's violent insult. The whole world went completely dark. In order to get Amaterasu out of the cave, the other gods and goddesses threw a party in front of the cave. The goddess named Ame-no-Uzume performed an obscene dance to rouse much laughter. Amaterasu got curious about the peals of laughter she heard and peeked out. At that very moment, a god known for his strength forced the rock cave open. Then Amaterasu revived and the world recovered the light.

This episode tells about the death of the Sun (namely, the sunset) and its revival (namely, the sunrise) but, at the same time, about rituals that incidentally take place at funerals, in front of the tomb: laughter caused by sexual gestures, music and dance.

In *Records of Wei*, the Chinese historical text from the 3rd century, it is mentioned that the people of *Wa* (Japan) are known for the merrymaking at the funerals of persons of high social status. It was due to the belief in earlier times that death and life (i.e. birth) were two sides of the same coin. This explains the large number of similar rituals at funerals and weddings. The feast in front of the tomb that calls forth laughter is like a ritual of rejoice for the coming revival. *Fashang*, the carnival in the south-west of Romania, can also be considered such an example.

A very interesting *haniwa* was excavated in 2002 out of a burial mound called *mukade tsuka*, found in Shintomi-chō, Miyazaki Prefecture. It represents a woman showing her private parts. The hem of the kimono is visibly tucked up and the lower part of the body is emphasized by being painted in Indian red. It can be undoubtedly associated with Ame-no-Uzume.

Resuming the *saru ishi* I have already mentioned, the one embodying the woman must be Ame-no-Uzume. I would like to mention one more example which points out the main role played by Ame-no-Uzume in Japanese mythology. It is connected to the descent to the earth of Amaterasu's grandson, Ninigi-no-Mikoto. The episode goes as follows:

Suddenly at the cross roads between the Heaven and the Earth there appeared a deity with his red eyes radiating light around. It was Saruta-Hiko and he looked so ferocious that no man of Ninigi's could advance. Then Ninigi ordered Ame-no-Uzume to go on the scout because she was said to be most irresistible in the evil eye. She was approaching him with her private parts exposed to view and

inquired who he was. Saruta-Hiko answered he was an earth god and was going down there to make a deferential reception for the heavenly descendants...

The big one in the image, with fierce looks, is supposed to be Saruta-Hiko, the pathfinder, while the little one seems to be Ame-no-Uzume. According to folk belief, exposing private parts to view acts as an amulet that protects from evil eye.

A well-known pathfinder in the traditional Japanese funeral in olden times was Fang-Xiang (Hōsō-shi in Japanese). As it is mentioned in the fascicle 26 of *The Rules of Funeral and Mourning* from the Yoryo Code, Princes of the first Rank and Chancellors of the Realm were provided with a Fang-Xiang hearse to lead the way of their coffins during the funeral procession. Fang-Xiang was known in East-Asian cultures for his exorcism practices during the funeral rites and during *tsuina* (in Japan, the demon purge performed at the Imperial Court on New Year). He is first mentioned in *The Rites of Zhou* in the 1st century B.C.

See below the literal translation of the classic Chinese text:

Fang-Xiang's offices are as follows: he should wear bear skin, be golden and four eyed, wear black in the upper part and red in the lower part, carry a dagger-axe and hold a shield, lead a hundred men to exorcise at the time, search the rooms to smite the evils. And at the Imperial Funeral he should lead the hearse to the tomb and enter the chamber first, poke the four nooks with his dagger to exorcise Evil Fang-Liang.

Classic Chinese is very concise and sometimes ambiguous, but this time it is clear that Fang-Xiang opens the way for the coffin during the funeral procession and exorcises the evil.

The account of his outside appearance ("golden and four eyed") is not clearly stated, but the description of the golden head-cover both on the face and on the back of the head is similar to that of the terra-cotta image of Fang-Xiang in the Han Dynasty, while the bronze one in the Yin Dynasty shows even more clearly the two faces: in front and on the back.

In later periods of time, Hōsō-shi appeared in Japan only at the rituals of exorcism at the end of the year, while in Korea the presence of Fang-Xiang's hearse in the funeral procession lasted until around 1930.

Unlike the physical appearance in the Chinese documents, the Japanese Hōsō-shi carries a pike or a spear instead of a dagger-axe and holds a shield, while wearing a four-eyed mask. On the other hand, in the same documents it is not stated clearly whether the Korean Fang-Xiang is provided with a pike and a shield. But in either case, the mask is not golden and one can see four eyes, but no faces on their backs.

According to the documents extant in both countries, the ritual is considered to be a Chinese imitation. However, at present people wonder what

Fang-Xiang looked like because, except for the annotations in the 2nd century, his appearance as it was described in *The Book of Rites* was completely forgotten. Besides, the four-eyed image still found in Japan and Korea later was no longer to be seen in China, not even under the form of a clay figure.

Nevertheless, there are written records as to a ritual introduced from China around more than fifty years ago, namely that of transferring Buddha's relics to the temple Gankō-ji with a procession preceded by Hōsō-shi's hearse. It does not resemble exactly a king's funeral march, but it is similar to seeing the deceased off to the other world. Since in China Fang-Xiang does not appear in the ritual of transferring Buddha's relics, the Hōsō-shi encountered in Chinese records couldn't have been the same. It may be just a typical example of accidental similarity due to the lack of a Japanese writing system at that time. I mean the Japanese must have borrowed a combination of ideograms that resembled the Chinese name. And this "Hōsō" seems to be one such example.

The truth is that even after the introduction of the Chinese ritual, the funeral specialists called *asobibe* encountered in the old Japanese funeral rites are still to be met with. That's why the ritual of transferring Buddha's relics preceded by Hōsō-shi's hearse is said to be typical of the Japanese, while the word recorded in the Chinese documents is supposed to be a cognate. It must have also been caused by the similarity I mentioned above, I mean the *haniwa* with two faces (in front and on the back).

Nowadays in Japan Hōsō-shi does not show up in the funerals any longer, not even in those arranged by the Imperial Household. But there are folk observances where the presence of such a character is suggested. For instance, in *Shiromi Kagura* in Miyazaki Prefecture we come across a ritual called "the divine farewell". It takes place in several rural districts around the New Year, when the deity from a holy mountain is invited to come down into the village. The villagers meet the deity, i.e. they let themselves being possessed by it and dance *kagura* through the night. The divine farewell takes place at the end of the entertaining program, usually the next morning. I am not going into the details as to the dances, but I would like to mention that the three (in some parts only two) dancers who see off the deity have faces both in front and on their backs, the same as in the funeral ritual in olden times.

Unfortunately, similar practices are not to be found in neighboring countries, but I came across a similar one at ten miles' distance from Japan – in Romania. In Nereju village which lies in a "region archaïque", as the distinguished sociologist H.H. Stahl calls it, there are still practiced precious customs. I would like to mention only one to be met with during the funeral ritual, namely the disguise of the people who call in for condolences. Though I could not attend a real funeral, in 2011 I was lucky enough to closely look at a mock funeral. Stahl gives

full account of the particulars in his precious book written in 1939, but I was able to understand directly that the funeral ritual goes in accordance with the Romanian Orthodoxy alongside with the vestige of an old pagan custom, namely the presence of several callers masked as animals or bogeymen, called “old-headed men”. Since such condolence callers feign old voices, they are thought to stand for the ancestors who come down from the mountains, i.e. Heavens, in order to meet the dead.

I am sorry to say there are nowhere else such examples of condolence callers within the rites of passage. Or, at least, I ran into one only in Nereju, which in my opinion bestows the traditional culture here a gem-like value.

One wonders where the belief in the sacredness of the mountains springs from. The world must have been thought to consist of both the realm of deities and that of people. To put it concretely, the world of the deities lies in the heavens, which at the same time means “the mountains”. Further, “mountains” = “forests”, while the world of people is called *sato* (“village”). Between the forests / mountains and the village, one can encounter the intermediary space called *no* (“plain”), which is in fact the foothill. Basically, when deities descend from the mountains = forests (i.e. from the heavens), people go up to that intermediary space *no* to meet them. After the deities’ short stay in the village, *sato*, people send them back to *no* through a traditional ceremony called *matsuri* (“festival”). This world view pertains both to social events (*matsuri*) and to individual ones (i.e. the rites of passage). The attendance at a funeral makes no exception. Therefore, with most funeral rites the remains are taken to the cemetery that lies at the foothills of a mountain. Incidentally, in Japanese “attendance at a funeral” is synonymous to “sending to the vicinity of the plain”, i.e. burial service.

This world view is common to several areas all over the world. In Sumer language, *kur* signifies “mountain” with the meaning of “the other world”. *Gunrai*, which literally means “coming in crowds” refers in fact to “the collective descent” or “group descending” from the other world. The descent of *kami* (“deities”) in groups is typical of Japan. We can also mention Genesis 18 – 1 ff, Amida-Raigōzu (the picture that refers to Amitabha, a Buddha who, like “Mater Dolorosa”, descends from the Heavens to welcome a dying person on the deathbed), etc. In the same way, in Nereju condolence callers disguise themselves as animals or bogeymen and they attend the funerals in groups.

Through the extension of the sense, the turn of the year means, without any doubt, “an end” that entails “funerals and festivals” – extremely important rituals to prevent “the end of mankind”. In Occident, in conformity with each country’s specific religion, around the winter solstice “old men” (e.g. Santa Claus, Saint Nicolas, Ded Moroz, etc.) come down from the mountains to bring happiness to

people. They correspond to *Toshigami* (“the Deity of the Year”) in Japan, who stands at the same time for the spirits of the ancestors.

The “demon” I spoke about today, which appears at *Setsubun*, is in fact the spirit of ancestors, too. In the beginning, the Chinese character did not represent “the demon” meaning “apparition” or “ghost”, but “the dead”, showing itself in the form of an ideogram resembling a person wearing a big mask. As a rule, the demons at *Setsubun* come in groups, the same as the disguised bogeymen in Romania.

In Japan there are many other customs that resemble those in Romania, but I am not going to speak about them today. Instead, I would like to go back to the funeral rites in Nereju in order to mention the big outdoor fires kindled during the night vigil. James Frazer and other scholars explain them as remains of the old pagan ritual of rebirth or physical regeneration or recovery of life energy.

After the condolence call, the bogeymen in Nereju get out into the garden, line up, and sing and dance *The Cypress* – the symbol of death in Europe. It became such a symbol because it would be planted at the graves. In my opinion, it’s the other way round: it came to be planted in cemeteries because it is considered a sacred tree due to its everlasting nature. The song is not sad, as the deceased is not “dead”, while the “cypress” is taken back to the forest, i.e. to the mountains where it is subject to rebirth. Afterwards, the men jump over the bonfire in the garden. The leader props against a cane that has at the top an animal head with a face in front and one on its back. This reminds of the Japanese Hōsō-shi as a leader and, without any doubt, of Janus.

In Roman mythology, the double-faced image called Janus originates in the deity found in the gateway. It is the special borderline between the house and the outdoors, which explains the image of the deity with two faces. Since the turning point in time is also worth mentioning, we can easily make out the role of Janus as a substitute for ages as well. This role must have entailed his bearing the name of the first month of the year.

Due to the universal character, the image of Janus shows up at the borderline of various cultures. On the other hand, death stands for the transition from this world to the other world and during the passage from life to death there are many rituals to be performed, in which the image of Janus with two faces plays a very important part, since it keeps his faces towards both worlds. If we take the cosmos like that, we can better understand why double-faced figures attended funerals in days of yore. However, with the passage of time, the custom got lost and one can come across vestiges of it only in remote villages like Nereju in Romania or in Japanese traditional observances like that in *Shiromi Kagura* in Miyazaki Prefecture.

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