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Exploring the Japanese Skyscape

Akira Goto

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Figure 1.3 Hoshida Myōken (or sei) statue at Hoshida Myōken Temple 星田妙見神社 in Osaka.

Bootes and Corvus

Farmers of the Setouchi Inland Sea in western Japan sowed wheat when *mugi-boshi* (the wheat-star), Arcturus, rose in the eastern sky at dawn around November. They harvested wheat when this star sat on the western horizon at dawn around mid-May. Here, the red color of Arcturus was associated with reddish ripe wheat.

In northern Japan, Arcturus was called *kato-boshi*, meaning "pigeon star." When the cold north wind ended, and late spring arrived, a big orange star appeared over the eastern mountain during the evening. This specified the season when mountain pigeons would fly down and disturb the garden (Nojiri 1973: 26–27).

In Lake Hamanako of central Japan, Arcturus was called *kaji-kai boshi*. The farmers changed the water in rice paddies when this star reached the mountain in the west during midnights of July. Since *kaji-kai-boshi* sounds like "rudder-paddle-star," this name may have derived from fishermen who used this star for knowing the fishing season or for navigation. For instance, Arcturus was used among fishermen of the Setouchi Inland Sea to determine the appropriate season for catching shrimp octopus, goby, and crab. It was there called *wojima-boshi* (a fish-island star), which indicates the start of the season of abundant fish (Uchida 1973: 157–165).

Throughout Japan, the rectangular shape of Corvus was called *hokake-boshi*, meaning a "sail-shape star." This name was probably used among the sailors of *kitamae-bune*, a north-bound ship route that transported products from Hokkaido Island to western Japan during the Edo Period (1600–1868). Since *kitamae-bune* was sailed frequently and by many ships, this name spread to other places as well (Nojiri 1958: 24).

Scorpio

When the rainy season ended around early July, a long chain of Scorpio rises vertically like a fire flame. In western Japan, it was called *yamagi-boshi* (a willow star), since it resembles a weeping willow. However, in mid-summer, Scorpio changes its position in the southern sky and looks like a fishhook. In the Setouchi Inland Sea, Scorpio was called *wotsumi-boshi* (a star for hooking fish) or *tai-tsuri-boshi* (a star for hooking sea bream). On the Japan Sea side, it was also called *katsuo-boshi*, meaning a star for *bonito* (fishing). In Okinawa, Scorpio was called *tyucha-boshi*, which means a fishhook-star (Nojiri 1973: 41–42). All of these offer comparative examples of how Japanese fishermen saw Scorpio as the shape of a fishhook, similar to the Polynesian.

There are also several interesting names for Scorpio. Antares has σ and τ stars at both sides and together these three stars were called *kagokatsugi-boshi* (a carrying-basket star), *tembin-boshi* (a scale star), or *akindo-boshi* (a merchant star). All of these names derived from the fact that the shape of the three stars looks like a man carrying a scale with heavy baskets at both sides. Similar names could also be applied to Orion's Belt. The baggage was too heavy, which is why the man carrying them in the middle (Antares) had a red face. Antares was referred to as *aka-boshi*, literally meaning "a red star."

If the stars at both ends appeared to be lower, it was believed that the price of rice would be cheap, since the baskets were full of rice. This suggested that a good harvest was coming and that there would be an oversupply of rice. If the stars appeared to be a little higher, the price of rice would be high, since the baskets were not full of rice and therefore there would be a shortage of supply. Also, two small stars, $\mu 1$ and $\mu 2$, were called *sumotari-boshi* (*sumo* wrestler stars), since the two stars looked as if they were pushing against each other like *sumo* wrestlers (Nojiri 1973: 45–48).

The Pleiades and Hyades

Among winter stars, the Pleiades is the most conspicuous. In his fieldwork throughout Japan, Kitao has pointed out that there are two major names for Pleiades, *subaru* or *sumaru* from Honshu to the Kyushu Islands, and *muri-boshi* (clustered stars) in the islands south of Kyushu (e.g., Amami and Ryukyu Islands; see Chapter 7 for further discussion) (Kitao 2018: 16–52).

This star cluster has been called many different names, such as *azuki-boshi* (red bean stars), *gumkan-boshi* (battleship stars), and *musura-boshi* (six string stars) among others. It is likely that the Pleiades appeared to be a group of battleships. The Pleiades was also called *hagoita-boshi*, meaning "battledore star" (Figure 1.4). *Hagoita* is used in Japanese badminton, which is usually played during the New Year season (Nojiri 1973: 121–122; Kitao 2018: 16–98).

The Pleiades has been most important to farmers and fisherman throughout Japan for determining the seasons. For instance, the heliacal rise of the Pleiades in June was the mark of planting rice in central Japan and thus the Pleiades were called *no-boshi*, which means a "star for agriculture." This seasonality does not apply to other areas, however. For instance, rice planting was usually done in March in the Kyushu region. Planting rice also occurred early in northern Japan (May), where it is colder than in central Japan. The difference comes from the difference in temperature and hours of sunlight.

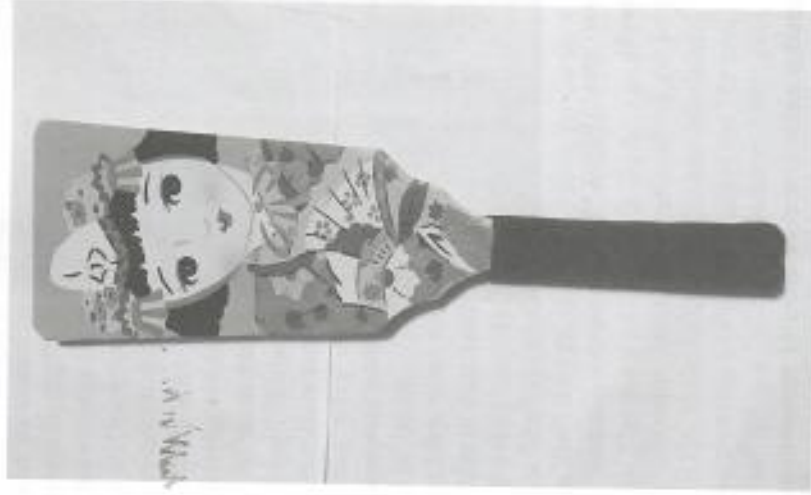


Figure 1.4 *Hagoita*, a racket for Japanese badminton. Source: courtesy of Kitao Kōichi.

When the Pleiades came to a zenith at dawn in September, this was the time to sow buckwheat in western Japan. There was a proverb "*subaru mandoki soba-no-toki*," meaning "when the Pleiades are in the zenith, it is a time to sow buckwheat." In central and northern Japan, acronical set of the Pleiades was the time to sow wheat (Uchida 1973: 5–8).

In Miyagi Prefecture (northern Japan), V-shaped Hyades was called *tagara-boshi*. *Tagara* is a basket carried on one's back for transporting seaweed and crops throughout this region (Chida 2015:72). Alternatively, it was called *mokko-boshi*, with *mokko* also being a local name of carrying baskets in Iwate Prefecture of northern Japan (Kitao 2001: 58–59) (Figure 1.5).



Figure 1.5 *Mokko*, a basket used in fishing villages.
Source: courtesy of Kizao Koichi.

Orion

Orion has been called various names: one of them is *tsutsumi-boshi*. *Tsumumi* is a Japanese traditional hand drum. The heliacal rise of Orion occurs in late July, which corresponds to *natsu-no-doyo* (the day of the summer dog). In central Japan, when the three stars appeared in the early morning, farmers went mowing. During the Bon funeral festival of the old calendar (now corresponding to August), Orion rose at 1 or 2 a.m. and this told the people to send off the spirits of the dead that were welcomed during the Bon festival (Uchida 1973: 62–65).

The culmination of Orion at dawn indicated the sowing season for buckwheat. This is probably around 5 a.m. in the middle of September. In central Japan, there was a saying that "*mitsu-boshi hirama, kana hachigo*," meaning "when three stars are in the mid-day, eight *go* [one *go* = about 150 g] powder can be got." Here, the expression "in the mid-day" means that the stars came to a culmination. Another expression is "*sova-naka*," meaning "in the middle of the sky." Since the seasonality of Orion is close to that of the Pleiades, similar wisdom was expressed concerning the sowing buckwheat (Uchida 1973: 53–55).

Acronical set of Orion's Belt in early December was a time for sowing wheat in central and western Japan. In addition, fishermen in Fukui, western Japan, said that when *karasuki* (a Chinese plow) that is Orion rose in the evening (in the eastern sky), scads and mackerel ate well. Acronical rise of Orion was close to the winter solstice and farmers performed an important Buddhist annual rite: *sandaiishi* ("three great princes") (Uchida 1973: 57–58).

Sowing wheat in December, farmers of Shizuoka, central Japan, said that "if three stars are in the direction of eastern sky near zenith, let's stop working." During this cold season, garden soil was frozen in the morning and therefore farmers sowed seeds of wheat, radish, and millet in the early evening when the soil was slightly warmer. In other places, the same custom was practiced when farmers saw the Pleiades in the western sky near its zenith.

In May, three stars appear in the western sky after the sunset. This told farmers to start working on their rice paddies. In Shizuoka, the three stars were called "*suji-kai*." Here, *suji* meant "rice species" and *kai* probably meant "star" (Uchida 1973: 60).

In the Edo Period (1600–1868), an essayist wrote that they observed that "*mitsu-tsuronetaru-hoshi*" reached Sado Island on the west coast of Japan. The name of this star is literally translated "a series of three stars" and this name must have referred to Orion's Belt (Katsumata 2000: 112–113). In the folklore of the Setouchi Inland Sea, Orion was called *ate-boshi*, meaning a "direction-telling star" or *nerai-boshi*, meaning a "targeting star" (Nojiri 1958: 30; Kuwahara 1963: 146).

I argue that Orion's Belt was one of the most important stars for fishermen and sailors, and this importance must have originated in ancient mythology, which will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Cassiopeia

Due to its W-shape, Cassiopeia was called *ikari-boshi*, meaning "an anchor star" in many regions. During summer nights, fishermen on the sea knew the coming of dawn, seeing the anchor star near its zenith. Also, they knew that the anchor star set in the evening around June 10 of the Old Calendar. These facts indicate that Cassiopeia was an important constellation for fishermen and sailors. In Shikoku Island of western Japan, Cassiopeia was also called *yamagata-boshi*, meaning a "mountain-shaped star." This comes from seeing Cassiopeia upside down, like the letter M.

In a religious context, Cassiopeia could be called *goyo-sei*, "five-days-star," in contrast with, *shichi-yo-sei*, "seven-days-star," which is the Big Dipper. These names came from Esoteric Buddhism and the people knew

Urashima and the Pleiades

The oldest surviving literature after the *Kojiki* and the *Nihonshoki* is the *Fudoki* 『風土記』, which is a description of the regional climate, culture, and geography collected from local countries during the eighth century. In the *Tangono-kuni Fudoki* *Isuhun* 『丹後國風土記逸文』, a partially lost work from Tango Country (north of Kyoto), there is a story of “Urashima Taro” 浦島太郎, which has been a popular folktale in Japan (Chamberlain 1892). The origin of this story can be traced back to the *Tangono-kuni Fudoki Isuhun* and its content is rather different from the Urashima Taro story told more recently. What follows is a summary of the original story.

The *Tangono-kuni Fudoki Isuhun* explains: An ancestor of the local chief, Urano-shimakō 浦嶋子 (hereafter, Shimako) was fishing on the sea and found a rainbow-colored turtle. He brought the turtle into the boat, but it turned into a beautiful lady. She invited him to the island that lies far beyond the sea. At the entrance, Shimako met seven children and these seven children were called *subaru* (the Pleiades.) Then he met an eighth child, who was called *amefuri*, which means “raining” in Japanese. This term came from one of the 28 *Sei Shūku* (28 houses in Chinese zodiac system), and corresponds to 8 stars of the Hyades in the Taurus (Kanezashi 1974: 12).

Shimako had enjoyed his time with the lady for three years, but he felt homesick and wanted to go back to his country. The lady handed him a decorated magical box, *tamakushige*, and told him to never open the box. He thought that only three days had passed, but in his world, 300 years had passed already. The people in his country thought that Shimako was lost forever and he was only a legend. Being nostalgic for the lady, he opened the box that he was prohibited to open. Suddenly, smoke rose and Shimako quickly aged and died.

This story is one of the oldest mentions of the Pleiades or any constellation in Japanese classical literature. However, even in the older version of the Urashima Taro story found in the *Nihonshoki* (Aston 1972: 368) and the *Manyōshū* 万葉集, no mention was made of stars.

On the other hand, the name of the Pleiades is mentioned in *Makura-no-sohi* 『枕草子』, the famous essay written by a woman officer in the tenth century. In this essay, *subaru* (the Pleiades) is mentioned together with other stars, such as *hikoboshi* 彗星 (Aster), *myōjōu* 明星 (Venus or morning star), *yutsutsu* 夕星 (evening star), and *yobai-boshi* (night crawling star, shooting star).

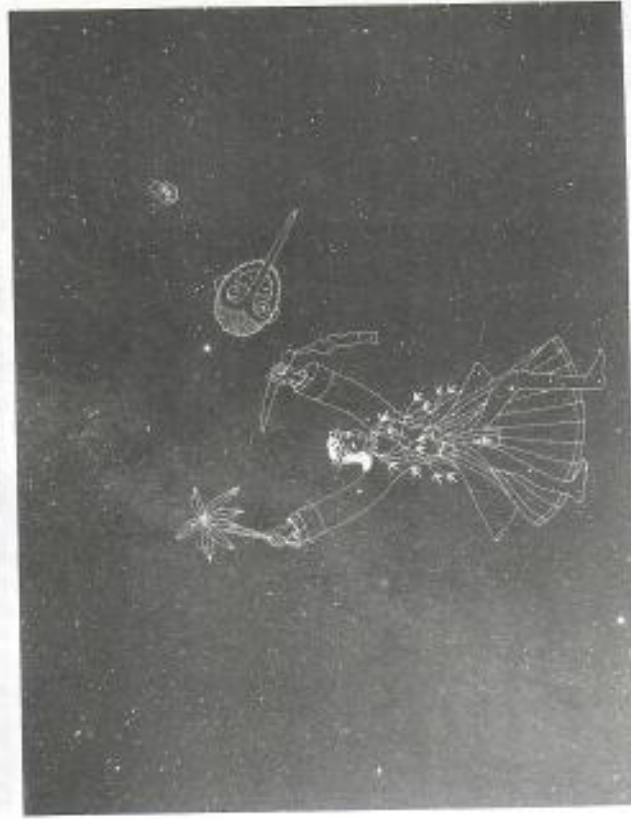


Figure 2.2 Constellations supposed to correspond to the myth of “The August Descent from Heaven” (Katsumata 2000, frontispiece).

Source: courtesy of Katsumata Takashi.

who shine and are noisy like flies. At the same time, grass and trees also speak loudly (Katsumata 2000: 46). Most of the earthly gods finally surrendered to heavenly gods, but only Ama (heaven)-tsu (of)-mika (big round object)-boshi (star) never surrendered.

The meaning of Amatsu-mikahoshi has not been determined definitively, but *mika* probably means “a big round object” and could indicate a big star. Researchers have attempted to identify which star corresponds to it: Venus, Mars, Sirius, Canopus, a comet, a meteor, or something else. Setting aside the problem of identification, most researchers agree that the Amatsu-mikahoshi symbolized local chiefs who did not surrender to the Yamato Dynasty. There are quite a few shrines where Amatsu-mikahoshi is worshiped as a principle god from Kyushu to the northern Kanto region (north of Tokyo) and it seems that these shrines originated in the unification of local powers by the Yamato Dynasty (Katsumata 2000: 46–64).

As the boats sailing during nighttime make the Polaris as a direction mark,
Parents rely on children as a direction mark.

In Okinawa, there is a belief that a human's life span has been determined by a discussion between the Northern Polar Star or Polaris (*nemufa-bushi*) and the Southern Polar Star when the two stars are playing zest. There is, however, no consensus about what the Southern Polar Star refers to, where it is Centaurus (*umamifa-bushi*), Crux, Canopus, etc.

Chant for the applause of stars

In the *Omoro-soshi*, a collection of chants compiled during the fifteenth to sixteenth century, there is a famous chant applauding stars that translates as:

Oh, rising of crescent/is a god's golden bow
Oh, rising Venus/is god's golden arrow
Oh, rising clustered stars (Pleiades) is god's ornamental hairpin
Oh, rainbow-colored cloud/is the band loved by god.

This chant clearly shows the Ryukyu Islanders' view of stars as sacred objects. Concerning the expression in the last verse, *nochi gumo* (literally meaning "rainbow-colored cloud"), astronomer Norio Kaifu argued that clouds are not visible during night time, so this portion should be understood as meaning the Milky Way (Kaifu 2018: 184). In the Ryukyu dialect, the Milky Way is usually called *tin ga ra*, meaning "heavenly river" (*tin* [heaven], *ga* [of], *ra* [river]). This interpretation is reasonable since the expression *obi* (band) means something long. If this is so, this chant consistently references stars that Okinawan people find most praiseworthy.

Origin of star sand

In the Yaeyama Islands, there is a well-known white sand beach called *hoshi-zuna*, "star sand." This sand originated from Foraminifera shells and there is an origin story told on Taketomi Island:

Long ago, a heavenly goddess conceived and looked for a place to deliver her child. She found a beautiful beach on Taketomi Island and delivered her babies. The sea god got angry with this since the goddess defiled the sea. The sea god ordered sea snakes to kill all the babies by biting them. It was believed that the star sand was the remnants of dead babies. The goddess felt very sorry about the babies and

told humans to put star sand in the incense burner of Misaki Utaki Shrine. During an annual ritual, the people burned the incense in remembrance of the babies. The smoke ascends to the sky, taking babies' souls to their mother in heaven.

(from data file of NPO Okinawa Denshowa Shiryō Center)

This legend has been told, concerning Misaki Utaki in Taketomi Island (Figure 4.2).

Observing Pleiades

The Pleiades in the Ryukyu Islands

Among the many constellations seen in the islands, the Pleiades are the most important. The Pleiades is called *murikabushi* or *muribushi*, literally meaning "clustered stars" (*mu*ri [clustered], *shi*). There are many myths and legends about the Pleiades. In addition to a swan maiden myth that is similar to that of Big Dipper cited above, the Okinawa Denshowa Shiryō Center notes famous folktales concerning the Pleiades:

Since many years ago, farmers of the Yaeyama Archipelago have had to pay a very heavy land tax to government officials. Seeing that this



Figure 4.2 Misaki Utaki, Taketomi Island, Yaeyama Archipelago.

was not just, the King of the Heavens ordered the Northern Seven Stars to rule the Yaeyama Archipelago. However, since none of the stars obeyed the king, the stars were banished to the northern sky. Thereafter, the king ordered the Southern Seven Stars to rule the islands. However, again, because the stars would not follow the king's orders, they were banished to the southern sky.

The King of the Heavens then became enraged and all of the stars felt frightened. Then, the constellation of little stars, *murikabushi*, went before the King and said that "I will undertake the job." The king was pleased and ordered him to pass through the center of the sky. Therefore, *murikabushi* rises from the East Sea, passes through the center of the sky of the Yaeyama Archipelago, and sets in the West Sea.

After that, by observing the position of these stars in the sky every evening, the farmers were able to plan the schedule for farm work and were able to know the proper times for sowing and harvesting good crops. Farmers always sang the song of *Murikabushi-yunta*, "song of Pleiades," after working on their farms. Farmers said that the reason why their village was rich is because they knew the best times for sowing and harvest wheat by observing the position of stars *murikabushi* (Kaifu 2014: 70–72).

Star-observing stones

The Pleiades was perceived as a zenith star in the Yaeyama Archipelago. In particular, the rise of the Pleiades was observed to define the season for planting crops, such as wheat and foxtail millet.

In the Yaeyama Archipelago, local people erected stones for observing the altitude of the Pleiades. The stone in Kohama Island is called *shichi-sadame-ishi*, meaning "a stone for determining the season" (*shichi* [season], *sadame* [to determine or define], *ishi* [stone]), and those stones on Ishigaki Island and Taketomi Island (Figure 4.3) are called *hoshi-mi-ishi*, meaning "a stone for observing stars" (*hoshi* [star], *mi* [to observe], stone). The people of these places would sit in front of the stone and observe the altitude of the Pleiades beyond the top of the stone or through the hole in the stone (Figure 4.4a, b). This occurs around November when the Pleiades appear on the eastern horizon at twilight. When the Pleiades reached a certain altitude at twilight in the eastern sky, farmers started to sow wheat. This practice is similar to customs in Micronesia and in the Gilbert Islands in particular (Goto, Ohnishi, and Ishimura 2019).



Figure 4.3 *Shichi-sadame Ishi*, Kohama Island, Yaeyama Archipelago.



(a)



(b)

Figure 4.4 *Hoshi-mi-ishi* in Yaeyama Archipelago.

Notes

a Ishigaki Island.

b Taketomi Island.

The Pleiades Shrine

As discussed, religious shrines in the Ryukyu Islands are called *utaki*. Among hundreds of *utaki*, there is one called Muribushi-utaki, or "The Pleiades Shrine" (Figure 4.5). This shrine was constructed for worshipping the Pleiades. There is a legend concerning the origin of this shrine:

One night, a girl of good behavior saw a light descending from the Pleiades. Every night she saw the same strange phenomenon. The people were so impressed by it that they finally went there to find out what it is. They discovered a circular mark with white sand on the ground. They believed that was the mark where gods descended from heaven. They constructed a shrine for the worship of the Pleiades as a god for fertility.

(from data file of NPO Okinawa Denshowa Shiryo Center)

Star lore: indigenous star book and star chart

Even after the introduction of the Chinese calendrical system, the indigenous system seems to have been kept intact on remote islands. For instance, the discovery of *Star Book* (or *The Book on How to Observe Stars*) in the Tarama Island of the Miyako Archipelago is one example.



Figure 4.5 Muribushi-Utaki, Ishigaki Island.

This literature records the ways to define the seasons and predict the weather by observing stars (Tarama Sonshi Henshu Iinkai 1993: 331–340). Similar literature has been found on Kume Island, which lies west of Okinawa Main Island, and Hateruma Island in the southernmost part of the Yaeyama Archipelago. Also, there are many proverbs and pieces of folk knowledge that predict weather patterns based on star observations (e.g., Iwasaki 1974). There is also a "star chart" from Hateruma Island.

Examining the *Star Book* and star chart together, I suggest that the rising and falling of stars were used to index seasons, although there are some ambiguities as to whether the stars were observed at sunset or sunrise. The Tarama Island literature indicates that the people observe the heliacal rise and acoustical rise of particular stars in order to know the season (Tarama Sonshi Henshu Iinkai 1993: 330), as shown in Table 4.1.

In Hateruma literature, such expressions as "when the star is first visible" or "when the star is last visible," indicate that the people observe stars at certain positions. For example, expressions such as "*a-ri yudon*" of "*ogari-yudon*" are interpreted as a heliacal rise and "*iri-yudon*" is interpreted as a helical set (Kuroshima 1999). Here, *ogari* means "rise" and *iri* means "set," while *yudon* means "stagnation" or "less visible."

In addition, there is also evidence that the rise and set positions of stars were used for telling direction (Table 4.2). In the star chart found on Hateruma Island, it is clearly indicated that stars are used to indicate the direction (Figure 4.6). In the charts, 12 cardinal points are shown and each point is associated with the 12 zodiac animals: north is a mouse, south is a horse, and so on. These 12 animals are also associated with divisions of time in a day: the mouse is midnight, the horse is noon, and so on. These 12 animals also correspond to the 12 years cycle.

This 12-unit system is a modification of the Chinese zodiac system and a similar system was used in Japan as well. From this, we can hypothesize that Ryukyu Islanders used to observe rising and setting points of particular stars as a compass in a similar way to that of the Micronesian star chart.

Sun stone

As will be discussed in the following chapter, the sun was an important symbol of political power in royal ideology. Kume Island, which lies southwest of Okinawa Main Island, was an important location on the trading route between the capital city of Shuri and China. On this island, a high-status man called Donohiya 堂之比屋 is believed to have existed. This man might have occupied a chiefly status and, according to legends, he went to China and learned about the Chinese calendar and astronomy.

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6 Fallen star legends in Japanese folk beliefs

Fallen star legends in old literature

In the oldest existing pieces of Japanese literature, the *Nihonshoki* and *Shoku-Nihongi* (*Ex-Japanese Chronicle*) 『統日本紀』, there are more than 60 instances of abnormal phenomena recorded prior to 710, when the Heijo Capital 平城京 was established in Nara. Such phenomena include eclipses, shooting stars, comets, auroras, Venus being visible during the daytime, and several others. Those phenomena were generally considered to be signs of bad fortune.

The oldest recorded abnormal phenomenon happened in 637 of Emperor Jomei's Era. The *Nihonshoki* has it that:

A great star floated from East to West, and there was a noise like that of thunder. The people of that day said that it was the sound of the falling star. Others said that it was earth-thunder. Hereupon the Buddhist Priest Bin said: "It is not the falling star, but the Celestial Dog, the sound of whose barking is like thunder."

(Aston 1972, Vol. 2: 167)

The celestial dog could possibly be of *tengu* 天狗 origin, which is a demon with a long nose. Further, in 639 of the same emperor's era: "a long star appeared in the northwest. Priest Bin said that it was a bosom-star. When it appeared, there was famine" (Aston 1972, Vol. 2: 169).

In 640, the star encountered the moon and this phenomenon was believed to be an omen forecasting a disaster (*ibid.*). Concerning this star, Aston wrote: "Chinese history records that Venus entering the moon was looked upon by the diviners as portending mortality among the people" (Aston 1972: 16), suggesting that this star was Venus. On the other hand, the astronomer Saito Kuniji argued that the star was Aldebaran and he arrived at this conclusion using an astronomical calculation (Saito 1982: 14).

In 685 of Emperor Tenmu's Era, the *Nihonshoki* states:

On this evening at twilight, a great star passed from the East to the West ... A thing appeared in shape like a Buddhist baptismal flag and was of a flame color. It floated through the void towards the north and was seen by all the provinces. Some said it sank into the Sea of Koshi. On this day a white vapor arose on the Eastern Mountain, four fathoms in size.

(Aston 1972, Vol. 2: 357)

Here, Koshi 越 refers to present-day Niigata Prefecture, which lies north-east of Yamato, facing the Japan Sea.

In addition, the *Fuzoki* 『風土記』 states: There was a stone in Mt. Tamaoki of Owari County 尾張 (Aichi Prefecture). It was where a red star fell and there lies a *hoshi-ike* (star pond) at its foot. The water of the pond always mirrors a star and a star lives in the pond. There is a strange rock that was considered to be a transformation of a star and even today stars fall on the mountain from time to time.

Additionally, in a report from Iyo County 伊予 (Ehime Prefecture), it is written that: A mountain in heaven was divided and fell onto earth. One became Mt. Tenzan in Iyo County and another became Mt. Ameno-Kagayama 天香久山 in Yamato County 大和 (Nara Prefecture).

In this way, unusual astronomical phenomena (fallen stars in particular) were often recognized as ominous signs. But in western Japan, there are several Shinto shrines that worship the remnants of fallen stars as a sacred object (Figure 6.1).

Shrines of fallen star legend: Kudamatsu of Yamaguchi Prefecture

One of the most famous examples of fallen star legends came from Kudamatsu 下松 of Yamaguchi Prefecture (Figure 6.1: 4). On September 18, 595, a large star descended upon a pine tree of Aoyanagi-ura Beach, which is now in Kudamatsu City. The star illuminated for seven nights like a full moon. An augur said: "I am the bodhisattva Myoken. After three months and three days, Prince Rinsho 琳聖太子 of the Paekche Kingdom 百濟 of Korea will come here. Tell Prince Shotoku 聖徳太子 to welcome him to Japan" (Sugihara 1985: 23–25).

Legend has that it was then, when Prince Rinsho actually came to Kudamatsu, that Prince Shotoku sent Hata Kwakatsu 秦川勝 to see him. It is also said that Prince Rinsho introduced star-worship rituals, in particular, those of Myoken, to Japan for the first time in 597 (Ueno 2010: 138).

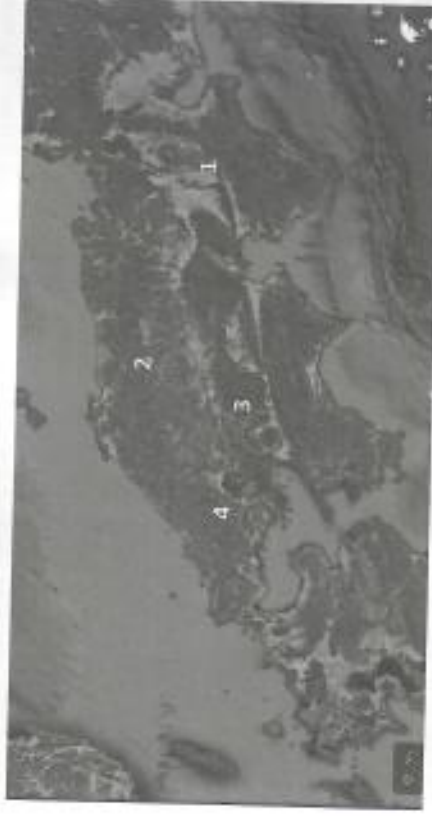


Figure 6.1 Map of western Japan.

Notes

- 1 Katano and Hirakata City Area (Osaka).
- 2 Okayama City and Biset Town Area (Okayama).
- 3 Imabari City and Nihama City Area (Ehime).
- 4 Kudamatsu Town Area (Yamaguchi).

At the place where pine trees were standing, now lies Kanawa Shrine 金輪神社. Three pine trees used to stand at that time and these trees were named "pine trees shaped like a tripod kettle" (Figure 6.2: a).

Prince Rinsho departed to Japan and landed on Tatara Beach near Kudamatsu. Prince Rinsho built a palace on Mt. Juto 鷲頭山 where he established a star shrine to worship the Bodhisattva Myoken. This shrine is now the Kudamatsu Shrine (Figure 6.2: b), but because of the separation between gods and Buddha 神仏分離令 in the Meiji Era (after 1868), Myoken has moved to the Buddhist Juto Temple (Sugihara 1985) (Figure 6.2: c).

Descendants of Prince Rinsho became the Tataru Clan 多々良氏, which later changed into the Ouchi Clan 大内氏. The Ouchi Clan governed this area from the Medieval Period until the fifteenth century. Many historians consider that the legend of Prince Rinsho was fiction for several reasons. Probably the Ouchi Clan created this legend to legitimate their origin as descending from Korean nobles (Kudamatsu Shishi Hensan Iinkai 1989).

I do not discuss the validity of such legends here. The point is that the Prince Rinsho was said to be the ancestor of the Tataru Clan. *Tataru* originally means cupola furnace or foot-operated bellows and the term later came to mean specialists of forging and iron-making. This place was famous for forging by sand iron and the Ouchi Clan was also known to

have been active in developing mines (e.g., *Iwami Silver Mine*) (Wakao 1980: 124). The important point here is that the fallen star legend was closely related to the introduction of advanced forging technology and star worship from the Asian continent.

Hoshida Shrine in Katano City, Osaka

This legend is closely related to the famous monk Kobodaishi 弘法大師 or Kukai 空海. Kukai is the founder of Esoteric Buddhism and astrology, which was brought from China. He is also considered to have been actively engaged in developing mines.

In the early ninth century, legend has it that Kukai was training and chanting a mantra in a cave of Katano City (Figure 6.1: 1). Then from heaven, a large star fell and broke into three pieces. One fragment fell in an area called *hoshi-no-mori* 星の森 ("forest of stars"), one fell on Korinji Temple 光林寺 (Figure 6.3: a), and the last one fell on the summit of Mt. Hoshida Myoken 星田妙見 (*hoshida* meaning "field of stars"). The rock in the yard of Korinji Temple is said to be the remnant of the fallen star (Figure 6.3: b). Interestingly, these three places form an equilateral triangle (Akiyama 2008).

Presently, Hoshida Myoken Shrine exists on the summit of Mt. Hoshida Myoken (Figure 6.3: c). Behind the shrine on the summit, there is a rock that is said to be the remnants of the fallen star at that time (Figure 6.3: d).

In Neyagawa City, just west of Hoshida Myoken Shrine, there are place names that remind us of the Hata Clan: Hata, Uzumasa, and Kawakatsu. The Hata Clan are considered to be specialists responsible for flood control. In Neyagawa City, there is Hosoya Shrine 細谷神社, but in historical records preserved in one of town's old family Nishijima, that shrine was originally the Hoshiya Shrine 星谷神社, which means "Star Shrine." Ueno believes that this shrine was established by the Hata Clan from China and worshiped stars on the basis of Chinese star customs (Ueno 2010: 131–134).

Hata Kawakatsu, who was said to have welcomed Prince Rinsho at Kudamatsu, was living in the Neyagawa area. This area had strategic importance in water transportation between Setouchi Inland Sea, Osaka Basin, and the capital in Nara. Ueno pointed out that the Hoshida Myoken Shrine was located to observe north, south, and west in order to control the water transport of the Yodogawa water system (Ueno 2010).

The Hata Clan were originally seafarers to whom the Polaris was important, probably as a guiding star of navigation. Myoken symbolizes the Polar Star whose worship is considered to have been spread by the Hata Clan.

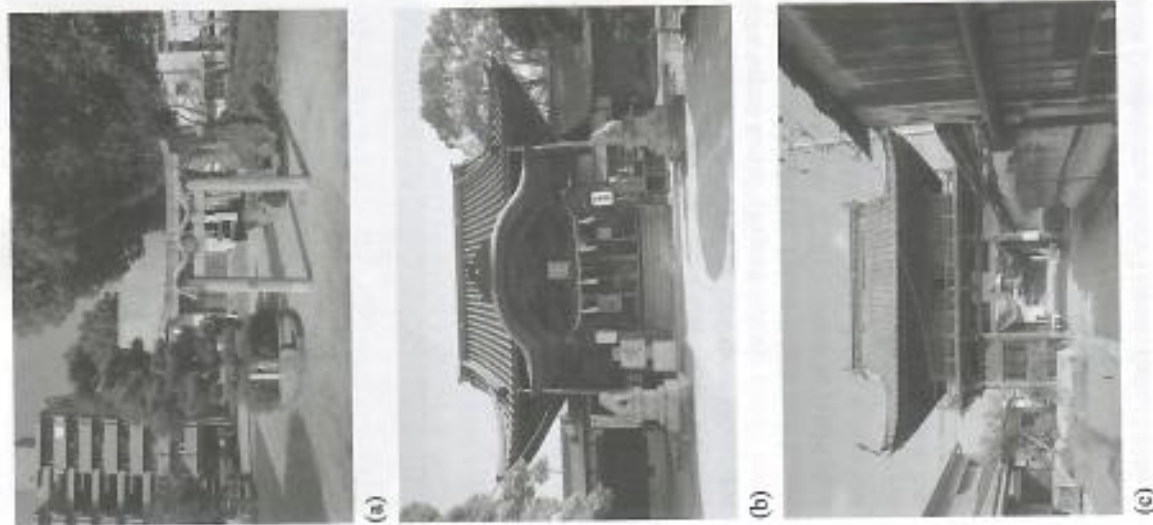


Figure 6.2 Shrines and Temples in Kudamatsu City related to fallen star legends.

Notes

a Katsawa Jinja and the Pine Tree.

b Kudamatsu Shrine.

c Jutosan Temple.

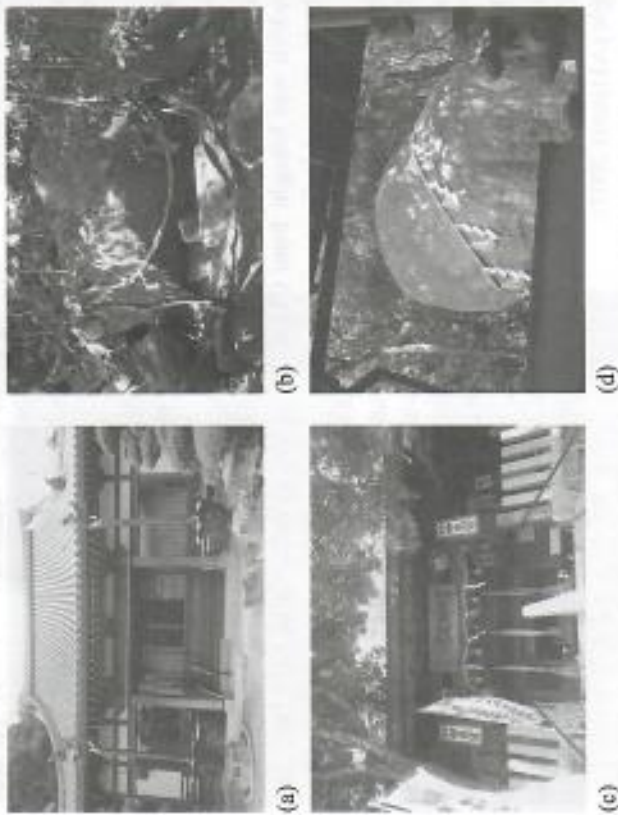


Figure 6.3 Monuments, Shrines, and Temples in Katano City related to fallen star legends.

Notes

- a Korinji Temple.
- b The rock said to be the remnant of a fallen star.
- c Hoshida Myōken Shrine.
- d The rock said to be the remnant of a fallen star.

Kibi Region, Okayama Prefecture

Bisei Town, now included in present-day Ihara City, is located in a mountainous area in Okayama Prefecture (Figure 6.1: 2). There is a legend about the origin of three shrines in the area that originated from a fallen star (Bisei Choshi Hensan linkai 1976).

In early the twelfth century, three shooting stars fell to the earth. The local chief who governed this area built a small shrine to worship the stars. When his descendants became ill, he prayed to the stars. One night he dreamed of Hoshio 星尾, one of the 28 *Sei Shūta* (Chinese lunar houses), and he recovered. Then he rebuilt the previous small shrine into Hoshio Jinja 星尾神社, which means “star tail shrine” (Figure 6.4: a).

Originally this shrine was facing south. When the fishing catch continued to be poor, fishermen heard an oracle that they should face the



Figure 6.4 Shrines and Temples related to fallen star legend in Bisei Town.

Notes

- a Hoshio Shrine.
- b Takaboshi Shrine.
- c Myōjin-shū Temple.

shrine to the north, which is the direction of Myoken. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, fishermen used to visit the shrine to ensure a good catch.

The other two shrines from this story are Takaboshi Jinja 高岳神社, meaning "high star" (Figure 6.4: b), and Myojinsha 明神社 meaning "bright star" (Figure 6.4: c).

A similar legend is recorded about the Hoshi Shrine 星神社 of the Manaboshi Area of northern Okayama City. Legend has it that during the era of Emperor Tenmu (673–686), a black cloud suddenly descended, and thunder continued for 31 days. The people did not go near the mountain out of fear and they saw something shining on the mountain summit. When they asked an *ommyoji* (an astrologer) to divine it, the *ommyoji* said that three rocks fell on the summit, and it was a symptom that Mikahaka-Hikono-Mikoto descended from heaven to the earth.

Mika means "round object," as discussed in the previous chapter concerning Ama-tsu-mika-hoshi, and the name of the god who descended might be its variant. The villagers constructed a shrine and changed the place name to Mana-boshi 真星 ("true star"). Three rocks behind the shrine are believed to be those that fell from heaven (Figure 6.5).

In the Shimoni District where the shrine is located, there is a place called Kami-Hata Village (Upper Hata) 上土田村 and "hata" refers to the Hata Clan who is said to have migrated to here. There is also a place named Ohnaru 大成, which could be derived from the site of smoked iron (Okayama City Society for the Study of Place Names 1989).

This area is part of the ancient Kibi Kingdom that was once a competing hegemony with the Yamato Kingdom. The reason why Kibi was so strong politically was that this area was the center of most advanced iron forging at that age. This area is famous for iron sand and archaeological evidence shows that the iron-making technology introduced from the Korean Peninsula was innovated considerably in this area.

Iyo County (Ehime Prefecture)

In Iyo County (Ehime Prefecture) of Shikoku Island, there are shrines constructed on the basis of fallen star legends (Figure 6.1: 3). These include Hoshi Jinja (star shrine) located in the Hoshi Ura (star inlet) 星浦 in Onishi Town (Figure 6.6: a) and Manaboshi Jinja (true star shrine) in Hoshihara (star field) of Nihama Town (Figure 6.6: b).

The place in Iyo County where these shrines are located is known for being rich in mineral resources. One of the biggest copper mines in Japan, Besshi Copper Mine 別子銅山, is located here. This area is famous for mercury. Mercury was important for decorating Buddha Statues in the



(a)



(b)



(c)

Figure 6.5 Hoshi Jinja Shrine in Okayama City.

Notes

a Hoshi Jinja Shrine.

b The Emblem symbolizing fallen star cracked in to three parts.

c Sacred Rocks said to be cracked fallen star.

capital. In addition, this area is known as the place where the Hata Clan actively engaged in trading, mining, and probably forging mercury. I would add that this area was the home base of the monk Kukai, who had a strong relationship with the Hata Clan, star worship, and probably mining as well.

The following example has been recorded in Japanese folklore. About 600 years ago in Iyo, in Onishi Town (now belonging to Imabari City), there is a legend saying that a star fell in this area. Since it was a curious stone, children played with the stone by rolling it. Adults, seeing this, warned against this as it might induce bad karma. Then a serious disease spread among the population and the people constructed the Hoshi Jinja (star shrine) for worshipping the stone. They named this area as Hoshi Ura (star inlet) (Nishioka 1976: 82–83).

In Nihama City, east of Onishi Town, there is another star shrine, which is the Manaboshi (real star) Shrine at Hoshibara (star field). According to historical records, a meteorite once fell in this area and the villagers constructed the shrine to worship it. The shrine still prohibits ordinary people to see the sacred object.

In the Heian Era (794–1192), during the days of the annual festival, from July 14 to 26, and from December 14 to 28, a market was opened in this shrine. Those days of the old calendar correspond to summer solstice and winter solstice respectively (Nihama Shishi Hensan linkai 1980).

Discussion

Japanese star worship is complex, as it is syncretized with Kokuzo-Bosatsu worship 虚空藏菩薩 (Bodhisattva Akasagarbha) and Esoteric Buddhism (Sano 1994). It was Kuka who introduced Esoteric Buddhism, including star worship from the Tang Dynasty of China, to Japan during the early ninth century. He is also considered to have been ambitious in developing the area's mining industry. The temples of the Shingon Mission 真言宗, founded by Kukai, were often built in mountains near mines (Tani 1983; Sato 1991).

In relation to this, historians and folklorists have noticed the close relationship between star worship and mine developers (Sato et al. 1991; Wakao 1994). Historical records indicate that pioneer miners were immigrants from Korea and the northern Kanto region (north of Tokyo), and that they constructed many star shrines near mines. Among these naturalized Japanese, the Hata Clan was most known.

Mine developers tend to worship the Bodhisattva Myoken, symbolized as the Polar Star and believe that mineral resources originated from heaven (Ohwa 2013: 370; Tani 1983). Among *tataru*, iron forgers, belief in



(a)



(b)

Figure 6.6 Shrines related to fallen star legends in Imabari City and Nihama City.

Notes

- a Hoshi Jinja Shrine, Imabari.
- b Manaboshi Jinja Shrine, Nihama.

Kanayako-gami 金屋子神 is popular. This is the belief that forgers descended from heaven onto the mountain and started making iron. They had strong taboos, such as the taboo of touching women (Inada et al. 1994: 545). The relevance of Myoken belief to ironwork is also pointed out among samurai clans of the Boso Peninsula 房総半島 and the Chiba Clan 千葉氏 (Marui 2013).

There are many Hoshi Jinja 星神社 (star shrines) in the northern Kanto region. Most of them enshrine gods of Iwasaku 岩裂 (rock-splitting god) and Nesaku 根裂 (root-splitting gods). In Ancient myths (see Chapter 2), when the goddess Izanami was delivering babies, she died because her genitals were burned by the fire god Kagutsuchi 迦具土神. Izanaki felt sorry for Izanami and felt angry about the fire god, and, in response, he cut Kagutsuchi into three pieces, each of which became a god. One version of the *Nihonshoki* states that the blood that dripped from the edge of the sword became the myriad of rocks which lie in the bed of Amano Yasukawara 天安河原, the Easy River of Heaven (Aston 1972: Vol. 1: 23).

Masayuki Tsugita, who translated the original text of the *Kojiki* into modern Japanese, argued that the shedding of Kagutsuchi's blood from which several gods were transformed, reminds us of forging in which iron is burned and stroked, producing red sparks, and finally forming an iron sword (Tsugita 1977 Vol. 1: 59).

Aston argued that Amano Yasukawara represents the Milky Way and therefore the gods of Iwa-saku and Ne-saku thus formed a symbolized myriad of stars in the Milky Way (Wakao 1994: 77). Iwa-saku and Ne-saku are often worshiped in star shrines of northern Kanto and are often syncretized with Kokuzo-Bosatsu. The northern Kanto region is rich in mines and Hoshi Jinja shrines are considered to be closely related to the mining industry (Wakao 1980) and naturalized Japanese (Kurabe 1983). I argue that the act of cutting the fire god Kagutsuchi into three pieces, and the name Iwa-saku (splitting rock), have symbolic associations with forging and meteorite.

It is Mircea Eliade who recognized the relationship of meteorites to forging. He wrote,

they [meteorites] fall to earth charged with celestial sanctity; in a way, they represent heaven. This would suggest why so many meteorites were worshiped or identified with a deity. The faithful saw in them the "first form," the immediate manifestation of the godhead.
(Eliade 1956: 20)

The meteorite is associated with fire or sparks, as are blacksmiths. In New South Wales of Australia, meteors were associated with fire and

linked to the *waratah* plant (*Telopea speciosissima*), whose brilliant red flowers seemed to the Aborigines like sparks from a fire. In the early years of white settlement, some Aborigines brought *waratah* flowers to the European blacksmiths. They identified the sparks from anvil with the sparks from meteors and hence with the *waratah* flower (Haynes 2000: 85-86).

In conclusion, like many groups in the world, the ancient Japanese came to believe that new technology, producing fire or sparks, or which transform stone or sand into metal, was a magical or esoteric procedure. This is especially true of the western part of Japan, which had a direct influence on cultures from the continent. This situation served to develop star worship, and fallen star legends in particular, which are associated with *kikajin* (the naturalized Japanese) expert group.

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7 Cosmology seen in house and burial orientation of the Hokkaido Ainu, northern Japan

The orientations of houses and burials seem to have been decided based on several factors, such as river orientation, land slope, and various others. Ainu villages were typically arranged along a river and the river's upstream movement toward a sacred mountain was just as important as the eastward orientation. I will examine whether this difference came from regional or temporal variation.

Prehistoric chronology in Hokkaido

The prehistoric chronology of Japan is shown in Figure 7.2. In Hokkaido, where rice cultivation was then impossible, a distinct Post-Jomon culture

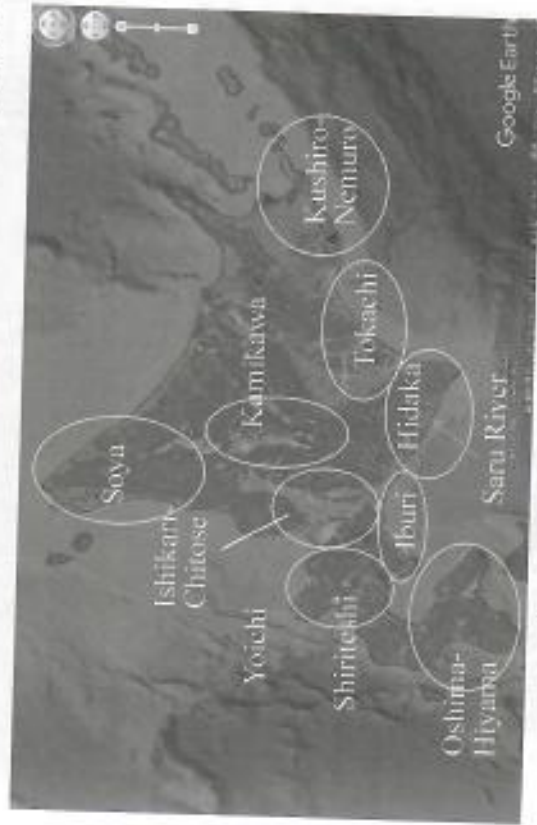


Figure 7.1 Hokkaido and its regions mentioned in this chapter.

Interestingly, the sun of December solstice is seen to rise just over the Nakamon Gate that connects the world of darkness and that of light. Seen from this tomb, the direction to Kudaka Island appears to be the direction of the heavenly world.

The last King of the Urasoe Dynasty, King Satto 察度, who lived in the latter half of the fourteenth century, was invited to Shuri Castle to construct a new capital, again by "zeijo" succession. King Satto was succeeded by his son Bunei 武敏, but King Bunei was later defeated by the Sho Clan. The Sho Clan then founded the Sho Dynasty at the beginning of the fifteenth century and they defeated Northern and Southern Kingdoms, which united the islands. The First Sho Dynasty continued for seven generations and the Second Sho Dynasty continued for 19 generations (Asato 2006).

The sacred Kudaka Island

Kudaka Island 久高島 was the most sacred island in the Ryūkyū Islands. The size of this island is only 1.38 km² and its maximum height is 17.5 m (Figure 8.6). This small island is known for the *Izaiho* ritual, which has been held every 12 years in the year of the horse. This ritual was last performed in 1978 and ceased thereafter. A series of rituals were held for five days until one day before the December solstice to initiate the priestess.

The inhabitants of the island consider the direction of sunrise to be sacred since there is an ideal space, *nira-hara* or *nirai-kamai*, from which gods visit the island. This place is also where ancestors live and where the fertility of crops and seafood came from. As already mentioned, the sun rises at *teda-ga-ama*, which lies toward the direction of *nirai-kamai*. The islanders pray toward this direction (eastward). On the other hand, the sun sets in the direction of *tida-banta*, which means "cliff where the sun hides" (Higa 1993).

The islanders consider the direction of the sunset to be impure. Once a year, they put harmful insects on a model raft made from banana trees and ritually drift them to this direction in order to prevent a crop failure due to an insect plague. On the island, there is a proverb saying that you should finish your wish before the sun crosses the meridian. The islanders consider that the sun is stronger before noon and is weaker afterward. The sacrifice to the dead and the ritual to remove harmful insects should be done in the afternoon. They also sacrifice the dead in this direction and the soul of the dead is considered to follow the setting sun. Both the sun and the souls go around the underground or under the sea and finally reach the *nira-hara* in the eastern sea (Wakugami 1992).

Kaberu Hama Beach is located at the northeastern corner of the island. Kaberu means "the field of gods" and this is the place where the heavenly



Figure 8.6 Kudaka Island.

god Amamikyo first ascended. On this beach, rituals are held in February and June of the lunar calendar. The summer ritual held on June solstice sunrise is *miruku-gwati*, meaning beautiful or new June when the sun is to be reborn. On this day, the sun god descends on the small rock in the sea and then it lands on this beach (Higa 1993). The rock is referred to as Ugan-jima, meaning "the island for prayer." The villagers said that the June solstice sun is seen to rise behind this rock. The trail is extended from this beach southwestward to the village and this trail is said to be the road of the sun. I suspect that this ritual is to introduce the strongest power of the sun on June solstice to the village.

Unlike many other islands, rice does not grow on this island. In contrast, the creation myth describes this island as the origin of wheat. Legend has it that a white shinning pot was drifting and beached on Ishiki Hama Beach 伊敷浜 on the east side of the island. When locals opened the pot, it contained seeds of five crops, one of which was wheat. The wheat was dedicated to the royal palace and the king thereafter visited this island to celebrate this event (Suetsugu 1995: 117–118).

There is another legend regarding the origin of wheat:

The daughter of the founder of Kudaka Island served as a priestess in the royal palace. She was beautiful and loved by the king. She became his wife and became pregnant, but other women who were jealous harassed her said that the lady broke wind (farted). Being ashamed,

she returned to the island and begat a boy. The boy, when turning seven years old, went to Ishiki Hama Beach and prayed to the gods. After seven days, a golden gourd drifted to him. He dared to see the King Tamagusuku 玉城, the 4th king in royal lineage founded by "solar king" Eiso of (the 4th king of Urasoe chiefly lineage originated in Shuntan) and dedicated the golden gourd to the king. He said to the king, "if a woman who never breaks wind plants it, it will produce a lot of fruits." The king realized his fault and came to know that this wise boy was his son. The king adopted him as his successor and the boy became the fifth King Seii 西威. After that, kings came to visit Kudaka Island to get the first crops of wheat and worshipped the sun at this beach.

(Suetsugu 1995: 117–118)

The legend of a shining pot or golden gourd drifting to the Ishik Hama Beach, the place to pray for the sun, indicates the origin of wheat was closely related to sun worship.

Solar kingdom in Shuri

After the unification of the islands by the Sho Dynasty in the Shuri district of Naha City, there was a growing tendency to see the king as the sun itself. The *Omorososhi* is full of such expressions. For example:

shuri owaru, tedakoka/tama, isigaki, kerahete
(in Shuri, live, child of the sun)/(beautiful, stonewall, built)

Translation: "In Shuri Castle lives a child of the sun (i.e., the king), he built a beautiful stonewall" [No. 217 song in Volume 5: Hokama 2000].

These expressions clearly indicate that the worship of the sun occupies the central role in the ritual of the kingdom.

As already mentioned, *teda* means "the sun" and *teda-ko* means "the child of the sun." *Teda* is a symbolic expression applied to kings as well as to local chiefs, but *teda-ko* is used only for the king. There is a possibility that *teda* was originally a symbolic expression to someone with political power, such as *aji* 按司 (local chiefs), but *teda-ko*, child of the sun, was specifically used to symbolize king or paramount chief (Fuku 2002). There is another possibility that the expression *teda-ko* was created during the Shuri Dynasty, or at the era of King Shoshin 尚真 of Second Sho Dynasty, in particular, and that *teda* was given to local chiefs in order to legitimate the subordination of local chiefs to Shuri Dynasty (Suetsugu 1995: 166–167; Yoshinari 2018: 226–233).

In the Ryukyu Dynasty, there is a historical record that notes that locals performed the new year ritual on December solstice and the New Year (Irumada and Tomiyama 2002: 229). During this ritual, the king stood at the balcony of the palace and faced westward (Asato 2006: 46–47). The followers in the royal garden looked up eastward at the king symbolizing himself as a sun god. This ritual was clearly of Chinese influence, since in China at the December solstice ritual, the king worshipped the north direction (i.e., Polaris and the Forbidden City of Beijing 紫禁城) (Ikemiya 1990).

At Shuri Royal Castle, when a king died his corpse was carried out from the Kankaimon Gate 坎会門, which is located in the northwest of the palace. On the other hand, when the new king came up to the palace for the first time, he passed through two particular gates, the Keiseimon Gate (継世門), meaning "the gate for succession (of the King)," and the Bifukumon Gate (美福門), meaning "beautiful and happy gate." These gates, which are located at the southeast of the palace, were usually used only by women officials, but at the time of succession, they were used by the new king. He passed from the eastern end of the castle through Keiseimon and Bifukumon and moved westward to the palace (Figure 8.7: a). Thus, the

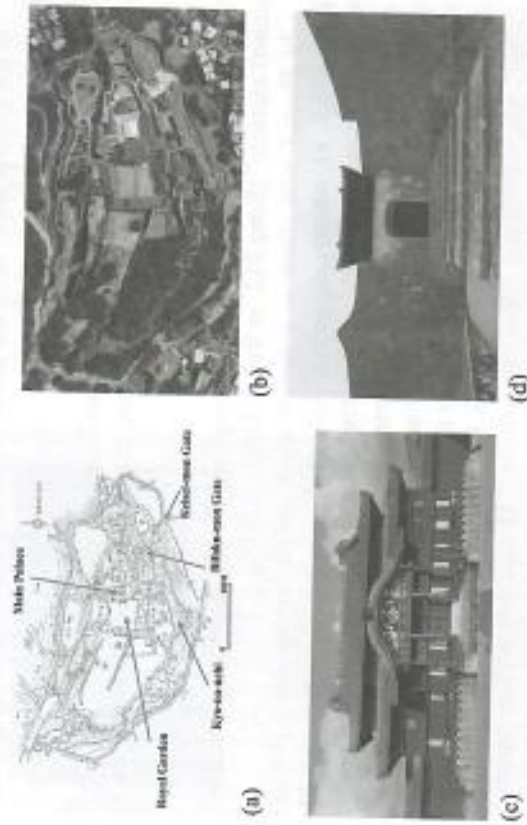


Figure 8.7 Shuri Castle.

Notes

a Plan of Shuri Castle (modified from Okinawaken Kyoinka Inkaik Bunshaka 1975: 32).

b Shuri Castle seen from Google Earth.

c Reconstructed Main Palace facing west (burnt down in October 2019).

d Keisei-mon Gate.

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