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SPATIAL CHARACTERIZATION OF HUMAN TEMPORALITY IN THE RYŪKYŪS

Introduction

SCHOLARS dealing with the traditional folk culture of Japan, and in particular with problems of cosmological representations, seldom omit reference to the Nansei Shotō (Southwestern Archipelago), commonly known as the Ryūkyū Islands—whether on a comparative basis, or in search of a past that has been preserved. The degree of cultural kinship between mainland Japan and the Ryūkyūs is a moot point which I will not tackle in this paper. Let it just be said, however, that in the domain of cosmology, as has emphasised by numerous authors (see, for instance, Ouwehand 1964: 85 ff.), there are obvious links between the concepts found in both places of a 'far-away land' (land of the dead, *tokoyo*, or land of the primeval deities, *ne no kuni*, as known in mainland Japan, and *nirai-kanai*, as known in Okinawa), or between the various ritual traditions of 'visiting deities' (*marebito*) related to those concepts.¹

Though traditional Ryūkyūan culture and society have been slowly vanishing for many decades, one is nevertheless left with a complex and diversified picture of ancient cosmologies. In this respect, it is worth noticing that rites appear to last longer than explicit beliefs and representations, so that, when memories fail, the observation of rites may still provide relevant information about bygone times.

1. For a parallel with the tradition of visiting deities on mainland Japan see Laurence Caillet's discussion of the Ricefield God (in the present volume).

In connection with the bare fact of the geographical isolation of these islands, the weak influence of organized Buddhism surely accounts for the rather well-integrated aspect of village cosmologies in the Ryūkyūs, as recorded during the present century. Yet on the whole, discrepancies between local concepts, even on the same island, should not be under-estimated. Here one cannot neglect to mention the name of Mabuchi Tōichi, whose comparative analysis of local traditions has proved very stimulating (Mabuchi 1968, 1980).

However, the subject I will be dealing with departs slightly from the usual approach to the relationship between space (i.e. symbolic orientations) and time (i.e. annual rites) in cosmologies. Here, I wish to restrict myself to some aspects of the way in which human temporality is figured in space—or, rather, 'characterised', since one is not dealing simply with a material space but rather with space that is symbolically oriented also.² The general intention of this paper can be summarized by indicating that it gives support, in my view, to Durkheim and Mauss's statement (1969: 74) that 'La considération des temps est parallèle à celle des espaces'.

I will mainly be making use of data collected on Tarama Island during a stay of sixteen months (from March 1978 to July 1979). This small, round island, which is only twenty square kilometres in area, is located midway between Miyako Island to the north-east and Ishigaki Island to the south-west. It has received influences from both regions. Tarama is a one-village island, with clustered dwellings; its population, which has been steadily decreasing since the war, has now fallen below 2,000.

I will successively consider observances occurring on three levels of space: inside the domestic unit, in the neighbourhood, and in the village—or island—taken as a whole.

From Birth Onwards

Briefly, as can quite commonly be seen all over the Ryūkyūs, houses (*yā*, 屋) in Tarama have a quadrilateral shape with two main front rooms. Most frequently—according to folk orientations—they face south (or sometimes east), but in reality they face south-south-west. Outside, the yard of the house is surrounded by a stone wall which also opens towards the south. The kitchen stands on the west side of the house, sometimes as a separate building. Due to its nature and function, it is essentially a women's place, where the fire-deity is honoured (*fi nu kam*, 火の神). Guests (usually male) are entertained in the first and most honorific room, on the east side of the house (most often the greatest

2. In spite of conventional anthropological usage, the word 'time' should be dropped and replaced by the word 'temporality', which simply means 'being in time', since in practice one rarely grapples with the problem of what time actually is or consists of.

dignity seems to be attached to the north-east corner, but in Tarama there is some ambiguity between the north-east and south-east corners). Further to the west, the second room is used for meals and daily activities. When a house has been inhabited for several generations, it has its own altar for ancestor worship, built in the back wall of the second room. Outside, located in the north-west corner of the yard, there is a pigsty and a privy, which formerly had a ritual significance with regard to purification and fecundity.

From a static viewpoint, the Ryūkyūan house is a sort of microcosm which reproduces in the course of everyday life the cosmic hierarchy between east and west: the east side is superior (*wāra*, in Tarama dialect) to the west side (*stādi*). Heat, sunlight and masculinity are the main attributes of the east side, and their opposites—humidity, darkness and femininity—are those of the west side. From a dynamic viewpoint—that is to say, taking into account the meaning of certain rituals—females and the fire deity connect the west side of the house compound to the east side of the cosmos, displaying an instance of hierarchical reversal. Under Taoist influence the fire deity is conceived of as a go-between, reporting, at least once a year, near the end of the last month, the deeds of humans to the ‘deities of Heaven’ (*tin nu kam*, 天の神), thus ensuring protection to the household. Moreover, the fire deity seems to be akin to the primeval deities belonging to the ‘far-away land’ on the east side (for details, see Beillevaire 1982).

Until recently, the bringing forth of a child took place at the rear of the kitchen. The placenta was buried behind the house, in the north-west corner. In Tarama, four days afterwards, occurred a ceremony (*fuzu urusu*, Japanese *kujibiki*) for the selection of a name for the new-born child (*yarabi nā*, 童名, or ‘domestic name’). I cannot here go into all the details of this ceremony, but the process of selection was of a divinatory kind, where first the fire deity, then the ancestors, would be asked to express their preference. On the same day, the mother carried the baby in her arms through the house and out into the yard through the door on the east side. There, she introduced her baby to the sun deity (*uputeda ganasu*). One may think of this quick and early move from west to east as an epitome of a person’s destiny from birth to ancestor-hood or *kami*-hood. This blunt statement calls for an explanation. But first, a few words are needed about what Lebra (1966) termed the ‘life-sustaining human spirit’ (*mabui* in Okinawa). In Tarama village this kind of ‘soul’ or vital principle, akin to the Japanese *tama* or *tamashii*, is honoured, or taken care of, on a small altar with an incense-burner located in the first room (in traditional houses on Tarama there are very few *tokonoma*, viz. the slightly raised ‘sacred dais’ commonly found in Japanese country houses). It is called *mabvul*, but also referred to in conversations as *mamorigami*, or ‘protective *kami*’. The *mabvul* comes to inhabit the body for life, and leaves it at the moment of death. There seems to be a closer relationship between the head of the house and the *mabvul* than with other members of the domestic unit.

Two main eschatological opinions, loosely related, coexist among Tarama islanders. One is the belief in the reincarnation of a deceased person whose name has been given to a descendant of either sex in the male line (that is, the *mabvul* is supposed to be reincarnated). The other possibility is for an ancestor to merge

eventually with the *kami* (deities) of the cosmos who abide in ‘Heaven’ (*tin*), or more precisely on the horizon towards the south-east, a place commonly called *nirai-kanai* on other islands.³ In Tarama, however, the *nirai-kanai*, or *nilla* in local dialect, is seen as a dreadful place located deep beneath the surface of the island and inhabited by *kami* whose function makes them reminiscent of the Greek *moira*. According to the opinion of some villagers, the ‘spirit’ of people who have just died would remain there for a short while during the liminal stage of funerary rituals.

The ‘career’ of an ancestor starts from the day of the funeral. The corpse lies in front of the altar for ancestor worship, or *kamidana* (神棚, also called *butsudan*). On that day, the west side of the house is laden with pollution, and food for the participants has to be conveyed out of the house from the kitchen to re-enter the house via the first room. In Tarama it is customary to put under the pillow of the deceased a small bag containing ashes taken from the incense-burner of the *mabvul* altar. The coffin is carried outside into the yard through the inferior side of the entrance way (the opening in the surrounding wall, being barred by a recessed wall [*tsunpun*], is divided in two ways—east and west, superior and inferior).⁴

From that day on, the deceased is remembered by means of a tablet (*ipai*, 位牌) on the *kamidana*, and by a long series of rites. The *mabvul* of the dead is sometimes deemed to reside in the tablet itself. Usually thirty-three years after the burial (though this may vary a great deal), a last rite (*upu ninki*, 大年忌) is held, implying the ‘deification’ of the ancestor—literally his elevation to the status of *kami*, or *ubudatti* (大立ち) (although in fact the word *kami* is used for younger ancestors too). The tablet is then destroyed, or the name of the ancestor simply removed. However, these now anonymous *kami*-ancestors are still revered on the *kamidana*, but on the right side (facing it)—that is, towards the east, in a special part with a separate incense-burner (for a similar observation, see Newell 1980). Elsewhere in the Ryūkyūs, a similar place for deified ancestors is found in the first room. The existence of an *ubudatti* section of the ancestral altar bears witness to the fact that a house has reached the status of ‘stem-house’, or *yā mutu* (屋元; *mutu yā* on Okinawa, a term with sociological implications somewhat different from the Japanese *honke*).

Much older ancestors, termed *uzugam* (Japanese *ujigami*), are given particular attention in some houseyards. Their altar is situated in the eastern part, most often in the north-east corner. These ancestors are sometimes said to be the founders of a domestic line of so-called *shizoku*, or people of ‘gentry’ status

3. On this point see for instance Yoshida’s description of the *hamaori* ritual on Tokunoshima (in the present volume).

4. This hierarchical scheme opposing east and west exerts a wide influence on the behaviour of villagers. For instance, three days after the funeral, women and children related to the house go to the north beach and clean the soiled clothes belonging to the deceased; on their outward journey they have to take a western (*stādi*) path (that is, western in relation to the village), whereas they come back home on an eastern (*wāra*) path.

(良い人, *yūkāl pstu* in dialect). It is difficult to check this assertion, because former *shizoku* were surprisingly numerous in Tarama (over 50%, probably illegitimate descendants of court officials sent on duty or exiled on the island). What remains beyond doubt is the seniority of these houses (大屋元, *upu yā mutu*). Whether or not a privilege of status—and as a consequence of deeper genealogical memory—these *uzugam* are granted power of protection against disease, sterility, and malevolent spirits.

In Miyako, according to the *Dictionary of Okinawan Cultural History* (Maeda, Misumi and Minamoto 1972: 393), protective *yashikigami*, or 'deities of the residential site', termed *tokulgan* or *tokulnushi*, are also honoured in the north-east corner of the houseyard (associated with the 'direction of the tiger', *tura nu pa*, Japanese *tora no hō*, as derived from the Chinese zodiac). Evidence of the transformation of ancestors into *yashikigami* can be found in several places in mainland Japan (for an example from Miyazaki prefecture see Yonemura 1976: 180). In Tarama the protective power of *uzugam* is clearly exemplified when a house is situated along the north-west corner of a cross-roads. In this situation the south-east corner of the yard of the house becomes a weak point through which there can enter the sacred but also deleterious energy of the *yū nusu* (世主), originating from far away in the 'horse direction' (午の方, *uma nu pa*);⁵ entry to this part of the yard thus has to be prohibited. However, if the house is entitled to have an *uzugam* altar, it is placed in the south-east corner, and its protective power removes the prohibition on the use of the area.

To summarize, in opposition to the cosmic life originating from the east (or also from the south-east, according to folk orientations in Tarama; see Beillevaire 1982), which is the home of the primeval deities, human life starts from the west, on a mundane level. However, during a person's lifetime, his or her vital principle belongs to the eastern part of the house. Death is followed by a movement back to the west, but gradually the ancestor, unless reborn, moves east again, and tends to merge with the cosmic *kami*.

The Spatial Expression of Succeeding Generations

The hierarchical relationship between east and west, and to a lesser degree between north and south, also appears in the spatial ordering of houses. Everywhere in the Ryūkyūs the inheritance of houses strictly obeys the rule of male primogeniture. As a consequence, younger children have to leave the house, at their wedding at the latest. Formerly, there was a tendency among Ryūkyūan villagers to cluster together not far from an older 'stem-house' (*upu yā*

5. Literally translated, *yū nusu* means 'master of the *yū*'. According to Origuchi Shinobu, the early meaning of *yū* (Japanese *yo*, as in *tokoyo*) was 'grain harvest', 'grain' (see Ouweland 1964: 88). Each year, during the Sutsu Upunaka festival, the *yū nusu* visits the realm of humans, bringing renewed fertility and prosperity.

mutu) of their domestic line. But in doing so they had to comply with one rule: descendants' houses (the houses of younger sons) had to be built on the west or south side of the 'stem-house'—otherwise, all sorts of evil would have been brought about. I noticed several such cases of extended house-arrangement in Tarama, chiefly in the more densely populated Yoshikawa ward. The spatial subordination of the sites of younger sons' houses is often reflected in these house names (屋の名, *yā nu nā*, Japanese *yagō*); in that case, it is common to retain the stem-house name and to add a prefix such as *pai* or *il*, which mean south and west respectively. Nakamatsu (1972) has shown the existence of a similar ordering of houses on Miyako Island (especially in Karimata village), and in older villages on Okinawa Island.⁶ Muratake (1975) also drew the conclusion that, because of the superiority and sacredness of the north side, ancient Ryūkyūan villages tended to expand southwards (as, for example, Nagusuku and Maezato villages on Okinawa Island). This also seems to be the case in Tarama, but contrary to Muratake's own opinion concerning Tarama, the north is not superior to the south in every ritual context (see below). Moreover, in Tarama the dangerous region of the tombs, where malevolent spirits are supposed to wander, is located north of the village.

The genealogical development of a family and village expansion are both open-ended processes in human experience. Nevertheless, the house-arrangement they display shows that they are also conceived as framed, at least partly, into the symbolic orientations of space.

Before taking the discussion further, it may be appropriate here to mention the spatial usage of the twelve animal signs of the Chinese calendar or zodiac, a subject that relates simultaneously to the various levels of the houseyard, the village section, and indeed the whole island. Their usage is directly modelled upon the Chinese practice. Each animal sign corresponds in a fixed way with an orientation and, combined with other cycles, determines the fortune of units of time. At the houseyard level, each of the twelve orientations hosts a *kami*, but these are almost always collectively honoured as houseyard *kami*. The four signs—rat (north), tiger (east), horse (south), and cock (west)—refer to orientations significantly involved in important domestic or communal rites. In a more profane manner, they are also used within the village to designate each of the four wards.

Myth, Rite, and History

Let us now look at some major events that take place at village level. Tarama village is clearly divided, following a north-south axis, into two sections which

6. The *agere* house of priestesses mentioned by Yoshida Teigo in his paper on Tokunoshima (in the present volume) shows another instance of the symbolic superiority of the east side in the ordering of houses.

are nowadays administrative sub-units or *aza*. This division runs right across the island territory, north and south. Each *aza* consists of four *buraku* or wards. It should also be added that there are six main shrines (*utaki*, Japanese *otake*) for the whole community. Although in the course of ordinary life the symbolic meaning of this bipartite division is not so overt as in other villages of the southern Ryūkyūs (Sakishima), it nevertheless reveals itself in certain ritual contexts, such as the Sutsu Upunaka and the Hachigatsu Odori festivals, at which times the west side of the village stands as primary and feminine, the east side as secondary and masculine.

The festival of the Sutsu (or Shitsu) Upunaka is the climax of the annual ritual cycle, and marks the renewal of the agricultural year. It is held around the end of May, on the 'water-days' of the Chinese calendar—formerly when the millet harvest was completed.⁷ The word *sutsu* (節), cognate with *setsu* in modern Japanese, conveys the meaning of a transition or hinge between two seasons (and of a bamboo knot also). *Upunaka* (大中) means 'big', or literally 'great middle', also referring to the turning of the year. The word *shitsu* is not uncommonly used in the Ishigaki area as a term for festivals with a similar general signification, but with very different ritual proceedings.

On the second and most important day of this festival, the priestesses of the community (司, *tsukasa*) proceed from west to east, in the southern outskirts of the village. On sites revered by tradition are settled four ceremonial camps, each belonging to a pair of wards (*buraku*). The first site, Nagashigawa, from where the procession of the priestesses starts, obviously possesses more prestige than the other three sites. In fact, the first site is related to the two westernmost wards of the oldest part of the village. While they walk from one camp to the next, the priestesses ask the fertilizing power (*yū nusu*) to come down and bless the earth. In the four camps, all the ceremonial arrangements face east or south, save for the last ceremony on the third day, when the participants turn to the west. At that time, the secular order is reinstated and malevolent spirits warded off. During the ceremonies that are held at each camp on the second day, as well as on the route between these camps, the leading priestess is always the one in charge of the village shrine, called Ungusuku Utaki, where the tutelary hero of the whole community is worshipped. This half-legendary, half-historical character is worthy of some further remarks, but some enlargement of the context is needed first.

The myth of origin of the Tarama islanders relates the story of a brother and a sister who, very long ago, luckily escaped a tidal wave that drowned all the other villagers. The brother and the sister innocently became husband and wife, and after some initial failures begat the forebears of the present-day villagers. This story is but one version of a mythic theme widely found in the Austronesian area. Records of the same myth have been made elsewhere in the Ryūkyūs, especially

7. It is worth noting that the rite of 'rejuvenating water', clearly connected with the renewal of the year, still occurs in Tarama during the Sutsu Upunaka, while it takes place at the lunar New Year in the main island of Okinawa.

on the island of Hateruma where, in a manner more conspicuous than in Tarama, the myth frames the local symbolic landscape (and particularly the bipartite division; for a detailed analysis see Suzuki 1977: 26–8). In Tarama, this myth is called the Bunaze Myth, from the word *bunal*, meaning 'sister'.⁸ The safe retreat that prevented the Bunaze couple from being drowned is a low hill located to the west of the village. Within a short distance from there, just on the boundary of the dwelling area, can now be seen a small sanctuary dedicated to the couple; it is deemed propitious against sterility.

After this rapid encounter with mythical beings, let us pass on to the second act of local history—associated with the famous (and better attested) character called Ntabaru Shungen. The villagers say Ntabaru came from Amagawa (Ama well), the oldest part of the village, but in fact he might have been the son of an official dispatched from Miyako Island. Around the year 1500 Ntabaru, still in his teens, killed seven hooligans of the village. Then, by means of trickery and strength, he carried out the political unification of Tarama Island (prior to that time there had been three separate clusters of habitations). But the greatest feat in Ntabaru's eventful career took place when he sided with Nakasone from Miyako, and helped suppress the rebellion fomented on Yonaguni Island under the aegis of a local chief, Untura. The victory substantially contributed to ensuring the hegemony of the Kingdom of Shuri over all the Ryūkyū Islands, and Ntabaru received the title of Tuyume as a reward for his services. (The Kingdom of Shuri, on Okinawa Island, had previously been known as the Middle Kingdom, before it gradually superseded the two rival kingdoms on the same island.)

This brief historical outline will be sufficient to further an understanding of the symbolic setting. As mentioned above, Ntabaru was living near Amagawa, in the western and dominant part of the inhabited area. Ntabaru's presumed descendants share in their first name the character *shun* (春, meaning 'spring'), and thereby form the Shun Uzu (the Shun 'clan'), the largest *uzu* in Tarama.⁹ Nowadays, they still maintain special links with the western half of the village, and form a significantly higher proportion of the villagers who reside there. To that side also belong the two main shrines (*utaki*) dedicated to Ntabaru. The first and oldest shrine has been previously mentioned in connection with the Sutsu Upunaka festival. The second, called Tarama Jinja, was built at the beginning of this century, under the pressure of the growing nationalist ideology that favoured the unification of Shinto shrines. It is used both as an ordinary *utaki* for

8. In the Ryūkyūs, sisters are supposed to be endowed with a protective spiritual power over their brothers' destiny, a power which is termed *onarigami* (*onari* and *bunal* are the same word). However, in Miyako and Tarama this attribute nowadays seems to be lacking, and the interpretation of past data is a matter of discussion. Anyway, in Tarama as indeed throughout the Ryūkyūs women play the foremost part in religious activities. This notable feature of Ryūkyūan culture first pervaded court life as well as peasant life, but from the seventeenth century it receded at court under the pressure of Confucian ideals.

9. Actually there is a genealogy showing how certain domestic lines branched off from some remote scion of Ntabaru in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries.

parishioners living in the western wards and, on official occasions, as a shrine representative of all the villagers. For this purpose, the memory of Ntabaru was reactivated by electing housewives from the domestic line of his most direct descendants (as claimed by the villagers) to be the priestesses in charge of this shrine. But yet another small sanctuary, located to the west, bears Ntabaru's name. It is in the surroundings of this sanctuary, called Ntabaru Ugan, that each year, in autumn, there commences the other great festival, gathering together the whole village. This festival, the Hachigatsu Odori, is a dramatic and colourful performance relating the surrender of the local chiefs in the southern Ryūkyūs. In olden times, the festival was held when the task of collecting taxes had been completed.

The festival lasts three days. On the first day, it takes place in Ntabaru Ugan.¹⁰ On the second day, it is continued in the eastern part of the village, in a place where the house of Ntabaru's concubine is said to have been located. On the final day, the festival is performed simultaneously in both places. Despite its more profane appearance, the general signification of the Hachigatsu Odori, like the Sutsu Upunaka, is to call for abundance and prosperity. In this context too, the fact that the festival is started on the first day by villagers from the west side is definitely considered a token of its historical and ritual pre-eminence. People think of this side as the *mutu* (元) side—the root or stem-side—of Tarama village. It should also be observed that the *shishi* (獅子, 'lion'), performed at the start and close of each day's performance, is female on the west and male on the east.

What can be concluded from this cursory presentation of ritual organization on Tarama Island?

First—although this is hardly a discovery in the Ryūkyūan context—the east–west axis is of the utmost importance for the annual renewal of fertility. On Tarama, it manifests itself during the Sutsu Upunaka as a procession, leading village representatives from west to east, and involving the participation of every ward and shrine. The complementary division between east and west also finds expression in the Hachigatsu Odori. In both cases, the west side draws prestige from initiating the festival. A comparable procession, welcoming the *yū* (世迎い, *yūngai*) and moving from west to east, can also be observed on Taketomi islet, near Ishigaki (Ishigaki 1976: 81 ff.). But in many other villages the east–west duality operates by means of a fixed contest between representatives of each side of the village (a boat-race or a tug-of-war). Most frequently, the west side has to be the winning side. By this symbolic victory, the west side acts on behalf of all the villagers as a receiver or purveyor of the fertility and prosperity annually bestowed by the deities from the outer world (usually the 'far-away land' to the east). Though this is without any doubt the dominant spatial perspective in Ryūkyūan culture, I am aware that data from other places are not always perfectly consistent with this schema: in practice, it is necessary to pay attention

to the local topography (see Mabuchi 1968).¹¹ Nevertheless, my purpose here is restricted to the linking of Tarama's specific customs with the broad outline of Ryūkyūan concepts of space.

Secondly, the data from Tarama indicate that the Ntabaru legend and history take root in, or coalesce with, a pre-established symbolic pattern of space. This is not the only instance of such a tendency. Related to the aforementioned rites of bisection in villages of the main island of Okinawa (the tug-of-war), it is also the case that crests of the former royal house of Shuri are borne by representatives of the west section (Muratake 1975: 307). Note that here, however, the west side occupies a dual role: it stands for the feminine and worldly (whence the presence of the royal crests), but its worldly status makes the west side the actual intermediary—like women—between this world and the outer world represented by the east side of the villages. More similar to the case of Tarama, at least two other places give evidence of the intermingling of history with spatial symbolism. In Hateruma, where the east–west polarity is quite pronounced, the children of a personage similar to Ntabaru, who happened to die while fighting for the king of Shuri, were granted the charge of three shrines as a reward for their father's deed: following their rank of birth, the eldest brother and sister received the west shrine, the brother and sister coming next obtained the shrine situated in the middle, and the youngest pair the east shrine (Suzuki 1977: 33–4). Moreover, in Komi, on Iriomote Island, *shizoku* (people with 'gentry' status) inhabited the south section of the village (Miyara 1973: 168). Here, the village is divided between north and south. During the festival of the red and black masks (*akamata-kuromata*) incarnating visiting deities, the black mask of the begetter deity is an attribute of the south section, and consequently was previously worn by *shizoku* villagers.

Conclusion

Two notions of time are commonly held as primary and opposites (see Leach 1961): the notion of a repetitive or 'cyclic' time, based on periodic events such as seasons and the growth of plants, and the notion of a time that slips away, or 'linear' time, referring to the uniqueness of each human existence, the succession of generations from a founding ancestor, or the irreversible course of history. From this analytical standpoint, birth and death fit either with the first or the second notion, depending on whether one chooses a subjective or a collective approach. Contrary to this dualistic presentation I have tried to show how, in Ryūkyūan society, these diverse sorts of events, whether recurrent or not,

10. In the morning, before the performance starts, villagers from the west side pay a visit to the Bunaze sanctuary.

11. But, whatever its topographical expression, one should bear in mind the pervasive existence in the Ryūkyūs of the complementary opposition between male and female elements, and between village divisions.

individual or collective, all tend to be concretely expressed within a symbolically oriented and encompassing space. No original concept of time is involved here. The perception of time displayed in Ryūkyūan folk culture might rather remind us of Aristotle's concept of a substantial time linked to physical movements or changes. This 'human temporality' consists precisely of such physical changes intervening in human life or in the natural environment, but also of invisible changes in culturally significant areas such as the incorporeal existence of the ancestors. In Ryūkyūan society (though presumably other specific examples could be found elsewhere) these changes are symbolically materialized as movements within space. History too, which is related to the development of a centralized kingdom, seems to some extent to be grafted onto the traditional spatial and cosmological pattern. In short, this oriented space can be described as a kind of mnemonic device embracing in lasting form different aspects of human temporality.

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