

## Regional Types in Japanese Culture

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Chapter 6

Regional Types in Japanese Culture<sup>1)</sup>

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I PURPOSE AND METHOD OF THE STUDY

Regional differences in Japanese culture and society, especially the remarkable contrasts between northeastern Japan and southwestern Japan, have attracted much interest from various disciplines since the end of the Second World War, and significant contributions have been made independently by sociologists, physical anthropologists, cultural anthropologists, linguists and other related scientists. In spite of these efforts, however, empirical data about these differences have not substantially accumulated, and interpretations of this data still seemingly remain at the stage of conjectural hypothesis.

In order to obtain further evidence and thus shed new light upon the problem from a cultural anthropological point of view, we started a project called "The Study of Regional Differences in Japanese Culture" organized at the Department of Cultural Anthropology, University of Tokyo, in 1959. We adopted three different methods and applied them one by one in three consecutive phases.

The paper we read at the Annual Meeting (1962) of the Kyū Gakkai Rengō Taikai (the Union of Nine Academic Societies) was an interim report based on the results of Phase II and on early returns of the questionnaire of Phase III; the return has reached 1,113 in number since then and we have completed additional analyses. We have thus amended the original paper with some additions of maps and tables.

II REGIONAL FEATURES OF SOME PARTICULAR ITEMS

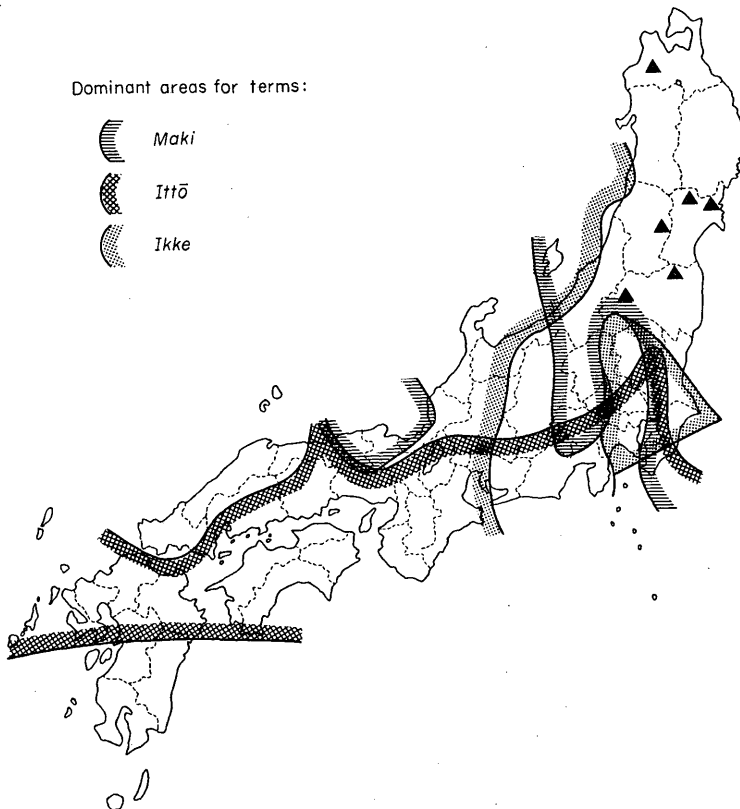
1) Terms Designating a *Honke-bunke* Group

Terms which designate a group of *ie*, presumably consisting of a *honke* and its *bunke*, turned out to be quite numerous (we registered 66 terms) and overlapping in their distributions. It must also be noted that we do not know the structure of such groups simply from the term, nor can we assume that the same term represents the same structure wherever it may be found. Despite this ambiguity, we have tentatively called such a group "a *honke-bunke* group," but it is still debatable whether there really exists such a unified entity. Distributions of these terms are not even but show considerable regional characteristics both by their presence and by their absence, and they thus offer clues for establishing correlations with other items.

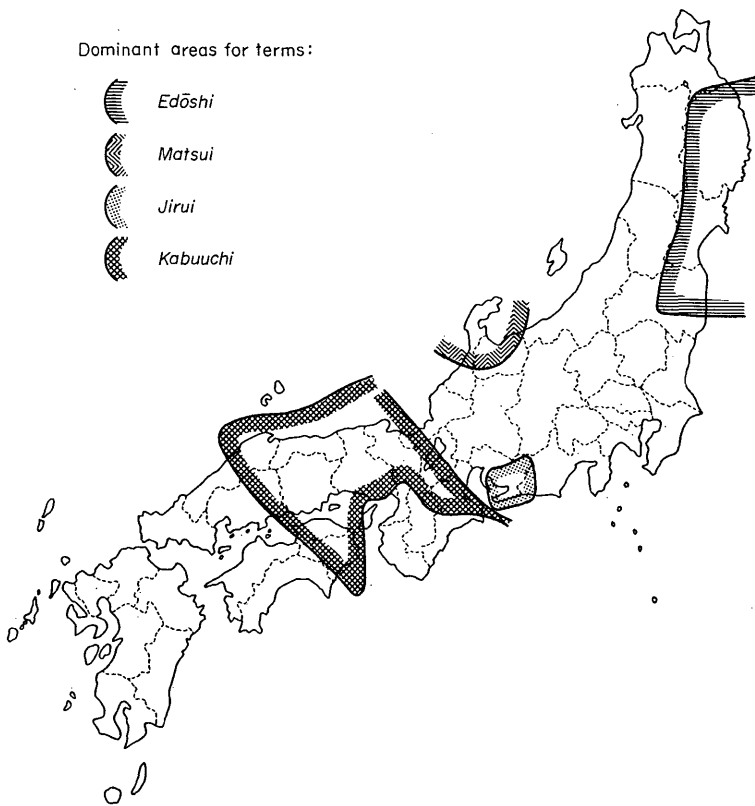
1) "Nihon Bunka no Chiiki Ruikei," *Jinrui Kagaku* (Human Sciences) vol. 15, 1963.

Terms which are widely distributed and frequent in number are *maki*, *ikke*, and *ittō*. *Maki* is concentrated in Tōhoku and Niigata, but is also found in Kantō (especially in Chiba) and Chūbu, sporadically in northern Kyōto and Hyōgo and in a part of the coastal areas of the Seto Inland Sea. On the whole, the pattern of its distribution may be classified as a northeastern type. Distributions of *ittō* and *ikke* contrast to that of *maki*, but while the former almost entirely occupies the non-*maki* areas and reveals its southwestern characteristics, the latter is a western type, which overlaps the *maki* areas in the coastal areas of the Japan Sea. It is also noticeable that *ittō* is not found in Sanin (the western coastal areas of the Japan Sea) and in southern Kyūshū.

Apart from these three terms, some terms exhibit very limited distributions. Thus, *edōshi* is concentrated in the Pacific side of Tōhoku, *matsui* is confined to the Noto Peninsula and its southern fringes, and *jirui* is found only around Ise Bay. The distribution of *kabuuchi* is much wider, but it is also limited to northern Kinki, eastern Chūgoku and the northeastern corner of Shikoku. The *edōshi* area comprising the eastern parts of Tōhoku corresponds to the area where the typical northeastern type



**Map 1** Divisions by terms for *honke-bunke* group I



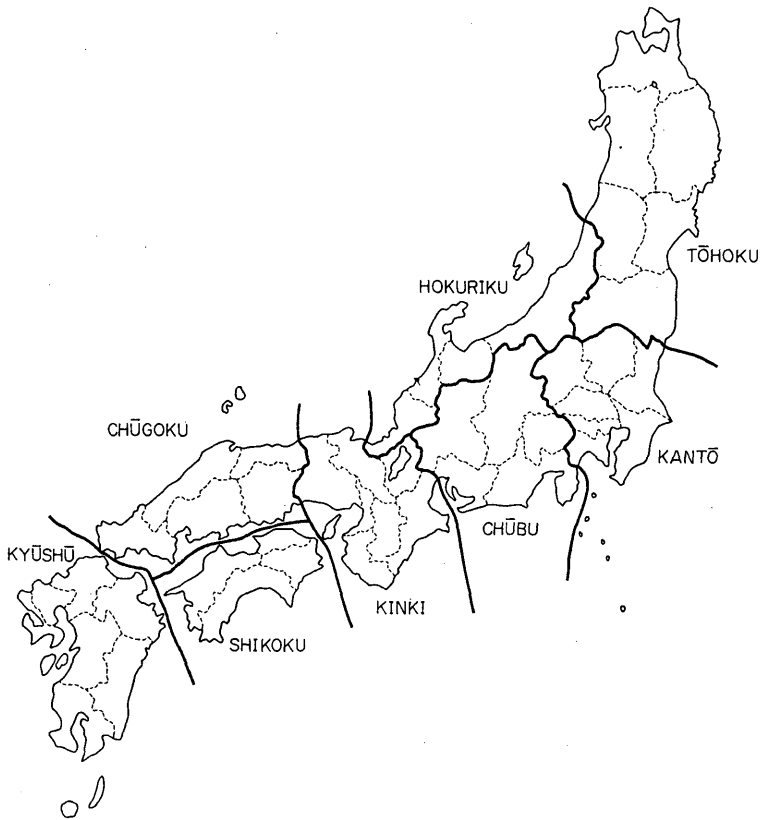
Map 2 Divisions by terms for *honke-bunke* group II

is said to be found and there may be differences in social organization between that area and the western side of Tōhoku.

Other numerically infrequent terms which show localized distributions are: *kamae* of Yamagata (4 cases), *yagomori* of Miyagi (4), *yauchi* of Miyagi (2) and *dōke* (5) and *jimyō* (3) of Chiba. Thirteen terms were recorded in Chiba and this is remarkable compared with the number of terms found in other prefectures.

## 2) Permanent and Ranked Relationship between *Honke* and *Bunke*

It is structurally significant whether or not the *honke-bunke* is regarded as lasting forever; or as terminating at a certain point, such as the final mourning ritual for the head of the *bunke* (the ritual is held either in the thirty-third year after death—mostly in eastern Japan—or in the fiftieth year, in western Japan); or at a time calculated to be a certain number of generations since the founding of the *bunke*. This may be related to the hierarchical view that states that the *honke* is ranked higher than its *bunke*. The view that the relationship of a *honke-bunke* is permanent is found widely throughout Japan and reaches seventy-three percent of the total answers. The same is true



**Map 3** Eight main regions of Japan (except Hokkaido)

**Table 1** Perpetuation and nature of *honke-bunke* relationship

Perpetuation nature	Permanent		Limited		Total
	Hierarchical	Egalitarian	Hierarchical	Egalitarian	
Tōhoku	81%	3%	16%	0%	100%
Hokuriku	79	2	16	3	100
Kantō	72	6	18	4	100
Chūbu	65	9	23	3	100
Kinki	60	16	20	4	100
Chūgoku	55	8	34	3	100
Shikoku	33	20	35	12	100
Kyūshū	38	15	33	14	100
Total	64	9	22	5	100

**Table 2** Perpetuation and nature of *honke-bunke* relationship and three terms for *honke-bunke* groups.

	<i>Maki</i>	<i>Ikke</i>	<i>Ittō</i>	Total
Permanent	82%	69%	65%	70%
Limited	18	31	35	30
Total	100	100	100	100
Hierarchical	90%	73%	70%	75%
Egalitarian	10	27	30	25
Total	100	100	100	100

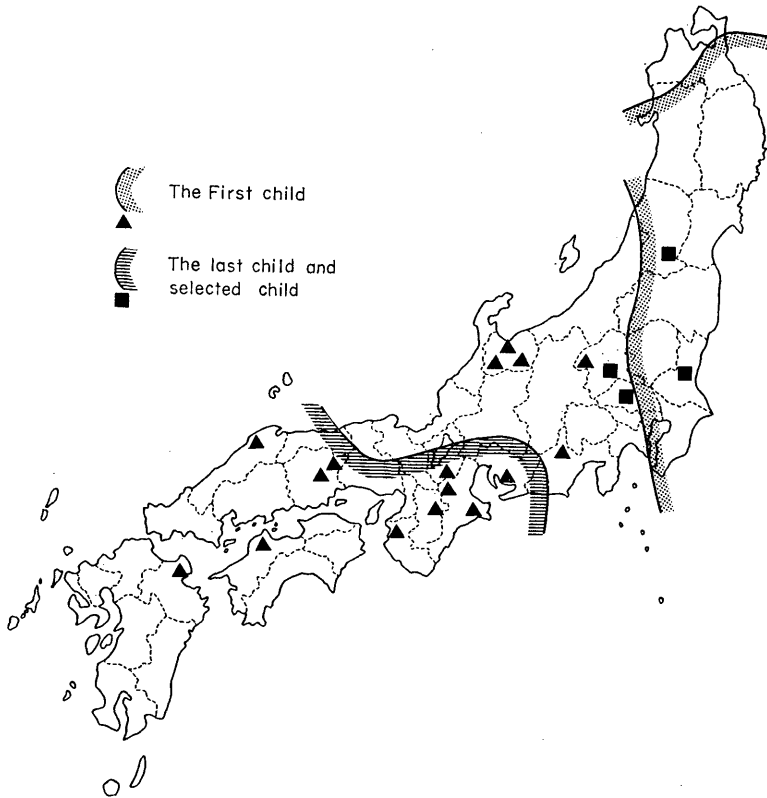
of the view of its hierarchical nature, which is eighty-six percent. These two are therefore general characteristics of *honke-bunke* relationships in Japan, but in terms of the proportion of each of them in each prefecture we have discerned a degree of regional differentiation. Namely, moving from northern Japan to southward, a gradual decrease of these two features is found, as shown in Table 1. It indicates that an egalitarian inclination is stronger in western, or southwestern Japan, as has often been pointed out.

Correlations between these two features and the three terms for a *honke-bunke* group are shown in Table 2. It is evident from this table that the *maki* is more permanent and hierarchical than the *ikke* and *ittō*. It must be noted, however, that both the hierarchical *dōzoku* of the northeastern model (*maki*) and the egalitarian *ittō* of the southwestern model are based upon the general characteristics of the *honke-bunke* relationship and that their differences are not mutually exclusive but are a matter of degree. We must therefore consider regional differences only within a framework of common structural principles in Japanese society.

### 3) Successor of *Ie* and Rule of Residence of *Inkyo*

These two items discussed above presuppose the existence of the *ie* as a lasting social unit over generations and of the very concept of *ie* as such. We have confirmed this in our research in a statistical sense—even if in some areas the *ie* both as a social unit and as a concept does not exist, the proportion of such areas is very low. In relation to this, we have found it imperative to distinguish succession to the *ie* headship (*katoku sōzoku*) from the inheritance of *ie* property (*zaisan sōzoku*), which have both often been referred to as *sōzoku*. For instance, discussions of the mode of inheritance by dividing it into two categories, single and plural inheritance, should be made only after establishing who will succeed to the headship.

According to our data, cases of succession by the first son exceeded more than seventy five percent and may be regarded as the general mode of succession in the Meiji period. The other three modes of succession, by the first child (that means by the first daughter if she was the first born), called *ane-katoku*; by the last son; and by the choice of the parents (chosen presumably by the father) were much less frequent,



**Map 4** Divisions by successor of *ie*

but it is these rare modes that exhibit regional biases. *Ane-katoku*, or succession by the first child, was mostly found in Tōhoku (excepting northern Aomori) and eastern Kantō (48 cases out of 73 recorded), while succession by the last son (5 cases) and that by the parents' choice (18 cases) were all found in southwestern Japan.

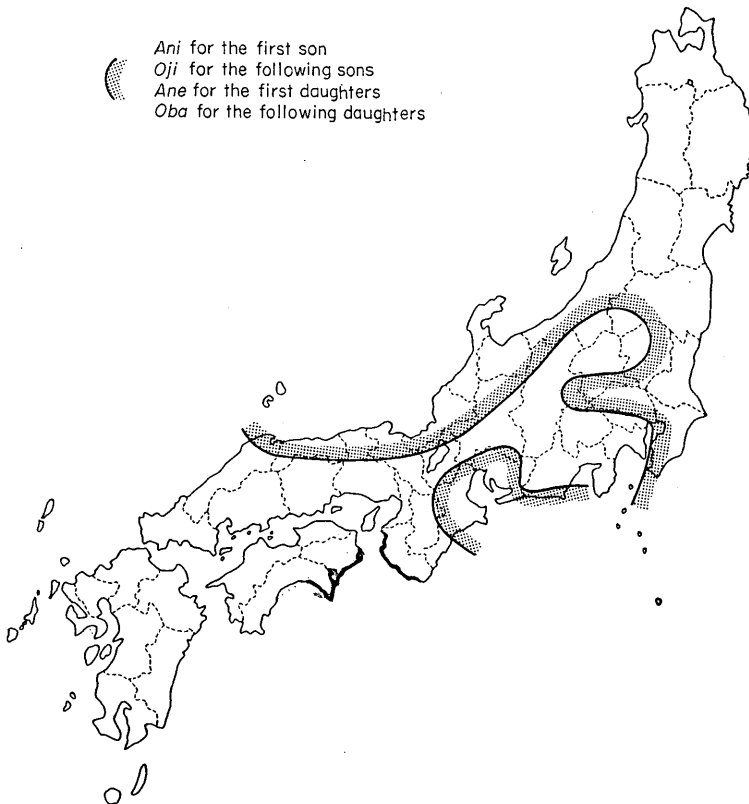
The problem of succession is complicated by the institution of *inkyō* (retirement of parents) of various types. This is one of the most important aspects of the study of Japanese family and kinship but it involves many analytical difficulties because of its varying ideologies and practices. We have adopted three categories for classifying the residences of *inkyō* as follows: first, the retired parents continue to live with the successor in the same house; second, they build their own house within the same compound; third, they move to another house separate from the one in which they formerly lived. The first type is widely found throughout Japan, but the second and third type are very rare, mostly found only in Tōhoku and Hokuriku. We are not yet sure of the implications of this distribution.

#### 4) Terms Distinguishing the First Son and Daughter from other Sons and Daughters

There are many terms which distinguish the first son/daughter from the rest of the children, such as *sōryō*. We have taken up two sets of terms, namely *ani* (which generally means an elder brother) for the first son and *oji* (which generally means an uncle of both sides) for the other sons; and *ane* (which generally means an elder sister) for the first daughter and *oba* (which generally means an aunt of both sides) for the rest of the daughters. The distribution of these two sets of terms shows a northeastern bias, although they are also found in eastern Sanin and in a part of Tōkai (Shizuoka, Aichi and Mie). These terms distinguishing the first son and daughter from the rest of the children may correspond to the concept of hierarchy between a *honke* and *bunke*; their relative concentration in Tōhoku would support this hypothesis.

#### 5) The Final Mourning Ritual

This is a ritual to terminate the transitional status of the dead person, making him or her into an ancestor, and can be regarded as an independent custom of social



Map 5 Divisions by distinctive terms for the first son and daughter

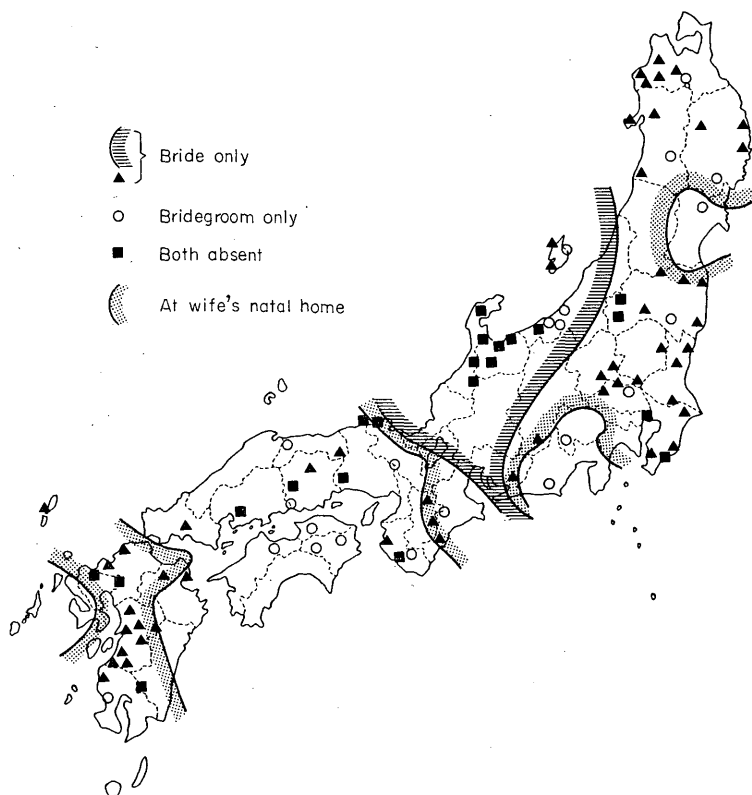


organization. According to our research during Phase II, there are two types of the ritual in terms of the length of years after death; one is held in the thirty-third year and the other in the fiftieth year. These two types also show clear regional differences. The first type is found mostly in eastern Japan divided at the western borders of Aichi, Nagano and Niigata, excepting northern Aomori. One relevance of this custom for social organization is that the ritual may be used for the termination of affinal relationships created by the marriage of the dead person and sometimes of the *honke-bunke* relationship itself.

#### 6) Absence of Bride and/or Bridegroom at Wedding

A wedding ceremony or reception is a very important occasion at which the affinal relationship is established and the bride is incorporated into her husband's *ie*. We found in the research of Phase II, however, several cases in which either the bride or the bridegroom is absent from her/his own wedding.

There are four possible types in terms of the combination of presence and absence of the bride and bridegroom; 1. both are present, 2. only the bride is present, 3. only the bridegroom is present, 4. both are absent.



**Map 6** Divisions by attendance of bride and bridegroom at their wedding and by the place for the first delivery.

**Table 3** Presence and absence of bride and bridegroom at wedding

Region	Both present		Bride absent		Bridegroom absent		Both absent		Total	
Tōhoku	89	79%	5	4%	17	15%	2	2%	113	100
Kantō	175	85	7	4	16	8	7	3	205	100
Hokuriku	45	25	9	5	112	63	12	7	178	100
Chūbu	109	77	2	1	28	20	3	2	142	100
Kinki	148	78	12	6	22	12	8	4	190	100
Chūgoku	97	90	3	3	6	5	2	2	108	100
Shikoku	44	90	4	8	1	2	0	0	49	100
Kyūshū	96	80	1	1	17	14	6	5	120	100
Total	803	73	43	4	219	19	40	4	1105	100

**Table 4** Place for the first delivery

Region	Married-in home		Natal home		No rule		Total	
Tōhoku	47	41%	65	57%	2	2%	114	100%
Kantō	90	44	112	55	1	1	203	100
Hokuriku	12	7	166	93	0	—	178	100
Chūbu	63	44	78	55	1	1	142	100
Kinki	118	62	69	37	1	1	188	100
Chūgoku	96	88	10	9	3	3	109	100
Shikoku	46	93	0	0	3	7	49	100
Kyūshū	40	33	76	64	4	3	120	100
Total	512	46	576	52	15	2	1,110	100

According to the results of Phase II, the second type occurred remarkably often in the four adjacent prefectures of Niigata, Toyama, Ishikawa and Fukui, while the third and fourth types were reported here and there without showing any regional pattern. The first type was most commonly found, as would be expected.

Results of the Phase III questionnaire generally confirmed the patterns, but the distribution of the second type turned out to be much wider. It not only extends from Hokuriku to northern Gifu and Nagano but also is found in Tōhoku and Kantō, and to our surprise even in Kyūshū. (cf. Table 3)

### 7) The Place for the First Delivery

The place of a wife's first delivery is socially significant in considering the nature of affinal relations. Three types were distinguished in this respect; 1. at her married-in home, 2. at her natal home, and 3. at a special hut in the village built for this purpose (Table 4).

The Phase II results showed that the first type was more numerous than the second type, and that in most cases of the latter the following children were delivered at her married-in home. Only one case of the third type was reported, from Kinki.

**Table 5** Correlation between presence at wedding and the place for the first delivery

	Married-in home		Natal home		Total	
Both present	421	54%	362	46%	783	100%
Bride absent	19	46	22	54	41	100
Bridegroom absent	48	23	168	77	216	100
Both absent	13	35	24	65	37	100
Total	501	48%	576	52%	1077	100%

According to the Phase III questionnaire, when the second type exceeded the first type in number, its distribution mostly coincided with that of the second type of wedding attendance, namely, "only the bride was present". On the other hand, in Chūgoku and Shikoku, where both the bride and bridegroom were generally present at their own wedding, the place for the first delivery was mostly at the wife's married-in home. The correlation between the two items is here very remarkable, as shown in Table 5.

### 8) Age Groups and *Neyado*

The *wakamono-gumi*, an age group of young men, appears to have existed almost everywhere in Japan, but whether it was a part of an age organization consisting of several age groups graded according to generations, or simply for young people only, is an important difference in terms of village social organization and of cultural history. We found only the former type in the Phase II research but the Phase III questionnaire revealed the existence of age-organizations comprised of several age-groups in coastal areas not only in southwestern Japan but also in Tōhoku and Hokuriku, although it was more prominent, as has often been pointed out, in the former region. It is also to be noted that it was very rare in inland areas, even in southwestern Japan.

The distribution of *neyado* (a sleeping house for young men which is said to have been connected with age-organizations), is similar to that of the age-organizations, occupying the coastal areas. In Kantō, it was distributed around Chiba; and in Chūbu, Kinki, Chūgoku, Shikoku and Hokuriku, it was found in coastal areas. It was also prominent in western Kyūshū. A sleeping house for girls was rare but was found in Chūgoku, Shikoku and Kyūshū.

As a whole, age-organizations and sleeping houses for youth can be said to have been found mostly in coastal areas, and most prominently in western Japan.

### 9) Animal Familiars and Animal Possession

The notion that certain (deified) animals, such as the fox, dog, *tanuki* (badger),

snake, weasel and even imaginary ones, could possess human beings and be used as familiars by certain families at the cost of others was very widespread, and the number of species was fairly numerous. The fox was the most common and was found all over Japan, but others show regional characteristics. A dog deity was concentrated in Chūgoku and Shikoku along with adjacent Kinki and Kyūshū; a snake god was also found in Chūgoku, Shikoku and a part of Tōhoku; the *tanuki* was remarkably numerous in Kinki; and the *osaki* (a kind of weasel) was confined to western Kantō. On the whole, this phenomenon of animal possession was more prominent in western Japan.

We can divide the functions of these mystical animals into two categories: those which possess human beings individually and tentatively, and those said to belong to certain families and which act as familiars over generations. The first type was more common in eastern Japan, while the second type was mostly found in western Japan with some occurrences in Kantō. This item is one of those which exhibits clear regional differences.

### III TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

This is only an interim report of our project because we have not yet completed analyses of the available data; so far we have presented regional characteristics of some items in terms of their patterns of distribution and tried in a tentative way to find correlations between certain items. Further correlations are yet to be made by statistical methods.

Patterns of distribution may be classified into the following five categories:

- (1) Universal—those items which are found throughout Japan.
- (2) Dichotomous—those which divide Japan into two areas.
  - a. Northeastern: those mainly distributed in northeastern Japan.
  - b. Southwestern: those mainly distributed in southwestern Japan.
- (3) Specific—those specific to certain areas.
  - a. Widely distributed.
  - b. Locally distributed.

Items broken down according to the categories above listed are:

- (1) Universal

Existence of the *honke-bunke* relationship; the notion of the superiority of the *honke* to the *bunke*; succession to the *ie* headship by the eldest son; the institution of *inkyō*; the attendance of both the bride and bridegroom at their wedding, and others.

(These universal items are all taken for granted as commonplaces by Japanese, but from the viewpoint of comparative ethnology a more rigid analytical scrutiny of them should be attempted in the future.)

- (2) Dichotomous
  - a. Northeastern

Permanent relationship of the *honke* and *bunke*; the superiority of the *honke* over the *bunke*; the term *maki*; the terms *ani/oji* and *ane/oba*.

b. Southwestern

Termination of the *honke-bunke* relationship at a certain point; egalitarian nature of the *honke-bunke* relationship; the term *ittō*; succession by the last son, or selected son; and animal familiars affiliated with certain families. The following items show southwestern biases but they are also distributed in the northeast to a lesser degree: the term *ikke* and the separate residence of the *inkyō*.

(This central dichotomy was the basis of this project, but in spite of these examples demonstrating dichotomous tendencies, we could not delineate the exact boundaries of the dichotomy.)

(3) Specific

a. Widely Distributed

This category is for those which are mainly distributed in coastal regions, i.e. age-organizations and *neyado*.

b. Locally Distributed

Absence of bridegroom at his wedding (Hokuriku and some other areas in Tōhoku, Kantō and Kyūshū); first delivery at wife's natal home (almost the same distribution as that of the previous item); the term *edōshi* (eastern Tōhoku); the term *matsui* (Hokuriku); the term *jirui* (southern Chūbu); the term *kabuuchi* (eastern Chūgoku and northern Kinki); a dog deity as a familiar (Chūgoku, Shikoku, Kyūshū), and others.

(These items which show specific distributions have not been extensively examined in most cases and need further enquiries.)

We have so far discussed some items which show certain regional characteristics, but there are many others which are difficult to classify according to regional types. We cannot at present offer any definite explanations as to why some items are more regional than others. Classifications of patterns of distribution into regional types should be regarded as merely preliminary procedures; in order to consider the meaning of regional differences in Japanese culture, structural relations of items should be established. This is the reason why we have more or less concentrated on social structural factors rather than on rituals and other customs, and the results presented here should only be regarded as preliminary to further research.