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The Culture of the Meeting : The Tradition of 'Yoriai' or Village Meeting

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The Culture of the Meeting: The Tradition of 'Yoriai' or Village Meeting

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1. UNANIMITY AND POOR SPEECHMAKING

It is often said that the Japanese meeting is unique. One of its unique characteristics is that unanimity must be reached. Every participant's agreement must be obtained before a decision is reached. Also, the Japanese are said to be poor at making speeches in which one must express one's own opinion. In other words, because logical reasoning is seldom resorted to, our speeches are rarely persuasive.

How then is unanimity attained without rational, persuasive speeches? There is an excellent review of comparative cultural studies of meeting management by Toshimitsu [TOSHIMITSU et al. 1980]. Here I would like to discuss what judgment process the Japanese undergo in decision making, and how we reach agreement in negotiations. In other words, I would like to discuss the *chi* and *kyōyō* of Japanese negotiations and consensus, from the viewpoint of the culture of the Japanese meeting.

Little research has been done in this area; therefore, I will attempt, using the few materials I could find, to reconstruct the culture of the Japanese meeting.

2. IMPORTED MEETING TECHNIQUES

I would like to begin by analyzing present-day Japanese meetings. The Japanese meeting of today does not necessarily have its roots in the West. It appears that the culture and method of the Western meeting were not imported in their entirety. *Robert's Rules of Order*, an authoritative book on meeting management in the U.S., has been a sort of meeting "bible" since its publication by Major General Henry M. Robert in 1896. In the U.S., the chairman of a large meeting

must be fully knowledgeable in these rules, sometimes even consulting a lawyer regarding them.

The Japanese translation was published in 1986. The promoter of the translation, Kikuzo Sugiura, said in the evening issue of the Kyoto Newspaper of August 19, 1986 that he had decided to start the project so as to improve Japanese meetings, of which he had had ample experience in the Lion's Club. This translation made me aware of the fact that the Japanese meeting is westernized only in procedure; Western meeting methods have not been fully adopted. In the Japanese version of *Robert's Rules*, several words are not fully translated: "debatable," for example, which means "subject to discussion" has no fixed Japanese translation even today.

Similarly, "second" is used, as in "Watashi wa kono gian wo secondo shimasu (I second this proposal)." To "second" means, in conference management procedure, "to support or agree on a proposal or motion" (definition by Shogakukan Random House English-Japanese Dictionary). However, there is no Japanese equivalent; in the translated version of *Robert's Rules of Order*, "second" is given in phonetic katakana (see page 25 of translated version).

Some western meeting terms have taken root in Japanese vocabulary: for example, the word "pending." It is very often used in the modern-day Japanese meeting. To the surprise of most Japanese, *Robert's Rules of Order* prohibits discussion among participants. It says, "The participants are only allowed to talk to the Chairman or other participants through the Chairman" [see pages 16-17 translated version].

3. THE MEETING IN MODERN TIMES

Where did the Japanese word *kaigi* (meeting) originate? It was only after the issuance of the Five-Article Oath of the Meiji Restoration that *kaigi* began to be used widely among the Japanese. This government proclamation was issued in Kyoto on March 14 of Keio 4 (1868), one day prior to the new Meiji Government's attack on the Edo castle.

The Oath, which represented the Emperor's promise to gods both of and beyond earth, proclaimed in its first article:

1. Hold meetings widely and make various decisions through public debate.

According to Kiyoshi Inoue [INOUE 1968: 84], it was Kimitada Yuri (Hachiro Oka), councilor from the Echizen Clan, who originally insisted on including this article in the Oath. In his draft, the fourth article said:

1. Subject every decision to public debate and avoid decision-making by any one person.

His purpose in this provision was to prevent dictatorship by any single individual.

In the first draft, revised by Takachika (Fujitsugu) Fukuoka, councilor from the Tosa Clan, the provision was placed first, as:

1. Subject every decision to general debate by government officials.

This was further revised by Takamitsu Kido (Kogoro Katsura) from the Choshu Clan, into the final wording as it exists. It is clear therefore that "meeting" in this Oath refers to the convening of government officials as a decision-making body. The word *kaigi* was thus spread among the Japanese. Concurrent with this, we must note the efforts of Yukichi Fukuzawa, who promoted the concept of speechmaking. Fukuzawa says:

In Japan, since ancient times we have never had meetings conducted along logical lines. Discussions among scholars, consultation between merchants, conferences of government officials or brief meetings among townspeople are no exception. In other words, never once has a logical path been followed at a meeting, which led to an agreement through rational procedure. If the procedure is not appropriate, time and money are wasted and many things cannot be settled in due course. Scholars now say they will spread knowledge, merchants that they will enrich the country through commerce and politicians that they will open a parliament to handle national matters. This is evidence that we are becoming more civilized and advanced, and it should be welcomed. This spirit should be praised. However, I have never heard of anyone actually taking action toward achieving these goals. This is because people do not know the method; they only know how important is the realization. What is the method? It involves meeting with logical procedure. The teaching of this procedure is comparable to the training of soldiers [FUKUZAWA 1959: 65].

In his book, *The Encouragement of Learning* [1872], Fukuzawa discusses how to make a good speech (*enzetsu*). He writes,

'enzetsu,' or 'speech' in English, is a means of expressing one's opinion in front of many people, as at a meeting. In Japan, such a means of communication has never existed; the preaching of priests is perhaps the only comparable mode of speaking. Speeches have long been a very popular means of communication in the West, on such occasions as meetings of government officials, scholars, company employees and citizens, weddings, funerals, even such minor occasions as the opening of a small shop. Westerners give speeches about the purpose of the occasion, or their own philosophy in life, even subjects that occur to them at the moment. Speeches are considered to be very important in the West. In Japan, on the other hand, even though people are discussing the establishment of a Parliament, such a body will be useless if we do not have a good means of expressing opinions. When expressed in a speech, the degree of importance of the subject matter becomes quite obvious. Also, a certain flavor can be added naturally, so that things not impressive in writing sound quite persuasive in a speech. ... Therefore, the means of communication plays a great part in whether or not the opinion of a single person can be spread quickly" [FUKUZAWA 1975: 52].

Fukuzawa goes on to say, "I translated the English word 'speech' as 'enzetsu' and 'debate' as 'toron.' Also, finding translation words for 'approval' and 'non-approval' was quite easy. However, I had a difficult time when I saw the English word 'second,' not knowing that it could be translated as 'sansei' (support)" [FUKUZAWA 1975: 313]. It is clear from Fukuzawa's statement that the translation of 'second' has been attempted ever since his day, but that no single translation has taken hold in Japanese. In his book, *Bunmeiron no Gairyaku* (Outline of a Theory of Civilization), Fukuzawa says, "It is surprising that the Japanese are ruled by the custom of no debate, meeting participants sitting with undue relief in unconscionable comfort, their lips sealed tight, not debating at all, even though that is not the way meetings should be conducted. To compete for advantages (利 *ri*) is to compete with logic (理 *ri*). Now is the time for we Japanese to compete with the West, with logic, to obtain advantages. Those who are silent within cannot help but be silent without as well" [FUKUZAWA 1975: 135].

With all this in mind, Fukuzawa established Meirokusha, an academic institution, to stimulate Japanese practice in debate. In this connection as well, in 1876 (Meiji 8), he set up the Speech Hall in Mita. As Fukuzawa points out, the Japanese of his time were poor speakers unable to develop their opinions in a rational way. A description of the poor Japanese debating of those times can be found in a book by Golovnin, a Russian naval officer who spent some time in a Japanese prison toward the end of the Edo era. He writes, "It is extremely impolite and savage to debate hotly in Japan. The Japanese always express their opinions politely in quite a roundabout way, even behaving as if they did not trust their own judgment. In an argument, they never refute straightforwardly, but counterargue indirectly, giving an example or making a comparison in most cases" [GOLOVNIN 1946: 88].

The Japanese do have a technique for persuading others, but not through speeches, as in the West. What then is the Japanese alternative to speechmaking? I would like at this point to touch upon the traditional Japanese modes of oral expression.

In old times, it was taboo for Japanese to call out loudly. This was because our ancestors had a unique attitude toward the language. As we have a spirit, the language was also believed to possess a spirit (魂 *tama*), that could affect reality. The line between language and reality was so obscure that the language was believed to be reality itself. For example, the name of a person was considered to be the person himself. For a woman to tell her name to a man meant that she had agreed to give herself to the liberty of that man.

In Volume 13 of the *Manyōshū*, which was written in the 8th to 9th century, there is a poem by Hitomaro Kakinomoto:

Ashihara no Mizuho no kuni wa kami nagara kotoage senu kuni
(Japan is a country where even gods do not speak loudly.)

In Volume 6, another poem praises a man, saying:

Chiyorozuno ikusanaritomo kotoage sezu
torite konubeki onoko tozo omou

(It is a real man who does not even cry for fear when facing a thousand soldiers.)

As can be seen in these poems, the power of the language was mystical. The spirit of language was then called 'kotodama' (言霊). A poem from Volume 13:

Shikishima no Yamato no kuni wa kotodama no tasukuru kuni zo masakiku
arikoso

(Japan is a country supported by the spirit of language; long may she prosper.)

So as not to disturb the spirit of language, people refrained from speaking inauspiciously. The Manyo Period attitude toward the language is well represented in the following poem:

Kamiyo yori iitsukeraku soramitsu Yamato no kuni wa sumeramikoto no
itsukushiki kuni kotodama no sachiwau kuni

(As from the time of the gods, Japan is a country of dignity where the Emperor rules and the spirit of language keeps people happy.)

The ancient Japanese so deeply believed in the power of language that it was only in an emergency, when the power of the spirit of language was required, that they ever raised their voices. With this attitude as a basis, Confucianism, the ethical standard for the samurai class during the Edo Era, played a great role in educating the Japanese to view their language, especially in oral form, as something vulgar. This view is well represented in a saying from the Analects of Confucius: "Falsehoods of a smooth tongue."

In modern times, skill in oral expression came to be regarded as a special talent. Kunio Yanagida discusses this in detail in his work *On the History of Orally Inherited Arts* [YANAGIDA 1963: 78]. He writes, "It is only quite recently that we began to speak inconcisely. Before, if one wanted to say something meaningful, the only way was to think about the wording before speaking, and then speak slowly in a stiff manner."

During feudal times, eloquence was considered an art, and could be rewarded with a fief, as in the cases of Sorori and Fujiroku of Numa. Good speakers were regarded as specialists. Yanagida confirms our theory that in the traditional Japanese community, oral communication played a negligible role. In particular, the Zen philosophy of Furyumonji (intuitive discernment of the ineffable Buddhahood) firmly established the idea that language cannot fully communicate thought. In Japan, speech did not develop as a technique for persuading others. That is, debating techniques are one form of 'culturedness' that has never developed in Japan.

Not only in oral communication, but in writing as well, the Japanese have traditionally been more interested in recording everyday life, as can be seen in old diaries, than in compiling history books consistent with an ideology. "Essays in

Idleness" written by Priest Kenko in the 8th century is a good example. In the introduction he writes, "what a strange, demented feeling it gives me when I realize I have spent whole days before this inkstone, with nothing better to do, jotting down at random whatever nonsensical thoughts have entered my mind." As exemplified by Kenko, it was in recording trivial and fanciful matters that the Japanese excelled. Gen Itasaka supports this point of view, saying that the Japanese of former days had a habit of recording anything, indiscriminately [ITASAKA 1971: 176]. Referring to Konan Naito's work: *An Anecdote about Hakuseki* (白石の一遺聞に就いて), Itasaka says that the Japanese wrote historical records with no consistent policy, and that the book *Rokkokushi* (History of six countries) is, despite its title, a mere compilation of government announcements.

4. THE VILLAGE MEETING

What kind of meetings, then, did the Japanese have, being so poor at speaking and having so little rhetoric? The atmosphere of such meetings, or how they proceeded, was rarely recorded in writing. What we can see today is only the results of such meetings, namely, what was agreed upon. Fortunately, however, we have a good report by Tsuneichi Miyamoto [MIYAMOTO 1971: 7-24], which is quite helpful in imagining how old Japanese meetings or gatherings were managed. Though the report is a bit long, I believe it will be quite helpful to dwell on it for a bit, and speculate as to the management of old Japanese village meetings.

Miyamoto stayed in an east coast village called Ina, close to the northern end of Tsushima Island. Whaling had been popular in the area. Early one morning, he heard a conch horn calling for a village meeting. When he passed by a shrine later in the morning, many villagers had gathered there and the meeting was already underway. Miyamoto visited the village chief in the afternoon, but the chief was at the meeting, and an old man, his father, answered. While talking about various things with this old man, Miyamoto learned that the family of the village chief had a box containing old documents. When asked to open the box and show the documents, the old man answered that he could not grant Miyamoto's request without the approval of the village chief and his deputy. He sent for these two heads of the village, who decided it would do no harm just to show the documents. Miyamoto brought some of them back to his inn; however, he was slow in copying them due to fatigue from his travel.

The next morning, Miyamoto asked the old man to let him borrow the documents, but was told that the chief must be consulted, who was again at a village meeting. The old man sent for his son, the chief, who answered that he would ask the assembly. However, by three in the afternoon the old man and Miyamoto had obtained no answer, so, under pressure from his schedule, Miyamoto went to the meeting with the old man.

At the meeting place were seated some 20 men inside the shrine and several clusters of other village men under the trees outside. Their talk appeared to be idle

chatter; but it was not. Miyamoto was told that for the villagers to make a decision, they needed to meet for days until everybody was comfortable. They would discuss proposals from the chief, and bring the results to their own neighborhoods. Then they would bring the results of the neighborhood discussions back to the village meeting. If no agreement was reached, the process would be repeated.

They said they had conducted discussions late into the previous night. If they became sleepy or ran out of new ideas or opinions, they were allowed to leave for home. Miyamoto's request had been brought to the meeting in the morning. As he later heard, it was processed as follows.

First the chief asked the meeting if he could lend the old documents to the professor (Miyamoto). The meeting decided to discuss it in detail because there was no precedent. Then they went on to some other agenda item. After a while an old man told the meeting, "In the old days, the master of the oldest family in this village passed away and a very young son succeeded him. Then a relative came and took their old documents. He never returned them to the young successor, but began to act as though his family were the oldest in the village." Related stories were then exchanged.

After a while, they started talking about the documents themselves and one man suggested that it would be all right to show the documents to help people, even though he had never seen them himself. They then talked about the old documents in their own homes. At this point, Miyamoto and the old man arrived. Everyone was saying whatever occurred to them. One old man said quite loudly, "Looking at him, I don't think he is a bad man. I support lending the documents to him." Others talking outside also gathered around the window to take a look at Miyamoto. When Miyamoto told them that he had found an old document which said, in part: "When whales are caught, young women get dressed up and made up to go and see them. This is quite regrettable." The villagers then spent some time talking about the times when whales could be caught.

The process seemed very slow; however, the discussion was certainly approaching a final decision. The old man, the chief's father, proposed that the meeting approve the request. Villagers supported this proposal, whereupon the chief made a document of agreement. He read it aloud to the villagers, who voiced their approval. At last, Miyamoto was able to borrow the documents, which had been sitting in the meeting room since morning.

This village, Miyamoto reports, had documents of village meetings from 200 years before, and village meetings had been held for a much longer time. In the old days, villagers sent for lunch while still meeting. Meetings were not occasions for reasoning. Participants would say whatever they knew of or thought of that related to the agenda item. Once a decision was made, all were required to adhere to it strictly.

5. SETTLEMENT ("OSAMARI")

As can be seen from this report by Miyamoto, these village meetings were quite easygoing and time-consuming. They were never occasions for one-sided speeches or heated debate. The final decision had to emerge naturally in the course of such a meeting, as a kind of settlement (*osamari*). Villagers would continue meeting until a settlement presented itself which was acceptable to all.

Kunio Yanagida describes such a 'settlement' as follows [YANAGIDA 1946]:

In general, the villagers have been equals since ancient days. The large landowners, who run most of the village land as if it were one big farm, are quite new and it is unlikely that they will continue their dominance. The fact is, though, there are not many big landlords in Japan. Even though a given village may have developed with the initial dominance of a landlord, most such landholdings are inevitably broken up, the landlords ultimately losing their dominance. It is rather for administrative convenience that the position of village chief is hereditary. Occasionally in the past, high offices were given to farmers, so as to have them represent the interests of the ruler to the peasants. However, since these representatives were themselves peasants, and their interests therefore consistent with those of the rest of their villages, a "Sogoro Sakura"¹⁾ was frequently created. Many villagers proud of their family lineage tried to have their heirs succeed to the position of village chief, so as to maintain their social status. However, such heirs often died young or were incompetent and had to be replaced. Wealthy families were also candidates for the position, because they could afford a deputy and naturally were good tax payers. Also there were the peasant positions of Elder and Group Leader. They, in cooperation with a village arbitrator, assisted the village chief, especially when the village chief was incompetent, or checked his moves if he tried to act against the will of the village majority. In the event an important decision had to be made, the village meeting was the real executive body. This function is quite similar to that of the current village meeting, while the execution of the meeting decisions was naturally smooth. That was because decisions were reached through settlement. Settlement was the source of common sense. So many families were able to furnish lower ranking village officers, indeed there were so many such village officers that their opinions did in fact influence the management of the village. In other words, in olden times as well, villages were managed by the majority, the villagers cooperating with each other. The villages were not necessarily ruled by a powerful few.

As Yanagida says, settlement was the common style of Japanese meeting. When participants felt that all knew the general direction, an agreement was reached. However, an agreement could not always be reached by *osamari*. There must have been times when conflicting interests were involved, and no settlement could be reached. How was agreement reached in such cases? Again let me refer to Miyamoto's report [MIYAMOTO 1971: 25-41].

In a village near Lake Suwa in Nagano Prefecture, the villagers insisted on their right to their farmland at the time of the Occupation's Agricultural Land Reform

after World War II. The smaller the piece of land they possessed, the more they clung to it. This was indeed a situation in which the interests of the villagers or meeting participants conflicted. It is extremely interesting to look at how the villagers resolved this critical situation.

According to Miyamoto's report, villagers became elders at the age of 60. The elders would sometimes get together and discuss subjects generally not discussed in the open. Few of these subjects were good things; most could ruin the reputation of village families. Only such sensitive things would be discussed by the elders. Villagers other than the elders did not even know that they were discussing such potentially shameful subjects.

One day, when villagers were saying whatever they wanted to say at a meeting regarding Agricultural Land Reform Measures, one elder said, "Please step forward if you believe, and could swear to God, that you, your father and your grandfather, have never done anything wrong or shameful in obtaining the land you have now." All of the villagers, who had been strongly insisting on their rights, suddenly became silent.

After this, whenever the villagers could not reach an agreement, someone would question whether they had done anything shameful, which in most cases would lead to some kind of agreement. The sense of equality among these villagers thus did not have its roots in a positive exchange of opinions about individual rights; the underlying principle was not a compromise reached through the balancing of conflicting opinions, but endorsed based on mutual feelings of hidden shame. Thus it may be posited that the Japanese sense of equality is born not of a sense of equal footing, in which individuals develop their own opinions, but of negative consciousness of their own inadequacies or defects. Of this is born the humility that imbues the Japanese sense of equality. The ability, based on this sense of humility, to recognize the settlement point of any discussion, was an essential aspect of intellect and "culturedness" in Japanese society. To assert oneself without knowing where the settlement point lay would be to commit a despicable indiscretion.

6. VILLAGE UPRISINGS

How did the emphasis on unanimity in Japanese meetings originate? We should again turn to the village meeting for the answer to this question. The most extreme decision taken at a village meeting is no doubt the decision calling for a revolt. In a number of old documents remaining in the country villages of Japan, we can find many village decisions in favor of "rising up." The first such example is that of 1428 (Seicho 11). In that year, villagers were having a hard time, due to a poor harvest and an epidemic. In August, horse couriers started rioting in the Sakamoto and Otsu regions of Omi. Peasants in the Kyoto area and the Yamashina and Daigo regions followed suit, attacking liquor shops and warehouses, requesting a Shogunate Government moratorium on taxes. This upris-

ing spread to Yamashiro and Yamato; that is, to all regions of the Kinki District. Priest Jinson of Kōfuku Temple Daijoin in Nara recorded this event as “the very first peasant uprising in Japanese history.”

The Japanese word for peasant uprising, *ikki* did not originally imply the use of violence; it meant “to closely cooperate” or “to agree to closely cooperate.” Such an agreement, to which all the participants affixed their signatures, sometimes had the signatures in a circle. A circle was drawn first in the signature section, then all the participants would sign around it.

Originally this method was employed to eliminate ranking within these cooperative movements; however, the method ultimately served to hide the leader and impart equal responsibility to all participants in the uprising. A number of *ikki*, in the sense of agreements for close cooperation, have been recorded. One *ikki* of this type is referred to in a document of 1384 (Eitoku 4) from Matsuura Yamashiro. Called the “constitution of the Takeshige Kikuchi family,” it is a written pledge by Takeshige Kikuchi, who played a key role in the Southern Dynasty of Kyushu.

The first article provides as follows:

1. Cooperate (*ichimi dōshin*) in *ikki*. Cooperate loyally both in public and private. Even if one person has lost face and is suffering public or personal opprobrium, discuss such matters in close cooperation and do not allow any one person to hinder the cooperation of *ikki*. (omitted)
1. Put to discussion all general affairs and border disputes. Get together, show all documents regarding the borders and settle matters with reason. Never resort to hasty fighting.

This example shows that equality was sought and that conflicts in land ownership were settled through evaluation of documents. One of the earliest materials showing an agreement for close cooperation among peasants is a document from 1270 (Bunei 7) from Okushimasho in Omi. It provides, “Peasants of Okushima should cooperate (*ichimi dōshin*) closely; anyone betraying this cooperation must be banished from the village” (大島奥津島神文書 Documents Dedicated to the God Oshima Okutsu-jima).”

7. “ICHIMI DŌSHIN” AND POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT ARTS

Having seen all these documents, I think we have come to one important concept governing the lives of the Japanese. That is the concept of “*ichimi doshin*,” as evidenced in the previous two documents. This term means to cooperate in the kind of friendliness often achieved by dining together. A village meeting is the process of achieving such cooperation. The origin of such meetings is to be sought in the prayer meetings, or the “*Naorai*” held after prayer meetings, at which participants partook of offerings together. With such an origin, it was only natural that the village meeting came to involve eating and drinking, ultimately evolving in-

to a banquet. Popular entertainment arts also have their origin in such village meetings.

One good example is the art of the tea ceremony. Imported during the Nara Era (8th century), the custom of the tea ceremony was well established when Priest Eisei brought tea seeds from Sung China and introduced ground tea, at the end of the 12th century. Eisei then wrote "Curative Effects of Tea Drinking." In the Kamakura Era, tea, a medicine, was used by priests as a stimulant. During the Northern and Southern Dynasties, tea drinking became widely popular. It is recorded that in 1382 (Eitoku 2), tea was served at a meeting of villagers from 14 villages in Akaiwa-Go (District), Kazusanokuni. Villagers unified their thinking by tasting the same tea together. The ruling classes, i.e., the court nobles and samurai, held luxurious parties at which they gambled on contests to guess the brand of tea.

Among townspeople and villagers, on the other hand, tea meetings, called "Unkyaku Chakai" became popular. Inferior tea was used at such meetings. The name Unkyaku seems to have come from the fact that the bubbles on the surface of such tea disappeared quickly, like the drifting clouds in the sky. Such meetings only involved tea drinking as a means of helping participants unify their thinking. In the Higashiyama Period (15th century), this custom among townspeople and villagers was developed into an art by Juko Murata who created the art of Wabicha (simple, quiet tea ceremony). The tea ceremony was an art originating in the village meeting.

Linked poems (*renka*) arose from the same origin. People would gather and converse by exchanging 17- and 14-syllable verses. Most important here, again, was the atmosphere generated by the assembly. In the era of the Northern and Southern Dynasties (14th century), the custom of *renka* developed into a unique form of literature, which spread among people of all classes.

Many literary documents evidence the popularity of this unique art. "Nijo Kawara Rakusho (Nijo River Bed Scribbling)" of 1334 (Kenmu 1) includes a poem which reads, "Everywhere in Kyoto and Kamakura, people begin conversing in poetry whenever they get together, even though not all members participate. It is regrettable that no one plays the part of judge."

In the diary by imperial prince Gosukoin (Prince Sadanari Fushimi, later to be Emperor Gofushimi) 看聞御記 (Recordings of What I See and Hear), there are the following descriptions:

On the clear 14th day of the leap fifth month, Oei 24 (1417), a humble tea party was held in the kitchen. Many chamberlains, maids of honor and commoners participated in the party. This party took place as a regular, annual event.... On the night of the sleety 12th day of December of Oei 16 (1419)... again men and women started a *renka* [linked poem] meeting. A hundred poems were made by dawn. This meeting has not skipped a month this year. It is unbelievable.

Sogi played a great role in bringing *renka* to unprecedented popularity in the

middle of the 15th century. This trend then led to the art of the haiku poem. Renka, as well as the art of tea ceremony, was an art form based on the principle of *ichimi dōshin*.

Tatusaburo Hayashiya says that the Noh play derives as well from the same principle. He writes, "Zeami, who perfected the 'Noh' play, says that in this form of art, the pleasure of 'establishment' lies in the appreciation of all. This 'establishing' does not mean the physical establishment of a troupe, but the mental unison of actors and audience; in other words, the perfect moment of artistic ecstasy achieved through uniting the entire theater" [HAYASHIYA 1947: 49].

As we have seen, the tea ceremony, renka and Noh are all arts of *ichimi dōshin*, a principle born of the village meeting. Eating from the same bowl and drinking from the same cup is the concept underlying this principle, out of which the entertainment arts were born. These arts developed further in the Era of the Northern and Southern Dynasties and the Muromachi Era (14–16 century). It is worth noting again that the tea ceremony, renka, Noh and Kyogen, or Noh farce have their origins, to a greater or lesser extent, in popular entertainment arts. Tatusaburo Hayashiya called the underlying principle "groupism" [HAYASHIYA 1947: 48]. Koshiro Haga agrees, writing: "The arts in medieval times, born of life in small communities and gatherings of friends, were supported by a strong group sense" [HAGA 1954: 39]. In short, he points out that their common outstanding characteristic is group entertainment.

One of the features of medieval society, *za*, originally meaning "seat," came to mean meeting and then to mean group or union. *Miyaza*, the groups managing religious ceremonies, later developed into local autonomous bodies. The *za*, or union, developed into an entertainment troupe while maintaining a close relationship with *miyaza*. In time, the word *za* shifted in meaning, finally coming to refer to an exclusively professional group.

We have seen the connection of traditional arts to the village meeting, centering on the concept of *ichimi dōshin*. These arts are now part of the general knowledge of the Japanese. In other words, the village meeting was the origin of *za*, the union, or group. In the village meeting we can also see the attempts of individuals to act autonomously. People came to recognize their autonomy through village meetings.

Many point out that the modernization of Japan did not start in the Meiji Restoration. Some say it started very quietly, without anyone's being aware of it. When did this quiet modernization start? I think we can see its first stages in the village meeting, as early as the 14th century. The village meeting can be described as a social institution that helped the people realize their strength.

NOTES

- 1) Sogoro Sakura (佐倉惣五郎) was a village chief who lived in the early 16th century. He was executed, together with his wife and children, in the wake of his petition to the

shogun to lighten heavy taxes imposed by a local government. For this act, he has been remembered as a man of justice.

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