

## ARAKABU AND THE ARAKAWA MOUNTAIN KAMI

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**Abstract.** Under the assumption that religious concepts are like any other concepts, ethnographic studies have been able to provide plausible explanations for a wide range of religious beliefs and behaviour. One under-studied question asks how such concepts help form specific expectations about social life in modern communities. Here, we focus on how a micro-community in a southern Japanese village edits inherited religious concepts to help make solutions to a social problem intelligible. In section one, we study the variables: the religious concept, the problem, and the micro-community. In section two we turn to the details of the editing of the concept.

**Key words.** *kami*, Japan, myth, religious concepts, imagistic mode, conceptual editing.

### Introduction

The scholar of Japanese literature, Donald Keene, made the observation that, after the seventeenth century, the average Japanese citizen viewed Confucianism as regulatory of duties to society, Buddhism as concerned with spiritualism, and Shinto belief as the ‘joy in the world’ stemming from the ‘ambience of the land itself’ (1993). One of the most productive places to observe this last sentiment is in how communities in rural villages understand the land and its memory within localized *kami* belief.<sup>1</sup> The *kami* are gods that are associated with the land and

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, Kami is capitalized in ‘Arakawa Mountain Kami’ in order to approximate the sentiment held among people of Arakawa when referring to the social expectations I discuss in this article. Locals say 山の神 (*yama no kami*) in a way that indicates that there is a particular relationship with a specific local *kami*. The issue is not quite so clear cut, though. Capitalization does not indicate anything like the difference in English between God and gods. In fact, local water *kami* elicit far more fear (I focus on water

especially with how local communities relate to its contours. The types of religious concept most often associated with the *kami* are largely expressed nonverbally in what Harvey Whitehouse has referred to as the imagistic mode (2000, 2002). The imagistic mode relies heavily on episodic long-term memory. It is also a mode of experience that is more emotional and personally felt due to the characteristically intense rituals and events associated with it. As one might expect, *kami* belief and associated events pervade local villages throughout Japan at a very deep level and remain an important feature of community life.

The question remains as to how *kami* concepts help form specific expectations about social life in modern communities. Since the human mind is adept at tackling quite challenging social problems within increasingly powerful concepts and theoretical paradigms, what place would religious concepts associated with the *kami* have? That they should have a place at all in the problems faced by modern communities rests on the idea that the way human cognitive architecture functions is the result of adaptive problems that were formative in the evolution of the human mind (Barrett 2000; Cosmides et al. 1992). In short, we have religious concepts available if we need them. What I have found is that *kami* concepts play a part most often when the problem faced is of a particularly intransigent nature. It is not that *kami* concepts help formulate effective solutions, but rather that they work alongside other conceptual frameworks

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*kami*, house *kami* and others in the wider work from which the current article derives), and *kami* are said by locals and Shinto priests alike to inhabit everything, including rocks. One of the facts about localized *kami* belief is that there is no doctrine and no clear leader that interfaces with and authoritatively interprets meaning regarding the local *kami*. In fact, each mountain is also said to be occupied by a mountain *kami*, so we might wonder which mountain *kami* is the Arakawa Mountain Kami? This question is not an important one for the people of Arakawa. However, when locals are referring to the social relationships we discuss in this paper, there is one *kami* that is *yama no kami*. It is the relationship felt by locals within a particular social framework that has led me to use the phrase ‘the Arakawa Mountain Kami’.

and provide intelligibility to aspects of the problem that cannot be understood from within other paradigms. It has also been my experience that, in the type of community I am studying in southern Japan, micro-communities actively edit *kami* concepts to these ends. The problem has usually been previously packaged as a specific solution within another paradigm and often by another micro-community. Specific events related to the problem are then understood by profiling these against the comprehensive *kami* knowledge network for meaning. The micro-community thereupon develops imagistic events that provide the opportunity for the community to interact with a specific *kami* in ways that provide intelligibility to the problem.

### **1. The land and its memory: the Arakawa Mountain Kami**

Kagoshima Prefecture is situated in the south-western region of Kyushu Island, the southernmost of the main Japanese islands. The prefecture runs north-east from the sub-tropical Amami Islands to the temperate Kirishima mountain range. In between sits the Satsuma peninsula. The geography of the peninsula is dominated by relatively low, but rather steep, heavily forested mountains and by narrow river valleys. While the roughness of the terrain has deterred large settlements of the kind seen in the Kansai (Osaka) and Kanto (Tokyo) regions, the mildness of the climate has always allowed a flourishing of small villages. Arakawa is one such village.

The Arakawa landscape exerts an important influence on how village life is experienced. Part of the reason lies in the narrowness of the valley. Village construction has long been designed so that nearly every bit of valley land is put to use for rice production. In dramatic contrast, village houses with terraced vegetable patches sit at the foot of the northern mountains. There are few rice terraces here, not only because the mountain soil is far too rocky,

but also because much of the soil is the result of millennia of volcanic ash having been laid down as so-called *shirasu*. This fact has historically placed an upper limit, a sort of *shirasu* line, on how far up the mountains house construction can safely be considered. The reason is that the loose *shirasu* is unsuitable for construction works on the steep mountains. Up beyond the housing area the thick forest climbs at increasingly sharp angles.

The Arakawa Mountains are rarely accessed by locals. Exceptions include tactical reasons such as hunting wild boar, frequent intruders to the late-stage rice harvest. Another exception is of a more practical nature. Village elders move up the bordering paths in spring in order to gather wild plants, which are particularly tender in that season. But none of these people express any interest in going deep into the mountains. Though many residents told me that they would do so if a task required this of them, many others said that they would not enter the mountains under any circumstances. These assertions become clear in our last example. As part of a community-wide day of action that occurs at a designated time in mid-summer and is based on an ancient ritual of cleansing, the fathers of children in the local school clear the mountain path that runs from mountain to inaccessible mountain not far up from the habitation zone. I always participated in this careful cutting back of vegetation. The idea was that this was something we did for the elders of the community who occasionally pass this way and for the mountain spirits who share this mountain with us. What these examples show us is that the Arakawa Mountains encompass a mysteriousness that is felt as ever present and wholly relevant to everyday life.

The physical relationship between the valley, human habitation and the mountains reinforces a comprehensive knowledge network based on the land and its memory. Far more than other major influences, such as Confucianism, Buddhism, Western science or even official Shinto belief, the localized *kami* belief incorporates the natural surroundings. Subtle changes in

nature, such as the passing of the seasons, the cleanliness of the Arakawa River, or even fluctuations in insect populations, are registered within *kami* belief. Belief surrounding the Arakawa Mountain *kami* in particular is tied to local ascriptions of meaning to the human relationship with the land. Of the many *kami* that are important for the Arakawa people, it is the social relationship the community maintains with this deity that I shall focus upon. As the Arakawa Mountain *kami* shares in many of the concepts of mountain *kami* belief found throughout Japan, I will begin by outlining the concepts that are pertinent to the community editing of related concepts that I shall describe in Section 2.

One of the ramifications of the social exchange between villagers and mountain *kami* is that these deities are also conceptualized as the local rice *kami*. In tradition, the rice *kami* were understood as wandering the mountain regions in winter, and a part of this deity's journey included the descent from the mountains into the valley. The reason for doing this was to give birth to rice when an invitation to enter the community had been effectively delivered. The invitation is almost always attended by festivals referred to as *matsuri*, which are in part derivative of the ancient peasant field dances known as *dengaku*. The *matsuri* features the community itself having fun and functioning appropriately, and the event is thus conceptualized as a social exchange between the villagers and the local mountain *kami*. In exchange for the display during the *matsuri*, the *kami* not only gives birth to the rice, but also remains in the fields to protect and nurture it until harvest time in the autumn, when she returns to the mountains.

In ancient times there were no depictions of *kami*. It was not until after interaction with the then new religion of Buddhism in the sixth century that depictions of Buddhas in statue form stimulated the introduction of rice *kami* statues throughout Japan. The syncretism in the interaction moved both ways, altering concepts associated with Buddhist statues. While the rice

*kami* increasingly appeared depicted in statue form in the rice fields of Japan, Buddhist statues began their increasing concealment, hidden in mountain area shrines away from the sight of the people (Yamaori 1995/2004). Arakawa represents a village highly influenced by this trend even today and has recently been the focus of research on the topic of its Concealed Buddhas (Morita 2011). Consistent with this historical development, the Arakawa Mountain Kami is currently conceptualized as an invisible deity that can possess artefacts.

Another important result of the syncretism between *kami* worship and early Buddhism is the form of the depictions we see in artefacts. Since the focus of ancient rice *kami* myths was on the maternal aspects of the deity, both for rice and for human fertility, when representations of *kami* became acceptable, rice *kami* depictions throughout Japan bore a distinctly young, robust, motherly look. This did not last long, however, and rice *kami* depictions gradually began taking on more natural and more elderly features (Yamaori 1995/2004). This change occurred precisely because the belief understands *kami* as invisible, and therefore depictions came to represent idealization of the progression of human life in the local community.

Idealizations of this sort are not always directly depicted in statue form. Generally, when male features are prominent, the protector status of mountain *kami* based on the ancient link with the power of the mysterious mountains has been emphasized. But depictions of rice *kami* in statue form in Kagoshima exist almost entirely in the rice fields, where rites related to rice and human fertility are common. As a result, many of the rice field statues in the region express a conceptual ambiguity between the male and female aspects. However, these statues almost always describe elderly and peaceful features. Even though the statue in Arakawa proves to be one glaring exception to this generalization, the consequence relevant at this point to the Arakawa Mountain *kami* is that this deity was understood, by extension from rice fertility and mountain protection, as both the provider of human life and its protector.

Depictions in mask form more clearly represent an idealization of community roles and life procession. Early masks tended to depict the idealized face along the lines of a typical, successful natural life of a human being acquiring a sage, stern appearance in old age. However, a new idealized view of the late stages of life eventually took hold throughout Japan. Tetsuo Yamaori has referred to the peaceful idealized face of the farmer as, for males, the *Okina*, and for females, the *Uba* (1997/2004), after the great masks in Noh Theater productions, *Okina* and *Takasago* respectively. Masks bearing similar representations are quite widespread and found in a great number of folk performing arts around the country. The way the masks are understood as functioning in *matsuri* is as if this particular dancer wearing the mask is possessed by the *kami*, who has been invited into the community for a specific reason. The *kami* thereby enters directly into the community by occupying the dancer, who in turn bears the mask of the idealized life of the community.

What we see in Arakawa is that the Arakawa Mountain Kami provides more than a general joy in the land, but rather a comprehensive knowledge framework for how to live an individual life fully in tune with the joy of the land and its memory. An individual life was traditionally viewed as progression within the overall environment that runs from fertility up through to human habitation and then further up into the mountains. A person is born into the valley with a pure soul, a gift of the *kami*. One then moves through the stages of life, a progression that is understood as moving through the inevitable dirtiness of life. This part of life's journey is conceptualized as requiring both periodic cleansing and assistance from the Arakawa Mountain Kami in its role as protector of the community. The final stages of life are understood as a slow progression up into a mysterious and lonely otherness in the Arakawa Mountains, where, in dignified old age, through the hard work of farming within the social structure of the community, the people of Arakawa can become *kami* themselves.

*The Arakawa Tanokansa*

One need not travel far into the rural areas of the Kagoshima region to discover that the rice fields are to this day populated with statues dedicated to the rice *kami*. The word describing these statues, *Tanokami*, means god of the rice-field: *ta* (field) *no* (of) *kami* (god). In the dialect of the Kagoshima region they are referred to in the endearing form of *Tanokansa*, a term which includes a shortening of *kami* to *kan* and *sama* (honorific) to *sa*. Another name is *Tanokamai*, the difference between *sa* and *mai* indicating that such rice *kami* were associated with dance. The verb form of *mai* (*mau*) means a beautiful, sublime and, of course, god-like, dance.

*Tanokansa* belief derives from a seventeenth-century revival in the former Satsuma domain. For inanimate objects like the *Tanokansa* statues, a great deal of counterintuitive qualities must have been ascribed to them in order to maintain the attention-focusing level of the artefact (Severi 1993). This was true in the revival of rice *kami* belief in Satsuma. *Tanokansa* are potentially associated with all of the religious concepts we discussed above in relation to the comprehensive mountain *kami* knowledge network. However, while the *Tanokansa* are still revered in the countryside, with offerings appearing at most statues I have seen, the degree to which *kami* concepts have remained strongly linked with the *Tanokansa* depends on how the artifact has been incorporated into modern formulations of problems and how they provide intelligibility to them.

A good example of success on this scale can be found in the town just north of Arakawa village. The *Tanokansa* is cleaned up and painted in stark colours on a yearly basis before being moved to a new location. Rather than the sage look of a weathered stone figure, the *Tanokansa* of this village is made to appear like a sizable figurine that might be found in an expensive shop. The entire event is in fact a fertility dance for newlyweds. What happens is

that several dancers tie ropes to the *Tanokansa* and dance around it to boisterous music and singing. These dancers are understood as having become *Tanokansa* themselves, possessed by the local mountain *kami*. Following this *matsuri*-like event, the *Tanokansa* is moved to the house of the newly married couple, where it stays for a year. In this example we see that the modern newlywed concept is profiled against the comprehensive *kami* belief, with the result that the fertility concept associated with rice *kami* provides intelligibility, though few solutions, to the journey conceptualized within the very modern experience of marriage currently being re-evaluated throughout Japanese society. The visual impact of the event has made it such a unique and popular one that it often appears as a local TV news story.

In Arakawa, a similar extension of the fertility concept once flourished. The *Tanokansa* in the rice field near the center of Arakawa village is depicted as wearing a bowl-shaped straw hat. Viewed from behind, this *Tanokansa* is said by elders in the village to have the appearance of a penis. In the past, when a local couple was experiencing trouble having a boy, the *Tanokansa* would be placed in front of the couples' house with a *matsuri*-like atmosphere and left there to assert its influence on fertility. The practice was still important in post-war Arakawa, but eventually died out. The reason for this is that the specific need for the heavy labor that young male children were expected to bear in the fields ended with newer technology and other modern pressures. Even as the population of Arakawa started going into steep decline with lower fertility rates, rice harvests benefitted from a great many changes in circumstances which left no community need specifically for male children. When the original fertility need disappeared and was therefore no longer profiled against the comprehensive Arakawa Mountain Kami network, the *Tanokansa* fertility dance declined and eventually vanished completely.

Even the rice fertility aspect of the Arakawa *Tanokansa* has experienced conceptual

contraction. We know that rice fertility had once been a prominent feature because the *Tanokansa* holds in its right hand one of the traditional symbols of rice fertility, the *shamoji*, or rice scoop. Until the most recent generation, in preparation for the critical rice-planting rituals known as *Taue*, a community-wide *matsuri* was held prominently featuring the Arakawa *Tanokansa*. Everyone participated, from the very young to the oldest, and the *matsuri* was attended by a boisterous drinking and dancing party. The *Tanokansa* sat at the center of the festivities. What was being anticipated in this *matsuri* was the arrival of the Arakawa Mountain Kami into the local fields, by way of occupation of the *Tanokansa*, in order to assess the community, ensure that the symbolic rice fertility rites performed in *Taue* were successful and oversee the progression of the rice through its natural maturity to harvest.

The Arakawa *Tanokansa matsuri* has now become a very minor and formalistic ritual. The only people who attend the event are those directly associated with the actual *Taue* rites and the practical work of planting. Those residents of Arakawa who directly benefit from the sale of rice still profile the need for a good crop against the Arakawa Mountain Kami knowledge network, but the rites that had provided intelligibility to successful crops no longer do so. The *Taue* ritual is considered to be important by these individuals, but it is now a minor and mutated part of their understanding of the success of these crops. For those involved in rice production, there exists a sophisticated level of comprehension of modern farming technology that far eclipses the religious concept in importance when consideration of crop success is primary.

Since contraction of the other religious concepts would have weakened the statue's attention-focusing ability, we should expect to discover that the Arakawa *Tanokansa* has also lost its association with the concept of protector. This is true even though the Arakawa *Tanokansa* unambiguously features a middle-aged male with an extraordinarily stern and fierce

facial tone, and despite the fact that, instead of the bowl of rice typically held in a *Tanokansa*'s left hand, the hand is hooked on the *obi* belt that holds up traditional farming pants. As an image, the manner in which the hand sits in the belt is one of occupation with a challenging or even dangerous task. It is clear that in the past this *Tanokansa* was prominently conceptualized as possessing the power of protecting the purity that is born into the valley, both the new rice in *Taue* and the new souls of the community.

For the people of Arakawa, protecting the community was conceptualized as an ever-present problem. The stories I heard from residents of ancient battles with larger nearby townships bears out the history we see depicted in the local *Tanokansa*. The hideout in a mountain area clearing where the local samurais defended the village is still maintained along with their graves in a meticulous and proud manner. In the past, as we see in the *Tanokansa*, protecting the village had also fully developed intelligibility in profile against the Arakawa Mountain Kami knowledge network. And we should not be surprised to discover that, whereas the Arakawa *Tanokansa* no longer participates in the protection of the community, the will to ensure that protection still very much exists in modern Arakawa.

*Kasochi: a new community problem*

About a kilometre up the Arakawa valley, visitors will run into the most important modern public building, the elementary school. The people of Arakawa have for some time been keenly aware that the life of the community itself hinges on this school remaining open. This fear is connected with a larger problem: every such village and many towns in Japan have had to deal with *kasochi*, or rural depopulation. The situation is so critical in Arakawa that the number of students enrolled in the elementary school four years before our arrival had fallen to six. Such schools were either shut down or, as in the case of Arakawa, turned into experimental schools.

One of the goals of the experimental program is to bypass the issues that make small villages unattractive as places to live in. The main culprit is clear. Rural villages suffer under the perception among young people of a stark and uneven contrast between the exciting lifestyle in the cultural centres of Japan and, on this scale, the rather dreary ugliness of places like Arakawa. In rural Kagoshima, the perception of the way of life available in cities like Fukuoka, Osaka and Tokyo is an overwhelming draw that even today ensures that most young people leave villages like Arakawa and never return to live in the community.

In order to address this part of the problem, the experimental program at Arakawa elementary school has developed around the idea of creating an alternative educational environment. Because the program seeks to draw new students into the school system from the surrounding towns, the experimental part of the program offers something that larger town and city schools cannot. Many parents in the Kagoshima region have become dissatisfied with the purely academic aspect of elementary school, especially the focus on memorizing vast amounts of information. For some of these parents, the linking of the purity of the valley with human habitation emphasized in the experimental focus of the school offers an attractive alternative. It is not just the back to nature stance that draws these families, but rather the idea of having their children enmeshed in a traditional landscape. On a conceptual level, this means that such parents seek to have their children grow up with many educational priorities being profiled for meaning against the comprehensive traditional knowledge network offered in local villages such as Arakawa.

These programs have had success, but the overall problem cannot be fully addressed within the school system. By the time we had moved into an old farmhouse in Arakawa village, the number of students enrolled in the elementary school had already risen to thirty-seven. Three years later that number had reached nearly fifty (though it has since fallen to thirty-two).

If every one of these students were to decide to live in the community at some point in the future, the long-term prognosis for the community would look decidedly better. However, effective as the gifted educators at the school have been, the full extent of local tradition does not fall within the scope of a pedagogically driven endeavour. One of the most important aspects of life in Arakawa can only be fully felt when events are profiled against the comprehensive knowledge network associated with the Arakawa Mountain Kami, and this is an area of expertise beyond capture within a syllabus, however closely studied the related topics become.

Two of the many pedagogic goals are of interest for us here. The first is the attempt to create a community identity among the children within the milieu of the local nature. To this end, students undertake activities that bring them into close contact with the land of the Arakawa river valley. Many of the most cutting-edge pedagogic tools have also been brought to bear on enmeshing children in local tradition. At the same time, within the community-nature context, the contemporary concept of students actively developing their own individualized life goals has received more attention in the experimental program than in other schools in Kagoshima. Students have been encouraged to develop very individualistic ways of engaging with the world from within the re-visioning underway of the traditional Arakawa way of life. These goals are of particular interest precisely because of the way they have been applied by a very different micro-community living in Arakawa village.

### *Sailor-Moon*

Within the first week after our arrival in Arakawa I was welcomed into the fathers' club known as Sailor-Moon. The group was named after the popular female anime characters who had worn the sailor-moon school uniform in the long-aired show called *Sailor Moon*. Most of the

fathers in the club belonged to the age group influenced by the show. Our ages ranged slightly more widely than this, from twenty-seven to fifty, but the sheer buffoonery of the Sailor-Moon name was not lost on any of us. Another factor unifying us was that every member of the group during the three years of this study had at least one child in Arakawa elementary school. These and other factors reflect the fact that, while the name of the group of course shows the level of levity inherent in its construction, the main reason for its existence and indeed its driving goal was to provide action that might be capable of dealing with *kasochi*.

The everyday lives of Sailor-Moon members were quite diverse. Life-styles included commuting to modern jobs outside the village, working the rice and vegetable fields, or, very often, engaging in both endeavours. One typical father tends a fairly large rice patch in the valley and commutes to a world-renowned chip factory in a small city forty-five minutes north of Arakawa. Other fathers included a busy doctor, two mechanics, a noodle chef, a high-school counsellor in a local town and a couple of full-time farmers. The leader of Sailor-Moon had spent his twenties on a large fishing trawler, more out of the community than in. He now tends his family's rice fields and participates in the township's politics.

We often met in the local Arakawa *kominkan*. A *kominkan* is the folk's house, and it also functions as a free resting spot for travellers. In the country it is more likely to be a shack than anything else. In Arakawa it is one of the oldest buildings in the village and still sits just up from the residential area, right at the edge of the forest. It was there at night that we drank the local alcohol, *shochu*, talked, told stories and practised our acting and singing for the various activities and *matsuri* that we were designing for the children of Arakawa. There was no secrecy about what we were preparing for coming events. Such evenings as often as not included the children of the village filling the *kominkan* with raucous play, learning aikido or karate moves from one of the fathers, or just having fun running around at night. These were

often folk nights in themselves, but also the place where we worked out the details of what we wanted to accomplish.

Event planning was generally guided by this question: How can we make the community an interesting and fun place for the children, something that they would want to maintain and keep viable? There was a sense that we had to embody a new spirit that was, nevertheless, based on the traditional ways of Arakawa. This allowed us to approach the problem from a decoupled perspective and develop simulations of events in which the students might begin to imagine themselves as tightly embedded in the community. The ability to do this is a perfectly natural part of human cognitive architecture, and small groups most naturally engage difficult problems in this way (Tomasello 1999). With the overriding goal clarified from the beginning, we could profile certain ideas and concepts against a number of knowledge networks, including the network of concepts associated with the Arakawa Mountain Kami.

## **2. Editing the Arakawa Mountain Kami**

### *Hotaro-de-Night*

Even though the Arakawa *Tanokansa matsuri* has been forgotten, the experimental programs at Arakawa elementary school keep the *Taue* tradition alive for the children of the community, but not in the imagistic manner that *matsuri* had long invited. The school has been provided with its own rice patch, and students study plant and soil science. They also study the history and meaning of the *Taue* ritual, and even participate in their own guided and pedagogically supported ritual for their plants. In this manner of transmission, however, the critical part played by the Arakawa Mountain *kami* in the tradition of *Taue* simply cannot be felt as the joy in local nature, and consequently the motivation for future transmission is low.

*Taue* rituals are closely tied to seasonal change. In Arakawa, a radical environmental change occurs in late May with the onset of the rainy season, when the temperature and humidity in the valley rise dramatically. The timing of *Taue* is generally coordinated to slightly precede the rainy season and occurs just before rice sprouts are planted into flooded rice paddies. The saliency of this dramatic shift in the details of the nature of the valley makes late May perfect for another nature-inspired event that follows the timing of the old *Tanokansa matsuri*.

This event is a two-day *matsuri*, designed by Sailor-Moon, which is referred to as *Hotaro-de-Night* (Night of Fireflies). The *matsuri* draws crowds from far and wide to see the *hotaro*, enjoy the *matsuri* and watch the students play *taiko* drums. There are no events in Kagoshima of which I am aware that combine the image of barefoot elementary school children dressed in black setting the emotional stage for a gathering of people, pounding out the deep rhythms of the *taiko* within a *matsuri*-type mood just before sunset, after which *hotaro* begin to reveal their pure light in front of a forbidding pitch-black background. While for many of the guests the sight may well be no more than entertainment, the intention of Sailor-Moon was to provide students with an opportunity of experiencing a leadership role in the deep emotional currents formerly associated with the Arakawa *Tanokansa matsuri* that had invited the Arakawa Mountain Kami to bring purity into the valley.

It started with another of the experimental programs at Arakawa elementary school. The goal was to re-link students to the small river running next to the rice fields. As a result, the study of the *hotaro* under this school-based program became a year-long engagement in the life-cycle of the insect. Much of the program is carried out knee deep in the *hotaro's* habitat, the Arakawa River, with free swimming activities in eddies and science projects like larvae calculations spread throughout the year. The culmination of all this study has become the short

firefly season in late May during *Hotaro-de-Night*.

The Arakawa River *Hotaro* provide *Hotaro-de-Night* with two symbolic elements to profile on the Arakawa Mountain Kami knowledge network. First, they arrive exactly at the time that makes them a salient symbol of the return of the Arakawa Mountain Kami into the valley for *Taue* fertility rites. Second, in Japan they are a clear symbol of innocent purity. In fact, as a result of the general veneration of the purity of *hotaro*, the fact that their numbers in rural Kagoshima are on the rise has been greeted with jubilation in many small towns and villages. The joy is in the simple purity and ephemeral life that flitters so close at hand.

A factor that differentiates the Sailor-Moon focus on *kasochi* from the seasonal Arakawa *Tanokansa matsuri* is the importance of chaos. The story told to me by members of Sailor-Moon specifies that until about twenty to thirty years ago the river had been a polluted, even dangerous place in which few *hotaro* could ever live. In Kagoshima, *hotaro* are also a primary symbol of the literal cleanness and purity of a river. For Sailor-Moon, the starting point for the simulation of a renewed Arakawa was a state of chaos in the river in the form of extreme industrial pollution, with no light to symbolize the purity of a river valley that in older times had been conceptualized as the source of purity. It was this understanding of the history of Arakawa River that was profiled along with the positive elements of the literal and spiritual purity of *hotaro* on to the Arakawa Mountain Kami knowledge network.

A few Sailor-Moon members knew this understanding of the history of the river to be false, but this was not nearly the point. In fact, if the profiling of the problem had been done in a way that would have involved gathering all the facts and acting on them, they would not have had much need for any religious concepts. The way forward would have followed more practical environmental assessment of the situation and investment from the township. What Sailor-Moon actually profiled was the concept borrowed from the Arakawa school program

which had been formulated from the general concepts of chaos and return as understood in dealing with *kasochi* by bringing students together as a community into joyful communion with the local land. The teachers had profiled this formulation of the problem against current pedagogic theory. Sailor-Moon dispensed with this knowledge network and replaced it with one based on the Arakawa Mountain Kami and thereby started developing a specific social relationship between the students and the *kami*.

The research I conducted on the actual history of the river provides insight into other influences on the decisions made by Sailor-Moon. What I found was that a century ago there were intensive gold-mining operations further up the Arakawa valley, resulting in a great deal of pollution running down through the Arakawa River. However, the most intensive operations ended quite a bit earlier than understood by Sailor-Moon members. Even at its worst, the primary reason for the chaos in the river derived far less from the mining than from over-population in the valley. There were simply too many people living in the community. Farmhouses in Arakawa employ a gutter system that allows the release of non-sewage water from dishwashing, cleaning, bathing, fertilizer and pesticide run off from use for crops, and other purposes, directly into the Arakawa River. Given the smallness of the river, the post-World War II baby and farm technology booms put intense pressure on it, creating the perception of chaos. Though the *hotaro* had never left the river, and their absence from community consciousness was more a matter of preoccupation with the new post-war economy, their perceived return to greater numbers coincided with changes in the state of the river that had a dramatic impact on Sailor-Moon.

By the time the Sailor-Moon group had been started up, a number of influential changes in Arakawa had already occurred. The Arakawa River had been straightened out so that it runs along one side of the rice fields in the valley in order to make more space available for farming,

and an efficient, straight road was built along the side where community houses sit at the foot of the mountain. An influential government worker who had coordinated the program with the elders of the community made the observation that the *hotaro* in three areas of the greater Kushikino Township had become especially beautiful, and that Arakawa River was one of these. He not only suggested to these communities that they re-start the May tradition of viewing *hotaro*, but also promoted these areas throughout the township. The straightening of the river actually contributed to the advancement of this idea because the new road made Arakawa the only easily accessible location of the three. Also, now that the river was on the other side of the valley right up against Arakawa Mountain, the river was shrouded in the darkness that made the display spectacular.

The reason Sailor-Moon made *taiko* drumming an integral part of this new event is due to its traditional participation in the *matsuri* that had invited the Arakawa Mountain Kami into the Arakawa valley. We saw earlier that in Arakawa drumming had at one time been linked to the Arakawa *Tanokansa matsuri*. But the ability to invite the *kami* into occupation of the *Tanokansa* was never a general belief in the power of this artefact to bring purity into the valley. While the artefact served as the spot where the *kami* entered the community, it has always been the social relationship between *kami* and the community which has been the foundation of local *kami* belief. *Taiko* drumming is a natural feature of the belief in rising to prominence due to the way in which it allows the children to engage in the social relationship that is integral to the more comprehensive Arakawa Mountain Kami religious network of knowledge of the land and its memory. In the past, in association with the Arakawa *Tanokansa*, late May was dominated by the elders drumming and *matsuri*. It was their manner of inviting the Arakawa Mountain Kami into the community to ensure the arrival of purity into the Arakawa valley. Now, it is every child in the school, boys and girls, right from grade one all the way through

elementary school, the ones Sailor-Moon hopes will maintain the community far into the future, who invite the *kami* into a renewed community.

Within the concepts of *Hotaro-de-Night*, the children of the community can develop a unique understanding of their place in the community. The rising number of visitors, the perception of yearly increases in the number of *hotaro* and their sheer power in bringing the *taiko* drums alive all invite the children, and, within the religious concept, the Arakawa Mountain Kami, to understand that the village is not quite as badly off as many had felt to be the case not long ago. What I am referring to here is the moral assessment of the state of the village the Arakawa Mountain Kami had historically undertaken from the position of the Arakawa *Tanokansa*. Within localized *kami* belief, the *hotaro* have become intelligible as temporarily serving as the location of the Arakawa Mountain Kami, and thus the return from chaos can represent the idealized state of the community. This point has no meaning except when understood from the perspective of the joy in the return of the small and pure things to the land as this is understood in localized *kami* belief.

### *Onibitaki*

Not long after *Hotaro-de-Night* finishes, the rainy season begins and the *hotaro* are no longer seen in the river. One of the consequences of this is that they cannot symbolically serve the protector function that the Arakawa *Tanokansa* had once been understood as performing. This function is actually spread out among a number of different events throughout the year. Here, I will focus on a *matsuri* that resulted from a fusion of religious concepts.

A dramatic fire *matsuri* is still practiced in some rural areas throughout Japan, a variation of which is referred to in Arakawa as *Onibitaki*. Though it was originally tied to the lunar New Year, the event now occurs in early January due to the realignment of New Year celebrations.

One of the largest and most famous of this type of festival is the *Daizenjitamatarekuno Oni-yo* in the northern Kyushu city of Fukuoka. The original introduction into Arakawa of the *Onibitaki matsuri* almost certainly derives in part from the ancient *Oni-yo matsuri*, and many of the concepts associated with the *Oni-yo* must have been transferred to the original Arakawa version. These include purification of evil spirits (the *oni*), granting luck for the year, a prosperous harvest and possibly even fertility. However, since the practice had disappeared in Arakawa, only to be revived by Sailor-Moon, albeit under the practical guidance of the elders of the community, the new *Onibitaki* has been edited to the needs of addressing *kasochi* within *kami* belief.

Several days prior to the *matsuri*, three of the tallest bamboo trees available in the valley are prepared for the event. They are strung together and pulled up by local elders in a traditional but still precarious way with ropes that are later fastened sufficiently firmly. Even though some stability is provided by having the base wider than the top, the emphasis is clearly on the height. The three tall bamboos used in *Onibitaki* are referred to as *yama*. They are of great symbolic importance in many folk performances such as the *Kagura* folk dances of eastern Kagoshima. In *Kagura* the *yama* are fastened to a centrally located post, where they function as the point at which the *kami* enter the community. It is at this spot that the deities descend right into the fabric of the community.

Whereas the *Kagura* dancers wear masks and become *kami* during the time that they move about in the community, there are no dancers in the Arakawa *Onibitaki*. The religious concept surrounding the *yama* creates inferences of a *kami* entering into the community at a specific spot, but then the very spot is the site of a bonfire (*takibi*) traditionally associated with other religious concepts like the *Oni*-mask (*mikoto*), as in the *Oni-yo matsuri*, which symbolizes the evil factor. In the Arakawa *Onibitaki* the fire is not conceptualized as evil, but

rather as possessed by the Arakawa Mountain Kami.

The school's experimental program played a minor but important role in how Sailor-Moon went about editing for this *matsuri* concepts associated with the Arakawa Mountain Kami knowledge network, so let us quickly go over this role. Arakawa students gather together on the grounds of the school early on the day of *Onibitaki*. The teachers go through the coming events of the day, and then the students are given a length of bamboo of approximately fifty centimetres long. They are asked to consider what their wishes and dreams are for the coming year, and then they are given directions to go into the rice fields in front of the school, where the *Onibitaki matsuri* will occur, and think this idea through. There is no specific direction on where they should spend the next couple of hours, so students generally play in the rice fields as they wish. At some point before the *matsuri* begins every student writes their wishes and dreams on their length of bamboo.

After night has fallen and the *matsuri* is well underway, while the *takibi* burns at its most intense and salient level, the students are gathered into a close group. Before an overbearing *takibi* burning as high as the tallest trees in the mountains, all the young children of the community come to stand, some laughing and some frightened, grasping the event in their own individual ways. While they are standing before this stark scene, they are told to throw their bamboos into the towering flames, where their dreams and wishes literally explode with great sound and visual effect. This grabs the attention of even the most sceptical of the children. The scene is imagistic in that it is designed to create the flash-bulb memories that are recalled in full vividness.

The memories formed will be of intense social connectedness in at least two forms. First, this is a moment experienced together with their fellow students. The idea of throwing the bamboos directly into the *takibi* as a close group reveals Sailor-Moon's intentions. The point is

that the students should remember that they are a community in the traditional way understood in Arakawa village. Secondly, the relationship with the Arakawa Mountain *kami* is a personal one. This event is intended to affect a particular attitude about the journey the students have written as their individual hope for the coming year. In the traditional religious concept, the Arakawa Mountain Kami protected the people of Arakawa on a life journey that moved from purity in the valley up through collective work in the rice fields and on to sage old age in the mountains. It should be clear by now that this life is no longer an attractive one for the young people of Arakawa. It is, in fact, part of the perceived ugliness of Arakawa. Their individual journey is by far a more motivating factor in the life choices they will eventually have to make. This event makes intelligible the idea that the Arakawa Mountain Kami not only sanctions this new vision of individual liberty, it will also protect the individual child on their personal journey with the greatest vigour.

The new concept reflects a deep understanding of what a revitalized Arakawa community would have to look like. Sailor-Moon profiled the new idea of individual goals and dreams on to the Arakawa Mountain Kami knowledge network and came up with a small but viable way of promoting the students to envision developing contemporary lives, with very individualistic dreams, which would still be connected to the traditions of the Arakawa community. As with *Hotaro-de-Night*, however, the intelligibility gained in this event does not directly solve the problem, nor does it even express a wish on the part of the fathers for the children to stay in the community. What *Onibitaki* does do is make the unlikely link between, on the one hand, ancient tradition and a highly contemporary concept, and on the other hand, traditional village bonds and a salient, new and personal relationship with the *kami*, all done right in the rice fields of Arakawa, in stark outline, right in front of them.

*An Arakawa myth*

Sailor-moon also organized events in which specific *kasochi*-related problems were profiled against the Arakawa Mountain Kami knowledge network in ways that allowed the children of the community to observe a full narration of community leadership. A good example can be found in how we edited an old local myth. We called our version of the myth *Arakabu and the Arakawa Mountain Kami*. As one would expect, many versions of the story exist throughout the greater Kyushu island area. The Arakawa story makes use of an old local pun derived from the name of a rock fish, the *Arakabu*, plentifully available in the ocean area at the opening of the Arakawa River. The *Arakabu* is a rather easy fish to catch for locals who know where it hides. Tasty as it is (and for locals it is a delectable part of *miso* soup), its main claim to fame for the people of Arakawa is its extraordinary ugliness, a factor that plays an important part in the myth, which I have presented below in a condensed version of the final form we narrated for the audience.

*Arakabu and the Arakawa Mountain Kami*

One spring a long time ago, just as we were preparing for *Taue*, all the people of Arakawa gathered for *matsuri* to call down the Arakawa Mountain Kami into the fields. We played the *taiko* drums, sang, danced and drank in the fields as we had always done. The Arakawa mountain *kami* came down as usual to ensure the rice plants were successfully placed in the fields and would grow into the harvest season. That year, however, as she passed by a house, she happened to see her image in a mirror hung from the house. She became shocked at how ugly she was and returned up Arakawa Mountain in a frenzied state without giving her blessing to the young rice.

What followed was chaos in the fields as the rice withered and we feared for the harvest. Everything was tried in order to invite her back down into the rice fields, but she refused to return. Finally, a village elder suggested to us that we bring an

*Arakabu* fish up into Arakawa Mountains and present it to her so that she can see that she is not the ugliest thing in Arakawa. We went up into the mountains and hung the *Arakabu* on an old shack near where she wanders. When she saw the fish, she began to laugh heartily and decided to return to the fields. That year the rice harvest was a good one. The Arakawa Mountain Kami to this day still comes down into Arakawa to bless the rice and stays to make sure the harvest is a good one.

This myth was acted out in February at the yearly cultural festival on the school grounds. The children of the school sat on mats that had been placed right in front of the stage on the gym floor. We continually engaged the students with verbal comments, and they were encouraged to comment on the actors and their performances. We acted out the scenes in exaggerated voices and gestures, regularly leaving the stage to bring the performance closer to enhance the vivid nature of each scene. The prevalent atmosphere was noisy and playful in the way of traditional *matsuri* events. One of the fathers was dressed as an Arakawa elementary school student, and he ran into the group making a ruckus and banging a *taiko* drum, often sitting down with the children or having one of them hit the drum for us. The performance worked in a way that was entirely bereft of doctrinal input, relying instead on the imagistic mode of experience.

Let us focus on the most important editing undertaken by Sailor-Moon in preparing this myth: the concept of ugliness. The narrated part of the myth only mentions that the Arakawa Mountain Kami notices her ugliness, but otherwise leaves open how ugliness was to be depicted.

In the role of the Arakawa Mountain Kami, I wore a shaggy, long blonde wig. This is a dramatic image for a mountain *kami* to bear. One reason is that, in contrast to the *Uba* peacefulness, long, unruly hair has long been associated with a striking and even fear-inducing mountain figure, the *Yamaba*. This is the woman who does not move peacefully within a tightly knit community through life into the mountains to become a *kami*, but rather is left alone and

in her desolate state becomes the mountain witch. She has a grossly exaggerated appetite and appears suddenly and in an uncanny way with her hair hanging over her face. I was encouraged to affect part of this image by letting the hair fall in a particularly unruly way across my face and by walking in a way that would have been registered viscerally by all the children present. Every child will have been exposed to this figure in many of its variations, from anime characters to the evil factor in TV shows and movies like *Ring*. The reaction of the children when I first appeared on stage was a mixture of silent fear, nervousness and uproarious laughter. The dark implications of community health implicit in this image of ugliness were designed to leave a vaguely understood but intense emotional impact on the children of the village.

There is in this image of ugliness another critical feature. In many ways, the depiction also represents the current state of the Arakawa community. With the exception of many of the elders in the community, no one any longer leads the life of the idealized farmer. Every one of us is the product of some mixture of industrialized, post-industrialized and even globalized contemporary societal constructs. Most young people are absorbed in national- and international-level cultural trends such as the newest video games and anime emanating out of Tokyo. The profiling of these societal currents on to the traditional concept of the Arakawa Mountain Kami provides a far more salient depiction of the current community than a traditional *Uba* mask would have done. The visual image that the blonde wig brings to the Arakawa Mountain Kami is a very natural result of the meaning clarification that arises out of a cognitive process that has been provided with these inputs. The state of contemporary Arakawa is not one of ugliness when profiled against the Global Village knowledge network, but when profiled against the joy in the small and pure things of nature so critical to local *kami* belief, the more exciting concepts of modern culture take on a certain unsophisticated grossness, an inability to fine-tune our senses to the local beauty in the land so close at hand.

But some things about society cannot be changed. As I mentioned earlier, the underlying currents of *kasochi* are based on the perception among young people of a comparative ugliness in villages like Arakawa. Even though this reality runs opposite to the sentiment in the religious concepts associated with the Arakawa Mountain Kami, the myth accepts this state in the failure of the community in the story to alter the chaotic situation. What finally resolves the issue and brings the Arakawa Mountain Kami back into social communion with the people is the ability of community members to redirect attention away from the ugliness that cannot be changed.

The stark image of the Arakawa Mountain Kami depicted in *Arakabu and the Arakawa Mountain Kami* does not directly resolve the *kasochi* issue. However, over the many years and many varied presentations which have resulted in the transmission of the Arakawa Mountain Kami knowledge network, the message of this presentation will inhere in the way these children experience the Arakawa land and its memory. The experiences Sailor-Moon designed into the ironic play in dramatic performances such as this version of an old myth, as with the two *matsuri* we discussed earlier, and many other events besides, form precisely the type of imagistic experience that creates lasting bonds among small groups of individuals. In *Arakabu and the Arakawa Mountain Kami*, Sailor-Moon formulated a conceptual picture of the state of the community and profiled this on the more comprehensive, localized *kami* belief knowledge network and thereby made intelligible for the group of students a way of conceptualizing themselves as the leaders of a future revitalized Arakawa community that is as modern as it has to be, but also linked closely in deep social relationship with the ambience of the land which encapsulates the joy of life in the Arakawa valley.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, I have set out to describe and analyse the purpose for and the way in which religious concepts derived from the Arakawa Mountain Kami knowledge network were edited by Sailor-Moon to help solve the intransigent nature of the *kasochi* problem. I hope I have been able to show that the group went about providing simulations of the social relationship that the children should eventually develop with each other, with the land, and especially with the *kami* so that they may someday have the will and the conceptual map that would allow them to become the leaders of a renewed community. The results were not always explicit, but there was always intelligibility provided for the events as conceptualized from the perspective of joy in the land. Only when the religious concept could provide additional support for the overall goal of simulating a community where the students would feel that a compelling future were possible did Sailor-Moon make use of Arakawa Mountain Kami -related concepts.

The problems that were profiled on the more comprehensive knowledge network were closely linked to other currents in the community. Conceptual contraction occurred passively due to radical changes in community life. Conceptual extension proceeded on suggestions from outsiders, highly developed concepts within the school and many other sources besides. Conceptual fusion involved actively bringing together various separate concepts to fuse contemporary hopes for individual dreams on to the traditional religious concept. Finally, conceptual dramatization allowed for a public viewing of the community in the mirror. As with all mirrors, it provided the opportunity to fine-tune images and reflect on who we were, and on where we were, in the context of the overarching problem of *kasochi*.

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