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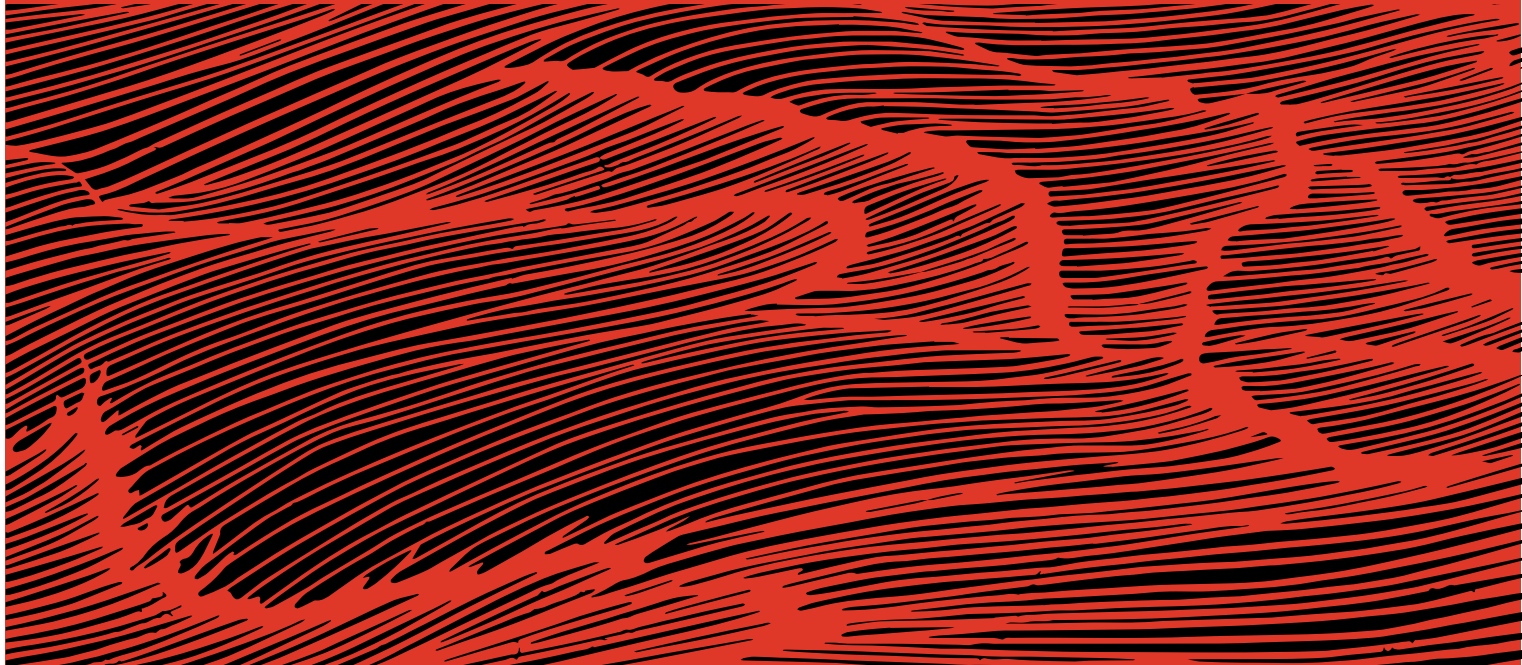
# **Small-scale Fisheries in Japan**

Environmental  
and Socio-cultural  
Perspectives

edited by  
Giovanni Bulian and Yasushi Nakano



**Edizioni**  
Ca' Foscari



Small-scale Fisheries in Japan

**Ca' Foscari Japanese Studies**  
History and Society

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## Small-scale Fisheries in Japan

Environmental and Socio-cultural Perspectives

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# Leadership, Ritual Power and Festival Management in a Japanese Fishing Community

Giovanni Bulian

(Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia)

**Abstract** The article provides an anthropological overview of the critical processes of empowerment and disempowerment of ritual leaders in a small Japanese fishing community. The main topic of the paper is a winter festival that takes place during the New Year's Eve in Kamishima island (Ise Bay), whose management and celebration represent an important catalyst for local leadership, which is related to the transformation of the local institutions and to the power relations among the various local leaders.

**Summary** 1 Introduction – 2 Territorial Roots and Institutional Dynamics – 3 Renegotiating Ritual Power – 4 Recontextualising a Winter Festival – 4.1 *Awa tsukuri* – 4.2 *Awa tsuki* – 5 Contextualizing Local Leadership: Conclusive Remarks

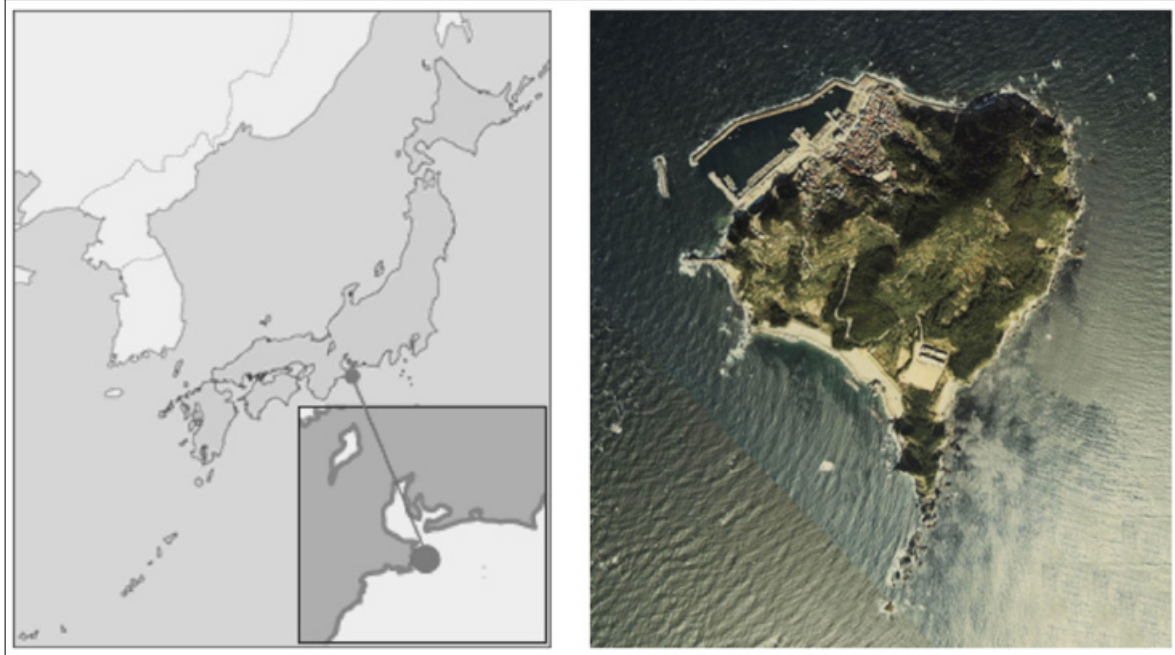
**Keywords** Festival management. Leadership. Ritual power. Japan. Fishing community. Folk religion. Anthropology of power.

## 1 Introduction

This article provides an anthropological overview of the critical processes of empowerment and disempowerment of ritual leaders in the context of demographic and social-economic transformations of a Japanese fishing community. In particular, the article focuses on a community-based festival (*matsuri* 祭り), which is structured into a series of winter festive celebrations collectively called *gētā matsuri* ゲーター祭り (*gētā* festival)<sup>1</sup> that take place during the period of New Year's Eve (*shōgatsu* 正月) on the island of Kamishima (map 1). This festival could be considered as an example of power arena managed by two different typologies of ritual leaders who are considered powerful figures whose social prestige lie in preserving their social status, which they have gained within the local institutional systems. The article will

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the meaning of the term '*gētā*' and the religious symbolism of the *gētā matsuri* see Hagiwara 1973; Yamada 1995; Bulian 2012.





Map 1. Geographical position of Kamishima island

Map 2. Subdivision of the three *seko* of Kamishima: (A) *higashi seko* (east neighborhood), (B) *naka seko* (center district), (C) *minami seko* (southern district). The rural settlement of Kamishima is crossed by two rivers: *mizo* and *dai mizo*, which are the geographical boundaries that separate the three *seko*: *mizo* separates *naka seko* from *higashi seko*, while the *dai mizo* divides *naka seko* from *minami seko*



Figure 1. Rural settlement landscape of Kamishima island. The houses are mainly built in two areas: the flat land near the north coast, and on the north-west side of the main mountain slope

explore the balance of power between the *kumiaichō* 組合長 (director of the local fishing association) who is connected to the 'new' institutional system introduced in Kamishima (that is, *chōnaikai* 町内会, neighborhood associations and *gyokyōkumiai* 漁業組合, fishing cooperative association) and *miyamochi* 宮持, the head of the religious ceremonies, traditionally elected year by year by the *seko* セコ system (that is, the three historical local districts of Kamishima) and *inkyoshu* 隠居衆 (group of retired *miyamochi*).

The article is divided into two main topics. First of all, it will be discussed how local festive management represent an important catalyst for local leadership. As will be seen, the *kumiaichō* and the *miyamochi* can act as mirror reflecting the particular characteristics of these organisational systems, which differ mainly in two aspects: on the one hand, the *seko* system represent the territorial division of historical settlement of Kamishima, which is rooted into the local religious activities, including the practices of election of the *miyamochi*; on the other hand, *chōnaikai* and *gyokyōkumiai*, represent nowadays more efficient organizations for the needs of the local community, if compared to the 'staticity' of the traditional *seko* system. This radical administrative change is mainly due to the constant lack of funds for the festival celebrations which has forced the new organizations to take on the responsibility of managing funding of the religious events, including *gētā matsuri*, which was traditionally managed by *seko* system. Such institutional dualism has become more critical especially when the aging population and the consequent economic implosion forced local community groups to develop a number of strategies giving decision-making power to a single person: the *kumiaichō*.

Secondly, the article will discuss the ritual involvement of *kumiaichō* in the celebration of *gētā matsuri*. As many other New Year's Eve festivals performed in Japanese rural communities, Kamishima's *gētā matsuri* is not based on a single festive event but includes a series of interrelated ceremonial events, that ritually prepare the community for the new year. In particular, between December 31 and January 1, there are several religious events that represent the most important part of Kamishima's New Year's Eve.<sup>2</sup> For this peculiarity, in order to offer an ethnographic account on the relationship between the institutional change of local organizations and the increasing social visibility of the *kumiaichō*, in this section will be discussed two main celebrations of *gētā matsuri*: *awa tsukuri* アワ作り (creation of the *awa*) and *awa tsuki* アワ付き (lift of the *awa*). In the conclusions, the topics discussed in the previous sessions will serve to put some anthropological reflections on the question of Kamishima's leadership and its complex hybrid nature, highlighting the many political, economic and sociocultural factors that characterize the religious role played by *kumiaichō* and other local leaders.

## 2 Territorial Roots and Institutional Dynamics

Kamishima is a small island located at the entrance of Ise Bay, on the border between Mie Prefecture and Aichi Prefecture. The island is about 16 km from the coast of the city of Toba, being situated at the further east point, between Toshijima and Sugashima islands, and just 4 km from Irako Cape (Atsumi Peninsula, Aichi Prefecture). Characterized by a compact and rounded shape, the mountainous territory has placed complex constraints to the urban settlement which is concentrated in a very limited space, occupying the northern side of the island, connecting longitudinally the beach with the fishing harbor. The spatial organization of the village consists of a succession of dwellings set in a complicated web of alleys and streets that connect the main buildings (shrines, temples, administrative buildings, etc.) (fig. 1).

From an administrative perspective, Kamishima is a typical municipality (Kamishima-chō) which is, since 1954, headed by the coastal town of Toba

2 According to the official calendar, Kamishima *shōgatsu* officially begins after the exorcistic ceremony of *yarimashobune* ヤリマシヨブネ (ward off boat), which takes place on 8 December, followed by *towatashi* と渡し (delivery of the god) on 11 December, the *shōgatsu hajime* 正月始め (the beginning of New Year's Eve) on 13 December, *morōmo kubari* モーロモ配り (sending mandarins), *awa tsukuri* アワ作り (construction of *awa*), *saba tsukuri* サバ作り (co-construction of *saba*), *awa tsuki* (raising *awa*), both performed on December 31, the *namikirifudō kakeji kukaichō* 波切不動掛け軸の開帳 (opening the scrolls of Namikiri Fudō), the *saba tori* サバ取り (*saba* catch) and *hinata no matsuri* 日向の祭 (festival of the sun) performed on 1 January, the *funa matsuri* 船祭り (festival of boats) the *iso matsuri* 磯祭 (festival of the beach) on 2 January, *shishi mai* 獅子舞 (lion dance) on January 4 and finally *Hachiman sai* 八幡祭 (festival of Hachiman) on 6 January (also called *muikasai* 六日祭, festival of the sixth day) (Bulian 2012).

(Mie Prefecture). Kamishima is divided into three historical districts called *higashi seko* 東セコ (eastern district), *naka seko* 中セコ (centre district) and *minami seko* 南セコ (southern district),<sup>3</sup> and it represents, along with *chōnaikai* (neighborhood associations) and the local Fishing Cooperative Association (*gyōkyōkumiai*), the main institutions of the community. The three *seko*, unlike *chōnaikai* system, administer some open spaces called *tsuka* ツカ (shell heap), located along the quay in front of the port of Kamishima and used for the repair and cleaning of the fish nets. The complex *seko* system is also characterized by an articulated internal organisational structure, which varies depending on the *seko*: each *seko* has a representative called *tsuka iin* 塚委員, more commonly called *seko no yakuin* セコの役員, elected together with other representatives with the task of assistants and accountants. Until about twenty years ago, every *seko* had its youth organization (*seinendan* 青年団) called, respectively, *higashi shibu* 東支部 (East district), *naka shibu* 中支部 (Centre district) and *minami shibu* 南支部 (South district), and each *shibu* had its own headquarters where the young were performing cultural activities (Bulian 2012).

The system of *chōnaikai* was instead introduced in Kamishima before the beginning of World War II and nowadays there are four *chōnaikai*, subdivided into 25 sub-associations (*tonarigumi* 隣組) including a fifth *chōnaikai*, called 'Kamishima *chōnaikai*', which has the task of leading the local administration of the fishing community. The administrative function of these *chōnaikai* is extremely important because these 'new' organisational structures were strategically designated to adhere to the national politics of 'ideological centralization' (Sugimoto 2003, 71). That is, *chōnaikai* are moreover social institutions which are at the lowest level of Japanese administration, transmitting government or semi-governmental programs to the local communities.<sup>4</sup>

3 The construction of the village of Kamishima occurred in different phases, with small villages (*mura*) initially settled in the North and then in a west valley on the island. These villages later became the three districts (*seko*) of Kamishima that constitute the current urban structure of the village. *Higashi seko*, for example, was called *higashi mura* (East village) until the early Shōwa period (1936). Later, the word was changed in *higashi buraku* or *higashi seko*. *Buraku* 部落 is however a term which better reflects the bureaucratic and administrative implications of the village, as that term is used in official documents of the Meiji government. After the Meiji period, *buraku* was also used in non-administrative contexts. However, the main difference between *buraku* and *seko* concerns precisely everyday use of the two terms: the first is mainly used for the local administration, the second reflects instead the sense of belonging of the local inhabitants to their neighbourhood.

4 The *chōnaikai* were one of the main objects of study in Japanese sociology, in particular urban, rural and political sociology. Despite the vastness of the studies on the subject, it is still possible to make a brief summary of the main sociological debates concerning *chōnaikai*. From 1945 to 1960, debates focused on the political characteristics of *chōnaikai* in rural areas and, in particular, on the question whether these organizations were independent or not from state governmental authorities. During this period, urban sociology, in an attempt to affirm its own academic identity, focused on the process of formation of new *chōnaikai*. The period from 1960 to 1980 was characterized by strong economic devel-

However, these new institutions are rooted in a complex historical background. In Kamishima, the traditional *seko* system and the new centralized *chōnaikai* system represent two aspects of the traditional Japanese community organization, based on the territorial configuration of the internal relations in an urbanized space: *muragumi* 村組 and *kinringumi* 近隣組 (Fukuda 1979). *Muragumi* is a term for a settlement area separate from the rest of a village, whose boundaries are drawn from a river or a road. Each village can contain a number of *muragumi* and each house can only belong to one of these. Topographical names and terms belonging to the rural architectural vocabulary are often used to indicate the *muragumi* such as, for example, cave, garden, valley or stream. *Muragumi* primarily performs also different social functions within the rural community (mutual aid and support in the daily activities of the community, cooperation for community activities, organization of religious services).

In turn, *muragumi* is divided into small groups called *kinringumi*, which have the task of carrying out a series of community work for the *muragumi* management. *Kinringumi* is a term that indicates a particular type of neighbourhood association, which administers its own a specific area of *muragumi* without the direct intervention of governmental authority. The main functions assigned to *kinringumi* are the local administrative organization, cooperation and mutual support among its members. Moreover, the *kinringumi* is divided into subgroups called *tonarigumi*, which can carry out similar tasks to those assigned to *kinringumi*. The main difference between *muragumi* and *kinringumi* consists in the fact that the first is a separate area of the village, based on a series of social relationships between residents, while the second term indicates an area of the *muragumi*, generally consisting of a row of houses or group, whose members perform some basic functions of local government (also called *jichikai* 自治会, local self-administration body). Both terms also imply the idea that the basic unit of the village is mainly the neighbourhood, which is the principle of the 'shared territory bound by an organization' (Fukuda 1979).

This brief introduction contextualizes the main organisational structures of Kamishima and highlights two important aspects of the local institutional system. First of all, local organizations are closely tied to the territorial system: the *seko* system, which corresponds to *muragumi*, and the system of *chōnaikai*, which corresponds instead to *kinringumi*. Around these two

opment in urban and rural areas and the emergence of new social issues. Urban sociology focused on the interrelations between *chōnaikai* using theories then in vogue: system theory, theory of social movements and community theory. From 1980 onwards, sociological studies focused on the revaluation of the roles of *chōnaikai* in regional areas (Masashi 1997). In anthropology, Theodor Bestor, for example, analyzed *chōnaikai* as social institutions that produce and reproduce traditionalism as a social process to support the current patterns of social organization (Bestor 1989). Iwasaki Nobuhiko focused on analyzing the role that *chōnaikai* played in environmental movements (Nobuhiko et al. 1989).

organisational systems gravitate a number of small and medium-sized organizations, which perform simple tasks (road maintenance, grass cutting, etc.), or more complex tasks (organization of fire brigades, the Association of pensioners, the Association of women, the parent-teacher Association, the Association of students, etc). Interestingly, the *chōnaikai* system in Kamishima has not an exact geographical correspondence within the community: if the boundaries of *seko* are mainly driven by geographical features, the four *chōnaikai* are distributed in such a way that members belonging to the same *chōnaikai* can also be resident in two different *seko* (Bulian 2012).

It is also important to note that the *muragumi* and *kinringumi* systems are two systems that have two different institutional roles not only from an administrative point of view. Place-based institutions assume their importance not only for the frequency they are used, but also for the intensity of the arousal they cause. As seen through the schematization of the main traditional institutions proposed by Fukuda (1979), the Kamishima community is thus constituted by a set of smaller communities and bounded by geographical boundaries. Even from a linguistic point of view, if we look at the etymology of the term *seko* we note that it indicates the boundary of some rural or urban settlement: according to the *Kokugo Daijiten* (Dictionary of the National Language) *seko* means ‘side road or narrow passage’,<sup>5</sup> while in *Kadokawa Nihon Chimei Daijiten* (Geographical Dictionary of Japan Kadokawa 1991) indicates an ‘out-of-the-way’ or ‘a part of the city or village’.<sup>6</sup> If on one hand, *seko* is therefore a ‘community within a larger community’, defined according to specific geographical and institutional boundaries, on the other hand, it is also an example of a community defined according to certain symbolic boundaries which, “encapsulate the identity of the community and, like the identity of an individual, is called into being by the exigencies of social interaction” (Cohen 1965, 13). It is no coincidence that the folklorist Wakamori Tarō used the expression ‘*seko* spirit’ to indicate a sense of ‘rivalry’ among the various *seko* members (1964). This expression also indicates how the system of the *seko* constitutes a set of cultural values so deeply rooted in individual identity that one may say that the inhabitants of Kamishima are not related to their own community but to their own *seko*.

Finally, another important difference between *seko* and *chōnaikai*, is that the *seko* system represents the spatial orientation that characterizes the main religious practices of this community. For example, there is a small shrine dedicated to Aragamisama 荒神様 (a *kami* protector of the

5 See *Nihon Kokugo Daijiten* (2001). 『日本国語大辞典』 (Dictionary Of National Japanese Language). vol. 7. Tōkyō: Shogakkan, 576.

6 The term *seko* is also used in another village, Kō Ago, while the term *sekonomi* セコノミ is used in the village of Kohama, both under the Toba administration (Wakamori 1965).

*seko*) in each *seko*, while *chōnaikai* have instead no place for religious practice remaining, on the organisational level, simple 'institutional inventions'. In this cultural context, it can be said that the religious practices that take place in the *seko* are therefore part of a 'theology of the territory'. As we shall see later, Kamishima's New Year's celebration is mainly based on this territorial configuration, determining specific cultural norms and ritual practices which are connected to *miyamochi*.

### 3 Renegotiating Ritual Power

While, on the one hand, the urban settlement of Kamishima community is structured according to specific cultural and geographical factors, on the other hand, the management of these institutes has undergone radical transformations in recent decades, influencing strongly the local policies. In particular, the question of the economic management of community religious ceremonies has undergone critical changes in the organisational and administrative level.

The religious organization of Kamishima falls under the category of so-called 'tōya community', and the local term *miyamochi* refers to a 'person in charge' (*tōya* 当家) who organizes the religious events (Hagiwara 1973; Sekizawa 2000). According to the historical rules established by *seko*, the role of the *miyamochi* lasts one year, and the criteria for election are based on three requirements:

1. The *miyamochi* must belong to a wealthy family of the community. This condition was important because the role of *miyamochi* consisted in financially supporting all New Year's Eve ceremonies.
2. The new *miyamochi* must be married and have two generations of descendants. This condition requires that the *miyamochi* and his wife should have reached the age of sixty, although the age threshold has been recently brought to seventy years.
3. According to the religious prescriptions of the Shintō tradition, the *miyamochi* family must not be ritually unclean, but must constantly maintain a state of purity. It follows that the *miyamochi* and his family will have to keep away from the graveyard and the places of mourning or childbirth. In the past, in the case of mourning in his family, the *miyamochi* was purified with water on the 1st, 15th and 28th of each month in the public baths of Kamishima. This custom, though of extreme importance, has fallen into disuse towards the end of the last century.

In addition to these three conditions, in the past the *miyamochi* was traditionally chosen according to the *seko* of origin using a turnaround system (Hotta 1970; Hagiwara 1973; Itō 1992, 513), while nowadays the

selection criteria for the new *miyamochi* are based solely on the age of the candidate. From a strictly economical point of view, the *miyamochi* is supported now by the local Fishing Cooperative, thus freeing him from economic burdens, but also by depreciating his social status and ritual power within the community.

Fishing Cooperative's contributions have only come in recent times when the Kamishima Fishing Cooperative merged with the Toba-Isobe Corporation in 2002.<sup>7</sup> With the new organisational restructuring, Kamishima's corporate association was able to guarantee and manage a greater flow of money to finance New Year's religious ceremonies. Within this new institutional setting, the 'lay' figure of the *kumiaichō* (director of Kamishima Fishing Cooperative) has begun to play an increasingly strategic role.<sup>8</sup> The position of the *kumiaichō* is considered prestigious in Kamishima playing also a key role in choosing the new *miyamochi*. In fact, the selection of the new *miyamochi* is organized on June 11: the *kumiaichō* along with the *chōnaikaichō* (the director of the neighbourhood association) goes to the candidate's home to ask him formally if he wants to become the new *miyamochi*. It is generally considered a decisive moment, because becoming a *miyamochi* triggers the social mechanisms involved in the candidate's family sphere, according to which the candidate can not refuse.

After choosing the new *miyamochi* (who will formally be entrusted during a religious ceremony on December 11th), the *kumiaichō* organizes a banquet after the conclusion of the religious ceremonies of *isomatsuri* 磯祭り (beach festival)<sup>9</sup> and *gokuage* ゴクアゲ.<sup>10</sup> After completing his annual role, the *miyamochi* then passes the charge to the new *miyamochi* during a handover ceremony, where the ex-*miyamochi* gives to the new *miyamochi*

7 Until 1948, the Kamishima Cooperative was one of the many *gyogyōkai* 漁業会, or 'fishing society' created by the amendment of the Fishing Act of 1901. In 1949, with the entry into force of the new Fisheries Act (and in particular the *Kamishima-chō gyogyōkai* 神島町漁業 became *Kamishimachō gyogyōkumiai* 神島町漁業組合, 'Kamishima Fish Cooperative Association'. In 2002, 22 cooperatives located in Toba and Isobe area merged to create the Toba-Isobe Fishing Cooperative (*Tobashi-Isobeshi gyogyōkyōdōkumiai* 鳥羽磯部漁業協同組合). The Kamishima Fishing Cooperative Association became part of the new institutional organ in the same year, becoming *Kamishimachō Toba-Isobe gyogyōkyōdōkumiai* 神島町鳥羽磯部漁業協同組合 (Fishing Cooperative Association Toba-Isobe Section Kamishima).

8 After the merger of the co-operative with Tobashi-Isobe, the *kumiaichō* became *shitenchō* 支店長, that is, the director responsible for the Kamishima cooperative section, but since the co-operation of the cooperative and the consequent change of roles occurred in too recent times, the inhabitants of Kamishima continue to call him *kumiaichō* as a sign of respect

9 *Isomatsuri* is an important event for the community because it involves men and women working in fishing, and because, on a symbolic level, this ceremony is aimed at the ritual purification of the island. During the ceremony of the *isomatsuri* fishing boats circumnavigate the island of Kamishima, crossing some uninhabited islands.

10 *Gokuage* is a religious ceremony that consisted in the ritual exchange of gifts (abalones and rice cakes) between *miyamochi* and *ama* fishers.



a box, a symbol of his ritual power, containing a hung scroll (*kakejiku* 掛け軸) bearing the inscription 'Watatsumi Ōmikami', the name of the guardian of the sanctuary Yatsushirō. Once the ceremony is completed, the former *miyamochi* becomes officially the *kuchimai no jii* 米口の爺 (the elder of *kuchimai*).<sup>11</sup>

After the annual role of the *kuchimai no jii* has been completed, the former *miyamochi* becomes part of the *inkyoshū* 隠居衆 (group of retreats), the group to which all the former *miyamochi* have completed the two-year ritual process (see also Takeuchi 1952; Chang 1970; Davis 1977; Sekizawa 2000). The term *inkyō* 隠居 in the Japanese language means 'retired person', but in Kamishima this word indicates a major responsibility within the community, since *inkyō* must play a role of mediator in internal conflicts or attend ceremonial events. The status of belonging to the *inkyoshū* is considered of great importance and the ceremony that sanctions the definitive admission of the former *miyamochi* to the *inkyoshū* is called *inkyonari no oiwai* 隠居なりのお祝い (celebration of retirement). To become thus *inkyō*, the *kuchimae no jii* must then arrange the *inkyonari no iwai* by choosing one day before May 20, and set up a banquet where all the members of the *inkyoshū* are invited.

In this context, the active presence of the *kumiaichō* (and in many other cases the *chōnaikaichō*) has become more and more strategic with his progressive involvement in organizing community religious events and, above all, in the negotiation practices of the role of the *miyamochi* with the candidates, a task that in the past belonged exclusively to the organizations of the *seko* system. In many cases, the *kumiaichō* also carries out the task of *chonaikaichō*, *rojinkaichō* (Director of the Association of Retirees) and priest of the Yatsushirō Shrine (the main Shintō shrine of Kamishima) and this overlap of institutional tasks in a single person becomes therefore an example of centralization of political and ritual power. In the next section, some New Year's religious ceremonies will be examined, in which the director's involvement in ritual practices represents a means to legitimize his authority but also to 'build' it.

**11** In the past, *kuchimai* was a tax for the village and *kuchimai no jii* controlled this tax together with the *sanninshū* 三人衆 (three people), who were elected as representatives of the three *seko*. The *sanninshū* and the *kuchimai no jii* paid the tax and collected the money from the families of the village. The role played by *sanninshū* and *kuchimai no jii* was very important within the fishing industry, but with the disappearance of this charge, *kuchimai no jii* is now limited to attend the end-year ceremonies and visit the shrine of Ise Jingū in the city of Ise to propose good fishing and dedicate an *ema* 絵馬 (votive tablet) to the Kamishima Fishing Cooperative Association at the Yatsushirō shrine. In the following year the *kuchimai no jii* become then the *oremairi no jii* 俺参りの爺, a charge that is disappeared in 1964. The main tasks of the *oremairi no jii* consisted of attending the *gētā matsuri* and *Hachimansai* (Hachiman's festival), and visiting Ise Jingū on January 11 to thank for the completion of his ritual role (Hagiwara 1973; Bulian 2012).

## 4 Recontextualizing a Winter Festival

As seen in the previous section, the involvement of the *kumiaichō* in the election of the new *miyamochi* has highlighted the new dynamics of economic, political and ritual power within the Kamishima community. In this section, the role played by the *kumiaichō* will be examined in the context of the festive celebrations of New Year's Eve in Kamishima. In particular, a brief ethnographic description of two important ceremonies will be proposed: the *awa tsukuri* ceremony (the *awa* construction) and the *awa tsuki* ceremony (lifting of the *awa*). In addition to highlighting the ritual role played by the *kumiaichō*, these ceremonies also represent two key examples to understand the importance of the roles played by the main ritual actors involved in the organization and performance activities.

### 4.1 *Awa tsukuri*

December 31, 2008

In the late afternoon, all the men of the community, accompanied by the relatives of the new *miyamochi*, go to the Fishing Cooperative's headquarters to celebrate the *awa tsukuri*, a ceremony in which they build a huge circle (*awa*) made of twisted *gumi* ぐみ (oleaster) and wrapped with sheets of white paper. Although in the past the construction of the *awa* was a task that was solely for the relatives of the *miyamochi*, due to the demographic and population aging problems, the members of the various *chōnaikai* started to participate.<sup>12</sup> During the afternoon some relatives of the *miyamochi* distribute to all the families of the community a leaflet containing all the information, timetables and procedures to be followed for the celebration of the *awa tsukuri*. The leaflet is prepared yearly by

<sup>12</sup> Up to about 50 years ago, *awa* was prepared in the *miyamochi*'s house, but the place was changed 30 years ago because of the excessive costs of the ceremonial banquet. The dates shown are however indicative, as I found some inconsistencies with respect to the year in which this change occurred. Hitoshi Yamada reports that the construction of the *awa* was made at the *miyamochi*'s home. It is therefore possible to believe that there is some degree of discontinuity and that in some cases *miyamochi* decided to celebrate the *awa tsukuri* in his home; see Yamada 1995, 14. The choice of changing place was initially opposed by the same members of the Fishing Cooperative: since, in any case, *miyamochi* had to celebrate a banquet in his home after the end of the *awa tsukuri*, it was considered useless to move the site of the construction of the *awa* to stem costs. However, an agreement was reached: the building for the celebration of the *awa tsukuri* became the second floor of the Fishing Cooperative, while the main religious celebrations, including the banquet and the consecration of the *awa*, remained in the *miyamochi*'s house. Just to overcome the problem of being able to contain as many people as possible during the celebration of the *awa tsukuri*, the second floor of the Fishing Cooperative thus became the ideal place.



Figure 2. The *awa tsukuri* ceremony. At the bottom, from the left: the *kumiaichō*, the *kuchimae no jii*, the *miyamochi* and his wife and the *chonaikaichō* (Kamishima, December 31, 2008)

Figure 3. Preparation of the *saba* (Kamishima, December 31, 2008)

the Kamishima *chōnaikai* (Kamishima Neighborhood Association) with the collaboration of the management of the local Fish Cooperative. The material used during the *awa tsukuri* is prepared a few weeks before: the new *miyamochi*, accompanied by his relatives and some members of the Fish Cooperative Association, goes to the mountain behind the Gori beach to cut rubber branches (*Elaeagnus multiflora*), chosen on the basis of their natural curvature. A few days before the celebration of the *awa tsukuri* some men go to the beach to cut bamboo *medake* メダケ (*Pleioblastus simonii*) used for the ceremony of the *awa tsuki*. Once cut, the *medake* is then adorned on the tip with zigzag strips of white paper (*shide*) and placed in front of the home entrance.<sup>13</sup>

The place where the *awa tsukuri* takes place is prepared during the afternoon: desks and chairs and other material left in storage are stacked in the corners of the room while on the walls of the room is hanging a long white and red striped canvas and adorned with the *shimenawa* しめ縄 (sacred rope) to sacralize the area. In the middle of the room is stretched a huge blue canvas above which straw mats and tools are arranged. On one side of the room is placed the *tokonoma*, where are hanged some scrolls depicting the *kami* of the sun Amaterasu Ōmikami, the *kami* of the sea Watatsumi Ōkami 綿津見大神 and the *kami* of the war Hachiman 八幡. *Sake*, cakes and some straw lanterns are placed in front of the scrolls as a sign of offer.

Before the ceremony begins, the *kannushi* performs a ritual of purification of the room and participants, singing some *norito* 祝詞 prayers. After the ritual purification, the eldest son of *miyamochi* offers a cup of *sake* to the *miyamochi*, then to his wife, to the *kuchimai no jii*, and finally to all the participants of the ceremony. The construction of the *awa* begins with a first arrangement of the *gumi* branches, which are tightened together with strings (fig. 2). This operation is done several times, until the structure of the *awa* reaches a certain degree of stability. During this initial phase, participants call the *awa* with the term 'without meat'. The *awa* is then lifted up to several times and 'compressed' by the participants, who push the ring to prove its stability. Leaning on four wooden slats, the *awa* is then tied with straw lanyards, wrapping it completely. Once the *awa* is completed, the *kumiaichō* binds a purified cord to a part of the *awa*, symbolizing the head of the *awa* (*awa no atama* アワの頭).

The ceremony called *saba tsukuri* サバ作り (construction of the *saba*)

**13** The amount of bamboo owned by each family depends on the number of components: in addition to the head of household, only male children have the right to own a bamboo cane to be used for the ceremony of the *wa tsuki*. Along with *gumi* and *medake*, straw strings are woven in the summer by some relatives of the *miyamochi* and used to tie *gumi* and white paper together. Moreover, the *awa* requires a large amount of strings so that the tires are bonded together sufficiently stable for their transport.



Figure 4. The *awa* placed in front of the *tokonoma* of the *miyamochi*'s home (Kamishima, December 31, 2008)

Figure 5. The *awa* is lifted in front of the main entrance of the sanctuary Yatsushirō (Kamishima, January 1, 2009)

is held simultaneously in the same hall during the celebration of the *awa tsukuri*, whose preparations begin a few weeks earlier.<sup>14</sup> On December 13, some men go to Benten Mountain, near Bentenzaki (Cape Benten) to cut a piece of wood (*saba*), which is delivered to the new *miyamochi*. The *saba*'s carving is a task that is entrusted to the *ōdaiku* 大大工 (great carpenter), a carpenter who has built the *miyamochi*'s house and he is in close relationship with the *miyamochi* and his family. The *ōdaiku* carves the *saba* with twelve facets representing the months of the year (fig. 3).<sup>15</sup> Once the *saba* is completed, the *kumiaichō* writes the kanji of *ue* 上 (above) on the sheet and puts it back on the *tokonoma*. The *saba* is then handed over to the *miyamochi* who will guard it until the celebration of the *saba tori*.

#### 4.2 *Awa tsuki*

Once completed the *awa tsukuri*, relatives of *miyamochi* and *kuchimai no jii* carry the *awa* in the house of *miyamochi*, where is celebrated a feast. Arranged on a *tokonoma* (alcove), the *awa* is sanctified through prayers and offerings (fig. 4). After midnight, the participants are offered some food cooked with water drawn from a well, which is prepared as a meal to prepare for the 'battle' that will take place during the celebration of *awa tsuki*. Between 1 and 4 a.m., two young men, respectively, related with the *miyamochi* and the *kuchimai no jii*, leave the house of the *miyamochi* to announce the upcoming ceremony of *awa tsuki*. Called *nanadohan* 七度半 ('seven and a half times', a name due to the number of times they run through the village) the two messengers shout the words *beronno berorenno* ベロンノ ベロレンノ, following a predetermined route that leads them from east to west of the village. At about 5 a.m., when relatives of the *miyamochi* complete their task, the *miyamochi* and *kuchimai no jii*, after wearing the traditional ceremonial clothing, come out from the house

**14** Also called *takaramono* 宝物 (treasure), *saba* is a piece of carved wood depicting a charm amulet. There is another object called *saba* in Kamishima. During the *Hachimansai* (Hachiman festival), which takes place on January 6th, boiled rice shaped like fish is prepared on a tray. The dish and the white sheet on which they are served are also called *saba*. In the Japanese language *saba* means 'mackerel' (*Scomber scombrus*) and in the past it designated the main species of fish caught in Kamishima. Boiled rice was therefore a form of prayer to wish for a good fishing of mackerel (Hotta 1970). It is interesting to note that the term *saba* also indicates the rice offered to the *gaki* (the souls of the dead without peace) and to Kishimojin 鬼子母神, the *kami* of childbirth and children.

**15** Thirty or thirty one incisions are made on each face to indicate the days of the month, after which the *saba* is wrapped in white paper and bound with red and white wires. In some cases, on the decision of the *ōdaiku*, the *saba* facets are reduced to six or eight, to simplify the carving operation and to tighten the working times. If the *saba* is reduced to six sides, the *ōdaiku*, after completing all the engravings, vertically divides each face with a further engraving.



Figure 6. The lift of the *awa* during the climax of the *awa tsuki* ceremony (Kamishima, January 1, 2009)

of *miyamochi* to visit the homes of the *inkyoshū* members, the *kumiaichō* and *chōnaikaichō*. Following the same ceremonial procedure of the *nanadohan*, the *miyamochi* utters the phrase *beeron irasshai* ベーロンいらっしやい (welcome *beeron*) every time he crosses the threshold of a house, but he never receives any response.

When the visit of *nanadohan* is over, a group of young people come to the house of *miyamochi* to take the *awa* and carry it on to the Suzu beach, located north-east of the village, to celebrate the *awa tsuki*. The procession led by the *miyamochi* is firstly directed towards the main entrance of the Yatsushirō shrine. On the way, at regular intervals, the *awa* is lifted upright under the shouts of encouragement of participants (fig. 5). Before arriving to the great *torii* (Shintō portal) of Yatsushirō Shrine, the *awa* is again raised, while the procession awaits the arrival of *negisan* (local term for *kannushi*, the Shintō priest). The *awa* is then 'compressed' again by the group, performing an action similar to that which took place during the celebration of the *awa tsukuri*. The procession then heads on *higashi seko*, where the *awa* is 'compressed' again and raised. Later the procession moves towards a narrow alley in *higashi seko*, where another group

of young people intermarried with the *kuchimai no jii* expects to carry on the *awa* to the Suzu beach.

Residents of *higashi seko* and *naka seko* await on the beach the arrival of the procession to start a simulated combat against *minami seko* residents, using the long *medake* bamboo poles adorned with strips of white paper which symbolize the swords. The group led by the *kuchimai no jii* then pushes the *awa* in the middle of the battle where it is repeatedly hit with the bamboo. After the conclusion of this first phase of the ceremony, the *awa* is transported to *minami seko* to pay tribute to the *tsuka* and finally the *awa* is carried on the beach for the last phase of the ceremony. At dawn, all the participants raise the *awa* using long bamboo rods to make it float as high as possible. The *awa tsuki* lasts only a few minutes, although there is an effort on the part of all participants to raise it as high as possible in order to propitiate a good catch in the New Year (fig. 6).

When the *awa* finally touches the ground, the group led by *kuchimai no jii* carries the *awa* to the Yatsushirō shrine, to place it in front of the main building. While *awa* is transported on top of the Yatsushirō, a small group of people gather on the Suzu beach to celebrate the *saba tori* (catching the *saba*). The *miyamochi* delivers the *saba* (the piece of wood prepared during the celebration of *awa tsukuri*) to the *kumiaichō* to launch it into the group. The celebration of the *saba tori* consists in the attempt of the participants to take the *saba* in order to ensure good luck in the new year (for this reason it is also called *saba takara* サバ宝, 'saba treasure'). Although competition lasts only a few minutes, attempts to catch the *saba* push participants to behave in a violent and aggressive way. The man who succeeds then cries *totta* 取った (taken), and runs up the staircase leading to Yatsushirō shrine, to place the *saba* in front of the *awa*, as a ritual gesture of good wish for the New Year.

## 5 Contextualizing Local Leadership: Conclusive Remarks

This article has taken into account the need to rethink power relations among members of a fishing community and its contribution can be identified in the description and interpretation of the role of local organizations and their main representatives within the New Year's Eve celebrations. Starting from the assumption that the *gētā matsuri* could ideally represent a 'total social phenomenon', according to the conception inaugurated by Marcel Mauss and widely shared by most anthropologists, this series of religious ceremonies embraces a whole series of topics related to socio-economic complexity of the celebrant community and the transformation of the local political and administrative organization. The *gētā matsuri* reflects in fact the classical conception of the *modus operandi* of the ritual actors immersed in a certain social context and the strategies adopted

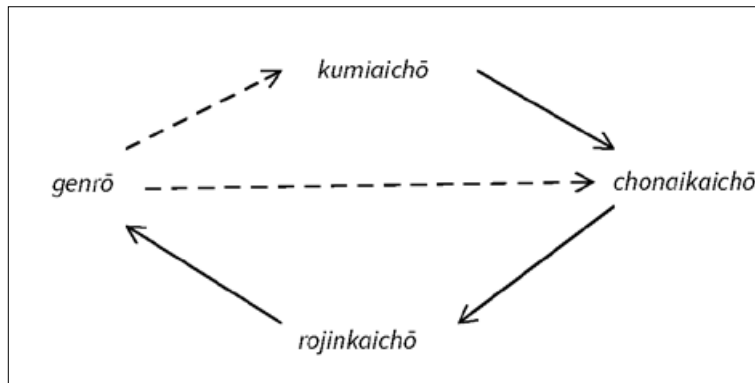


by local fishermen to come to terms with the transformations that have occurred inside of their community. As seen before, the complexity of the *gētā matsuri* is also loaded with particular thematic connotations that give it not only an historical-religious autonomy, but this festival also sheds light, on a symbolic level, issues related to the power relations of the local ritual leaders and, in particular, the issue of local leadership.

Regarding the last topic, some conclusive reflections on the concept of local leadership must also be delineated and contextualized. Local leadership is generally defined as a concept that must be understood contextually, occurring within a given local configuration of power, authority, social prestige shaped by local institutions with specific economic or political goals. In the context of Kamishima, the question of local leadership is of particular interest: it implies an anthropological insight into the social dynamics and internal equilibrium of this community. More specifically, local leadership is considered to be a particular form of social relationship that takes shape within a precise context, such as a fishing community, which requires socially accepted behavioural choices in order to create a strategic policy of general consensus. Local leadership is therefore interpreted as a process of influence produced by the combination of three critical factors: the power position of the leader (in this case, the *kumiaichō*), the nature of his task and the interpersonal relationships between the leader and the components of the groups (fishing associations, religious groups, etc.), which motivates a conforming group behaviour.

Local leadership must therefore be understood as a dynamic process that takes into account the skills of the leader and his collaborators in achieving specific objectives and such characteristic is particularly relevant in the context of this fishing community, since critical economic factors such as local economy (fishery management), geography (insularity) or demography (ageing population) are crucial in conditioning local welfare and require particular managerial skills (Bulian 2012). More specifically, local leadership in Kamishima is an example of transactional or transformational leadership (Burns 1978; Davies 2009, 2011), in which a leader through a variety of social mechanisms operates with the members of his community to identify needed changes and achieve benefits. According to Bass (1999, 11; cited also in Davies 2011, 62) transformational leadership is a style of leadership where: “the leader moves the followers beyond immediate self-interests through idealized influence (charisma), inspiration, intellectual stimulation, or individualized consideration. It elevates the follower’s level of maturity and ideals as well as concerns for achievement, self-actualization, and the wellbeing of others, the organization, and society” (Bass 1999, 11).

Returning to the central theme of the article, in order to understand the theoretical background of the relationship between local leadership and rural festival management, it may be useful also to resume Davies’s



Scheme 1. The “circular leadership” of Kamishima

reflections on the role of transformational leadership in an Australian rural festival management:

identifying and measuring the benefits (and costs) of festivals to rural communities is not as simple as subtracting the net investment capital from the net participant expenditure. Festivals catalyse social networking, capacity building and entrepreneurial capacities. Benefits are not just achieved during the period of the festival itself, but also through the organisation process. [...] Transformational leaders exhibit behaviour that make followers aware of the importance of their involvement in tasks, activate followers’ higher-order needs and encourage them to move beyond self-interests for the sake of the wider community. (2011, 60-1; see also Podsakoff et al. 1990)

Interestingly, transformational leadership in Kamishima is characterized by a number of factors that give it a certain political and cultural identity. These factors, which are all related to each other, can be summarized as follows: a) local leadership is a sort of ‘circular leadership’; b) local leadership is indirectly influenced by the community of elders (*genrō* 元老); c) the modalities to obtain leadership in Kamishima are based on the economic and political history of the community.

With regard to the first point, Kamishima’s leadership can be defined as a ‘circular leadership’, as the most important institutional roles of the community follow a sort of circular pattern: generally, the one who is appointed as the new director of the Kamishima Fishing Cooperative Association (*kumiaichō*), then becomes *chonaikaichō* (head of the *chonaikai*) and, when his role is concluded, he subsequently becomes the head of the Kamishima Elders’s Association (*rojinkaichō*). Such power arena sheds light on how this fishing community accepts its leaders by following a certain meritocratic system. At the same time, local leadership is influenced

by the old members of the community, collectively called *genrō*. Both the *chonaikaichō* and *kumiaichō* are under their influence, who acts indirectly on the politics adopted by the *kumiaichō*. As seen before, the question of seniority is an important factor which is also emphasized in the local religious tradition (see, for example, the ritual role of the *miyamochi* and *inkyoshu*). It follows that the sphere of influence of the *genrō* on local leadership completes this circular pattern (see Scheme 1) by highlighting how the transformational leadership of Kamishima operates through different formal and informal channels that do not exclude themselves.

One last factor, which distinguishes Kamishima's transformational leadership, is its connection with the local political culture centred on the kinship relationships, which historically deepen their roots in a consolidated economic and social structure. Until the middle of the Meiji period (1868-1912) the organization of the Kamishima community was based on the *ōmoto* 大元 system, who held the monopoly of almost all the economic activities of the community and owned about one-third of the farmland. The *koesaki* 肥先き system (the *ōmoto* families provided the fields in exchange for manoeuvring) and the marine product processing represented the main proto-capitalist systems of work organization through which the *ōmoto* exercised their leadership within the community. In 1893, Kamishima *gyogyōkai* 神漁業会 (Kamishima Fishing Company) was founded, at the initiative of the modernization of the fishing industry launched by the Meiji Government. With the establishment of Kamishima *gyogyōkai* the economic activities related to the transport of marine products were taken away from the *ōmoto* families and entrusted with the administration of Kamishima *gyogyōkai*. In 1902 (one year after the promulgation of the First Fishing Law), the fishing grounds, formerly the exclusive monopoly of the *ōmoto* families, were entrusted to the new organization, thus leading to the decline in the leadership of the *ōmoto* families. However, the *ōmoto* families, though they have lost their economic prestige, still continue to maintain a certain social role in the community, carrying out some important tasks. What is to important to note is that the election of the new *kumiaichō* is that the way the new *kumiaichō* is elected is also based on the candidate's lineage, although this is not the determining factor for his election.

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