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CELSTIAL MAIDEN WIFE TALES (*TENNIN NYŌBŌ-TAN*) IN THE AMAMI ISLANDS -Localization of Swan-Maiden-type Legends-

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Abstract

The celestial maiden wife tales (*Tennin Nyōbō-tan*) told in Japanese Amami Islands correspond to the globally recognized Swan Maiden type. These narratives typically describe a celestial maiden whose flying garment is taken by a man, forcing her to become his wife. Amami versions exhibit distinctive features: origin legends in which the celestial maiden's daughter becomes a *noro* (priestess) or *yuta* (female shaman); lullabies that reveal the hidden location of the *hagoromo* and found in many versions; and performances of the tale as *kuduchi* (*kudoki* - narrative songs) which are still sung today. The regional image of the celestial maiden or *amore onagu* is multivalent, encompassing religious figures, social outsiders, and ghosts. Furthermore, influences from performing arts and folktales of Okinawa are also evident in the transmission of these tales. Drawing on 42 orally collected and published texts, the analysis employs motif comparison and textual interpretation to illuminate the layered imagery and oral aesthetics of Amami's *Tennin Nyōbō-tan*. In doing so, it contributes to understanding how oral tradition and performance localize a global folktale motif.

Keywords: *Amami Islands, Swan Maiden, lullaby, narrative songs*

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INTRODUCTION

The Amami Islands extend approximately 380 kilometers southwest from the southern tip of Kyūshū and about 300 kilometers north of Okinawa Island. As part of the Ryūkyū Island chain, the Amami Islands occupy an intermediate position, both geographically and culturally, between the Japanese mainland and Okinawa. This study investigates how the celestial maiden motif was localized in Amami through ritual, song, and narrative performance.

The *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan* are found throughout Japan as one of the Swan Maiden–type narratives in a global context. Owing to the motif of a man taking possession of a celestial maiden's *hagoromo* (flying garment), these narratives are also referred to as *Hagoromo-tan* (Tales of the *Hagoromo*). F. Rumpf (1937) deals with numerous examples from Japanese literary sources. Y. Ishiwara (1956) examines folktales from Iwate Prefecture and Amami Ōshima, comparing them with variants from Vietnam, the Philippines, and Java.

Collections of folktales in the Amami Islands including the *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan* have been published since the 1930s, and a substantial body of research on the celestial wife tales of the Amami Islands has accumulated. H. Gōda (1960) considers the correlation between the *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan* and farming rituals. T. Kanehisa (1963) explores the various images of *amorewonagu* in Amami Ōshima. A. Kuratsuka (1979) investigates the relationship between priestesses and *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan*., while K. Yamashita (1979) examines connection between shamanistic culture and folktales in Amami. A. Fukuda (1992) discusses the primordial tradition of the *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan*.

To contextualize the Amami corpus within a wider frame, it is necessary to consider parallel forms in global folklore. Swan Maiden–type narratives generally fall into two categories: the separation type, which ends when the otherworldly wife returns to her realm; and the pursuit type, in which the husband follows her. Most of European Swan Maiden-type folktales feature pursuit-type narratives, in which the husband searches for his otherworldly wife and happily reunites with her. In Ireland, Scotland and Scandinavia, however, there are separation-type tales of human men marrying seal women or mermaids rather than swans. G. Darwin (2015) discusses that such tales often serve as origin stories. Y. Takashima (2023) points out that the absence of magic in the seal's metamorphosis in such tales makes them closer to Inuit and Japanese animal marriage narratives. According to Y. Watanabe (2025), mermaid wife stories are especially common in Ireland. In the Scottish seal wife legends, the seal folk are fairy-like beings who can take human form by shedding their skins (Iwase 2025). M. Honda (2025) points out, in Vietnamese versions, the human-celestial maiden couple often reunite after separation and live happily together. K. Kurabe (2025) collected a tale from the Kachin people of Myanmar, in which a man returns the wing garment to the celestial maiden, and the two ascend to the heavens together.

In most cases, the Japanese *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan* do not conclude with a happy ending. In the Japanese pursuit type, the husband follows his wife to the heavens. He fails to complete the assigned task there, resulting in a great flood that separates the couple and after that they can meet only once a year. According to M. Takatsu (2025), approximately three-quarters of Japanese *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan* are of the pursuit type. In the Amami Islands, pursuit-type tales are also common. However, distinctive separation-type narratives are found in the Southern Islands. N. Makigano (2025) suggests that Okinawan versions are typically of the separation type, including one in which the child becomes King Satto.

The *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan* is also performed in the style of *kuduchi* (*kudoki* in standard Japanese), a narrative song genre within *shimauta* (traditional songs of Amami and Okinawa). Several studies have examined recent *shimauta* culture in Amami (Yanagawa H. & An N. 2023, Katoh H. 2024).

In the *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan*, the maiden loses her flying garment and cannot return to heavens; in the seal wife tales, the seal woman loses her skin and cannot return to the sea. In both Scotland and the Amami Islands, it is the child who reveals the hiding place of the crucial item—garment or skin. Distinctively in the Amami Islands, a child sings the hiding place of the garment in a lullaby. While there are many studies of the Amami versions from perspectives such as agriculture, descent myths, shamanistic culture, ancestral legends, *amorounagu*, and star lore, no research has focused on comparing the structural elements of related tales or on the role of lullaby and *kuduchi*. This paper aims to identify the distinctive features of the *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan* in the Amami Islands and to demonstrate that lullaby and *kuduchi* played a vital role in the transmission and dissemination of these narratives.

***Tennin Nyōbō-Tan* in Amami Islands**

This article analyzes 42 texts of *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan* (including several *kuduchi* and a lullaby) orally collected in the Amami Islands and subsequently published. Summarized versions are generally avoided to facilitate motif comparison. Some texts appear to contain literary embellishments.

The *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan* collected in the Amami Islands are essentially composed of the episodes shown in Table 1. Of the corpus, 21 texts are of the separation-type and 21 of the pursuit-type.

Table 1. Episodes of Amami *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan*

	Episodes	Separation type	Pursuit type	Key motif
1	celestial maiden bathes in river	present	present	bathing
2	man steals her *hagoromo* and makes her his wife	present	present	theft of *hagoromo*
3	children are born to them	present	present	—
4	Hiding place of *hagoromo* is revealed through lullaby	present	present	lullaby
5	wife ascends after putting on *hagoromo*,	present	present	ascent
6	husband follows wife by planting climbing plant	absent	present	pursuit
7	wife aids husband in performing daunting tasks	absent	present	tasks
8	husband ultimately fails and they meet only once a year	absent	present	separation by flood

Here is an example of the separation type of *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan*:

***Tennin Nyōbō* (K3)**

(literal translation of a narrative told by Mr Tomi on Kikaijima in the 1930s)

> Once upon a time, *Amuriga* (descended child - celestial maiden) came down to earth from the heavens. When she was bathing in a river called Chiri, a farmer who happened to pass by seized her flying wing, forcibly brought her home and made her his wife. Three children were born to the couple. The son became seven years old, the elder daughter five, and the younger daughter three. One day, the brother sang a lullaby to the youngest sister while carrying her on his back:
>
> Don't cry nor wail,
> Mother's flying wing is
> Under unfulled rice in the six-legged granary,

Under unfulled rice in the four-legged granary.

When the celestial maiden mother heard this, she learned for the first time the hiding place of her precious flying wing. She went to the *Takakura* (raised granary), moved the bales of unfulled rice under the *Takakura* and found her flying wing there. She put it on and flew to the heavens carrying her son at her right side, her elder daughter at her left side and her youngest daughter at her front.

Upon reaching the heavens, everything had been changed and she could no longer locate her former abode. Reluctantly she sent her three children down to earth assigning them respective occupations. It is said that the elder son became the first *toki*, the elder daughter the first *nuru* (*noro*), and the youngest daughter the first *yuta*.

Among the examined versions, the texts from Kikaijima, Amami Ōshima, and Okinoerabujima relate the origin of specific occupations. In K1 and K7, the eldest son becomes a village chief, while the second daughter becomes a *noro*. In K3, as in the tale above, the children become a *toki* (diviner), a *noro* (priestess), and a *yuta* (female shaman). In A6 and A7, the children are designated as *guji* (Shinto priest), *suido* (village chief), and *noro*. In O2, the children become a *noro* and an *amure* (local religious figure or medium). In KK1, the youngest child left behind becomes an *ajiganashi* (leader). Of these, six tales assign the role of *noro* to one of the daughters, highlighting the recurring motif of female descendants inheriting sacred or spiritual roles. These ritual roles are comparable to shamans or priestesses elsewhere in East Asia.

Noro presided over communal rituals, conducting grand ceremonies to pray for peace across the island and for the abundance of the five grains. The role was one of great honor, traditionally hereditary, and tied to specific family lineages (Takeuchi 1969:158-9). Some families in Kikaijima claim descent from a celestial maiden and have preserved her relics, including a *hagoromo*, now housed in the local folklore museum (see Figs. 1 and 2). These items were likely ritual attire used by *noro*. This suggests a conflation of the celestial maiden and the *noro*, revealing how myth and ritual roles may have merged within local belief systems.

Unlike *noro*, *yuta* is not a hereditary role. One becomes a *yuta* through a spiritual illness (*fubyō*), after which they serve as a shamanic figure—possessed by spirits, performing divinations, and conducting magical rites. Some ritual chant, *otakabe*, recited by *yuta* incorporate elements of the *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan* (Fukuda 1992:282).

These religious figures have long held significance for the people of the Amami Islands, and the explanation that they were brought to the earthly realm through marriage with celestial beings appears to have been accepted with a sense of realism (Nishimura 1982:71).

The Celestial Maiden

The celestial maiden is referred to as *tennyo* or *tennin* in the Amami Islands, mirroring terminology found in mainland Japanese versions. However, Amami folklore exhibits a distinctive array of names that emphasize her descent from the heavens (see Table 2).

Table 2. Names of Celestial Maiden.

literal meaning	Amami Ōshima	Kikaijima	Tokunoshima	Okinoerabujima	Kakeromajima
heaven-descended				*amori*, *amore*	

heaven-descended child		*amurigā amurigwā*			
heaven-descended + heaven-descended			*tenchi amore*, t*enchi amora, tenka amori*, *teinka amori*, *tenka amoro*		
heaven-descended woman	*tenka onagu*				
heaven-descended woman	*amorowonagu amurewonagu*	*amore unagu*	*amuro unagu*		*amure wonagu*
amori + being	*amuremun*				
amori + shishi				*amureshishi*	
celestial being		*tennucchu*			
proper name	*Chōkana*				
yuta	*kami*				

As both *ama* and *ten* mean the heavens, *amoru, tenka* and *tenchi* mean "to descend from the heavens". *Onagu* means a woman. In Tokunoshima, the term is distinguished by adding *tenka* or *tenchi* ('descent from heavens') to *amore*, emphasizing its meaning of having come down from the heavens (Fukuda et al. 1984:59). This serves to differentiate it from *Amuremun*, who is seen as an idle wanderer without home or work, and is looked down upon in Tokunoshima. *Chōkana* is considered a proper name, and *kami* means probably *yuta*, as *yuta* is called as *kami* ("god" in standard Japanese) in some areas.

The term *Amore Onagu* carries layered meanings in the Amami Islands. In a legend about Amuro River in Uken Village on Amami Ōshima, a celestial maiden descended from the heavens to bathe and wash her hair. On the days she did so, villagers observed strict abstention and refrained from going outside. Her hair was said to stretch from the upper reaches of the river all the way downstream (Kanehisa 1963:124). The celestial maiden is portrayed as a divine figure who purifies herself in a river or spring. *Noro* also bathe in mountain streams and springs for spiritual cleansing. Nishimura suggests that it is a natural development that female spiritual practitioners would trace the origin of their roles to celestial maidens who descend from the heavens (Nishimura 1982: 67).

Kanehisa reports a folk belief in which *amorowonagu*, or *amawonagu*, descends from the heavens in the form of a beautiful young woman to seduce a man and lead him to his death (1963:126). Stories about such a beautiful yet fearsome being are often told with a sense of awe and dread, as though describing real encounters. In seducing a man, *amoro onagu* comes to approximate the figure of the *zure*, a courtesan or female entertainer (Fukuda et al. 1982:83).
The celestial maidens in Amami's *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan* are imbued with this multifaceted image. The multiplicity of *amoro onagu*'s roles—as celestial maiden, priestess, shamanic practitioner, courtesan, and spectral seductress—underscores her position as a profoundly liminal figure. This layered ambiguity reflects gendered marginality not only in terms of social transgression, but also

in cosmological and ritual domains, where female figures often mediate between purity and danger, sacredness and taboo.

Lullaby and Performance Art

Next, we examine the lullaby unique to the Amami Islands and Okinawa. In 38 out of 42 texts, the hiding place of the *hagoromo* is revealed through a lullaby. Most versions contain a message along the lines of: "Don't cry. Mother's flying garment and dancing garment lie beneath the bundles of rice and millet or under the unhulled grain in the *takakura* (raised granary), If you stop crying, I'll give it to you."

Table 3. Lullabies

	Amami Ōshima	Kikaijima	Tokunoshima	Okinoerabujima	Kakeromajima	total
number of texts with lullaby	10	11	13	3	1	38
number of texts without lullaby	0	3	1	0	0	4

In the Amami Islands, *takakura* granaries were traditionally built with four to nine round wooden stilts supporting a thatched roof, with the attic space used for storage. Their design—resistant to moisture, pests, and rodents—made them an ideal physical location for concealing the *hagoromo*. The number of stilts supporting the granaries in these lullaby narratives varies: granaries with three stilts (K13), four stilts (K1, K2, K7, T5, A10), five stilts (T12), six stilts (T1, T6, T11, O1, O3), seven stilts (K6, O2), and eight stilts (T10). Some texts mention combinations, such as four and six-stilts in Kikaijima (K3), Tokunoshima (T3), and Okinoerabujima (O4), or six and eight stilts in Okinoerabujima (O2). In Okinawan literature discussed later, the six- and eight-stilted granaries are consistently linked to the *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan*.

While ordinary houses in the Amami Islands were generally quite modest, the granaries stood out as remarkably grand. This reflects the deep respect and affection rice-farming communities held for rice as their staple food, a sentiment embodied in the granary's form and preserved into the present (Nomura 1961:246). S. Takoshima reports that women and children were traditionally forbidden from entering the *takakura* in Okinoerabujima, and comments that in the *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan*, it is striking that a child—occupying a liminal space between male and female domains—reveals the hidden location of the *hagoromo* to the mother, who is barred from entering (1995:14).

The *takakura* was was vital for storing rice as both food and seed for the next planting season. Gōda pays attention to lullabies and suggests that the hiding place of the *hagoromo* may be linked to sites of agricultural deity worship in Japan (1960). In mainland Japan, a version Gōda collected in Akita contains a similar lullaby (1960:51). Ishiwara points out that among various ethnic groups from the Indochina Peninsula to the Indonesian region, there exists a belief in the spirit of rice, which is thought to be bird-like—prone to flying away and difficult to capture. She suggests that this belief is reflected in the narrative of the *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan* who retrieves her *hagoromo* from beneath a sheaf of rice and flies off (1971:396-7). Thus, the *takakura* held both

physical and spiritual significance to the people of Amami.

Hagoromo

In lullabies, the *hagoromo* appears under various names, such as *tobi-gin* (flying garment), *mai-gin* (dancing garment) or simply *kimono*. The pairing of *tobi-gin* and *mai-gin* and the like appears in ten texts from Tokunoshima and one from Amami Ōshima.

The term *mai-gin* suggests a possible connection to the performing arts. In the *Noh* play *Hagoromo*, a fisherman named Hakuryū discovers a *hagoromo* hanging from a pine branch at Miho no Matsubara (pine grove of Miho). A celestial maiden pleads for its return. Initially, Hakuryū refuses, but moved by her sorrow, he relents—on the condition that she perform a celestial dance before ascending. *Noh*, a classical performing art that originated during the Muromachi period (1336–1573), weaves stories through instrumental music, chanting (*utai*), dialogue, and stylized dance. The author of *Hagoromo* is unknown, yet the play remains one of the most beloved and frequently performed pieces in the modern repertoire.

Nishimura suggests that the *Noh* play *Hagoromo* may have emerged from a fusion of two narrative traditions: the origin tale of the *Azuma-asobi no mai* (Eastern-style dance), in which a man witnesses and steals the dance of a celestial maiden who has descended to the shore near Miho no Matsubara, and the broader *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan* (1991:23). The highlight of *Hagoromo* lies in its final scene, where the celestial maiden dons her *hagoromo* and ascends to the heavens, dancing gracefully through the scenic landmarks of Miho no Matsubara and Mount Fuji. While the Noh version represents an elite adaptation, Amami's variants retain the tale's agrarian and matrilineal dimensions.

Kumiodori is a traditional performing art in Okinawa. In the early 18th century, Tamagusuku Chōkun, the *odori bugyo* (Dance Magistrate) of the Ryūkyū royal court, traveled to Edo and observed various performing arts, including *Noh* and *Kabuki*. Drawing inspiration from these, he created *kumiodori*, a form of musical drama incorporating Ryukyuan history, legends, and folktales. These performances were staged within Shuri Castle to entertain Chinese envoys. The *kumiodori* play *Mekarushi* centers on the *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan* theme.

Paired Expressions

In the *kumiodori* play *Mekarushi*, the hiding place of the *hagoromo* is also sung in a lullaby, an elder child to the youngest. The lyrics feature paired expressions such as "flying garment" and "dancing garment," "six-stilted granary" and "eight-stilted granary," and "beneath the sheaf of rice" and "beneath the sheaf of millet." These echo the motif of duality and concealment. Paired expression is a traditional technique found in oral literature, characterized by rhythm, repetition, semantic contrast, and rhyme. They enhance the memorability of songs and stories for both performer and audience. Their repetition in lullabies reflects the oral poetic structure typical of Ryukyuan and Amami narrative songs.

Ascending from Pine Tree

One of the most poignant scenes in the *kumiodori* play *Mekarushi* occurs when the celestial maiden, having flown up to the treetop, hesitates and stands motionless, drawn back by the voices of her two children calling for their mother (Japan Arts Council 2013). The children's anguished cries and the mother's sorrow at leaving them behind form the emotional climax of the performance, often moving the audience to tears. It is a moment so vivid that those who have witnessed the performance likely carry the image with them. This scene may be reflected in local folktales and *kuduchi*.

The story of *Mekarushi* is also recorded in *Ryūkyū-koku Yuraiki*, a geographical chronicle compiled in 1713 (Iha & Yokoyama 1972:259). Its lullaby goes: "The flying garment of the first parent, the dancing garment of the birth parent — bound within sheaves of rice, tied among bundles of millet, resting atop the six-stilted granary, atop the eight-stilted granary. Cry not, cry not, little one." A similar motif appears in *Chūzan Seikan*, the official history of Okinawa, in the life story of King Satto whose mother was a celestial maiden: "The mother's flying garment lies atop the six-stilted granary; the mother's dancing garment atop the eight-stilted granary." (Haneji 1933:39-40) Both accounts closely resemble the *kumiodori* version. In Okinawan literature, the six- and eight-stilted granaries are consistently linked to the celestial maiden wife narrative.

These stories also depict the sorrowful separation between mother and child. In *Ryūkyū-koku Yuraiki*, the celestial maiden dons her garment and ascends to the heavens via a pine tree. Her children cry out in grief until they lose their voices, and the mother, unable to abandon them easily, repeatedly rises and descends before finally riding a clear breeze into the sky. In *Chūzan Seikan*, the celestial mother retrieves her garment from beneath the rice sheaves and ascends. Hearing her young children call out and weep, she is overcome with longing and descends three times to the top of a pole—but ultimately does not return.

The motif of the celestial maiden ascending in stages appears in some of our texts. While not always explicitly expressing maternal longing, the pine tree is often mentioned. In T6, for example, the lyrics go: "With one leap, she reaches the top of the pine; with two, the middle of the heavens; with three, she returns to her place." Similar expressions are found in K6, T2, T3, T5, A3, A5, A6, O2, T11, and O3. Except for A3 and O2, these are *kuduchi*, suggesting that the imagery has been fixed in song form. The motif of ascending in stages also recalls the celestial maiden's departure in the Noh play *Hagoromo*, where she rises through a series of scenic landmarks as mentioned above. Ascending from a pine tree is considered one of the important motifs in the *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan* in Okinawa and Amami.

Mekarushi

The tale of *Mekarushi* has been widely collected as oral tradition throughout Okinawa. A search for "Mekarushi" in the web archive *Uchina Minwa no Heya* (Okinawa Prefectural Museum & Art Museum 2018) yields 92 entries, attesting to its prominence. In the Amami Islands, the names of the celestial maiden's husband often closely resemble *Mekarushi*, suggesting a shared narrative lineage. In Tokunoshima, for instance, we find names such as *Mae-nu-shu* (T1), *Megari-shunu* (T2), *Mikaru-shu-nu-me* (T3), *Takara-shu-nu-me* (T5), *Mikaru-shu-me* (T6), *Megane-shurume* (T10), and *Mekaru-shume* (T11). On Amami Ōshima, variants include *Mikeran* (A4) and *Neikan-sho-nu-miya* (A6, A7). In Okinoerabujima, names such as *Mikaru-shishime* (O1) and *Mikaru* (O2) appear. Fukuda notes that the name *Megane-shurume* is likely a phonetic corruption of *Mekarushi*, as transmitted in Okinawan tradition (Fukuda et al. 1984:44). He also argues that stories such as *Mekarushi* must have migrated northward from Shuri, the royal capital of Okinawa Island, to the Amami Islands (Fukuda et al. 1982:18). This is also suggested by the naming patterns of the husbands in Amami versions of the *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan*.

Kuduchi

Of the 42 texts, five from Tokunoshima (T2, T3, T5, T6, T11), three from Kikaijima (K6, K13, K14), and two from Amami Ōshima (A6, A7) are sung in *kuduchi*. *Kudoki* (as term in standard Japanese) is a genre of folk songs and refers to long narrative ballads, whose epic lyrics are connected to the lineage of recitative storytelling accompanied by musical instruments. In the Okinawa Islands during the early modern period, it became popular as a form of *shamisen* (three-stringed

instrument) song, characterized by a repetitive structure of verses in seven- and five-syllable patterns (Inada et al. 1994:285-6).

In examining how *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan* survives as living performance, *kuduchi* versions are important in the Amami Islands. Taking Tokunoshima as an example, *kuduchi* is deeply cherished and *Tenka Amuro* is particularly noteworthy for its retelling of the *hagoromo* legend, making it a valuable example of oral narrative literature (Isen-chō Kyōiku Iinkai 2015:14).

The *kuduchi* versions typically recount the story up to the celestial maiden's ascent. However, four Tokunoshima texts (T2, T3, T5, T6) describe the husband's pursuit episode after wife's ascent, and the style of such descriptions changes from verse (sung in *kuduchi*) to prose (telling). This combination of the former half *kuduchi* and the latter half storytelling is a notable feature of *Tennin Nyōbō kuduchi* in Tokunoshima (Fukuda et al. 1982:76-7).

The author (Yoneda) has learned a *Tennin Nyōbō kuduchi* on Kikaijima. The lyrics of the *kuduchi* titled *Amurigā* (Descended Child from Heavens) are presented in Appendix C. The pair expressions (e.g., "Wanya tsukiduki umaamiyui / Wanya oioi umaamiyui") and the repetitive seven- and five-syllable rhythm further highlight the formulaic nature of *kuduchi* performance. Such features resonate with Parry-Lord's oral-formulaic theory of composition, where rhythm and repetition serve to mark the speech as distinct. Moreover, like the examples discussed by Lord, *kuduchi* performances often incorporated improvisational elements, with singers adapting formulaic verses to the occasion (Lord 2000:30-65).

In "The Origins of Amami Oral Literature," H. Tabata describes the incantations of the gods (*kuchi*) as a grand epic within Amami's oral tradition, emphasizing the importance of apprehending these divine utterances directly. In Amami, such incantatory speech is called *kuchi* or *yungutu*, also known as *kamiguchi* ("divine speech"), a term shared with Okinawa, Miyako, and Yaeyama. Characterized by an ethereal, half-sung, half-spoken style, *kamiguchi* of *noro* was praised by elderly women for its beauty: "*Kami nu guin nu nachikasa yaa*" ("How dear is the divine voice of the gods") (Tabata 1979:5-6).

Yungutu, meaning "recited words," refers both to divine pronouncements and to speech directed toward the gods, but also extends to unintelligible mutterings or playful language, as in handball songs. In Tokunoshima, the prologue to the whole-island *kuduchi* begins with verses such as "*Kuduchi nuzumu ka / Yudi weshira*" ("Do you wish for a *kuduchi*? / Then I shall recite it"). Professor Jingorō Usuda notes that the verb *yumu* ("to recite") encompasses both speaking and singing, and that tales such as *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan*, often performed as *kuduchi*, preserve archaic modes of oral transmission. (Tabata 1979:7–8).

On Kikaijima, the word for "language" is *yumita*, likely derived from *yumi-uta* ("recited song"), paralleling the Japanese *kotonoha* ("words – leaves of speech"), which also connotes song. The relationship between *yumita* and song, and between *kotonoha* and song, connects directly to the ritual incantations (*kamiguchi*) of *noro* and *yuta* (Tabata 1979:7-8). In this sense, divine *yumita* — the spirit of words (*kotodama*)—becomes both chant and utterance, a *kami-uta* preserved in Amami's oral literature, including *kuduchi*, as a form of supplication to the gods.

CONCLUSION

One of the regional characteristics of *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan* in the Amami Islands is the layered image of the celestial maiden, reflected in figures such as *yuta* and *noro* (female shaman and priestess) who are regarded as her descendants, as well as in the term *amoro onagu*. Although *yuta* and *noro* live within the same social sphere as others, they are considered exceptional beings capable of communicating with the heavens—that is, of traversing between the celestial and earthly realms.

The name *amoro onagu* has also been used to refer to socially marginal figures such as

wandering female entertainers or courtesans, and at times to ghosts or supernatural beings at the fringes of the human world. Against the backdrop of these diverse and richly layered traditions surrounding the *amoro onagu*, the *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan* has been passed down and embraced within local communities.

In the Amami Islands, the *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan* has also been transmitted in the form of *kuduchi* (narrative songs), and the tradition continues to this day. *Kuduchi* are recited through a fusion of speech and song—what is referred to as *yomu*—and are linked to the divine *yumita* (sacred utterance). Singing, in this context, may be understood not merely as entertainment, but as an act of communion with the divine realm.

A notable feature of these tales is the recurring lullaby that reveals the hidden location of the *hagoromo*, appearing in most texts. Similar lullabies are found in official texts such as the 18th-century *kumiodori* play "Mekarushi" and the historical chronicle *Chūzan Seikan*. This suggests that the *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan* was transmitted throughout Okinawa and Amami with the lullabies containing relatively fixed meanings at its core.

Swan Maiden-type legends are found across the world, and have developed into ecotypes (von Sydow 1934) adjusted to the cultural, religious, and performative traditions of each region. The group of *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan* from the Amami Islands represents an important case in the formation of such ecotypes.

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APPENDIX A.

List of examined texts of *Tennin Nyōbō-Tan*

Amami Ōshima A1: Yanagita (1938:17–8), A2: Tabata (1976:44–6). A3: Inada & Ueda (1978:149–54). A4: Seki (1978:232–5). A5–A8: Toyama (1983:112–26). A9: Yamashita (1986:48–52). A10: Tabata (2005:196–203).

Kikaijima K1: Kawamura (1942:161-4), K2–K4: Iwakura (1943:18-20, 21-2, 22-3). K5–K6: Mitsui (1965:200-4, 205-8). K7: Takeuchi (1969:200-1). K8: Tabata (1978:235-6). K9: Kikai-chō Kyōzai Kaihatsu Iinkai. (2003:36-9). K10–K12: Iwase & Matsunami (2006:51-2, 53-4, 144-8). K13–K14: Amami Shima-uta Hozon Denshō Jigyō Jikkō Iinkai. (2014:61-3, 86).

Tokunoshima T1: Mizuno (1970:59–61). T2: Mizuno (1972:114-9). T3: Inada (Ed.). (1974:229-38) T4: Mizuno & Maeda (1976:30-6). T5: Tabata (1976:37–44). T6–T9: Tabata (1978:40-8, 48-50, 50-5, 55-8). T10–T11: Fukuda et al (1984:36-44, 48-60). T12: Honda (1988:20-5). T13: Amagi-chō Bunkazai Hogo Shingi Iinkai. (1991:119-20). T14: Honda (1998: 69-72).

Okinoerabujima O1: Iwakura (1940:262-3). O2: Wadomari-chōshi Henshū Iinkai. (1984:825-6). O3: Seki (1984:223-5).

Kakeromajima KK1: Kanehisa (1963:124-5).

APPENDIX B.
Figures

Fig. 1. *Hagoromo*

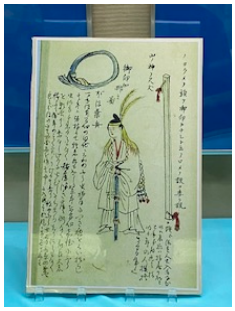

Fig. 2. Attire of *noro*

(the Folklore Museum of the Kikai-chō Central Community Center)

Fig. 3 *Takakura* granary

(Okinoerabujima Granary in Japan Open-Air Folk House Museum)

APPENDIX C.

Lyrics of *kuduchi "Amurigā"* from Kikaijima (text from the *shima-uta* folksong class at the Kikai chō Central Communicty Center)

Mukashi Kamō ni ataru kutu (Long ago, it happened in Kamō)

Ten kara amurigā ga uruti mōti (A celestial maiden descended from the heavens)

Ike no naka-n uti amiyūtari-ba (She bathed in the waters of a pond)

Kora kora kyuramun nuga yo umaamiyui ("Oh, beautiful one, why do you bathe here?")

Wanya tsukiduki umaamiyui ("I bathe here from time to time")

Wanya oioi umaamiyui ("I bathe here often")

Tubazu ni shiribaya tobigin nēran sō (When she tried to fly, her flying garment was gone)

Tobigin turarete domo naranu (Her flying garment had been taken, and she could do nothing)

Eshakushashati naku bakari (She wept and wept, helpless and lost)

Dekaya kyuramun wagaya tsurira ("Come, beautiful one, let us go to my home.")

Ocha nu dandan eshakushira ("Would you like some tea? I'll serve you.")

Tabaku dandan eshakushira ("Would you like some tobacco? I'll serve you.")

Toshi no shichinen kurachari-ba (Seven years passed as they lived together)

Umiba-nu michari dekiyabiti (They had three children)

Ichi no umiba ya nanatsu nayui (The eldest turned seven)

Uriga uttō ya itsutsu nayui (The second turned five)

Uriga uttō ya mittsu warabi (The youngest became three-year-old child)

Nanatsu nayunkwa ga naku na mittsu warabi (The seven-year-old said, "Don't cry, the thee-year-old child,")

Anma ga mōgin tuti kuriro ("I will bring you the mother's dancing garment.")

Mitsumata okura no haya nubuti ("Climb quickly to the three-stilted granary.")

Inawara shita shita heichimiri ("Turn over the rice straw beneath you.")

Heichimichari-ba uma ni andu ("If you turn it over, you'll find it there.")

Uri tuti kichantukya mutu-nu Sugata (She wore it, and became her original form once more)

Uri tuti kichantukya mutu-nu chū (She wore it, and became her original self once more)

Nanatsu nayunkwa ya migi no waki (She held the seven-year-old at her right side)

Itsutsu nayunkwa ya hidari waki (The five-year-old at her left)

Mittsu nayunkwa ya muneidachi (And the three-year-old close to her chest)

Chutobitudariba matsu no hana (With one leap, she reached the top of the pine)

Mata mutudariba ten no nābi (With another, the middle to the heavens)

Mata mutudariba ten ni agati (And with one final leap, she ascended to the heavens)

Mutu-nu sugata no oshiyabira (She had returned to her original form)

Mutu-nu sugata no oshiyabira (She had returned to her original form)

Aokusa nori hamō haete urabiran sa (Even the green trees and grasses no longer grow there)

Aokusa nori hamō haete urabiran sa (Even the green trees and grasses no longer grow there)

The performance of another version can be heard in Okinawanmusic (2019).

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