

Beast, Bird, and Fish: An Essay in South-East Asian Symbolism

by Lorenz G. Löffler

The study of world-views suffers, in my opinion, from a heavy bias. To view the world, to form an idea about it, is one thing, but to express this view, to communicate this idea, is quite another. Whenever a certain view has to be communicated, be it by verbal expression, by pictorial representation, or by actual behaviour, its realisation is bound to rely on a predetermined set of codified symbols. But the setting need not be identical, and the same symbol may be used in different codes. Hence, whenever we are confronted with an unknown code, all we can do is to work by the trial and error method in substituting the symbols of our own code to those of the other system. Perhaps we finally succeed in deciphering something which looks sensible – but others may be convinced that all we did was to convert no sense to nonsense. Even then, I think, we should be ready to run this risk, because nonsense may constitute at least an antithesis while no sense cannot.

If it were not for this reason, I should not have dared to prepare this paper. I am indeed far from presenting an interpretation of a certain world-view. Instead, I have just singled out a few symbols and tried to locate them in different codes and to venture some guesses about their semantics, irrespective of specific cultural relevancies of certain configurations.

Fig. 1 (Kalff 1932: fig. 34) delineates a scene of the old death ritual in Shantung¹, showing, amongst others, a pig's head flanked by a fish on the left side and a fowl on the right. The pig's head, representing what I shall call the "beast," lies before a pot filled with blood. We shall have to recall it later.

Fig. 2 (Hentze 1941: Tafelband I, pl. 141) shows a bronze drum from the Shang period. The deity may pardon me if I call her a beast; the two fishes will not mind to be called fish, and even if the figures on the top of the drum were no birds, the wings of the deity may stand for what I mean. Finally the "beast" has horns, and this is, as we shall see, what it should have. The horns may be those of an Argali ram, indicating a Central Asian origin; other old Chinese

¹ From a personal communication by Taryo Obayashi it appears that similar offerings of pig, fowl and fish, called *sam-cheng*, were common in several provinces of China, especially in connection with the festivities of the New Year. Thus, on December 24 of the lunar calendar, when the (male) members of the family worshipped the spirit of the hearth, they offered fowl, fish and a piece of pork in NE Honan (Szu Nge 1929: 111), while in S. Fukien a pig's head, fowl and fish were offered to the spirit who was sent up to the sky (Weng Kuo-liang 1929: 100). In Huaian (Kiangsu province) the offerings of the New Year, which were made to heaven and earth, comprised a carp to the right and a fowl to the left side of a pig's head flanked by its four feet and placed in the middle of the table (Lou Tsu-k'uang 1935: 11. Cf. also my note 8). The *sam-cheng* mentioned in the classical literature, on the other hand, seem to refer to a different kind of offering (e.g., cattle, sheep, and pig).

representations show horns of a stag or a buffalo. And it is probably a buffalo's head which, in modern times, is formed by the combination of a cock and a fish in a decorative design of the Amur tribes.² Since the buffalo is unknown and the fowl of little importance in the traditional way of life of the Amur tribes, our minds turn to the South.



Fig 1

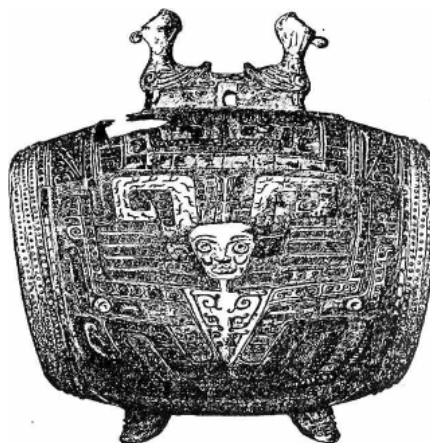


Fig. 2

Fig. 5 (LePichon 1938, fig. 52, p. 400) shows one of the sacrificial poles of the Katü, a hill people of Central Annam. On the wings of this pole we find the drawing of a fowl on the right side and of a fish on the left. After a buffalo has been sacrificed, its tail is placed at the top and its head at the bottom of the pole. The arrangement then corresponds to that of the Shantung death ritual, but now it is not the pig's head placed before a jar filled with blood, but the buffalo's before the sacrificial pole. And if we look for a connection with the death ritual, we may mention that the South-western neighbours of the Katü, the Loven, hang little wooden figures of fishes, fowls, and buffaloes, together with baskets filled with food, into a little house erected over the grave (Bernard 1904: 82).

Another parallel comes from the Mru, a hill tribe of the Bangladesh-Burma border region. Fig. 3 (Brauns and Löffler 1990, p. 236) shows the upper ends of three bamboo masts which are erected in equal number to the heads of cattle offered at feasts of merit. Here the bird, said to be a hornbill, sits on a fabric of plaited bamboo, heavily adorned with bamboo tassels, said to be a fish or a crocodile's tail. And to cite a last example: The Ao Naga must start their cattle sacrifices by catching fish, and a basket adorned with hornbill feathers, in which they keep a cock, is strung round the bull's neck, when they tie it to the sacrificial pole (Mills 1926: 393, 379).

If we stop here for a moment and try to abstract a first general idea, try to find something like a world-view behind these configurations, I think that there should be no great obstacle in conceptualising a tripartite universe: the earth between sky and water, represented by the most prominent domesticated animal flanked by fowl and fish. Materialists might reproach me and ask whether this

² Laufer (1902, pi. XXII, fig. 3,5, 6). Laufer himself did not recognise the buffalo.

view does not represent the world as seen by the stomach – for would it not be pork or beef flanked by chicken and fish what anybody might dream of? This is, no doubt, a serious argument – but I am sure that the Mru are not especially fond of eating crocodiles (they would not be available anyhow).

On the other hand, they never told me that the hornbill represents the sky and the fish or crocodile the water. They either profess not to know anything about what these animals have to do with the feast, or they tell you a story where the bird on the mast is called a drongo, and this drongo is said to be the elder brother of a famous feast giver who himself acquired his wealth by cutting up an ogre whom he caught in the water by means of a fishing net.

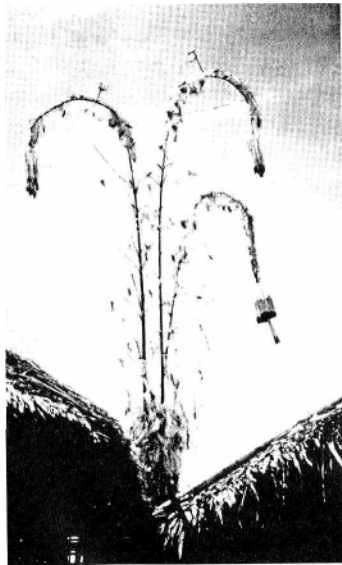


Fig 3



Fig. 4

The Eastern neighbours of the Mru, the Lushai, formerly knew of snakes which grew feathers, but these creatures do not seem to have had any bearing on sacrifices (Shakespeare 1912: 106). The Eastern Angami Naga, at the beginning of each cold season, used to catch lizards and birds which they hung up on bamboo masts (Hutton 1921: 205), and the resulting decoration (Fig. 4)³ shows a striking resemblance with that of the festive masts erected by the Sre in Annam at the occasion of their buffalo feasts (Dam Bo 1950, pl. 19). And it is the Sre who tell us that they used to tie fishes to their sacrificial poles before they started offering buffaloes (Dam Bo 1950: 93). The corresponding first sacrificial animals of the Mnong Gar were the iguana and the crocodile (Condominas 1957: 261). This cutting up of a fish or crocodile does not only recall the Mru story,⁴ but also a special practice of the Talaing who, since they became Bud-

³ Photograph 1937 by H. E. Kauffmann, Munich.

⁴ Condominas (1957: 206-10) moreover reports a sacrifice for firing the swidden, where a fish is suspended from a recurvate bamboo, and after the sacrifice two chickens are attached as well. Cf. also the *taleo yao* (plaited exactly like the Mru "fish" of the festive mast) with a

dhists, are no longer allowed to offer buffaloes. Before a Talaing girl leaves her parents' home definitely to join her husband, the couple brings a fish, fastened to a rope through its mouth, and drags it three times round the house, offering it to the house post of the clan spirit. Although this fish is said to replace a buffalo, it is called "the head of a Naga" (Halliday 1917: 98).

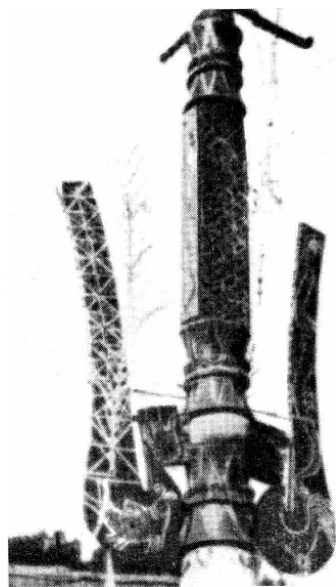


Fig. 5



Fig. 6

I am not prepared to answer the question whether the two Indian symbols, Naga and Garuda, will fit in with our opposition of fish and bird, but in Southeast Asia the Naga can obviously take the place of the "fish." Obayashi has shown how Nagas and ogres who grew up from tadpoles may enter into a peaceful competition for the honour to represent the ancestors of the Wa (Obayashi 1966). And this connection brings me back to another representation of the Katü.

From one of their village gates Hoffet copied the remarkable being of Fig. 6 (Hoffet 1931, fig 2). The Katü have masks which are said to represent the ancestors, but which are called by the word for buffalo (Levy 1944: 322). The head of this creature from the village gate resembles such a mask, yet its body is not that of a man but is said to be that of an iguana. Although we have seen that reptiles may take the place of the "fish," this so-called iguana apparently has gills, which make it look more like a salamander in larval metamorphosis. Such salamanders have got a reputation as prototypes of the Chinese dragon (Hentze 1953: 268, 272). Finally, the tail of the creature is shaped into a fish. Thus, starting with the tail, we have a fish metamorphosing via a larval salamander into a buffalo-shaped human ancestor. For a Katü there is nothing but buffalo blood which can be offered instead of human blood (LePichon 1938: 393). For

plaited fish at its lower end, used in the rice harvesting rites of the Thai yai, photographed and described by Iwata (n. d., pl. 21).

us the main characteristic which connects cattle and man is their intra-uterine period: for both man and beast it takes 40 weeks during which they pass their larval metamorphosis until they leave the maternal womb.

My conclusion then should be that the representations which I have subsumed under the symbol "fish" are connected with the prenatal state.⁵ And hence it would not be a far cry to presume that the corresponding "bird" symbol will relate to the postmortal state. The notion of soul birds is rather common in anthropological literature; here I just recall the famous Dongson bronze drums with their representations of soul boats carrying bird-shaped men (Steinmann 1941: 162).

Reflections of these configurations may be seen in the practice of the Kachin to prepare large wooden boards the ends of which are carved into hornbill heads; during buffalo feasts a big drum is placed on a scaffold and the boards are put below it (Carrapiett 1929: 59 f.). Similar boards used as cloth rakes are prepared during the buffalo feasts of the Mnong tribes (Condominas 1965: 121). Finally there are the death boards of the Dayak, in which the dead are thought to take residence until the final ceremonies. These boards are ornamented by soul boats, and it is common to see the whole boat shaped into a hornbill. And the hornbill was not only painted on these boards but also virulently enacted, as is demonstrated by a report from Simelungun in Eastern Sumatra where hornbills or slaves clothed as hornbills were thrown into the graves of chiefs who themselves were buried in coffins the ends of which were carved like heads and tails of hornbills (Schnitger 1942: 147 f.). During Batak death festivals dancers appeared as hornbills; women carried the skulls of big chiefs whose status was raised by these feasts round and round the huge bull shaped stone sarcophagi; the ancestors were carried around in boats, and these feasts were accompanied by cattle sacrifices (Schnitger 1943: 227). On the mainland of Southeast Asia, we know that several of the Old Kuki tribes adorned their dead headmen with feathers of the hornbill and carried them round the village; hornbill feathers also decorated their graves (Shakespear 1912: 147). Lhota Naga (Mills 1922: 157 f.) and the Konyak (Kauffmann 1939: 230) buried or exposed their dead in coffins called boats, which they decorated with hornbill designs. The Chang Naga erected Y-shaped poles and posts with carved heads of the hornbill in order to commemorate their dead (v. Furer-Haimendorf 1947: 158). Similar posts which have their upper ends carved into hornbill heads or tails are erected at the occasion of cattle or gayal feasts as sacrificial poles by most of the Naga tribes – but we find them also in Indochina where, for instance, Condominas (1955: 142 ff.) reported them for the Mnong Gar.

In connection with these feasts I might as well recall the Kachin, where the priest *after* having sacrificed the buffalo and bowing before the big drum cries like

⁵ With the Garo, the "women who are attending the expectant mother" sing a chant in which the names of different species of fish are mentioned, "intended as symbols for the child which is about to enter the world" (Playfair 1909: 98 f.).

a hornbill in calling attention to the spirits (Carrapiett 1929: 65). Let me finally mention the representations of another village gate, this time of the Angarni Naga (Fig. 7): Out of the head of a gayal arises a human head adorned with hornbill feathers (v. Fiirer-Haimendorf 1947, fig. 6). Most remarkable is a pair of small horns issuing from the neck of the human head. Similar horns may be seen with persons in soul boats on South Sumatranese weaving patterns (Fig. 8, Steinmann 1941: 176, fig. 36). This corroborates my suggestion that this representation on the Angami village gate is related to the postmortal life and thus may be regarded as the very counterpart of the representation of the prenatal life on the Katü village gate.



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

My argument then is that our own dualistic notion of life and death should give way here to a triadism embracing prenatal, actual, and postmortal life. Although this argument may appear reasonably documented, on closer examination we perceive a bias in the material: In Assam it is the "bird," and in Annam it is the "fish," which is of greater importance. If there is anything in the patrilineal societies of Assam to take the place of the "fish," it is the lizard, which, contrary to the salamander and even the crocodile, has no connection with water.

Concentrating my attention on the significance of fish and bird I so far have not given much consideration to the pivotal role played by the buffalo or gayal in the religious thinking of the Southeast Asian hill tribes. I shall not try to demonstrate here the holy communion enacted in the sacrifice of the pivotal animal, but I must mention a major difference between the buffalo in Annam and the gayal in Assam. While the buffalo is intrinsically connected with water, the gayal is not: it roams on the lofty hills and is connected with the sky, not just for the sake of the opposition fish and bird, but for the testimony of the people themselves. The Angami Naga let the sacrificial animal down from the roof of the feast giver's house (Hutton 1922: 68 f.). Old Kuki and Kachin cause the

sacrificed animal to climb up to the sky (Shakespeare 1912: 188; Carrapiett 1929: 65 f.).

While there is no confirmation that the bifurcated sacrificial post itself shows the way up and down (to and from the upper world) in Southeast Asia, this very idea is expressed in Northeast Asia by the Ainu and Gilyak. On one branch of the forked post put up during the bear festival the killed bear is said to ascend to the ancestors, while on the other branch the bear of the new year is descending. Moreover, tree forks were the places where, at least in stories, women had sexual intercourse with, or were transformed into, bears (Vasilyev 1948: 97 f.). From Southeast Asia we have several statements that the Y-shaped post is regarded as a symbol of the female sex (Hutton 1922: 58; Roux 1925: 415 f.). There is another characteristic feature, which connects the Gilyak with the people of the western mainland of Southeast Asia: their tripartite organisation of kin, the so-called gens triplex. And I do think that this organisation of kin is definitely correlated with the cosmological idea expressed in the Y-shaped sacrificial pole.

Recent studies on Kuki and Chin groups allow us to locate the tripartite kin in space and time (Needham 1958: 95 ff., 1960: 115). The wife-givers are on the right side, in the east, in the past; the wife-takers are on the left side, in the west, in the future. The own group is always in the centre, and seen from a man's point of view, women come in from the right, eastern side, and go out to the left, western side. The male members of the lineage do not change their place, but in a more general way they enter the scene of life from the left, western side, and go out to the right, eastern side, passing into the past. Consequently the Mru place their dead in such a way as to let the women face west and the men face east (Brauns and Löffler 1990: 198). Moreover, wife-givers and wife-takers are connected by a special system of prestations, and one of the goods, which can only pass from wife-takers to wife-givers, is the fowl. Wife-takers are not allowed to eat chicken prepared by their wife-givers (Brauns and Löffler 1990:181). There is no correlate in the shape of fish to pass in the opposite direction, since instead of the symbol fish, women themselves are passed this way. If we substitute the fish, it would have to pass to the left, western side, while the fowl passes to the eastern, right side. And it is here, the fowl on the right, male side and the fish on the left, female side, where we find them on the Katü sacrificial pole as well as in the Shantung death ritual. In Shantung the pig's head is in the middle – with the Mru pork (like beef) is "neutral," it can be eaten by both, wife-givers and wife-takers.

The imminent view then seems to be that prenatal life has to do with women whereas the postmortal life is an affair of men. For a more direct equation of women with fishes and men with birds we have to turn to the Ngadju Dayak (Schärer 1946: 27, 87). Here the hornbill is associated with the male sky god, and the water snake or Naga (which appears to humans in the shape of a crocodile) with the female water goddess. The underworld of the waters and the upper world of the sky are connected by the tree of life. This tree roots in a holy

jar which contains the primeval waters, and its top ends in a skull (Schärer 1946: 30). The simplest representation of the Ngadju tree of life is a standard, with a spear for the staff and a cloth for the flag. The spear is the male emblem and the cloth the female emblem, just like in the Kuki-Chin (and Mru) system of prestations, where spears as a male good go exclusively to the wife-givers while clothes as a female good pass exclusively to the wife-takers. After death a cloth covers the coffin of a Ngadju woman, while to the coffin of a man a blowgun is fixed. But the man's coffin is made to represent a water snake, while the woman's coffin represents a hornbill. Hence, even though the Ngadju state that the body returns to the underworld and the spirit to the upper world, the shape of their coffins (as also the directions into which they place the dead) show another dichotomy: Men leave for the lower female side, women for the upper male side. We must conclude that the tree of life with the skull at the upper end is indeed not the male but the female view of life, as the skull stands for the female dead. In a myth told by the Dusun Dayak a coconut tree grows out of the dead body of a buffalo cow who had nourished a brother and a sister (Evans 1953: 442). The tree bears a single fruit in its top; and when they finally bring it down and cut it up, an old woman steps out of the nut and says to the siblings: I am your mother.

There can be no doubt, our opposition of female prenatal versus male postmortal state does not fit in with the Dusun story as it covers both states by the same female symbol. Both ends being female, the centre should be male.⁶ With the Naga tribes on the other hand, where the lizard takes the place of the fish, this very lizard may appear as a symbol of the male sex while the gayal takes the female's place (e. g., Hutton 1929: 22). The female character of the forked post on which the gayal is carved and to which it is tied has already been mentioned. And the sacrificial buffalo tied to a straight post is held to be a son by the Sre and Cham (Dam Bo 1950: 225, n. 3; Mus 1931: 152). Recalling that the Katü put the head of the sacrificed buffalo at the bottom and the tail at the top of the post, we might generalise the Ngadju idea in presuming that the "female" gayal tied to the "female" post is sent upwards, whereas the "male" buffalo tied to a "male" post is sent downwards.

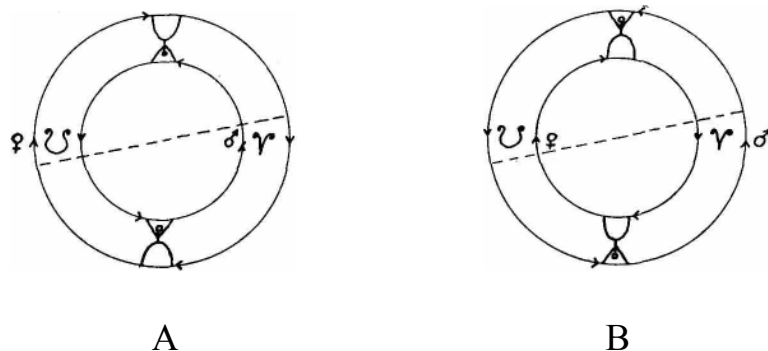
But if the netherworlds are to imply not only "female" birth but also "male" death, its symbol, the fish (and especially the "male" lizard) should cover male death as well, at least in the buffalo area. From Annam iguana ornaments in connection with death are reported e. g. from the Kaseng, Katang, Tahoi and Jarai (Hoffet 1931: 34; Jouin 1949: 147). The iguana as a postmortal symbol necessitates a revision of a former assumption: the village gate carvings of the Katü and of the Angami, even though differing in the use of symbols, may imply the same idea. We come nearer to it when we consider that the Katü symbols are carved especially on the inner side of the gates. They indicate "death" to those who leave for the outside, for the "other world," but for those entering to "this world" they appear as mirror images signifying "birth." This ambivalence is most obviously demonstrated by a Kaseng village gate. Here the inner side

⁶ For the male character of the coconut, see J. Van Baal 1966.

shows a snake while the outer side displays a woman in parturition pose (Hoffet 1931: 33). What appears to be a coffin passage to the "other world" is at the same time a womb passage to "this world."

It is, however, not only the postmortal and the prenatal symbol but also the central symbol itself, the sacrificial animal that changes its content. What appears to be an animal to this world, is indeed nothing but a human being in the "other world" and vice versa. This inference can be confirmed by verbal testimonies from buffalo and gayal keeping people as well. The Ao Naga maintain that man's gayals are the souls of the inhabitants of the sky in the same way as the gayals of these sky people are the souls of the inhabitants of this world (Mills 1926: 224). Killing an animal causes death to him in the other world whose soul it is. The same concept was reported for the Chang Naga (Hutton 1929: 13); it applies also to the buffalo souls of the Mnong Gar (Condominas 1966; Dam Bo 1950: 260), and a Batak seer expressed a similar idea (v. Brenner 1894: 78). It is but reasonable that a dead buffalo revisiting the earth will assume human shape (Dam Bo 1950: 266), while the ancestors, whenever they reenter this world, must look like buffaloes.⁷ Even the coffin-womb, by which the dead passes to the other world, may take the shape of a buffalo, since the dead enters buffalohood. Returning once more to the "gate" symbols, we learn that the hill people of Indochina regard the fishes as the fowls of the water people, and that he who dreams of catching many fowls will catch a lot of fish (Dam Bo 1950: 261).⁸

In order to resume and to expand the results, I have tried to enter them into the following two diagrams, A and B.



In both diagrams I have used the volute of the Katü as a symbol for "fish" on the left, and that of the Konyak for "bird" on the right. The symbol for "beast" is the reversal of that for "man." "Man" always has its feet downwards on a "female" circle and its hands upward on a "male" circle. The "male" circle runs

⁷ Besides the Katü material, cf. also Graham 1937: 48 f.

⁸ It is perhaps in this context that we might find an explanation for the arrangement reported for the festival of the New Year in Kiangsu (cf. my note 1). While we saw the fish to the left and the fowl to the right side of the pig's head in the death ritual of Shantung, the order is reversed in the New Year ritual of Kiangsu, so that we might interpret it as the representation of a "birth" gate.

counter-clockwise, the "female" circle clockwise. The inner circle ("this world") is male in A but female in B, the outer circle ("the other world") is female in A but male in B. These premises cause "man" to appear in the lower half of A while the "beast" belongs to the upper "world." In B, on the other hand, "man" is in the upper half while the "beast" appears in the lower "world." The diagonals shall help to assign the passage symbols bird and fish according to their relevance to their worlds.

A and B may be said to stand for two ideal types of society: A for a patrilineal society with sky orientation, B for a matrilineal society with water orientation. It is of course possible to assume mixed types, for instance a male society with water orientation. The resulting constellation may be shown either by exchanging the symbols for "man" and "beast" in diagram A or the inner and outer circle in diagram B. In both cases "fish" becomes a death symbol, while "bird" becomes a birth symbol.

The Naga tribes approximate type A. The gayal is a "female" sky animal, but man's world is arranged according to the male principle. Both man and sacrificed gayal pass to their "other world" by using the "bird" side. The Angami village gate shows man in hornbill adornment entering "gayalhood." Ao and Sangtam let the heads of sacrificed gayals, together with that of a chicken, face duly east. Warriors dancing adorned with gayal horns and hornbill feathers must be interpreted as enacting the appearance of the other world.⁹ The lizard may be used as a male fertility symbol, but since the combination of a water animal and sky is rather difficult, fish seems to be of little general importance.¹⁰ The Kuki-Chin and Mru custom to pass fowls and "male" goods on to the "right" side while females and their goods go to the "left," although fitting into the diagram will be discussed later on.

There is no society to conform completely to diagram B. The hill tribes of Annam lack a common matrilineal stratum. Some of the matrilineal societies call the buffalo a son, i. e., a "male," and their "other world" is below the earth. But also the Katü let the buffalo descend. Its way from fish to ancestor is illustrated by one of their village gates, and seen from outside, the "fish" gate represents "female" birth. The idea that man and buffalo will have to leave by the "bird" gate for the netherworld seems less plausible, still some Mnung tribes carve the

⁹ Ao dancers are asked to lick salt, cf. Mills (1926: 395); Sangtam dancers stamp like gayals, cf. Stonor (1950: 7).

¹⁰ With the matrilineal Garo, on the other hand, fish has its full symbolic value (cf. my note 5). After a child's navel string has fallen off, mother and infant are taken to the stream and bathed. Back at home, the child's head is shaved, and the father climbs on the roof of the house where he kills a fowl and lets its blood drip down a bamboo, which has been forced through the roof, into the house. The bamboo is then cut by the priest, the fowl flung down, cooked on the very spot where it dropped, and eaten by the priest and the father (cf. Playfair 1909: 99). These symbolic acts correspond best with our diagram when we "matrilinealise" diagram A by exchanging the signs for male and female, thereby confronting a spiritual entrance down from the sky via the bird gate of the outer male circle with actual birth via the fish gate of the female inner circle.

upper end of the sacrificial pole for buffaloes offered in cases of illness or death into a hornbill's beak,¹¹ the Bahnar fasten wooden birds to their sacrificial masts (Guilleminet 1942: 11, 14). And even though the peacocks decorating the graves in the matrilineal area (Rhade and Jarai) imitate Laotian models,¹² some Rhade grave posts show carvings which are said to be dove heads; the Kpa instruct the deceased that his fingers will become doves,¹³ and there is a general idea that one of man's souls becomes a bird (Condominas 1965: 480).

On the other hand, a roof carrying a boat or a double-headed iguana at its top surmounts the big Jarai graves (Jouin 1949: 147). When I mentioned the iguana designs on the coffins of the tribes of Central Annam, I tried to show how this symbol could be derived from a world-view of the Ngadju type, but in order to read it from the diagram, we shall have to revert the outer and inner circle of B, that is, to assume that the human world is "patrilineal." Generalising, I have ventured the hypothesis that, whenever we find the "fish" or the lizard as a death symbol (Tenazas 1966), it will correspond to a predominantly patrilineal organisation whose "other world" is below the earth.¹⁴

With the Ngadju Dayak themselves, the "male" line relates no longer to the other world and the "female" line to this world, but both lines are "human," and females travel the female line from "fish" to "bird," males the male line from "bird" to "fish." The effect will remain the same if we exchange the relative position of the circles of diagram B. Male and female seem equally unable to determine the linearity (the Ngadju have a bilateral kinship system); a special beast symbol does not enter the picture. It is only by resorting to the Dusun myth, which has the female buffalo under ground, that we may infer an original male character of the inner circle.

A human character is also assigned to both circles by the Kuki-Chin system of prestations and by the way in which the Mru place their dead. Both norms correspond to the "earthly" half of diagram A. Sex linked gate symbols were also used in a now obsolete festival of the Mu'o'ng in Annam; fishes and birds were caught in order to be released later on; the fish species were said to represent an incarnation of the male, and the bird species one of the female ancestor of the feudal lords (Cuisinier 1946: 211). Like the Japanese sex symbols crane ("bird")

¹¹ In Assam, on the other hand, it is generally the hornbill's tail. Thus, in both cases, the hornbill is turning towards the man's sphere (situated above the other world in Annam, below it in Assam). The sacrificial animal's death brings life to man.

¹² Two peacocks form the carrier of the coffin when it is brought to the burning place, cf. Deydier(1952:59).

¹³ Jouin (1949: 82,32); cf. also the symbolically fully consistent interdiction not to let a dove perch on a buffalo's back lest its owner should get struck by lightning, reported for the Sre by Dournes (1949: 49).

¹⁴ The full circle is described in the Imo myth of the "male" "sky" moiety of the Marind-Anim: The Dema after having travelled on earth towards the West, has his "fish" locked up by coitus, is brought back East under cover below the earth, where the female gives birth to a bird. Cf. van Baal (1966). A solar symbolism can be implied, but is not fundamental for the semantic interpretation.

for female and toad ("fish") for male, these representations are in accordance with diagram A, provided that we identify the "beast side" with the fertile ancestors.¹⁵ And it was just this identification which we had to accept when we discussed the role of the beast as a mirror image of man in the "other world." Judging from the ethnographic reports, people whose religion centres round the offering of gayal or buffalo are remarkably indifferent about ancestor cult and vice versa. If, however, my interpretation of the symbols is correct, these attitudes are just what we should expect, since both configurations are nothing but two possible interpretations of the same "metaphysical" phenomenon, the interdependence of life and death.

By this, however, it cannot be implied that the ancestor cult will automatically lead to a reduction of the two circles into a single "human" world. Different spheres of interpretation may indeed be coexistent as can be shown by a last example.¹⁶ Justus Doolittle reported from Foochow (Fukien) a peculiar custom "in connection with the transporting to the residence of his family the corpse of one who dies while away from home." Members of his family who go to meet the convoy take with them a living white cock (or an image of it made of bamboo and paper) which they make stand on the coffin when the procession proceeds homeward. "Sometimes, as in the case of high officials, the cock is placed in a sedan-chair, and borne home by four or eight bearers, according to the rank of the deceased. Sometimes it is placed on the top of the sedan which contains the wife of the deceased or the nearest of kin present."¹⁷

At the same time, we find another bird symbol, the *huang* (phoenix), representing the empress of China, while the dragon (the lord of the water animals) was regarded as the symbol of the emperor. The common people dared not make use of these symbols for their private purposes, except on certain occasions connected with the marriage rites. They represented them on wedding cakes and betrothal papers. "The document drawn up by the boy's parents, and kept by the girl's parents as evidence of the betrothal, has the picture of the dragon, while the document drawn up the parents of the girl, and kept by the parents of the boy, has a representation of the phoenix" (Doolittle 1967: 267).

Thus the two different bird symbols are used (a) for a dead male (fowl) and (b) for a marrying female (phoenix), but while the fowl belongs to the daily sphere of rural life, the phoenix belongs to the extraordinary sphere of divine powers. Instead of a single duplicity of male death and female birth, we find the first in connection with the earthly world, while the second associates with the heavenly world. In other words, the two aspects of the bird gate are represented

¹⁵ On the other hand, representations of visitors from the other world in the Yaeyama Archipelago correspond to diagram B: The (higher, fertility bringing) female Western group gains against the (lower) male Eastern group. Cf. Ito (1966: 45-48).

¹⁶ Thanks to Taryo Obayashi who not only drew my attention to, but also provided me with the passages quoted from Doolittle.

¹⁷ Doolittle (1967: 214 f.), cf. also the "soul" of the dead (fabricated by a wife-taker of the dead man's family), into which a fowl is placed, described for the Gurung of Nepal by Pignede (1966: 348).

(a) by the fowl for the inner male circle directed towards the other world and (b) by the phoenix for the outer female circle directed towards this world (in accordance with diagram A)

Keeping in mind the fundamentally identical approach to the phenomenon of the interdependence of life and death, it should, however, at least in the form of a mental experiment, be possible to unite the diagrams A and B. Since in both cases the "male" and the "female" circles have the same direction, all that will be necessary in order to join them is to alleviate the sex differentiation and to regard the inner circle as the "human" world while the outer circle constitutes the "transhuman" world. Under these conditions the only difference between A and B will lie in the position of the "transhuman": it will remain in the sky in A and beneath the earth in B, but man will always start from "fish" and end up in "bird." This "undifferentiated" conception of mankind flanked by prenatal (fish) and postmortal (bird) state is not represented in Southeast Asia itself¹⁸ although it could be inferred by the comparative analysis of carvings on village gates.

What we actually find is already connected with a certain differentiation according to sex, leading either to an inner female circle (and orientation towards earth) or an inner male circle (and orientation towards sky). In first instance the male and female character of the circles need not be identified with men and women themselves, but may relate to patrilineal or matrilineal descent (in which case the neglected linearity goes to the outer circle)¹⁹ or to "male" (or upper) and "female" (or lower) moieties (as in the case of the Marind-Anim). A patrilinearisation of earth-oriented societies results in a special ideology characterised by a reversal of the application of symbols: "fish" in the shape of the lizard comes to play a major role as death symbol, while "bird" as birth symbol is of minor importance. In second instance the sexes themselves are representatives of the circles, and the transhuman sphere cedes its visible character to the ancestors who reappear at special occasions at their "gates" finally giving way to a mere sex value of the symbols themselves, viz., in patrilineal societies, male "fish" and female "bird." I should plead, however, not to overrate the results of the diachronic arrangement of this summary²⁰ it may be nothing but a technical means for presenting the material.

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¹⁸ It has been reported, e. g. for the Bororo of South America by Levi-Strauss (1960: 183f.).

¹⁹ With the Bororo it is the outer (female) circle which corresponds to social lineality, yet the (male) centre is human as well, cf. Levi-Strauss (1958: 133,156 f.).

²⁰ At any rate, and contrary to Levi-Strauss's models (1958: 166 ff.), the symbol constellations cannot be manipulated *ad libitum*.

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