

# Pollution, Ontological Equality, or Unthinkable Series? Notes on Theorizations of South Asian Societies by Three Japanese Anthropologists

KATSUO NAWA

## INTRODUCTION

This paper scrutinizes several pre-eminent theoretical accounts of South Asian societies developed by Japanese socio-cultural anthropologists.

Japanese socio-cultural anthropologists have carried out long-term intensive ethnographic fieldwork in various South Asian societies for more than fifty years. Preceded by two strong empirical disciplines, Indology and history, post-World War II Japanese anthropologists have accumulated highly detailed ethnographic data on various aspects of the lives of South Asian people. At the same time, many of them have meticulously followed contemporary debates on South Asian societies in both South Asia and 'the West'. Indeed, in their theoretical discussions, Japanese anthropologists have quoted foreign scholars' works, the bulk of which is written in English, more often than their Japanese colleagues'. In addition, a considerable number of leading Japanese anthropologists specializing in South Asia received their PhD degree from South Asian or Western universities.

All these points suggest that there has never been a distinct academic tradition that can be called the 'Japanese school of South Asian anthropology'. Where, then, does the necessity to write an article on contributions to South Asian Studies by Japanese anthropologists lie? One strong reason is language. Although many Japanese South Asian anthropologists have published some part of their contributions in English (more so than Japanese anthropologists specializing in other parts of the world), a substantial part of their findings has been accessible only in Japanese, and virtually unknown to those who do not read the language.

This article, however, is not intended to be a comprehensive review article. I will be highly selective, taking up only those works that, in my view, substantially challenge, and have caused explicit discordance with, what has been discussed within mainstream Anglophone anthropologies

on South Asia.<sup>1</sup> For instance, in her largely favourable review, Mary Searle-Chatterjee wrote on Sekine Yasumasa's ethnography (2011): 'This book is filled with detail, and its arguments are densely complex. In my view, some pruning would have made it easier to read' (2012: 504). But if Sekine's ethnography is difficult for a real specialist of the field to follow, there should be something to be scrutinized and debated there. What I would like to focus on here are ethnographies of this sort. I will concentrate on following what they argue, rather than hastily locating their argument in the wider context of South Asian anthropology. To consult both Japanese and English texts will give us vantage to unravel those 'difficult' arguments.

### SEKINE YASUMASA ON 'POLLUTION' AND 'IMPURITY'

Sekine Yasumasa has written extensively on (im)purity, pollution, untouchability, and strategies of those who he has called 'Harijans', both in Japanese and English. His magnum opus, an ethnography based on his fieldwork in a village in Tamil Nadu, has been published once in Japanese and twice in English. He submitted his PhD dissertation to the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London in 1993. He revised and published it first in Japanese (1995), and then in English twice, first as a volume in *Senri Ethnological Studies* (2002), and then from a major Indian publisher, Rawat (2011). The contents of the three books are almost identical in many places.<sup>2</sup> Notably, however, the 2011 book contains two new chapters, titled 'Pollution Concepts Manipulated II' and 'Discussion Extended for a "Common-Ground" Anthropology'. A version of the former was published in English (1999), while a Japanese version of the latter, first published in 2001, was included as the last chapter of his collected essays (2006: 277-315). Sekine, a leading anthropological thinker in Japan, has written on various other topics in and out of South Asian Studies. Indeed, reflecting the development of his thought, he located his first book (1995) as the main accomplishment of his 'first phase', the second being his works on religious conflicts and 'common-ground' anthropology and the third on the anthropology of city and street (2006: 318). Here, however, I concentrate on his arguments in the first phase, as I believe that they deserve careful scrutiny.

For me, Sekine's ethnography-cum-theory on pollution, impurity, untouchability, and strategy is a complex, painstakingly composed whole, consisting of several mutually connected theoretical insights on different analytical levels, and supported by an enormous amount of carefully allocated ethnographic data on various aspects of the life-world of a Tamil village. Obviously, not all of his arguments are equally convincing now, two decades after they were originally written. Many readers will easily find that his book was originally written in the time when post-structuralist, dynamic, historicised, non-essentialistic, self-reflexive, subaltern, and less Orientalistic ways of writing were most seriously undertaken as such.<sup>3</sup>

The crucial point, however, is that he employed these critical debates not as stylish academic tools. They are deeply connected with his basic moral attitude to see things not 'top-down' but from the point of view of 'an unenlightened person who has both virtues and vices' (2011: 3).

Without doubt, one of the most significant and original theoretical contributions by Sekine is his distinction between what he calls 'pollution' in English and 'ke gare' in Japanese, on the one hand, and what he calls 'impurity' in English and 'fujou' in Japanese, on the other. Roughly speaking, they refer to two different, contrastive attitudes toward what is felt as dirty, impure and/or polluted: Impurity/fujou indicates the negative attitudes toward dirt/impurity/pollution, regarding them to be erased and eliminated lest they should disturb or destroy existent order and structure; pollution/ke gare indicates the positive attitudes toward dirt/impurity/pollution seeing intrinsically chaotic but indispensable power within them, which is to be converted to creative power by going through them. Note that both are clearly defined as analytical concepts. It is vitally important not to read these English or Japanese words in terms of any connotations they usually have. Moreover, the pair of pollution/ke gare and impurity/fujou should not be simply equated with the Tamil pair of *tiṭṭu* and *acuttam*, though they are intrinsically related.

To induce and support this key distinction, Sekine consults various theoretical and empirical sources. For instance he refers, convincingly I think, to what might be called a comparative historical sociology of discriminated peoples in stratified societies. Two points are extremely important here. First, he points out the existence of 'a loose contemporaneousness' in many stratified societies of the historical process by which many groups of people who had been awed and dreaded for having distinct powers derived from their marginality became discriminated peoples repressed in the marginal bottom within the society.<sup>4</sup> The explanation is crucial, lest the problem of 'caste' and 'untouchability' be discussed only as peculiarly an Indian or South Asian phenomenon. Second, he finds not only 'homomorphy' of 'occupations and social roles of the lowest groups who are the objects of discrimination', but also that 'discrimination/differentiation' against the 'lowest groups' is 'always' articulated, and felt, as a somesthetic fear of touching the polluted (2011: 5).<sup>5</sup> The emphasis of body sense also works as a criticism of a Dumontian understanding of hierarchy, (im)purity, and caste, which he sees as excessively intellectualistic, particularistic, and monolithic.

These points lead Sekine to several fundamental questions: 'What kind of people are polluted (impure)?' 'What in the first place is pollution (impurity)?' 'Why do pollution concepts play a role in discrimination so often and act so effectively?' (2011: 5). To answer these questions, Sekine proceeds to his general theorization of pollution, death, and sacrifice. He first introduces the structural anthropological theories of liminality, which explain taboo, dirt, and other anomalous phenomena as by-products of

the established structure of names, emerging from overlaps and gaps between named categories. Then he criticises these theories as uncritically based on a 'this worldly' viewpoint, treating liminality only in terms of the existing order and structure objectively from outside.<sup>6</sup> He urges the necessity of what he calls an 'other worldly' viewpoint, which sees and interprets liminality from within. From the latter viewpoint, he argues, pollution is not something to be eliminated or suppressed to the margin of structure but to be accepted and lived. Sacrifice is discussed here as the archetypal act, which violently destroys the existing order of the world, often unequal and hierarchical, and brings about the emergence of a 'continuous' egalitarian world full of amorphous power. Death, the prime moment of liminality, has a sacrificial aspect in that while very often connected with pollution, it is irreducible to 'this worldly' order of pure and impure. And pollution itself is, according to him, experienced as the perception of dying. Thus he elicits the following general equation: '*liminality (matter out of place) plus "metaphor of dying" (the intrusion of other-worldliness) equals pollution*' (2011: 23, italics original).

Though his argument on liminality, death, sacrifice, and pollution in general might not be fully convincing, it is certainly more persuasive as a model to explain South Asian socio-cultural realities,<sup>7</sup> as Sekine consults here works of many South Asian specialists, notably Veena Das (1976). His argument, thus read, can be roughly summarised as follows. First, pollution in general (including both what Sekine calls pollution/kegare and impurity/fujou) cannot be explained objectively in terms of innate attributes of what is regarded to be polluted; rather, it must be seen contextually, as something that appear through an interpretation by a particular person in a particular socio-cultural context. Second, at least in the Hindu context, it tends to be deeply related to liminal and other-worldly situations, prototypically represented by sacrifice. Note that it is in this context that Sekine emphasizes the 'metaphorical perception of liminality of death' (2011: 24) as an indispensable part of pollution in general.

Sekine then proceeds to distinguish between pollution/kegare and impurity/fujou as two distinctive attitudes toward pollution in general. On the one hand, one might try to eliminate or suppress it, regarding it as a dangerous threat to existing order and structure. On the other, one might have a positive attitude toward it, by trying to convert its amorphous power of the other-worldliness to a creative cosmic power, notably through sacrifice. The former attitude is highly compatible with the hierarchical socio-cultural order of pure and impure, while the latter with the act of sacrifice as death and the regeneration of life. Thus Sekine argues, '*I propose that the dimension of pollution directed by the attitude of "elimination" is called "impurity", while the dimension of pollution directed by the attitude of "acceptance" is named "pollution"*' (2011: 25, italics original). Impure/fujou

thus defined is centripetal, in the sense that by pairing with its affirmative antonym pure/jou, it always reinforces static hierarchical structure, while pollution/kegare is de-centripetal, in that, being a concept with no antonym, it has its own positive independent value, though being suppressed by the dominant interpretation in the actual world. The latter can be also called 'passively independent ideology' (2011: 34), as, though it is certainly produced by the superimposition of the ruling ideology, it also has a moment of escaping from it.<sup>8</sup>

At this point, Sekine gives another highly significant warning to the theorists of 'Harijans' not to confuse ideological and social dimensions. It is not that every 'Harijan' internalizes only the de-centripetal ideology of pollution, while Brahmins internalize the centripetal one of pure-impure. Quoting Lionel Caplan, he argues that ideological rupture exists 'between the Brahmanical theology and the popular ideology', not between Caste Hindus and Harijans (or, I would add, Brahmins and non-Brahmins). Thus it is wrong to presuppose Harijans' distinct unique culture, as what might be seen as unique and peculiar in their culture has been developed throughout the long history of discrimination. On the other hand, they might imitate various cultural traits of high-caste Hindus, but imitation does not necessarily indicate an uncritical acceptance of high-caste ideology. Sekine thus goes beyond the substantialistic debate between disjunctive and consensus theories of 'Harijans', Dalits, or 'ex-Untouchables'. At the same time, this insight enables him to focus on what he calls Harijans' strategy of 'self-aggrandizement'.

So far I have summarised Sekine's theory of pollution/kegare and impurity/fujo. Readers might have found some gaps and leaps in his general discussion. Notably, Sekine does not sufficiently locate 'sacredness' in his general theory. And if sacrifice is the only way to access the liminal amorphous power, then what about the Brahmanic rituals? Interestingly, he deals with these problems ethnographically, through his analysis of two Tamil concepts, *tīṭṭu*, and *acuttam*.

Though Sekine lists up to eight Tamil folk terms that are directly related to the English word 'pollution' and the Japanese word 'kegare', as well as six others that are semantically connected, his main focus is on two Tamil concepts, *tīṭṭu*, and *acuttam*, especially the former. He scrutinizes various contexts in which the word *tīṭṭu* is used, and finds that villagers explain *tīṭṭu* in terms of highly negative feelings 'as being dangerous, unpleasant, disgusting, and allergic', 'brought about by certain pollutants (things and acts) which are themselves visible and tangible' (2011: 108). These pollutants typically include a dead body, a newborn baby and the mother, a menarcheal woman, blood from the delivery and menstruation, as well as semen and female sexual fluid. Nail clippings, fallen hairs, and spat saliva are thought to be both *tīṭṭu* and *acuttam*. Caste Hindus (but not Paraiyars) regard the Paraiyars as 'a people of *tīṭṭu*'. Sekine

points out, however, that these metonymic explanations by villagers, attributing the cause of *tittu* to concrete physical pollutants, do not correspond with the actual details of villagers' treatment of *tittu*. Sekine thus moves beyond villagers' ordinary interpretation into the search for 'deeper' symbolic connotations of *tittu*, which villagers do not necessarily recognize consciously but actually live.

Based on both ethnographic materials and his theoretical insights on pollution/kegare, Sekine interprets *tittu* basically as 'the villagers' expression referring to the state of disorder or of confusion, which is brought about by death' (2011: 110). This anomalous or peripheral state is perceived subjectively as an intrusion of other-worldliness, as is suggested by villagers on death *tittu*, and experienced though the 'menace of death'. Other usages of *tittu*, though not directly linked to death, can also be interpreted as metaphorically connected to the feeling of the 'menace of death', or other-worldly power. Thus he concludes, 'the evocation of the feeling of "the menace of death", which is theoretically *the subjectively defined integration of anomaly and other worldliness*, is the essential or deep connotation of *tittu*' (2011: 116, italics original). Thus, *tittu* is regarded not only as dangerous and ambiguous but, if carefully managed, potentially powerful, bringing about creative power indispensable for villagers' lives.

Sekine then depicts the configuration of major Tamil folk terms used by villagers concerning socio-religious values, connecting them to the extended version of his theoretical framework discussed above. First, he points out that the two different views of, and attitudes towards, *tittu* discussed above correspond to his theoretical distinction between impurity/fujou and pollution/kegare. The term *acuttam*, antonym of *cuttam*, derived from the Sanskrit word *śuddha*, and largely overlaps with the shallow, ordinary understanding of *tittu* as impurity/fujou, the only difference between them being that of intensity. In this sense, *acuttam* is a subset of *tittu*. On the other hand, *tittu* as pollution/kegare, treated in rituals as the state that generates cosmic power, has intimate connection with the realm of *punitam*, or sacredness.

Sekine further argues that two contrastive attitudes to *punitam* can be clearly distinguished. Most villagers, regardless of caste, think that both cemeteries and Hindu temples are *punitam*, and cemeteries are *punitam* by accepting *tittu* while temples are *punitam* by excluding *tittu* and becoming *cuttam*. Sekine calls these two dimensions of *punitam* as 'pollution-sacredness' and 'purity-sacredness'. This distinction, like the corresponding one of *tittu* (i.e. between pollution and impurity), is not a straightforward symmetrical binary opposition. Pollution-sacredness is deeper and more fundamental, he asserts, because 'the sacredness has to be originally acquired through sacrifice' (2011: 121). He argues that the relation between pollution-sacredness and purity-sacredness is the

cyclical process between creation of sacredness in the other-worldly religious sphere and its maintenance in the this-worldly social sphere. The shift from the former to the latter has been mediated primarily by Brahman priests, first by reducing pollution to impurity by regarding it in terms of hierarchical social power relationship based on Dumontian *cuttam/acuttam* dichotomy, and secondly, by developing complex sets of sophisticated rituals with various sacrificial metaphors to access sacredness. On the other hand, the fact that villagers evaluate world renouncers as more *cuttam* than Brahman householders can be interpreted as this-worldly expression of the fact that *punitam*, generated and embodied by renouncers through continual self-sacrifice, is more important than, and indeed the source of, Brahmanical *cuttam*.

Members of dominant castes in the village, Kallars and Pillais, say that Paraiyar are not only *acuttam* but *tittu*, while they never describe lower service castes as *tittu*, though they are regarded as relatively *acuttam*. Contrarily, Paraiyars never think that they are categorically *tittu*. They use *cuttam* and *acuttam*, as well as *tittu*, primarily in religious contexts, not in relation to religious status or social hierarchy but to judge whether or not a person or a thing is in suitable condition to contact the gods in rituals. Thus they believe that fasting and vegetarianism make a person *cuttam*, i.e. powerful enough to worship gods, but to eat beef is not *tittu* in their ordinary life: they indeed argue that eating beef is their traditional custom and good for health.

Sekine thus interprets village folk terms in relation to his own analytical categories. Note that the Tamil conceptual world of *tittu*, *punitam*, *cuttam*, and *acuttam* summarized here is in the last resort the author's theoretical construct, based on ethnographical evidence but not able to directly induce from them alone. Interestingly, this configuration undergoes further twists in his ethnographical account. Meticulously analysing the individual characteristics as well as the structural allocation of village deities, for instance, he points out that both the centripetal 'pure-impure' ideology and the de-centripetal 'pollution' ideology can be observed there. Criticizing the substantialistic distinction between 'great tradition' and 'little tradition', he further argues that the cult of the village deities can be seen as an arena where two interpretations based on the two ideologies are contested. Most villagers 'share the common attitude in which their religious lives are fundamentally defined by the "pollution" ideological view' (2011: 160), though some villagers have adopted 'pure-impure' ideology more strongly. Similar arguments appear elsewhere, for instance in discussing Kallars' practice and interpretation of marriage based on the South Indian conception of bride as 'flower'. He insists that it is 'continuous with "pollution" ideology' (2011: 171), in that both seek to increase power (not status as Dumont argued) by attaching importance to women's potentiality. In these arguments, the 'pollution' ideology is

almost equated to that of sacrifice and/or power, and presented as the fundamental ideology, more or less shared among most villagers and lived in the village, conflicting with the dominant Brahmanical ideology of 'pure-impure'. And it is against this configuration of ideologies and practices that Paraiyars strategically struggle for their 'self-aggrandizement' at various levels, notably, caste, lineage, and individual. He thus conditionally admits both 'cultural consensus based on "pollution" ideology' and 'the disjunction in the interpretative or strategic dimension' (2011: 319).

### SEKINE'S THEORY AND ETHNOGRAPHY: A CRITICAL ACCLAMATION

So far I have summarized what I believe are the core theoretical arguments of Sekine's ethnography (1995, 2001, 2011). His arguments on pollution and impurity are highly complicated, oscillating between ethnographic details of a Tamil village, piles of literature on South Asian society and religion, several anthropological and philosophical theories, and his own basic conviction on the construction of this world. Moreover, this work is not only on pollution, (im)purity, and untouchability, but covers a wide range of topics from *śakti* and *bhakti*, to ritual *distinction*, and gender, to party politics and the reservation system. He also puts relentless efforts to open his argument beyond South Asian anthropology. My long summary above is still partial at best. I am also to blame for discussing so little on Sekine's contribution as an excellent ethnographer. Having said that, I would like to make several critical comments on his magnum opus.

I was struck that Sekine carried out his fieldwork in the village of Kinnamangalam, which lies only a few kilometres away from Louis Dumont's research village, Tengelapatti. He was highly strategic in selecting his field site. Though the caste composition of Kinnamangalam and Tengelapatti is quite different (Dumont 1986: 37-47, 51; Sekine 2011: 57-77), both are non-Brahman-dominated villages. The main dominant caste is Kallar, stereotypically famous for its openly and proudly non-Brahmanical and violent behaviour. This condition seems to affect his whole argument decisively. Sekine straightforwardly connects several customs and their interpretations in a Kallar-dominated village, based on south Indian, non-Brahmanic conceptions and largely shared among the villagers, to what he calls 'pollution ideology'. Moreover, he analyses Brahmanic tradition monolithically from outside, with little, if any, sympathy. I guess, and I can only guess as a non-south Indian specialist, that if Sekine, a highly meticulous and observant fieldworker as is shown in his monograph, had carried out his fieldwork in a Brahman-dominated village, a Pillai-dominated village, or a village where Kallars and Brahmans were competing for hegemony, he would have submitted a much subtler

analysis of ideological construct of 'Brahmanical' tradition, while relativizing Kallars from the 'south Indian tradition' in general.

This point also leads us to reconsider the treatment of 'pollution' in his theory and ethnography. 'Pollution', first introduced theoretically as an independent, other-worldly, and potentially positive category, is seldom connected in his ethnography exclusively to Paraiyals or Harijans except from the high-caste perspectives. Rather, the 'pollution' ideology is almost equated to the non-Brahmanical popular south Indian tradition in general and Kallars in particular. While moving from the theoretical consideration of 'pollution' to the particular ethnographic context, Sekine seems to tacitly change the focal point of 'pollution', in the way that the problematique of liminality and marginality gives way to that of sacrifice and power, as I suggested in the previous section.

All these points are linked to my theoretical reservations to his way of connecting sacrifice and death to pollution in general. First, he heavily relies on George Bataille, unconditionally accepting the basic assumptions of the French thinker. For instance, I do not agree with Sekine's heavily loaded generalization, 'religion in its nature must be free from usefulness' (2011: 20). Likewise, his distinction between 'l'ordre intime' and 'l'ordre réel', though certainly illuminating, causes *petitio principii* if it is directly used to explain particular ethnographic situations. Accepting Sekine's criticism toward Leach, we can still ask why sacrifice is so completely prioritized here. Is sacrifice the only archetypal way for 'cosmic dialogue with the other-worldliness' (2011: 25)? For me, the concept of 'sacrifice' is transculturally untransparent to begin with. Also problematic is the way Sekine uses Meigs' ethnography of Highland New Guinea. To say the least, one ethnography is clearly not enough to discuss the 'metaphor of dying' in general terms. Though Sekine might scorn me as a stubborn relativist positivist, for me this part is the weakest portion of his theoretical construct throughout his book. And I am afraid his book might be difficult for many readers, partly because he employs his arguments purely based on these assumptions to prove his theoretical and ethnographical arguments here and there.

More fundamentally, Sekine's attitude toward pollution, liminality, and sacrifice might not be totally coherent. He on the one hand stresses the necessity to have the interpretive point of view to see, accept, and live liminality and pollution from within, in order to experience the world of continuity allegedly appearing there. At the same time, however, he treats liminality, pollution, and sacrifice instrumentally. He argues for instance that 'the other worldly view leads to the acceptance of liminality for creating a new order' (2011: 21), and, from the viewpoint of the insider of the liminal domain, 'pollution is seen as cosmic pollution, so that it is once accepted and then converted into a creative power' through a sacrificial act (2011: 25). This is a highly teleological argument, in that

each sacrificial act is already accompanied by the clear purpose of revitalizing the world. Note that only outside observers can write this argument, as the liminal experience has no order or direction in itself. Likewise, when he writes, '*tīṭṭu* is regarded as the indispensable disorder for regenerating a new order' (2011: 117), he clearly discusses *tīṭṭu* from a higher order. But if everyone is certain that the liminal power of pollution can be tamed and utilized to reactivate the society in general, then it is always already domesticated in advance. The sense of death and decay, as well as of ambiguity and awe, gives way to socio-cultural necessity. Sekine does not really discuss pollution from inside here, but from a higher order of theoretical position. This positioning, I am afraid, would be incompatible with the most attractive parts of Bataille's visionary thought.

This teleological view of 'pollution' has its ethnographical counterpart, the above-mentioned point that Paraiyars are very rarely connected to the other-worldly power of 'pollution' or *tīṭṭu* directly. Sekine writes, 'today the "pollution" aspect of the Paraiyars appears to be repressed and their "impurity" aspect can be seen to be dominant in the eyes of the dominant castes [...] and their creative "pollution" aspect is found only in limited situations, as in the case of the Paraiyar priest of one of the village temples, the Mataikaruppacuvami Temple' (2011: 122). The problem here lies not only in the fact that 'this positive character of the Paraiyars is realized only in very temporally and spatially limited situations' (2011: 154), but also in that Paraiyars themselves do not at all stress the 'pollution' aspect of their *tīṭṭu* even in the occasion in which they are looked upon as the indispensable agent for drawing power from *tuṭiyāṇa teyvam* [a fearful deity] through the polluting act of animal sacrifice (2011: 154). Here it is regrettable that he includes little discourse of Paraiyars themselves on this god and Paraiyar *pūcāri* in his ethnography. Indeed, Sekine's ethnography lacks a chapter treating the personal level religious or ritual strategies of 'Harijans'.<sup>9</sup> If they do not use the word *tīṭṭu* even in ritual context, as is suggested in his ethnography, we might argue that Paraiyars were alienated also from the 'pollution'-*tīṭṭu* ideology of the village in a twisted way. This is to be noted because, as Paraiyars called themselves Adi-Dravidas (2011: 8), the logical possibility exists that they stress their Adi-Dravida-ness in relation to their special relationship with the deity, emphasizing their unique indigenous power deriving from the positive aspect of *tīṭṭu* or 'pollution', though this did not occur at least while Sekine lived in the village.

Sekine argues more straightforwardly in his expanded conclusion: 'what is the difference between the lower castes and "Untouchables"? That is whether they play the role of "the boundary marker" of the village order or not', and furthermore, 'Only "the boundary marker" can shoulder the task to be *tīṭṭu*. The lower castes that have become the inside other can be *acuttam* but can't be *tīṭṭu*' (Sekine 2011: 344).<sup>10</sup> This formulation,

however, is inconsonant with his own ethnographic details. Not all the 'Harijans' play the role of 'the boundary marker' of the village. The fact that a Paraiyar priest is always selected from the Mataiyan lineage shows that not all Paraiyars are equally accessible to the marginal power of 'pollution'. The actual ritual roles of Paraiyars in the cult of village deities are highly limited. Not all the *pūcāri* of *tuṭiyāna teyvam* are 'Harijans'. And is it possible to explain the general recognition that the non-Harijan Vannars hold magical power (Sekine 2011: 74) only in terms of *acuttam*? I am not arguing that we should throw away Sekine's theory. I am only pointing out several possible discrepancies between his theory and his ethnography. Reading Sekine's ethnography, I had the impression that the concept of *tūṭtu* in this village has been domesticated so completely by higher castes that it had almost lost its amorphous power and virtually became a second dominant ideology. In general terms, I absolutely agree that the discrimination against 'Untouchables' is irreducible to the caste discrimination, but at the same time think that Sekine's theory is not always straightforwardly applicable to all the discrimination against 'Untouchables'.

I would like to add two more small questions on Sekine's ethnography. First, the case of SP, a Paraiyar who had 'regarded himself as "ugly and unclean" (*aciṅkam* and *acuttam*)' and was thus unable to enter restaurants and temples (2011: 292), suggests that at least some Paraiyars internalized 'pure-impure' ideology in the near past much more than Sekine admits, as to enter restaurants is difficult to explain in terms of *cuttam* as religious abstinence and purification. Also important here is that he did not use the word *tūṭtu* in this occasion, negatively or positively. Second, on Kallars, we might ask, to what extent is the bare and open violence of Kallars connected to the ideology of 'pollution'. In other words, how should we interpret the attitude of Kallars towards Paraiyars, at the same time explaining the fact that they are so clearly anti-Brahmanic and far from 'pure-impure' ideology?

All these points seem to suggest that Sekine's virtual equation of the 'pollution' ideology with the popular non-Brahmanic tradition in general, as well as hierarchy and discrimination to the 'pure-impure' ideology, would be at best a part of the story. I guess the deficiency partly derives from the fact that Sekine wrote his book to criticize Louis Dumont. Writing an ethnography against someone's theory has its own risk, because, by criticizing the theory, one often invents its inverted double. Sekine's conviction that there should be *the* non-Brahmanic popular ideology based on *one* logic totally different from pure-impure dichotomy, I am afraid, might be the case in point. Thus his highly (and perhaps excessively) generalized application of the word 'pollution' emerges in his ethnography. Let us remember, however, that there was a substantial gap between Dumont the theorist and Dumont the ethnographer (Dumont 1980, 1986,

cf. Moffatt 1986). I have suggested that there is also a gap between Sekine the theorist and Sekine the ethnographer. The difficulty for readers of his ethnography is that both the theorist and the ethnographer appear one after the other within the same book.

This and the last section has been an attempt of 'pruning' Sekine's ethnography theoretically in my own way (cf. Searle-Chatterjee 2012: 504). Lastly I would like to argue again that Sekine's ethnography, published in English in India nearly twenty years after it was first written, is to be read together with the great ethnographies of Tamil societies from Kathleen Gough (1956, 1960) and Louis Dumont (1986) onward<sup>11</sup>, as well as with all the theoretical arguments on Indian society at least since William Wiser (1936), both in terms of theory and of ethnography.

### AKIO TANABE ON ONTOLOGICAL EQUALITY

If Sekine's ethnography was written as an empirical and theoretical criticism to Dumont and Moffatt, Tanabe Akio's ethnographical project (Tanabe 2006, 2010)<sup>12</sup> might have started as a critical acclamation of Nicholas Dirks' ethnohistorical monograph (Dirks 1993). Indeed, Tanabe's book (2010) is a monumental, more than five hundred and fifty pages long ethnography which covers topics from the eighteenth century pre-colonial system of entitlements to the post-post colonial era local politics. Borrowing the words Dirks himself used to comment on his own ethnography, readers must thus confront 'what might have been several different books, meanwhile stumbling over Tamil [in Tanabe's case, Oriya or Odiya] transliterations of place and clan names, lexical signs of key ideas and terms, and myriad other amounts of detail about the specific place' (Dirks 1993: xxviii).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to present a comprehensive review of this ethnography. Notably, Tanabe's argument on the system of entitlements in pre-colonial Orissa has been reviewed as an important contribution to the ongoing debate on local societies and states in late medieval and early modern India (Kotani 2011, cf. Kotani, Mita, and Mizushima 2008). His argument on kingship and ritual should have its own place in the long history of anthropological debates on South Asian kingship, together with other major Japanese contributions such as Tanaka (2002), Togawa (2003, 2006), and more recently, Ikegame (2012). I do not discuss in detail these and many other ethnographical cum theoretical arguments in his ethnography.

Here, I concentrate on what Tanabe calls 'ontological equality', which is, in my reading, the most conspicuous leitmotif throughout his ethnography. To be sure, he already used this concept, for instance in an English article published in *American Ethnologist* (Tanabe 2007). There he refers to this concept as 'an important, although often academically

neglected, value in India's society', and argues that the idea, 'although philosophically orthodox, remains a sociopolitically "subaltern" value as compared with the "superaltern" ones of hierarchy and domination' (Tanabe 2007: 564). He adds in a footnote, 'The interaction between the three values of status, power, and equality, involving both complementarity and contradiction, seems to me to characterize the history, society, and politics of India. It also constitutes the mechanism of sacrifice, which Indian tradition has identified as the basic principle of life' (Tanabe 2007: 571). Tanabe thus offers a new comprehensive perspective of South Asian society, politics and culture, by using the term 'ontological equality' together with hierarchy/status and domination/power, two concepts discussed for decades among South Asianists. He does not fully explain the concept in this article, however, and I believe the significance of this concept can only be fully scrutinized in relation to his ethnographical project as a whole. I will thus concentrate here on his argument/theory of 'ontological equality' in his ethnography.

In the preface of his ethnography, Tanabe clearly argues that the purpose of the book is to present a new understanding of Indian society through demonstrating the structure and transformation of 'caste' at the local level from a historical anthropological perspective (Tanabe 2010: 3). He discovered fundamental transformation of local society in rural Orissa, conspicuous since the mid-1990s. He interprets this transformation as the development of 'vernacular democracy', in which 'lower' caste people become involved in politics. Notably, it is not the Western concept of democracy that has guided this development. Though 'lower' caste people thoroughly criticize hierarchical dominance based on caste, they do not necessarily negate caste itself; rather, the concept of caste is creatively interpreted in the way that it might be utilized as a socio-cultural resource for various groups to cooperate on equal terms, recognizing mutual distinctiveness. Obviously the situation can be fully explained neither by the straightforward modernization theory, nor by existing theories on Indian society. He tries to figure out this conundrum by introducing the concept of 'ontological equality', which is, according to him, a fundamental value in Indian tradition throughout its history, though almost always neglected by modern scholars.

Referring to Indian philosophical tradition, Tanabe argues that, from the point of view of 'ontological equality', everything is equal, as well as one and the same, on the ontological level, beyond or deep within the phenomenal world. Unlike the modern Western concept of equality, this value does not provide a concrete social norm; it is often unmanifested, but it 'has provided the ethical basis of man's respect for the life of others which has remained an essential though often latent principle of social and ecological relationships in India' (2006: vii). Needless to say, 'ontological equality' is not the only major value in South Asia. The value

of Brahmanical hierarchy, or of status, has clearly existed for thousands of years. Also important has been what Tanabe calls centrality or domination of power, typically represented by the king. Tanabe thus schematizes the Indian world using three basic values, 'hierarchy of status', 'centrality of power', and 'ontological equality', by which history, society and politics have been defined and characterized.

Tanabe explains the necessity and importance of the concept 'ontological equality' in several different ways. In the context of South Asian anthropology, he first criticizes both Dumont's theory of hierarchy and the neo-Hocartian theory of kingship and power, in that they share 'the common methodological standpoint' that 'seeks to find out the overarching framework by which Indian social relationships can be explained'. Both order-centred and power-centred views regard people as 'embedded within a normative and power [*sid*] framework to obey the prescriptive and the coercive' (Tanabe 2006: 6). Tanabe stresses here the necessity to notice the situated agency of the people who, within interpersonal relationship, have the ability to reconstitute the relationships reflexively based on their values and ethics. It is in this context that Tanabe introduces the concept of ontological equality as the third value in Indian society, which complements and relativizes these two values. Ontological equality offers the ethical ground for respect and concern for the existence of others. Considering caste, he continues, we have to recognize the existence of complex dynamics generated from contradiction and complementarity among the three values of status, power, and equality. He further argues that, inter-caste cooperation has been realized throughout history, not only because of norms or coercion but also because each member shares the commitment to the universal value that, at the existential level, all lives are equal (Tanabe 2010: 18-19).

To this general explanation of ontological equality in the context of Indian society and caste, he quickly adds two points. First, while self and other may be distinguished in terms of status and power, they are equal as well as one and the same at the ontological level. Here he explicitly refers to classic Indian philosophical thoughts such as Brahman/Atman identity and 'thou art that'. Second, he underscores again that the value of ontological equality is supposed to exist beyond or deep within the phenomenal world. This means that,

... this value does not provide a social norm in the prescriptive sense that stipulates particular relationships. It rather functions as the moral basis, complementing the rigidity of status and power, for reflexive and practical revision of existing socio-political relationships from the viewpoint of mutual respect and concern. (Tanabe 2006: 6)

Thus, even though people do not usually have the capacity to change the social hierarchy or power structure themselves, they can relativize, within inter-personal relationships, the order formed by status and power,

from the standpoint of ontological equality, and ask, as negotiative agents, for due respect and regard, thus enabling the formation of new patterns of socio-political practices. What Tanabe sees here is 'people's creative agency embedded in particular socio-political relationships' (2006: 7).

Tanabe also discusses the value of ontological equality in relation to subalternity. He defines the word subaltern as those who are given subordinate positions in the hegemonic discursive system or value structure (Tanabe 2010: 26). Subalterns have thus no means to represent themselves in hegemonic superalternate discourse from above, and can only have the possibility for resistance by employing a subalternate discourse from below. He argues that, in the Indian context, the superalternate discourses from above are those of hierarchy and power, while the subalternate, ontological equality. Subalterns thus locate their own dignity, which cannot be discussed in terms of hierarchy or power, based on the value of ontological equality. Any socio-political resistances and negotiations based on this value are thus predetermined to be incomplete, but the value always provides the fundamental possibility/potentiality to those who are pushed into subalternate positions.

Throughout his historical ethnography, Tanabe treats the concept of ontological equality as a hidden drive of Indian history and society. In his argument of what he calls the 'system of entitlements' in pre-colonial Orissa (Tanabe 2010: 57-153), for instance, he depicts it first as a system of division of labour and resource distribution based on hereditary assignments, in which each household was engaged in its own prescribed duties, administrative, military, religious, productive, service, or otherwise, to the local (not village) community, and received shares of local products. Secondly, he points out that this system was based on the principle of sacrifice, in which each household served for the whole represented by the tutelary goddess of the region. Based on his detailed analysis of administrative records of the Manitri fort area written on palm leaves between 1776 and 1806, he demonstrates that caste in pre-colonial Orissa is irreducible to Dumontian socio-religious hierarchy, and that the centrality of the king which neo-Hocartian theorists emphasized, while crucially important in the early modern socio-political reformulation in Orissa, is not intrinsic to caste *per se* or the system of entitlements. Instead, service to local community and its goddess by each family in the prescribed way was the crucial factor. In early modern Orissa, moreover, people understood this as sacrificial service to the local goddess, Jagannatha, and the king as the representative of the latter. Thus, in pre-colonial Orissa, people belonging to various pluralistic social groups, including non-Hindus, were not only mutually connected but integrated to a larger whole through the logic of sacrifice, while keeping their distinctive features and identities. Though Tanabe does not use the term ontological equality much in this context, the leitmotif is clearly heard. He indeed

summarizes elsewhere that even though the pre-colonial system of entitlements certainly contained aspects of hierarchy and dominance, it was at the same time based on the principles of sacrifice, and ontological egalitarianism which existed at its depth (Tanabe 2010: 185).

Tanabe then describes the historical transformation of Indian society during the colonial period in two stages: first, the introduction of private land ownership which resulted in the breakdown of the system of entitlements, and second, its subsumption into the imperial system, which introduced the distinction between the two domains, i.e. state politics which were regarded to be managed directly by the colonial government, and the society left to the 'natives' under the non-intervention policy. The colonial rule thus left post-colonial India what he calls 'wedged dichotomy', with clear separation between 'politico-economic' and 'socio-religious' (or 'socio-cultural') spheres, which made the life-worlds of Indian people fragmented and incoherent. On the one hand, in the 'socio-religious' sphere, caste-based division of labour, cooperation, and giving and receiving of services and gifts has selectively continued. Behind this continuity, Tanabe finds a bio-moral order of things, of which individual 'body-persons' consist in parts, notably through consuming the local food.<sup>13</sup> To eat and exchange in a distinct way within the local world makes one's own distinct body and person. On the other, in the 'politico-economic' sphere, the modern state of India is based on the principles of democratic equality and rationality, which are incompatible with the basic principles of the 'socio-religious' sphere. Worse, it has often turned to the factional majoritarian politics based simply on the logic of numbers, which has resulted in the marginalization of 'low-caste' people and the poor. Thus in post-colonial rural Orissa, caste is denied its existence or significance in the official discourse based on the ideal of 'democratic' civil society. In the economic sphere, dealings based on the market principle have largely replaced inter-caste exchanges. In the socio-cultural sphere, however, caste as sacrificial organization has retained its crucial role as the basis of people's ontological identity, though the established ritual order includes values of hierarchy and power.

Tanabe then focuses on the village festival of the goddess Ramachandi to analyse the historical transformation of meanings and functions in the religious sphere. The festival represents that the power of the goddess, connected with the authority of the king as the sacrificer, enables prosperity and reproduction of the local community. From the symbolic analysis of ritual structure and process, Tanabe finds that the power of the goddess transforms in three stages, from equality through hierarchy to centrality. Here, his basic interpretation is not that the value of equality is processually subjugated by other values of hierarchy and power, but that equality, hierarchy, and centrality are three 'revolving values', which might be utilized as cultural resources by various people involved. Indeed,

historically speaking, the festival has changed its shape as well as its functions. In the pre-colonial era it was firmly rooted in the system of entitlements, with the sacrifice by the king. In the colonial period it attained a new significance as the basis of 'traditional' identities. In the post-colonial era, the old ruling class tried to maintain the structure of hierarchy and dominance, while subalterns tried to emphasize the value of equality. People have carried out difficult negotiations and dialogues on the form and meanings of ritual division of labour by caste, to keep ones' own honour and dignity. Caste as a sacrificial organization is thus irreducible to either Brahmanical hierarchy or kingly centrality. The value of ontological equality, always co-existing with the other two basic values, has provided the cultural-political basis of resistance against the structure of hierarchy and centrality when the latter becomes excessively static and oppressive.

In the last part of his monograph, Tanabe argues that a post post-colonial 'vernacular democracy' has been emerging since the mid-1990s, with more 'low' caste people participating in local political processes. He introduces the concept of 'moral society', criticizing Partha Chatterjee's famous distinction between civil society and political society (Chatterjee 2004), in that the dichotomous understanding of socio-political sphere and democracy cannot deal properly with the power of ethical imagination and creativity of the community.<sup>14</sup> He then argues that, though the ideal of democracy and civil society has had a crucial role in local socio-political relationships in India as newly added cultural resources, it is only by situating them within historically constructed and embodied local cultural ethos that these values can have persistent significance. He argues that, given that the value of hierarchy and centrality is clearly inconsistent with these new values, it is the egalitarian sacrificial ethic from the subaltern perspective that gives the alternative vision of local society, by mediating the value of modern democracy with traditional Indian moral values. He thus describes the recent transformation of local politics as the revitalization, if not resurgence, of the value of ontological equality. The concepts of duty (*kartavya*) and service (*sewā*), traditionally used in the context of inter-caste distribution and division of labour, are frequently utilized to present a new vision of democratic relationship in the local society, i.e., participation and cooperation of various pluralistic groups on an equal basis.

Lastly, Tanabe also explains the concept of ontological equality theoretically in terms of religiosity. A crucially important point is that ontological equality does not refer to the simple part-whole relation, as it is based on the thought that finds transcendental oneness within immanent diversity. *Brahman*, immanent and omnipresent in every being in this world, is also always already the transcendental Being. Moreover, '[a]t the existential level, the self as "a part" which offers sacrifice and

the sacrificed material are ontologically equal to the “whole” to which sacrifice is offered’ (Tanabe 2006: 7). He further argues that this thought is the universal condition of any religion, as the transcendental oneness and diversity in this world cannot be mediated without this sort of logic (Tanabe 2010: 6-8). And in the last chapter of his ethnography, he presents in a straightforward manner his own basic conviction on moral values and the construction of human (and non-human) beings in this world, referring to several Kyoto school philosophers among others (Tanabe 2010: 486-91, 510-13).

### TANABE’S THEORY: A CRITICAL ACCLAMATION

In the last section I summarized Tanabe’s ethnography, mainly focusing on his concept of ontological equality. The book is full of historical and ethnographical data, brilliant interpretations of them, and critical comments on various ongoing debates in South Asian studies. I cannot do justice to most of them. In the following, I again concentrate largely on his concept of ‘ontological equality’, presented as the hidden third principle after hierarchy and centrality.

I have to start with a sense of difficulty here. First of all, I do not share many of Tanabe’s basic assumptions and premises that he presupposes as self-evident. For instance, I have not been convinced by his absolutely Eurasia-centric (though certainly not Euro-centric), highly essentialistic and theological view of religion and religiosity summarized above, which, I am afraid, would impoverish one’s understanding of what can be called ‘religious’ in South Asia. Moreover, he often uses several terms which can be rendered in English as ‘Absolute Being’, ‘Absolute God’, and ‘Transcendental Being’ almost interchangeably, without a detailed description of how the ‘Being’ has been conceptualized, believed, felt, and experienced as such in various ethnographic contexts. To point out the strong influence of the *bhakti* movement in rural Orissa certainly does not give enough excuse to use these highly slippery terms so freely. It is as if Tanabe interpolates his own theoretical premises within descriptions without the requisite ethnographic scrutiny.

Similar questions can be raised on the very concept of ontological equality, which is ultimately Tanabe’s own theoretical construction. The value is supposed to have existed almost throughout the history of India, but only beyond or deep within the phenomenal world. This means that, unlike hierarchy and centrality, the value of ontological equality will never be fulfilled completely in the phenomenal world, and therefore can seldom, if at all, be derived straightforwardly from concrete ethnographic or historical data. Tanabe often presupposes the existence of ontological equality as a ‘spiritual tradition’ (2010: 228) without showing its diachronic continuity. I would argue that this empirical difficulty allows the author, rather paradoxically, to discover the value almost everywhere. To what

extent his blanket conceptualization of ontological equality (into which he throws everything from ancient philosophy to village practical knowledge, Upanishad and *bhakti* as well as Gandhi and Ambedkar together) is accurate, convincing, and analytically useful, should be scrutinized by specialists from various disciplines.

Another problem I found with the value of ontological equality is that it is often virtually equated with the subalternate discourses and practices. First, most of the great Indian thinkers who coined the thoughts he refers to were clearly not subalterns. More importantly, Tanabe seems to presuppose either that all the subalternate voices uttered to change their circumstance are based on the value of ontological equality, or that all the subalternate voices worth discussing (his moral judgement here) are based on it.

These points lead us to compare Tanabe's theory on equality, hierarchy, and centrality to Sekine's theory of pollution. Reading the two ethnographies side by side, I was profoundly surprised to find that Sekine and Tanabe share several theoretical premises, despite their fundamentally different understanding of Indian society. First, they both stress the crucial importance of sacrifice. But while Sekine sees it as an archetypal practice to revive the world, Tanabe treats it as the main locus where three basic values of Indian society revolve contradictively as well as complementarily. Sekine focuses on those who perform the sacrifice, actually or theoretically reconstructed, who possess the amorphous power and thus are discriminated. Tanabe, on the other hand, generalizes the concept of sacrifice to any prescriptive service to deities and/or community, without admitting the ambivalent privilege of the sacrificer. Furthermore, Sekine and Tanabe share the vision that in sacrifice, secular distinctions disappear and the continuous and egalitarian world manifests itself, incorporated with the quasi-Heideggerian problematique of death and equality (Tanabe 2010: 490). Sekine's sentence, 'in the religious and horizontal context *cuttam* and *acuttam* have a rather casteless and egalitarian value in front of a god' (2011: 125) could be written by Tanabe. I would argue in passing, however, that the obvious disappearance of structural discrimination in sacrificial sequences is not at all equal to the existence or appearance of an egalitarian value: the term egalitarian inevitably connotes the existence of isolable elements, and is therefore inappropriate to use when discussing experiences of continuity.

I was also surprised to find that Tanabe almost never quotes Sekine in his ethnography. Within South Asian studies in Japan, it was Tanabe's review article (Tanabe 1990), then widely read beyond the academic boundary of anthropology, that introduced post-Dumontian views of 'caste' largely in terms of kingship, auspiciousness, and sacrifice.<sup>15</sup> My own frustration with his argument then was that, while it multiplied the understanding of caste and South Asian society, it only dealt with people who could easily claim their superiority: Brahmans, kings, dominant

castes, and ascetics. For me at least, Sekine's monograph (1995) appeared as the major contribution to fill this huge gap, both theoretically and ethnographically, with the concept of 'pollution'. I do not understand why Tanabe never deals in his monograph with those who have distinct ritual power and are excluded from the bulk of society because of it, except as one of many groups with ascribed roles and privileges. On the other hand, Tanabe's ethnography questions Sekine's privileging of 'Harijan' in terms of pollution, in pointing out that not only Harijans but some others, notably 'tribes', have the similar power. Sekine's discussion on Kuravars might be reconsidered from this perspective. I should point out, at the same time, that Tanabe's interpretation of the role of Khonda and Saora solely in terms of equality (2010: 431) is insufficient in that it does not explain why they have distinct power as the privileged mediators to local goddesses.

Coming back to Tanabe's ethnography proper, his emphasis on locality might also be problematized. To be sure, he convincingly shows us that locality was the basic unit in the system of entitlement in pre-colonial early modern rural Orissa. But this does not mean that the coming democratic society must be based on 'local' cultural values (Tanabe 2010: 25). Rather strangely, he still treats the local society as the *sole* reservoir of accumulated and always renovated cultural resources (2010: 263), in the era when many successful upper-caste people are moving out of it. A similar problem can be found within his historical analysis, in his treatment of those who did not have one's own title, called *cāndanā*. They were categorically excluded from the local whole, in that while they admittedly paid expensive rent to the community for their residential and agricultural land (2010: 115), their degree of 'secondary' inclusion to the system of entitlement seems to be extremely weak in terms of rights and sacrificial logic. It seems that the equality in the system of entitlement in pre-colonial rural Orissa was accomplished, if ever, principally only among those who had titles, quite unlike the ontological equality in front of the Being. In addition, if those outsiders were also treated in terms of caste hierarchy, the problem of caste in pre-colonial Orissa cannot simply be reduced to the system of entitlements.

Tanabe criticizes both Dumontian and neo-Hocartian conceptualizations of Indian society as essentially looking for the overarching essence of Indian society and culture, without paying attention to people's situated moral agency. The criticism can be well taken, but two reservations would be necessary. First, Tanabe's schematized understanding of Indian society as the dynamic process generated by three basic values is itself an overarching meta-theory. In this regard, Sekine would find in Tanabe a 'top-down' attitude. Second, Tanabe treats people's moral agency almost solely within the realm of ontological equality, as if there were no moral aspect outside it, within the values of hierarchy and centrality, for

instance. I am afraid his whole theory and ethnography is preceded by his strong moral pre-judgement on what is 'moral'. Indeed, Tanabe clearly states that the purpose of his ethnography is to give an answer to these questions, by paying attention to everyday practices in India today, as what the moral basis of socio-political relationship in Modern India can be, and how India can overcome the post-colonial divides between individual and community, rights and virtue, intrinsic and extrinsic, modernity and tradition, rationality and religiosity, and so on (2010: 26). To do this, he conceives the value of ontological equality as a historically accumulated cultural resource in South Asia, and discusses how it is creatively utilized by subaltern or 'lower' people to achieve democracy in modern Indian society (2010: 486). In my reading, this is an attempt of 'he-story' as myth-making, rather than of analysis and theorization, if we can distinguish the two at all, in that he imports so strongly his own moral judgement, which might not be quite Indian, into his historical and ethnographical accounts. To what extent this newly created myth, or hypothesis, is useful as a new conceptual tool not only for scholars in reconceptualizing the past and present of South Asia, but also for people of South Asia in general, and subaltern people there in particular, is to be widely discussed.

#### YASUSHI UCHIYAMADA'S ENDEAVOUR

Let us now turn briefly to the works of another Japanese anthropologist, Yasushi Uchiyamada. Briefly, because Uchiyamada has not published his book-length ethnography yet, though he has written highly evocative articles both in English and in Japanese, mainly based on his fieldwork in Kerala (Uchiyamada 1999, 2008, 2009, and 2011 among many others). Here, I do not represent his oeuvre as a whole, but take up only two of his articles written in Japanese.

Uchiyamada starts his article on failed sessions of necromancy (2008) by describing scenes of a village in Kerala on the 59th Independence Day of India. He visited the house of a Kurava necromancer surrounded by rubber plantations. After briefly discussing the rapid transformation of the local landscape from coconut palm woods to rubber trees within global and national contexts, he describes the process, contexts, and consequences of two failed sequences of necromancy ritual called *chaavu thullal* in detail. The description of the first ritual, in which the dead did not arrive, is followed by what might be called a condensed field diary of the following days. Uchiyamada wrote down whom he visited, who the people he visited were, and what they told him and did not tell him, trying to retrace the chain of events. It is accompanied by a short ethnographic note on the debts of the dead, through which he demonstrates their understanding of persons, that each Kurava, living, dead, and still to be

born, always already exists with various debts within the chains of gift exchanges. The description of the second ritual, in which the dead came nearby but did not try to speak, is followed by explanations of its entangled contexts from three contesting perspectives. In tracing the entangled chain of events, he not only deals with emotion, gender, sexuality, and economic interest of the persons involved, who were either close relatives or (ex-)affines with each other, but also with modern institutions of the legal court and land registration. After recording what he calls 'biographies' of various negotiations between persons, persons and things, as well as persons and places, Uchiyamada indicates two points in conclusion. First, the purpose of necromancy is to clarify the existence of the debt of the dead, by his or her own voice, in order to avoid its transformation into misfortune of someone closely related to the dead. If the living relatives pay for the debt, the chain of debt is extended to the future. Second, in both cases, he clearly observes conflict between modern individuals who own commodified land privately and groups consisting of not-quite modern persons with un-commodified land. Notably, educated modern persons still sometimes participated in necromancy when their close relatives died. Consequently, necromancers had to deal with two different types of clients in fluctuating milieux.

Uchiyamada's other article (2009) is on Sanskritization. He begins with a theoretical criticism of the concept, pointing out that it is tautologic, teleologic, and unable to grasp qualitative transformation. He then juxtaposes several ethnographic fragments that would be regarded as typical cases of Sanskritization by those who accept the concept. In the first fragment, in August 2005, a Kurava former schoolteacher hosted a meeting, in which the social reform movement of Kuravas to redefine themselves as Sidhanar by 'Sanskritizing' their lives was propagated. A little before the meeting started, however, the host proudly and eloquently answered Uchiyamada's question on the ritual of *chaavu thullal*, emphasizing the distinct spiritual power of Kuravas and their gods, despite the fact that the ritual was targeted by the movement as a backward custom that should be abandoned. In the second fragment, in September 2005, Uchiyamada asked the present 'owner' of a former Kurava 'temple' about *chaavu thullal*. The owner stopped talking, getting goosebumps. This anecdote is juxtaposed with the narrative of a Kurava he heard a few days before, '... Formerly, if I spoke about this [*chaavu thullal*], my hair bristled. Now I feel nothing. The belief disappeared. It is of no use any more'. The third and the longest fragment is an account of his revisit to a small local Kali temple in Pavumba (cf. Uchiyamada 1999). The Kali was a beautiful Kurati (Kurava woman) who made love with a Brahman priest, became pregnant, and then was killed (according to a Brahman) or killed herself (according to Kuravas). In 1996, even though the place was already arranged as a temple compound, in which one could worship

in the authentic Sanskritized way, there were still some room, for an old Kurati beggar for instance, to enter the space and temporarily manifest the different state of beings, disturbing and violating the dharmic and hierarchic order as Kali-Kurati. In 2004, the temple was renovated, gated and decorated with relief and sculptures representing pan-Indian authentic mythology. It was as if the process of Sanskritization was complete, the goddess Pavumba-Kali absolutely tamed and turned to Kali, with no room for Kuravas to intervene any more. But Uchiyamada found that, across the road, there was an ashram where Kali, possessing a young Pulaya swami, destroyed the order and exorcized spirits almost every night.

I hope that these desperately schematic summaries of his texts, which strongly resist any attempts of abridgement, still show Uchiyamada's highly distinct gaze toward (South Asian) society. He tries to see things differently by recording various 'biographies' of interactions among peoples, places, and things, tracing the connections that a structural gaze cannot see, and focusing on various moments of emergence. His focus is on the reminder or excess, what cannot be represented by social, political, and existential questions (2011: 55). It was Nicholas Dirks who pointed out 'possession was a form of ritual practice that was genuinely dangerous and always already subversive' (1994: 498). Uchiyamada goes much further in evoking the real sense of danger directly through his always highly condensed ethnographic descriptions. Moreover, he depicts these events in relation to discriminatory and drastically changing village life, more and more filled with modern and post-modern discourses and institutions.

Uchiyamada's works can be read as a serious criticism to both Sekine's and Tanabe's theoretical formulations. That few of his ethnographic snippets, if any, are reducible to the concept of ontological equality, let alone hierarchy and power, shows that Tanabe's trichotomous theorization of South Asian society is desperately partial. His treatment of amorphous power, never in terms of equality, also shakes the treatment of pollution and imputy in Sekine's ethnography. Pollution (using Sekine's term) in Uchiyamada's ethnographic accounts looks much more powerful, lively, dangerous, and amorphous than Sekine's, though this might be simply the reflection of empirical differences. At the discursive level, the first incident of his 2009 paper shows that the amorphous power exclusively accessed by 'Untouchables', which Sekine calls pollution, was discussed positively as such, though in an extremely twisted way. Sekine's theoretical and ethnographic treatment of pollution would have been quite different if he wrote his ethnography on Uchiyamada's cases.

To be sure, unlike Sekine and Tanabe, Uchiyamada has not presented a comprehensive re-theorization of Indian society. I guess he would simply refuse to carry out such an endeavour, as he has always stayed with details

of particular concrete events in real and imaginary times, and looked through them differently by tracing 'unthinkable series', invoking various anthropological and philosophical theories out there. On the other hand, his insistence on the 'excess' might also be criticized as unbalanced, but this type of criticism would be valid only if it is accompanied by what one believes to be a more balanced account of South Asian society. Both Tanabe and Sekine certainly have full rights in this regard. On my part, reading Uchiyamada's works, I sometimes (but only sometimes) feel as if he were relentlessly recording swan songs of a dying tradition, sporadically sung here and there, however, evocative they might be.

### NOTES

1. I will not, thus, discuss here works of Hiroshi Ishii, for instance, because, even though his almost incomparably detailed ethnography on social change of a Newar village (Ishii 1980) has not been published in English as such, his detailed article on a Newar village occupies a distinct and indispensable part of a collective ethnography of the Newars largely organized castewise (Gellner and Quigley 1995).
2. Sekine divided chapter one of the Japanese version to two chapters in the English versions. English versions also include many pictures which were not there in the Japanese version.
3. I am not saying that these points are no longer important. The debates have become more and more complicated and entangled.
4. Many readers of his Japanese version would have been reminded of works of the Japanese historian Amino Yoshihiko (Amino 2007).
5. I am afraid the word 'always' might be too strong here.
6. Sir Edmund Leach, Sekine's main target here, would have had many counter-arguments as a critical functionalist-structuralist-atheist.
7. This argument does not preclude the possibility that his theory might also be applicable to other societies.
8. Here Sekine substantially modified and sophisticated his argument in English versions, counting the fact that the boundaries between inside and outside pre-conditioning liminality are clearly set by the centripetal ideology (1995: 37; 2001: 32-3; 2011: 33-4).
9. This lack is curious, as Louis Dumont's ethnography includes a chapter titled 'The Religion of the Individual' (1986: 449-59).
10. I should add that his argument in this chapter of triangular relationship among '(1) those who discriminate (the ruling caste), (2) the accomplice (the lower castes) and (3) the discriminated (Untouchables)' (Sekine 2011: 352) is absolutely clear in theory. But the dominant caste is the Kallars in his village, who, according to him, hold 'pollution' ideology.
11. See Moffatt (1979: xxii) for early anthropological studies in Tamil Nadu.
12. It was first submitted as his PhD dissertation in English (2006) and then thoroughly revised and published in Japanese (2010). In the following, I use his Japanese book as the main text, though I quote from his English PhD dissertation when an almost identical explanation is found there.
13. Tokita-Tanabe's ethnography contains a brilliant description and analysis on this bio-moral order and 'dividual' personhood in the same village from the dominant caste women's perspective (Tokita-Tanabe 2011: 89-113, 2000: 52-68).

14. He underlines here that the word moral is not used as an evaluative term but as a descriptive one.
15. This also suggests that it was through his fieldwork that Tanabe found his third value, 'ontological equality'.

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