

Crab-species identification in Yaeyama folk song "amparunumidagaama yunta"

Satoki OHYAMA

Orokuminami Primary School

The Yaeyama Islands have been called the province of poetry and song since ancient times. The islands are a treasury of folklore that has attracted many scholars for many years. The islands are rich in folk songs that deal, humorously or ironically, with the small living animals around people. Among the innumerable songs about crabs, the 'amparunumidagaama yunta' song is most popular. Amparu is a mangrove swamp located about 10 km northwest of Ishigaki City and is a paradise for the coastal fauna and flora. The song describes the morphological appearances and behavioural characteristics of 15 species of small crabs at Amparu, and personifies them in a manner unique to the genre of yunta songs in the Yaeyama Islands. There is still some uncertainty about the identities of the crabs. To identify the crab species, I studied the socio-ecological context of the song in the vicinity of Amparu on Ishigaki Island.

Key words: Yaeyama Islands, folk song, man and crab, crab ethology, Amparu, ecological-anthropology.

八重山民謡「アンバルヌミダガーマユンタ」におけるカニの特定

大山了己

那覇市立小禄南小学校

八重山の島々には身近にいる小さな生物たちを主題に歌い上げた民謡が多い。石垣市の西北10キロメートルほど離れた場所に網張（アンバル）がある。この場所は広大な干潟（カタバル）で、そこには貝類、エビ・カニ類、鳥類が豊富に棲息している。このアンバルを舞台に展開される八重山の民謡「網張ヌミダガーマユンタ（アンバルヌミダガーマユンタ）」には、15種類ものカニが登場する。カニの生態、形態や行動などを巧みに捉え、擬人化したこのユンタはいわば、「鳥獣戯画」の歌謡版といえるほどの傑作である。しかし、登場するカニの種の生物学的な特定に関して従来いくつかの混乱があった。そこで、カニの民俗学・行動学的な今回の調査結果をもとにユンタに登場するカニの種の特定を試みる。

Introduction

The Yaeyama Islands have been called the province of poetry and song since ancient times. The islands are a treasury of folklore that has attracted scholars for many years.

The islands are rich in folk songs that deal, humorously or ironically, with the small living animals around people. Among the innumerable songs about crabs, the "Amparunumidagaama Yunta" song is most popular.

Amparu, is a mangrove swamp located about 10 kilometers northwest of Ishigaki City and is a paradise for the coastal fauna and flora. Although today people go to this area only to gather sea shells or catch gazami crabs, or mangrove crabs (Scylla serrata), according to the local old people it was once a recreation area where sumo wrestling tournaments and horse races were held.

The songs describes the morphological appearance and behavioural characteristics of 15 species of small crabs at Amparu, and personifies them in a manner unique to the genre. There is still some uncertainty about the identities of the crabs. To identify the crab species, I studied the socio-ecological context of the song in the vicinity of Amparu on Ishigaki Island.

Study Site and Method

From August 1983 to December 1989 I studied three areas--Nagura Ohbashi (Nagura big bridge), Nagura Kobashi (Nagura little bridge) and the Nagura River basin --to determine the crab species and populations of the area. This study focuses on those crabs mentioned in the yunta, so crabs inhabiting the upper river basin, terrestrial crabs, and crabs on reef flats or reef margins were excluded from the survey. I also gathered oral data from the old people of the area by collecting crabs, bringing them and showing them to the old people, who gave us the local names for the crabs and related folkloristic information. To verify that this information was peculiar to the inhabitants of the Nagura River we conducted the same survey in the Miyara River basin about eight kilometers east of Ishigaki City.

Results and discussions

The 32 species of crabs collected through December 1989 in both places, as well as their habitants, are listed in Table 1.

In order to understand the function of the 15 different species of crabs mentioned in this particular yunta I here add a simple commentary on the lyrics (Table 1). Line 1 through 6 (a-1) speak of a ghost crab named midagaama who lives in a burrow on the shores of Amparu, and the fact that all the crabs on the island get together to celebrate his birthday every 12 years. The 7th (a-2) and following lines describe how the preparations for the feast--from the preparation of the food to its arrangement on platters--is apportioned among the different crabs: The okagani land crabs (Cadisoma hirtipes) carry the food for the feast (Line 7 a-2); the Okinawa-anajako mud lobsters (Thalassina anomala) form the crowd (Line 8 a-3 and 21); the nokogirigazami mangrove crabs (Scylla serrata) dice the food to prepare it (Line 17 a-12); the

sodekarappa box crabs (Callapa hepatica) arrange these foods on platters (Line 19 a-14); the minamisunagani ghost crabs (Ocypode cordimana) serve the food (Line 20 a-15); and the benkeigani sesarmine (Sesarmops intermedium) procure dried fish as an offering (Line 18 a-13). At the same time, the celebration of midagaama ghost crab's birthday is stimulated by a series of musical performances, as the kinsengani armed crabs (Matuta litterata) play the flute (Line 9 a-4), the oohiraisogani shore crabs (Varuna litterata) beat the drum (Line 10 a-5), the Okinawahakusennshiomanekei fiddler crabs (Uca lactea perplexa) play the shamisen guitar (Line 11 a-6), other benishiomanekei fiddler crabs (Uca chlorophthalma crassipes) dance (Line 12 a-7), other benkeigani sesarmine (Sesarmops intermedium) perform kyogen drama (comic interlude in a Noh play) (Line 13 a-13), the nokogirigazami Japanese mitten-handed crabs (Scylla serrata) beat the gong (Line 14 a-9), the swimming crabs dance and beat on a bar (Line 15 a-8,10), and the kebukagani hairy crabs (Pilumnus vespertilio) dance the lion dance (Line 16 a-11).

Table 2 lists the behavioral characteristics of crabs in terms of their usefulness to the people of the islands as a regular and important source of food and how easily they were seen (e.g., whether diurnal or nocturnal), as well as the degree of ease with which they are found and caught, based on this study.

The intimacy and lengthy history of relations between the islanders and crabs are reflected in a folk belief prevalent throughout Yaeyama that, upon the celebration of the construction of a new home, nine crabs of any sort as well as shirenashijimi shellfish (Gelonia coaxans), locally called kigajou, must be presented on one plate to the main pillar (nakabaraa) of the house to ensure good fortune and prosperity.

There is also a folk belief that holds that certain crabs (species unidentified) are only to be offered as part of the Buddhist memorial services making the 25rd and 33rd anniversary of a decrease's death.

On Iriomote Island the burrows of the ghost crab--the hero of the yunta--are used as an aid in forecasting the weather at sea. It is said that the sea will be calm the next day if the mouth of the sand crab's burrow faces seaward; if the mouth of the burrow faces landward the sea next day will be stormy. In an age when weather forecasting was not as sophisticated as it is today, the ghost crab was the most familiar and most important barometer of weather.

Today, the ghost crab is ground and mixed with sand and used as chum or bait, called locally either muti-izu or mutinuiyu, for catching nokogiridai large-eye breams (Gnathodentex aureolineatus); from September through November it is split in halves, tied with straw rope used as bait to draw anadako octopus (Octopus oliveri). The flesh of ghost crab's walking legs is also used for fishing hadaraa squirrel fish (Myripristis sp.), which live on the slope beyond reef margins, on Hateruma and Hatoma Islands. And it is widely used in farm households as a tranquilizer to soothe boars in heat. Accordingly, the ghost crabs must be suitable for the hero of the yunta, because of such a frequent use of ghost crabs as well as human food in the daily life, the easiness to find out the crabs which move according to the tide flow, and physically-strange

characteristics of their elongated antennae over the eyes.

Table 3 shows the similarities and differences, on the basis of the results of this study, of the classification and applicable interpretations of the identities of the crabs mentioned in the yunta vis-a-vis those of Oshima and Miyake (1938), Oshima (1962) and Nakasone and Shokita (1973).

First, midagaama ghost crab, the hero of this yunta, is identified as the kometsukigani crab (Scopimera globosa) by Oshima (1962) but as a ghost crab by Nakasone et al (1973) for the higher position of its eyes. Although the height of the eyes suggest that either the osagani or the sand crab is a likely candidate, a-1 suggest the behaviour of the ghost crab because of midagaama crab's movement along the shore with the tides.

I think that the arranger in a-2 are minami-okagani land crab. At any rate, I think that the minami-okagani land crab, rather than the okagani land crab, is a more likely food carrier, for the following reasons. First, the okagani land crab, unlike the minami-okagani land crab, which inhabits the mouths of rivers and whose burrows are flooded with brackish water at high tide, though nocturnal, lives in groups on the banks of the river mouth where the water does not reach. Second, the minami-okagani land crab is larger than the okagani land crab, with larger claws that can be thought suitable for transporting food. Third, at Amparu, the okagani land crab presents fewer chances to be caught and collected than the minami-okagani land crab despite the fact that the okagani land crab inhabits the seaward and landward sides of the sands and the minami-okagani crab inhabits the earthen banks near the mangrove forests; it is possible to observe that the frequency of contact between the okagani land crab and people is lower than that between the minami-okagani land crab and people. Finally, although the okagani land crab is widely held to form into groups and go down to the sea at spawning time and so is easy for people to see, in actual fact these crabs were seldom sighted even at the peak hours of 8-10 pm at Amparu.

Nakasone and Shokita (1973) identify the drummer crabs in a-5 as oohiraisogani shore crab (Varuna litterata); they base their assertion on the fact that the local name, kikaraakan, exists in Kabira. The nearly homophonic kigaran word means something like wood chips from the chopping of wood, a literal interpretation that would make it difficult to make the drummer out as either the Taiwangazami swimming crab or oohiraisogani shore crab, although the notion of wood chips exactly describes the pattern on the shell of the Taiwangazami swimming crab. The swimming crab, which is spawned in the sea but also inhabits the sandy bottom of the river mouth, is the better candidate for the task because of its large legs and because it is one of the crabs that the islanders eat most frequently, and it is unlikely that its long history of importance in the daily lives of the people has changed. In addition, as Table 1 shows, I were unable to collect any specimens of the oohiraisogani shore crab from either the Nagura River or Miyara River survey sites, which suggests that the population is so small as to prevent any frequent encounter of these crabs by human inhabitants.

I suggest that the dancers in a-7 are hime-shiomaneki fiddler crabs (Uca vocans

vocans) and not the beni-shiomaneki fiddler crabs (U. chlorophthalma crassipes), because the latter were rarely encountered in this survey. It may be argued that the latter, because of their red claws and their habit of waving their claws, would be better suited to the role of dancers, but I think the former, which are both diurnal and gregarious, and whose population is large, would be encountered with greater frequency than the latter.

There is room for further investigation concerning the identity of the kyougen actors in a-8. The paddy fields of Amparu today are well back from the sea and do not enter into this study, and no ashiharagani grapsid crabs (Helice tridens) were found in the paddies. However, topographical analysis showing the distribution of old ridges between paddies indicates that the fields were at one time very close to the mouth of the river, and it is thought that the kurobenkeigani sesarmino (Chiromantes dehaani) and ashiharagani grapsid crabs once inhabited these ridges. The former is disliked because it damages the rice; also, it is rarely encountered because today it inhabits the mangrove forests and the middle part of the river (Table 1). The latter crab may have been encountered more frequently despite its, blackish-brown color and nocturnal disposition. I suggest that the kyogen performers were not kurobenkeigani sesarmino but ashiharagani grapsid crabs.

The identity of the bar-beating crabs of a-10 also invites further study. Nakasone and Shokita (1973) suggest that they are a type of swimming crab. In general, swimming crabs closely resemble each other in appearance, and some of them live in the shallow waters of the sea. Judging from the degree of difficulty one has in finding and catching it, the minamibenitsukegani swimming crab (Thalamita crenata) appears to be the most suitable candidate for the job; though oceanic and inhabiting the mouths of the rivers, it has a habit of bouncing up and down on its legs when threatened. Both Nohara (1976) and Oshima (1962), however, think the bar-beaters are the Taiwangazami swimming crab. The former is struck by the length of this crab's leg, while the latter thinks so because of the necessitate crossing by ferry are locally called badaree the Taiwangazami swimming crab inhabits such areas. But both theories are flawed. For one thing, the minamibenitsukegani swimming crab inhabits the same types of area that the Taiwangazami swimming crab inhabits, and both move about by bouncing up and down on their legs; also, the Taiwangazami is not called "badareekan" but simply "gazami".

I think the benkeigani sesarmino (Sesarmops intermedium) that makes offerings to the gods in a-13 are most appropriately identified as the red-clawed kumadoriougigani xanthid crab (Baptozius vinosus), though some are black-clawed. The kumadoriougigani xanthid crab (Baptozius vinosus) though nocturnal and solitary, can be found under rocks and in the exposed roots of mangrove forests and collected with ease, has a unique coloration and varies richly in appearance. Its distinctive purplish-brown shell and red-jointed claws, as well as the pattern of the underside of the mouth and eyes, mimic the make-up of a kabuki actor so closely that it is no surprise to find it included in the yunta.

I think the waiters of a-20 are ghost crabs, though Nohara (1976) thinks they are the menagaosagani sentinel crab, with their eyes positioned on two long stalks, and Oshima thinks they are tsunomegani ghost crabs (Ocypode ceratophthalma). Now the local name for this crab is "parumayakan"; the word "parumayaa" means as quick as a horse, which is not unlike the actions of a scrambling waiter. The ghost crab is perfect for this part, whereas the menagaosagani sentinel crab hardly moves at all.

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