

The Ancestors of a New Society: The Tribes (Buzoku) and their Journey through the Misunderstandings of the Japanese Countercultural Scene

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Abstract

Buzoku 部族, generally translated as The Tribe (or The Tribes), was a transnational collective of artists, poets, activists, and young people who soon became one of the most vital Japanese counterculture voices. Between 1967 and 1980, they participated in what they called “building a new society into the shell of this civilization” in the Japanese islands. Despite scholars and mass media’s recent interest in their lives and literary works, there are common misunderstandings resulting from characterizing Buzoku as the Japanese hippies, or fūten. This paper focuses on the transition period (1965-1968), going from the foundation of the prior group named Bum Academy to the formation of Buzoku. This article recounts this part of their history to show that this transition was vital for forging Buzoku’s identity and original ideology guided by a cross-cultural approach to spirituality and arts. They used a range of synchronization, translation, appropriation, and juxtaposition skills to set the bases of a “dreamed” community of tribes. This research shows that at least one countercultural collective in Japan’s sixties scene was involved in complex linguistic, artistic, and spiritual synchronizations with the global scene while simultaneously practicing the art of embodying the dream of building a new civilization.

Keywords: Buzoku, countercultural, fūten, hippie, Nanao Sakaki

Introduction

Buzoku 部族, generally translated as The Tribe (or The Tribes) was the name adopted by a group of artists, poets, activists, and young people that between 1967 and 1980 participated in the creation of what they called “a new society into the shell of this civilization”¹ in the Japanese islands. During this time, the group, originally divided into five “tribes”, founded three communes and meditation centers, printed a newspaper, attempted for communitarian agriculture and business, hold artistic parades, poetry readings, and took part in environmental and spiritual activism. Despite its short existence, their collective experiences and artistic works served as a precedent for the Japanese countercultural movements, the alternative media, and the artistic sensibility of the next generations.

Because the group was strongly inspired and nurtured directly by the beatnik and the American countercultural ambient of the sixties’ decade, specially through Gary Snyder and Allen Ginsberg, it is often associated with the beatnik, hippie and fūten generational identities. However, as Nagasawa Tetsuo one of the founders of Buzoku has clarified in many interviews, the members of these “tribes” did not identify themselves with these names, but rather perceived their groups as part of a transnational movement of many tribes that were creating a new culture and building a new civilization. Even though the group was mainly formed by Japanese, they also received people from other nationalities and participated in varied translation projects. Despite their members settled in different locations and found different paths in life, the movement shared a common origin in the “Bum Academy” (Bamu Academī バム・アカデミー or sometimes written as ^{バム・アカデミー} 乞食学会) a previous group of vagabond poets founded by Nanao Sakaki, Yamao Sansei, Nagasawa Tetsuo and Akiba Kenji, which adopted the name from a suggestion of Gary Snyder, who connected the way of life of these Japanese artists with Jack Kerouac’s novel called *The Dharma Bums*.

Today, Buzoku’s life stories and works are becoming powerful voices in the Japanese literary and cultural scene. For example, the Tokyo Poetry Journal issue on the Japanese beatnik scene “Japan & The Beats” (vol. 5, 2018) and the Spectator Magazine issue titled “The Japanese Hippie Movement” (vol. 45, 2019)² focus their attention on Buzoku’s poets. Even before this, episodes from Buzoku’s time had attracted Gary Snyder’s biographers’ attention, and Nanao Sakaki is still a well-known name for almost all the beatnik generation scholars. Moreover, recently, Buzoku’s founder’s poetry, particularly Nanao Sakaki and Yamao Sansei’s works, has come into the spotlight of Transpacific and Japanese environmental and cultural criticism (Nagakari 2004, Thornber, 2012, 2014, Teranishi 2015, Masami, 2017, Melchy, 2017). The recent bibliography illuminates Buzoku’s contributions to the ecological literature and the connections between Japanese counterculture, environmentalism, and spirituality. Also, Buzoku’s legacy is now becoming perceived by the Japanese mass media as containing valuable teachings and messages for current environmental issues (Yamamoto, 2020).

¹ The theme was initially coined by the Industrial Workers of the World labor union, commonly known as wobblers. Gary Snyder echoes this theme in his article “Passage to more than India”, published in *Earth House Hold. Technical Notes & Queries To Fellow Dharma Revolutionaries*, New York: New Directions, 1969. Buzoku’s manifesto (*Buzoku sengen*) of 1967 appropriated this theme. This appropriation introduces the main topic of this paper: the countercultural synchronizations, appropriations, and juxtapositions carried by the Japanese members of Buzoku.

² Nihon no hippī mūvumento. We are the primitives of an unknown culture. Spectator Magazine Vol. 45. (2019)

Despite all this new interest and recognition to the influence of their life and works, to a curious observer not being Japanese nor being part of the Japanese countercultural generation, there are still gaps and obscure parts in Buzoku's history that make it challenging to identify their protagonist, their movements, the particularities of Buzoku's "ideology," and the origins of their ideas and dreams. Nevertheless, there is a considerable number of sources and documents: the memories written by Buzoku's founders: Yamao Sansei and Pon (Yamada Kaiya), the pictures taken by notable photographers such as Fukushima Kikujirō, the Buzoku's publications, magazine articles, and interviews. However, most of these materials are not available in libraries or bookstores, and they scarcely circulate beyond the countercultural and underground scene. I have found one of the major archives in Hobbito-mura, an alternative life center located in Ogikubo, Tokyo, that was founded as a commune. Hobbito-mura holds a library, a cafeteria, a meditation room, and a free-of agrochemical vegetable shop. Among the many projects carried in Hobbito-mura, one especially significant in preserving Buzoku's memory has been a cycle of interviews with the protagonists of the Japanese counterculture called "Countercultural Archive: My Blue Sky" (Kauntākaruchā ākaibu: Watashi no Aozora). The recorded interviews and other valuable materials in the Archive have been uploaded by Makita Kikori on his Youtube channel.

In this paper, I want to focus on the "period of transition" (1965-1968) that goes from the foundation of the "Bum Academy," by a group of poets that gathered in a cafeteria in Shinjuku, to the formation of "Buzoku," a transnational collective that soon became one of the most vital voices in the Japanese counterculture. This article attempt is to show that this transition was vital for forging Buzoku's identity and original ideology, which defies the stereotypical notions around many countercultural discourses. This originality also helps us understand Buzoku's criticism of the material civilization (busshitsu bunmei 物質文明) and their connections with the international beatnik scene. As this historical recount tries to show, Buzoku was fundamentally a movement seeking to create an alternative global modern culture guided by a cross-cultural approach to spirituality and arts. They used their poetical and artistical complicity, translation skills, and networks to set the bases of a "dreamed" community firmly rooted in work, "primitive" and "ancestral wisdom" while engaging in a cross-cultural vision of modernity that was synchronized with the generational spirit of the sixties. Buzoku's seed and its legacy were born amidst many processes of synchronization, translation, appropriation, and juxtaposition carried by artists, hitchhiking travelers, and very young people. The Buzoku seed began at a coffee lounge called Fugetsudō in the Shinjuku area and then moved to a farming landscape, a volcano island, and a building in the suburbs.

This article is based on an extensive history of Buzoku published in Spectator magazine volume no.45 titled "The Japanese Hippie Movement: We are the primitives of an unknown culture" (2019), particularly on the manga there included, titled "The Japanese Hippie Movement" by Akata Ryūchi 赤田 祐一 and Sekine Myū 関根美有, and the interview to Nagasawa Tetsuō and facsimile documents included in that issue. It also integrates some Yamao Sansei's memories to be found in the book: *The narrow path: Family, Work and Beloved things (Semai michi. Kazoku to shigoto to aisuru koto*, 2018), the testimony of Miyauchi Katsusuke (1987) and an anonymous special feature on Buzoku's poetical parade held in Miyazaki, published by the Shūkan Dokubai magazine in 1967. I also decided to include some photographs from the *The Tribes Diary (Buzoku shinbun*, 1967) and Fukushima Kikujirō photographic essays in *The postwar youth, part II. Ribu and Fūten (Sengo no wakamonotachi, part II ribu to fūten*, 1981).

Fugetsudō Coffeehouse

Fugetsudō Coffeehouse (風月道 喫茶店) was a coffee shop and music lounge located in the district of Shinjuku (3-chōme) near to the East exit of Shinjuku Station in Tokyo. The medium-sized business opened from 1951-1973. It was owned by the record entrepreneur and wealthy painting collector Goro Yokoyama and managed by Yamaguchi Mamoru. It was a popular meeting place for Japanese and international countercultural artists, beatniks, and hippies in Tokyo during the sixties.

According to Akane and Sekine, during the fifties and early sixties, the Shinjuku district was characterized by cheap hotels that received many low-budget international travelers who came to the Tokyo Olympics in 1964. Among those travelers was the journalist John Wilcock, who published in 1965 the travel bestseller *Japan and Hong Kong on Five Dollars a Day*, in which Fugetsudō is described as the hotspot of the Japanese artistic vanguard.³ John Wilcock's book led to the popularization of Shinjuku among many young travelers from around the world making Fugetsudō an ideal place for encounters between Japanese and Foreign backpackers, artists, and travelers. According to Yamaguchi Mamoru, the interaction between foreigners and Japanese raised a shared sense of solidarity (Akata and Sekine 2019, 53)

Fugetsudō is described as a place where people could sit for many hours just by consuming a coffee cup. It is described as a two-floor classic coffeehouse with a cosmopolitan ambient. The first floor was a common meeting point for artists, young people, and travelers, while the second floor was a well-known meeting point for the Japanese Student Political Activists of Zengakuren (全学連). It was frequently compared with the famous Greenwich Village District cafeterias of Manhattan. Also, it was the meeting point for a translation study group that gathered every night. Fukujima Kikujirō display twenty pictures, along with an introduction on Fugetsudō. His pictures capture the atmosphere of the Shinjuku coffee shop, as seen on Figure 1.

³ Time after, it would be called the “meca” of the Japanese hippies and an avant-garde spot visited by artists such as Ono Yoko, Terayama Shūji, and Akaji Maro (Akata and Sekine 43–44)

Figure 1

Interior of Fugetsudō Coffee shop in Shinjuku (Fukushima 福島, 1981)



Among the people participating in Fugetsudō study and translation group was Nanao Sakaki, a vagabond poet and frequent visitor who used to approach friendly to the different people gathered in the coffee lounge. Yamao Sansei says that whenever he was always penniless, Nanao was a natural leader and a confident person who always figured the way somebody would invite him some drink (Yamao 山尾, 2018, p. 41). Despite his eccentricity, or maybe because of it, Nanao was also a natural leader for many young people, among them Yamao himself and Nagasawa Tetsuo, a young poet and Sanskrit translator who used to hang out with Nanao in Fugetsudō. Fugetsudō was the place that hosted the translation study group and later became the “meeting point” of Bum Academy members and a place that fostered their contact with foreigners. Yamaguchi also remembers Fugetsudō as the place where a kind of “tribal” ideology appeared around 1965, when all the Translation Group members appeared dressed in Ainu attires and with a strange new appearance. According to Yamaguchi he could feel that at this point the group had already formed an ideological basis and become a community (Akata and Sekine 54) ⁴. Nonetheless there was still some way to go before the formation of Buzoku

⁴ According to Akata and Sekine, the “Bum Academy” group had already departed from the Fugetsudō ambient by 1965. (54)

in 1967. This transition period is characterized by the group's first public demonstrations as The Bum Academy.

The “Bum Style”

In 1965, Nanao Sakaki, “Nāga” (Nagasawa Tetsuo), Yamada Kaiya, Yamao Sansei, and the senior high school student “Namo” (Nagamoto Mitsuo) formed a new group they called Bum Academy (Bamu Academī バム・アカデミー or sometimes written as 乞食学会). Bum Academy forged a collective identity based on literary translations and practices of wandering through the Japanese islands that Nanao began to learn and promote around a decade before. Nanao's school of wandering was built on a set of appropriations and juxtapositions of Asian and Japanese spiritual wandering narratives (haiku poets and Buddhist sages), the visions on wandering and nomadism by indigenous peoples, and the beatnik countercultural wandering narrative. Nanao's forged these visions in his own life and wandering practice, in such a way that people used to call it simply as Nanao's style, or what Yamao Sansei calls “the way of the vagabonds” (放浪者の道).

Regarding the term “Bum”, it was adopted by Nanao and his followers, who were inspired by Jack Kerouac's novels. According to Miyauchi, the writer and Zen practitioner Gary Snyder, once named, in a joking manner, Nanao's Sakaki group as the “Bum Academy” due to their style that resembled the hitchhiking poets described in Kerouac's novels. In addition to this, almost all Nanao's friends had read Jack Kerouac's novel *On the road*, and probably, the novel *The Dharma Bums* (The book appeared translated into Japanese until 1973 translated as *Zen hippie* 禅ヒッピー). For instance, Miyauchi who was 17 or 18 years old at the time, had *On the road* as a model for a way of life to follow (Miyauchi, 1987, p.153) For Miyauchi, a charming aspect of the beatnik generation was their approach to Buddhism. (p.153). Moreover, according to Miyauchi, the Japanese “bums” were enchanted by the beatnik's writers' ideals of a “return” to the primitive, spiritual, and wild (荒野) amidst a civilization perceived in crisis (p.154-155). Also, Yamao Sansei reflects on the foundation of the Bum Academy and his connection with Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road*, as follows: “When I was a university student, I read Jacks Kerouac's *On the Road* and was knocked down by his book. Then, I was just an insignificant private tutor, but my soul wanted to beat.”⁵

According to Yamao Sansei, since before the foundation of the “Bum Academy,” Nanao instructed young people, who often approached him looking for advice, to embark on long journeys across the country without or almost without money. To travel without money was the only condition that Nanao set out to these younger people overwhelmed by their lifestyles. Yamao relates in his memories an episode on how Nanao instructed a friend called Shirasu Ryū (Shiro) who used to work in a juvenile detention facility (鑑別所) in Nerima:

- Your eyes are dirty— said Nanao.
- I can't bear looking at your dirty eyes, so please embark on a long journey—repeated Nanao.
- And how should I do that travel— asked Shiro.

⁵ 学生の頃、ジャック・ケラワックの『路上』を読み、その本にぶっとばされていた僕は、形の上ではしがいない家庭教師だったが、魂はビートのつもりだった。(Yamao, 2018, p.43)

- Take out your pants— replied Nanao. When Shiro obediently took off his pants, Nanao took a scissor he had neat to him and cut the pant legs to half, transforming the garment into short pants.
- Now put that on and set out to your trip— said Nanao.
- Yes, replied Shiro, putting on his cut pants, and despite owning just one or two hundred yens, he departed from Tokyo to Kagoshima by hitchhiking.
(Yamao 山尾, 2018, p. 38)⁶

As revealed by the previous episode, Nanao was very serious about traveling without money as a way to purify one's life. The instruction of traveling without money may force people to perform two actions that seemed necessary for Nanao: to walk long distances and to connect with other people. Nanao knew this by experience, and as an admirer and translator of Kobayashi Issa haikus and Milarepa chants, he also knew that these experiences were constituent parts of ancient and spiritual paths for discovering our true self. Nanao's style differed from the common ways of travel promoted by the burgeoning "material civilization" testing people self-confidence and determination. In a time in which modernization had provided Japanese society with effective means of transport that had become a consumable commodity, Nanao's way would force people to travel, opening our body, mind, and senses to the risk of a broader experience of discovering the material and non-material connectedness with others.

To sum up, "The Bum Academy" was a cross between paths, between Nanao's vagabond way grown in Japan's streets and country roads during the fifties and early sixties and the attempt of Nanao and his followers to synchronize this way with their admired American beatnik peers. This counter-cultural synchronization materializes in the term that Yamao Sansei uses to name the Bum Academy: ^{バム・アカデミー} 乞食学会 a neologism that translates and synchronizes a Japanese word and a Buddhist term with an American beatnik identity flag. Fugetsudō's translation circle and the experience of encountering with international beatniks were some of the factors that facilitated this counter-cultural synchronization. Literature and poetry became translation vehicles for this group of young artists exploring their spiritual path around Nanao's and Gary's figures. The friendship between these admired Japanese and American poets was seen as a bridge that connected spiritually young Japanese voices with those of their American peers.

In 1966 the Bum Academy organized The First Festival of the Bum Academy in Shinjuku. The next year, they organized a Second Festival, which the invitation was published in the Psyche Journal no. 001 (April 5th of 1967) designed by Pon and Toshie Nakazima. In this Journal appear an invitation signed by Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, and Paul Krassner to manifest against the war and for peace; also appear a poetic manifesto in Japanese and English divided into eight sections arranged in a design of Buddhist inspiration (Designed by Yamada Kaiya).

⁶ 「君の眼は汚い」

とナナオが言った。

「君の眼は汚くて見るに耐えない。旅に出なさい」

とナナオが言った。

「ようやく旅に出るんですか」

とシロは尋ねた。

「君のズボンを脱げ」

とナナオが言った。シロが素直にズボンを脱ぐと、側にあったハサミでそのズボンを半パンに切手、

「それをはいて旅に出なさい」とナナオは言った。

「はい」

とシロは答え、半パンに切られたズボンをはくと、百円か二百円のお金は持っていただろうが、そのまま東京から鹿児島へ向かって、ヒッチハイクの旅に出て行った。(p.38)

It also appears the invitation to the poetical parade “Revolution by Love” (Designed by Toshie Yakazima). It also appears Gary Snyder’s text “Buddhism & the coming revolution” translated into Japanese by Nagasawa Tetsuo. (with a picture from July 1963 of Nagasawa, Snyder, and Ginsberg in Kyoto).

The Bum Academy carried out its Second Festival titled “Revolution by Love. Poem reading, Free Words & Music”. The pamphlet of the event has written the names Nanao Sakaki, Gary Snyder, Phillip Whalen, Franco Beltrametti, Harry Hoogstraten, Yamao Sansei, Nagasawa Tetsuo, and Akiba Kenji. Also, it has written: “Bring shōchū and goats! Bring a wonderful kiss! Bring dandelions and flowers of renga, and also bring your frustration! A Gathering and a Parade for a Prophecy of Destruction of Human Beings” (p.51.)⁷ At this Festival, the Bum Academy poets carried out a Poetical Parade that announced the “collapse of the world” (sekai no metsubō 世界の滅亡). The parade departed from Toyama Heights to Shinjuku station’s west exit. The next day was carried a poetry reading in the Meiji Yasuda Hall (新宿西口安田生命ホール)⁸. The festival was followed the same year by a Third Festival in Miyazaki city (August 20-21, 1967) and a fourth Festival carried in 1968 in Kagoshima city. As Akata and Sekine note, this festival was carried just three months after the massive parade called Human Be-In that gathered around 30 mil people in San Francisco, suggesting that there was an intense transpacific dialogue among these young scenes. Also, it seems that during this period appeared among the Bum Academy the slogan “We are the primitives of an unknown culture” (ware ha mada shirarezaru bunmei no genshijin de aru ワレラハ未ダ知ラレザル文明の原始人デアル).

The Born of Buzoku as a Tribe of Tribes

In the Japanese context, Buzoku history is the story of a “tribe” among other tribes of the sixties. For instance, the suffix 族 is used to refer to the collective gathered around a specific place or identity: Fugetsudō-zoku or fūten-zoku. Akata and Sekine’s work helps us understand this landscape of different tribes, which shared familiar meeting places, tastes, and outlooks by the late sixties. Among these “tribes” were also the so-called hippies and fūten (Japanese young people who adopted hippie fashion and a semi-homeless lifestyle). As Akata and Sekine point out the Japanese media tended to refer to them indistinctly as hippies of fūten. Even so, Bum Academy members had their own characteristic ideals and visions, or what Yamaguchi called their ideology.

There are many reasons why Bum Academy members decided to transform and split the group into tribes and attempt a new way of life different from the countercultural scene in Tokyo. Some of these reasons are:

1. The desire to engage in full-time communal living led to the necessity to find a place to settle down collectively.
2. The changes taking place in the burgeoning Tokyo due to gentrification: The Fugetsudō staff became less permissive with the Bum members’ non-consuming practices.
3. Gary Snyder’s text “Why Tribe” of 1966, translated by Nāga, plus letters and diaries received with news on the West Coast scene (especially San Francisco Oracle underground newspaper) that inspired the Bum members to go into a new stage.
4. The Bum members’ connection with the spiritual and ancient practices (Zen meditation, Advaita, Milarepa, native American, Ainu, and Australian aboriginal spiritual visions)

⁷ 「焼酎もってこい、山羊もってこい！ ゴールデンバットもってこい！ 素晴らしい Kiss もってこい！ タンポポとレンゲの花もってこい、フラストレーションも！ *Psyche Journal* facsimile reproduction in (Akata 赤田 & Sekine 関根, 2019, p. 51)

⁸ This Hall operated until May 31st, 2017 when it was finally closed. <http://meijiyasuda-life-hall.com/>

was perceived as trivialized by the ongoing popularization of the hippie fashion and the “junkie” counterculture (two aspects that became characteristic of fūten).

The first and second reasons are closely related to the urban space. According to Pon, one of the members of the Tribe cited by Akita and Sekine, despite Shinjuku in 1967 still being the spot for the fūten, gay and anarchist scene, the zone was rearranged as part of an urbanization plan before 1970 (when the Us-Japan Security Treaty was going to be extended). Open meeting points as the famous green area called The Greenhouse (グリーンハウス) were prohibited or suppressed. Namo, one of the new Buzoku members, also explains that many of the bums (including him) wanted to settle permanently in a place wide enough to accommodate many people, and thus began to search for ideal spaces in Tokyo’s outskirts.

Regarding drug consumption, Bum Academy members’ irritation in front of the hippie movement’s ongoing popularization of drugs is more subtle and even complicated. According to Miyauchi, between the “process that goes from beatniks to commune living” was the “drug issue” (Miyauchi 154). Miyauchi says that he sympathized with a particular vision of consuming mushrooms, marijuana, and peyote (LDS, which was prohibited in Japan in 1970) as spiritual jumpers, while unable to empathize with the “junkie” vision of drug consuming as represented in that time by heroin and Burroughs approach to drug consuming. Even so, the junkie vision soon became particularly popular in Tokyo, during the summer of 1967, and many youngsters who escaped their house in 1967, embraced the hippie fashion, a homeless life, and popularized thinner inhalation in plastic bags. They were the so-called fūten, portrayed by the Japanese media as the Japanese hippies.⁹

Unlike the Bum Academy members, these youngsters were mainly boys and girls who had escaped their houses without any apparent intention of contesting the materialist civilization, connecting with spiritual practices, or building a new culture. Conversely, the Bum members had a special synchronicity with the beatnik generation members Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder and their participation in the hippie movement was moved by the communitarian, global, anti-war, and psychoactive vision on a new culture. Also, the Bums felt connected with the Japanese “primitives” of the Jōmon period, with the saints of India and other peoples of the world left apart by the “materialist civilization”. These features persisted and deepened when they turned into Buzoku in 1967. The photography essay of Fukushima Kikujirō who visited the Fujimi commune or “Bum Ashram” in 1967 exemplify his perplexity before to what

⁹ Fūten (フーテン), coming from the existing word fūten 瘋癲 was the name adopted by groups of young people that escaped from their houses and began to gather in the so-called “greenhouse” (グリーン・ハウス) a wide lawn area and Shinjuku station area. According to Akata and Sekine (2018) these young people adopted the style and fashion of the American hippies, started a semi-homeless life around Shinjuku, and used to sniff inhalants such a thinner consume sleeping drugs such as haiminaaru, (ハイミナル) called by them as Rariru (p. 64) Most of fūten were under twenty years, liked modern jazz music and adopted this lifestyle without any manifesting any political stance or criticism toward the social status quo. Following Bīto Takeshi, Akata and Sekine distinguish fūten from hippie since the first can be described as Japanese young people that just copied the hippie fashion and lifestyle, without adopting their anti-war attitudes, utopian community dreams or critical messages. According to Akata and Sekine, Japanese newspapers, reporters and magazines tended to call these young people the Japanese version of American hippie, using indistinctly fūten zoku and hippī zoku (Akata and Sekine 68). The people of the tribes were classified as fūten or hippies by the media (and later too by other artists from the countercultural scene); however, many of them were openly against being called by these names. When questioned by reporters and people curious about their identity, they called themselves just “bums” (ノム), “vagabonds” (放浪者), “harijans” (ハリジャン) or “primitives” (原始人) who gathered into tribes that shared the common dream of forming a new culture and civilization.

seemed a generational phenomenon of primitive-peasant young people in the plenty of the economically buoyant sixties in Japan (figures 2 and 3):

Figure 2

Nanda, One of the Founding Members of Buzoku in the Thunderbolt Red Crow Tribe Commune (Fukushima 福島, 1981)

Figure 3

Unidentified. Thunderbolt Red Crow Tribe Commune (Fukushima 福島, 1981)



Before displaying the fourteen pictures of this section, Fukushima Kikujirō writes an introductory testimony on his visit to the commune founded by the Thunderbolt Red Crow Tribe, one of the tribes of Buzoku. In this paragraph, one member of the commune manifests his unconformity with being called *fūten* and explains his own vision:

Unfortunately, the chief, Sansei Yamao, was digging potatoes in the hatake, so one of the young members, who was urban looking, offered himself to guide me. “It’s annoying that we’re called *fūten* ...” he said first. The ideal of the Red Crows was to predict the end of material civilization, to restore the original form of human beings by creating an ancient society in this mountain, and to expand a “new human class society.” ... They called themselves *harijans* (children of the gods, classless); by the same token, they called each other, regardless of their class or scholarship: “Sansei”, “Nanda”, “Captain”, “Boy A”, and so on. These

primitive men used to be a devout worshiper, an artist, and a top-mode stylist.
(Fukushima 福島, 1981, pp. 106–107)¹⁰

The Original 5 Tribes

During the summer of 1967, the members of the Bum Academy (except for Nanao, who had departed to a new journey) held a meeting in a Coffee shop called Seiga (青蛾). During that meeting, Bum Academy members changed the group's name to Buzoku 部族 (The Tribes) and proposed a newspaper's edition be called with the same name. For Nāga (Nagasawa Tetsuo), who had translated an article sent to the group by Gary Snyder titled “Why Tribe” (1966), the occasion was an opportunity for the group to jump into a new stage of building community (Akata and Sekine 59). In “Why Tribe,” the term tribe is proposed by Snyder as a term to refer to a type of community in the “new society emerging within the industrial nations” and “a group without nation or territory which maintains its own values, its language and religion, no matter what country it may be in” (Snyder, *Earth House Hold* 113). 1967 was a decisive year for the transition from the “Bum Academy” to “Buzoku”. According to Akata and Sekine's recounting of events, in the months from April to September of 1967, five tribes were established. These tribes were:

1. The Thunderbolt Red Crow Tribe. (Kaminari akagarasu zoku カミナリ赤鴉族).

This tribe moved to the valley of Fujimi in Nagano Prefecture at the foot of Mt. Nyūkasa (Nyūkasayama 入笠山). The Thunderbolt Red Crow Tribe was the first to settle a “base camp” in a 2000 square meter terrain that Yamao Sansei and three friends bought in Fujimi valley (around April of 1967). Nagasawa Tetsuo and Akiba Kenji were the first ones that moved to the terrain to begin with the camp base's construction, logging, and farming. The name was inspired by a local myth about a three-legged Crow that symbolized the Mountain and the frequent lightings.¹¹ Fukushima Kikujirō's photographic essay: The Thunderbolt Red Crow Tribe's thoughts and expressions (Kaminari akagarasu zoku no shikō to hyōgen かみなり赤烏族の思考と表現) displays his visit to the commune and meditation center. As described by Fukushima, at the commune's entrance stood a plate with the legend “Bum Ashrama” written on it.

2. The Banyan's Dream Tribe. (Gajumaru no yume zoku がじゅまるの夢族).

This Tribe moved to the island of Suwanose in Kagoshima Prefecture and established a meditation center that was later renamed as the **Banyan Ashram** (バンヤン・アシュラム). The center and its commune lasted until 1980 when it was finally dissolved (Maebara 96). The idea of turning the meditation center into an ashram seems to have emerged from the spiritual connection that many members of these tribes felt toward Hinduism. Nanao's original vision for this ashram was to build in the island a “meditation center” in which they could retire to cultivate their body and spirit and practice a sustainable life by farming and fishing. For Nanao, this was a necessary step for Buzoku members to overcome what he called the “disbelief of the modern civilization” (gendai bunka no fushin 現代文化の不信) (“Nihon Hippōzoku Minami

¹⁰ 折悪しく酋長の山尾三省氏は畠に芋を掘りにでていたので、割に都会じみた青年の一人が案内役をしてくれた。「われわれがフーテンよばかりされているのは迷惑だ……」と彼はまず言った。赤烏族の理想は、物質文明の終末を予測し、この山中に、古代社会を創造することによって人間の原形を回復させ、”新人類部属社会。を全国に拡げてゆくことだった。……彼らは自らをハリジャン(神々の子、無階級者)と称していた。従って階級、学識を問わずお互いをサンセイ、ナンダ キャプテン、少年A、という具合に呼びあっていた。この原始人たちは、敬虔な宗教者、アーティスト、トップモードのスタイリストだった。

¹¹ Akata and Sekine vividly illustrate in their manga on The tribe “one ordinary day” in the Thunderbolt Red Crow Tribe Commune.

No Shima Ni Tatekomoru” 15). More than envisioning a commune, Nanao envisioned a still and quiet place for meditation and spiritual practicing. Near to the place where Buzoku settled stands a banyan tree in which they used to meditate. Apart from Nanao, among the first ones who moved to Suwanose in 1967 were Nanda and Kyappu (Shinkai Kenji), later in July arrived Nāga, Gary Snyder, and Masa Uehara.

3. The Emerald Breeze Tribe. (Emerarudo soyokaze zoku エメラルドそよ風族 or sometimes Emerarudo burīzu エメラルド・ブリーズ).

This Tribe moved to the district of Kokubunji in Tokyo and founded a commune-house in a two-floor building that became a long-term residence for around 20 Tribe’s members. The rental of the entire building was arranged by Yamao Sansei when the commune was set up in 1968. In the commune, the Tribe’s members shared their food and ran three commune’s business: a food cart of Kagoshima style ramen (鹿児島ラーメンの屋台) and a rock music cafeteria named Horakai (ほら貝). The commune lasted for two years, until 1970, when the building was sold and the commune dissolved. (Maebara マエバラ, 2019, p. 95)

4. The Seven-Colored Rainbow Mantle Tribe. (Nanairo no niiji no manto zoku 七色の虹のマント族).

This tribe supposedly gathered around Gary Snyder and his peers in Kyoto. Nevertheless, some months later, Gary and Masa moved to Suwanose island, and the tribe merged with the Banyan’s Dream Tribe.

5. The Dreaming Hermit Crab Tribe. (Yume miru yadokari zoku 夢みるやどかり族)

This tribe moved to Miyazaki city by invitation of a local abstract painter named Itō Asahi (伊東旭), who was a sympathizer of Nanao and his peers. On August 20 and 21, they carried the third “Bum Festival” in the Miyazaki Jingu sanctuary and the surrounding areas. According to a special feature published by a weekly magazine, this festival included yoga and meditation sessions and held a musical-poetic parade. (“Nihon Hippiizoku Minami No Shima Ni Tatekomoru,” 1967, p. 13). Later, near the coast, in what is today part of the city’s port, some members founded a commune that lasted until 1971 or 72. (Ono 小野, 2015)

The Publication of The Tribe Diary and the Founding of Communes

On December 20th of 1967 was published the first diary of Buzoku’s tribes, just called “The Tribe Diary” (Buzoku Shinbun 部族新聞). In this first number appeared Nāga’s manifesto titled “Declaration of The Tribes” (Buzoku sengen 部族宣言), which would become later one of Buzoku’ most representative manifestos. The first volume had a print-run of ten thousand copies in full color. It had a cost of one hundred yen and became a major hit among the countercultural scene in Japan, especially among the fūten and other young people who used to hang out in the Shinjuku area. The second number of “The Tribe Diary” appeared on June 20th of 1968, pressed by The Emerald Breeze Tribe. As can be perceived from fig.1 and fig.2, there are some similarities between the San Francisco Oracle diary and The Tribe Diary: the two-color print designs, the themes portraying an Indian ascetic, the psychedelic motifs, and the use of the cover page as a pamphlet for a collective event to be held.

Figure 4

The San Francisco Oracle, Cover of No. 5. January, 1967 (Cohen, 1967)

Figure 5

The Tribes Diary, Cover of No.1. December, 1967 (in Yamada 山田, 2009)



The San Francisco Oracle (Figure 4, left) was an underground newspaper published in San Francisco by the poet Allen Cohen. Its 12 issues were published from 1966 until 1968. The newspaper published many poems and texts of beatnik generation writers such as Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder. The vol.1 no.5 (January 1967) displayed on its cover a poster for the “Gathering of the Tribes in the Human Be”, a performance held on January 14th, 1967. Similarly, The Tribe Diary cover (Figure 5, right) displays a poster for participating in the recently established Meditation Center by the Thunderbolt Red Crow Tribe.

Newspaper publishing and meditation center-commune’s foundation were also ways in which the Buzoku members synchronized with the ongoing movement of forming communes that emerged across the United States of America. As intentional communities, many of these communes initially took inspiration for their alternative lifestyle from European and American socialist cooperatives, Native American people’s villages, and religious communities such as Indian Ashrams. For example, just in New Mexico, around 30 ashrams-communes were established in the sixties, although almost all of them closed before 1973 (Lama Foundation, n.d.). Although through many transformations, one of the communes that remain until today is the Lama Foundation, founded in 1967. In the same way, Buzoku’s communes were raised, taking elements from Hindu, Buddhist, and Native American spiritual paths, and combining them in a juxtaposed collage of communitarian lifestyle that was going to be proved by difficulties and challenges. Similarly, to many American countercultural communes, Buzoku’s

communes were dissolved as members moved or quit, while some proved to be the seed for new communities still remaining.

Conclusion

First of all, creating a picture of the origins of The Tribe underlines the fact that it emerged among a local scene in Japan (Shinjuku) in which many countercultural collectives (called tribes) were coexisting. As the consciousness of a global countercultural scene spread after 1965, many groups were labeled (because of their fashion and attitudes) by the Japanese media under the hippie's etiquette or *fūten* (equivalent to the Japanese hippie). Moreover, when Buzoku members moved beyond Tokyo, their performances, meditation centers, and communes were perceived as part of the hippie movement and the *fūten* phenomenon. Nevertheless, The Tribe's ideology has its origins years before the hippie movement's appearance in Japan and America in an active period between 1965 and 1967 as the Bum Academy. As a result, both Japanese hippies and *fūten* tended to see Buzoku as their predecessor and often mention them as an inspiration. This research suggests that these factors contributed to perceive Buzoku as the first hippies or *fūten*. Nonetheless, the tribe's wanderer poets, artists, and people that moved to the communes did not identify themselves with any of these generational flags, neither with the beatnik one.

Secondly, the research on impressions and episodes from The Bum Academy members reveals that the group ethos was highly influenced by Nanao Sakaki's way of practicing wandering (*horōsha no michi* 放浪者の道) and Gary Snyder's perspectives of the beatnik and other countercultural movements. This significant double influence at the group formation shows a continuous collaborative effort to synchronize the Japanese wandering ethos with the Western countercultural ethos (bums). This transpacific countercultural synchronization was adjusted with the beatnik ethos through Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and majorly through Gary Snyder's figure. Gary Snyder was the direct interlocutor for Buzoku members due to his Japanese language proficiency and because he was living in Japan. Consequently, his vision and interpretation of the West's countercultural scene became predominant in the groups' way of synchronizing with the global countercultural scenario.

Thirdly, The Tribe's synchronization process with the global countercultural scene must not be seen as a crude or pale imitation. According to this research, the countercultural synchronization of Buzoku was also a complex exercise of translations and appropriations. A representative example is a visually evident juxtaposition in the term ^{バム・アカデミー} 乞食学会 (a neologism replacing the phonetic reading *kojigakakai* こじきがっかい that corresponds with the kanji traditional reading with the anglicism *bamu academi* バム・アカデミー) and the appropriation of the term "bum" (バム), both used in the Bums Academy names in Japanese. Also, it is worth noting that these translations and appropriations were not only directed toward the American counterculture. Yamao Sansei's appropriation of the term "harijan" shows that they were also synchronizing their identities, not only as wanderers but also as marginal Asian peoples. These multiple directions suggest an early separation between Nanao's wandering and Yamao's way. As revealed by this Bum Academy formation history, this complex synchronization could only be done by a translation process and openness previously facilitated by the Fugetsudō coffee shop, which was something like the incubator that granted a space for dialogue and establishing alliances with foreign artists and hitchhikers, prior to the gentrification of Shinjuku area. This reminds us that urban spaces can hold and boost translation practices, focused on spiritual practice, and artistic demonstrations.

Fourthly, the Buzoku project that was envisioned as a “tribe of tribes” posed a challenge for their founders regarding gathering a diversity of backgrounds under a flag and vision. Tribe members’ ideology continuously synchronized itself with the global and arranged their identity as a collage. This collage had as one of its prominent motifs the spiritual path. The Tribe’s identity was mainly forged by juxtaposing many spiritual and cultural traditions, especially “Worlds Primitives,” Hinduism, and Buddhism. Nonetheless, juxtaposition, appropriation, and synchronization skills were not only aesthetical, but they were previously incubated in their spiritual formation during the Bum period under the guidance of Nanao Sakaki.

Finally, Buzoku history offers us two pictures of the assimilation of counterculture in Japan; one can be described as a “pale imitation” of American hippies’ fashion and style. The other one, the Buzoku’s one, can be described as complex synchronization done by collaborative processes of translation, appropriation, and juxtaposition. Among these translations, the spiritual was not exclusive, but it was likely prioritized over the other ones and forged a new spiritual profundity. The artistic appropriation also seemed relevant for their identity flag and a perceived necessity for defining their dream. The poetic parades and The Tribe Diary that were surprisingly in tone with the San Francisco Oracle Diary, exemplify the countercultural appropriation of poetry readings and printed media.

In conclusion, although Buzoku’s existence was limited to thirteen years, their ideology, their practices, and their experience proved to be fertile in synchronizing their dreams with the dreams of other peoples and cultures. In this way, they nurtured the Japanese counterculture’s soil by creating various communes, businesses, and media under the theme of building a new global civilization. Compared to the fūten phenomenon, their legacy proved to be relevant for other groups that later identified themselves as hippie, alternative and ecological-spiritual movements. This research shows that at least one countercultural collective in Japan’s sixties scene was involved in complex linguistic, artistic, and spiritual synchronizations with the global scene and simultaneously practiced the art of embodying the dream of building a new civilization.

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