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Author	有賀, 喜左衛門(Ariga, Kizaemon)
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On the Conception of the Village Community of Japan

Kizaemon Ariga

Prof. Eitaro Suzuki gave a basic definition of a Japanese Village Community in the *Nihon Noson Shakaigaku Genri* (The Principles of the Japanese Rural Sociology, 1940, Tokyo). He pointed out a firm social unity in a Japanese village. I fear that he put too much emphasis on the fact that the Japanese village community is an unique social unit. He enumerated various characteristics that integrate a Japanese village into one firm social unit, such as the worshipping of *ujigami* (the guardian gods) and the management of the common property, etc.

The power of the guardian gods of a certain village reaches only as far as the boundery of the village; each individual village has norms and traditional practises more or less its own and the right to use the common property of a village is strictly limited to its members. All these facts conspire to prove that a village is an independent social unit in some way or other. Notwithstanding the fact that the guardian gods of a village are so important as to be regarded as the symbol of the integrity of the village, it is rare that the gods of *ujigami* are original with the place. As the matter of fact, most of them are the identical with the guardian gods of families with great political power in the past. This indicate that, generally speaking, the gods of *ujigami* of a village are those of former political rulers, having been invited and enshrined in the village. Although a village may naturally be the product of its socio-economic conditions, we must not overlook the fact that it has also been an administrative unit, the form of the village has therefore in many cases received some modification from the administrative point of view. The close relationship between the village guardian gods and the rulers of the village is indicative of the political and socio-economical relations between the village and rulers. It is necessary to understand that the character of Japanese villages has been determined to a great extent by the political structure of the rulers of each period in the history of Japan.