I have yet to fully understand Benedict’s point of departure as I am unable to procure books on the theory of so-called patterns of culture and have not met anyone who has done an intensive reading of them. However, I infer from the various issues discussed in *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* that these patterns are constant for and inherent in a nation or a race, and cannot be altered merely by changes in the environment or the effect of time. I think that this is one important point about this theory. Until immediately before defeat in the war, many people in our country conformed to the idea that such patterns persisted. Perhaps many still do so even today. More people would probably value and respect this theory, especially if it became established abroad. I think we can leave aside the question of whether this is a fortunate or unfortunate state of affairs. Scholarship demands that we first determine whether or not this theory of cultural patterns is correct or not. This is because the result of such an academic pursuit will not only affect plans for the future reconstruction of our country, but may also pose unwieldy difficulties at times for the nation in coming to terms with its own identity.

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1 This special issue was originally published in *Minzokugaku Kenkyū (Japanese Journal of Ethnology)*, Volume 14, Number 4, 1950.

2 Translator’s note: I have included words and phrases used in the English summary of this article “The View of Life of the Common Man,” *Minzokugaku Kenkyū (Japanese Journal of Ethnology)*, Volume 14, Number 4, 1950: 85-86 (347-348) where appropriate. I would like to thank Yoko Hayami and Tom Gill for checking the translation.
I think we can give plenty of opposing evidence if we analyze our past experiences. But for the purpose of reviewing this book, it will be more appropriate to cite what is written there. The most striking is the opposition between shame culture and guilt culture, and the idea that either one of these characterizes a nation permanently or for a long period of time. This theory is of interest for all ethnologists, and moreover it is also a topic where the knowledge of Japanese scholars can provide excellent reference materials. From materials of the medieval period, as well as commonplace knowledge of old people like me, we see that many Japanese used the word “guilt/sin” (tsumi 罪) all the time. Even people of Christian countries in the West did not use the word so frequently. The word came to be avoided in conversation when it acquired a special significance around the time of the establishment of the penal code. But phrases such as committing a sinful act (tsumitsukuri ツミ作り) and doing something guilty (tsumi na koto wo suru ツミな事をする) often appear in everyday talk even today. The meaning of the word has gradually become restricted, and it is usually used to refer to bullying the weak, or attacking those who cannot defend themselves, such as killing small animals. It is also used in describing a child as being innocent, such as in the phrase “a look of innocence” (tsumi no nai kao ツミの無い顔, literally ‘a face with no sin’). This usage has not changed since the olden times.

It may be said that words are mere traces. Even if they are not spoken, they can work inside the minds of ordinary people. The intellect covertly guided people not to commit sinful actions. We can discern from many examples that sin in this case was not to do with the law. Benedict has written in the book that the doctrine of transmigration is surprisingly absent in Japan, although the country is so deeply entrenched in Buddhist teachings [J: 291; E: 237]. But her understanding is clearly contrary to reality. Firstly, in spite of the fact that Buddhism actually pervaded Japan only partially, the sense of guilt or sin is much more widespread and extensive. For instance, it is said that if you glare at your parents you will become a flatfish, and if you sleep just after eating you will become a cow. Many such proverbs expound on the sins of past life as a caution against committing misdeeds in present life for the sake of the next life. The idea of transmigration of the soul, that is, reincarnation, was part of Japan’s indigenous beliefs. That was probably why a similar imported doctrine was easily naturalized. But in pre-Buddhist Japan there was no complicated principle comparable to the six paths of transmigration (rokudōruten 六道流転). It was the power of this new teaching that led to people fearing the consequences of sinful actions as the new doctrine became directly linked with ethics. It is sad that the word for

3 Translator’s note: Words in double inverted commas “” indicate words in parentheses 「」 in Yanagita’s original Japanese article.
4 Translator’s note: I have inserted Japanese words from Yanagita’s original article in brackets for clarity. I have also included their literal meanings where necessary.
cause and effect, inga (因果), came to refer only to inexplicable disaster and misfortune in Japan. The Japanese people’s tendency towards resignation (akirame no yosa あきらめの良さ) came from the understanding that the problems and suffering in this world were all due to wrongdoings in previous life. Hence they tried their best to guard their actions performed in their present life. According to Shintoism, sins could be purified and washed away by purification (harai 祜い) and atonement (aganai 贷い) in this life. But since Buddhism preached that sins were carried over to subsequent lives, the word inga (インガ) eventually came to be another term for incomprehensible and tragic occurrences. If Professor Benedict were still alive, I would have liked to have informed her that all women were believed to be sinful in Japan until very recently due to the teachings of Buddhist monks. Today we criticize this as mistaken reasoning, but it was thought that to be born a woman was due to past life’s sin (gō ゴウ), and it was easier for women to sin again. Pious women did not suspect or doubt this. They tried to eradicate this dual sin by undergoing much suffering in their everyday life. Of course, gradually more women became unable to tolerate this, but at least the ideal life of a Japanese woman was clearly aimed at not committing sin.

2. Since when did the Japanese come to have a shame culture? How did things change so that even I am persuaded when I am told that we are a nation of shame culture? We are able to reconsider this point thanks to the hints provided by The Chrysanthemum and the Sword. We can trace the existence of the Japanese word meaning shame (haji 帰) back to records of ancient times, but the word was not used in quite the same way as it is today. The original form of the word seems to have been somewhat related to the body. It was the same as the current usage of the word to express the fact that if you uncover something shameful, people will laugh at you. However, “shame” that dissolves if it is hidden away, or emerges when it is pointed out and exposed from the outside, did not exist originally. I have previously discussed this point in an essay called “The Origin of the Literature of Laughter” (Warai no bungaku no kigen 笑いの文学の起原). Laughing had a particular purpose, and it later seems to have developed considerably in that direction. It is common among many ancient peoples that when two opposing groups confront each other in war, the one that laughs out loud right at the beginning plucks up courage, and the one that is laughed at feels dejected and backs away. The people of our country are particularly sensitive in this regard. There are many such examples recorded in the medieval accounts of war. The trick was to quickly find out the enemy’s weakness and laugh about it out loud in a very nasty way. This kind of combat technique was inherited, utilized and sometimes even developed. Firstly, the targets of laughter became much more wide-ranging than before. Ugly appearances of individuals, such as short stature, dark skin and deformity, were probably targeted, but these were rather trivial for a group. What the enemy least wanted to hear were their incompetence, cowardice and past mistakes. These faults did not have to be true, but if they had even a

6 Translator’s note: Words in bold letters indicate words in bold letters in Yanagita’s original Japanese article.
small basis of truth there would be no excuse, so the laughing attack took effect. There are accounts of going to battle having arranged in advance for men who are good at talking to abuse the enemy as quickly and as amusingly as possible. It is difficult to imagine this now in the age of the atomic bomb, but one of the most powerful weapons in those days was to get together like that and laugh at the enemy. I think this practice has become a meaningless war cry (toki no koe トキノコエ) as the battlefields have become gradually larger and more far away.

We can trace the origin of the so-called shame culture in Japan. I do not know how it is in the case of other nations, but in Japan “shame” was something to be laughed at. Although the Japanese took great pleasure in roaring with laughter in a crowd, laughing at people was strictly prohibited. Or perhaps it was precisely because they took such great pleasure that laughing at others was restricted, since it was easy to imagine the suffering of the person who, being the sole target, could not take part in the laughter. People could only laugh at an enemy openly. It was only after a particular period that people came to confront their enemy and fight battles across common borders. Thus the technique of jeering and laughing at the enemy developed considerably, and the variety of shame gradually increased. No one can bear being laughed at. This is true for the past as well as the present. But, it was only the samurai class which was particularly sensitive about being laughed at. They had to caution against it in advance and come up with a plan of defense. Their sons were brought up according to this principle. They literally kept to the austere warning to die rather than face shame. There is plenty of evidence of how this instilled bravery in young men and women and fired their spirits. However, we should not forget that there were also many people who were in no danger of being laughed at in the first place, and were not even given a chance of facing the problem of shame. It was only later that peasants came to respect and admire the samurai class as being well-bred and behaving as might be expected of them. Moreover, it was only much later that the customs among the samurai class appeared to guide the general public as moral principles of a peaceful society. As our interaction with China has become more frequent in recent years, we have come to know what personal honor or saving face (mentsu面子) is about. Mentsu applies to individuals, but our reputation (gaibun外聞) mainly has to do with that of the group. Strict precautions were taken against being laughed at by an opposing group. For instance, a clan guarded against being laughed at by another clan, a village by another village, an association by another association, and a party by another party. But within each of these groups, such precautions were often done away with, and people were compliant and sometimes even humiliated. This may be a pattern of a particular period, and it would be out of proportion to consider this in opposition to the powerful concept of guilt that existed since the medieval period. So-called shame culture might collapse with just a single defeat in war. Guilt culture, however, may change its form a little and flourish again.
3.

In research that employs elaborate logic such as *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, even a small defect in the source materials could ultimately lead to a fatal error. It is very rare to find an author who has taken so much trouble to carefully collect and analyze the source materials. However, they are still unsatisfactory from our point of view; and more importantly, some points are clearly contrary to the facts. I think this is of utmost concern for ethnology as an academic discipline. Will ethnology really develop when the existing materials are so abundant that it would take a lifetime to just understand them unless we are equipped with a very effective index? Are Benedict’s description and introduction, review and critique the most we can expect from a foreign scholar under such conditions? I say this because until now ninety-nine percent of books have been written from the viewpoint of people who approached particular societies from the outside. Even if they are to overcome the language barrier with the best translators and an extraordinary learning ability, how can they believe or make others accept meanings behind the language when even the people themselves are not yet clearly aware of them? To overcome this problem, do we need to formulate some kind of tentative measuring standards? Or should we maintain some hypotheses and be open to cooperate with researchers who come after us? These are some of the things that occur to me when I read this book. In my student days, I bought some books on the geography of different countries of the world from Maruzen bookshop. As I read them, I saw that there was a very easy way of knowing the value of the book. When I first opened and read the part on Japan, there were considerable differences in the ways in which lies were written. Some depicted “the present state” of Japan with pictures of Edo castle before it was burned down, and a samurai with a topknot and two swords on his waist walking with an attendant. Even if they were not as bad as these, two or three amusing things were generally included. Of course, I did not usually throw the books away just because of that. I simply treated them for what they were, and accepted the information about other countries and the ways of life of other peoples, keeping in mind the possibility of there being such mistakes. Surveys may be easier in the case of material culture, but there are countless races all over the world about whose material culture we know nothing. We do not know what is reported about them in the first place, let alone correct mistakes in the reports. However advanced a nation may be, there are many things which even insiders do not notice and could not express even if they thought about it. These are what we would call temperaments and dispositions, habits and tendencies that cannot be seen by the eye. Someday, we should be able to establish principles by which we can discover the transformation of the mind by observing the results of actions. But we are still at the stage of explaining human uniformity, namely that the same law of causality applies to all human beings whatever their experiences or environment. I am not just talking about this particular work. I think it is generally a little too early to try to categorize patterns of culture with the present level of accuracy of ethnological knowledge. Some people are intoxicated by the wide-ranging search for data and the fascinating language in which the
arguments are presented step by step. It will be most unfortunate if there are two or three sycophants who completely believe everything in the book, just because they think many Americans admire it. For the past thousands of years, the power of the Japanese to think for themselves has often been disoriented by such exotic imports. Indeed it continues to trouble us even today.

4.

We should reflect and blame ourselves about the fact that those who tried to explain Japan to the world through speech and writing were often unconsciously teaching lies. For example, bushidō 菅木道 was a way of life only for the samurai. Although they were central to the nation and its people, their numbers were limited. They also included many exceptions. There were not that many people outside the samurai class who were overly influenced by them. Bushidō may have been one of the goals for ethics, but we cannot go as far as to say that it was a representative goal for everyone. Moreover, what the people outside the country wanted to know was the living conditions of the ordinary, common people who were the majority. Instead, what we told them was the possibility of leading and accomplishing a particular way of life. This was the root of the misunderstanding. We can give actual examples of revenge in Japan, without referring to the over-romanticized tales of the Soga brothers and Chūshingura. But surprisingly enough, the total number is in fact so small that some people have even drawn up a list. This number was astonishingly small considering the number of people who constantly carried around a pair of small and large swords. Thus, creating the impression to both insiders and outsiders that Japan was a country of vendettas in itself tells us something about a pattern of Japanese culture. We need not hide or cover up any facts. If we are to discuss how the Japanese social system in the early modern period sanctioned revenge, we need to mention that there was a strong influence of literature on public opinion. We should also note that this had the effect of suppressing acts of unjust murder. In fact, the logic of revenge was a new phenomenon, established in our country after the incident of the forty-seven rōnin. By the time this logic was perfected, acts of vengeance in the true sense hardly took place. Benedict’s critique tends to be rather off the point, probably because the theory that the Japanese tried to convey was so far from reality. Needless to say, what the Japanese called revenge was restricted to avenging murder. The law and the people’s moral sensibility approved of absolutely nothing else. It is wrong to put these together and consider them as a manifestation of the same national character.

The common error amongst the various people introducing Japan, be they well-known or not, was that none of them were sufficiently prepared as introducers. The slogan of so-called equality of all four classes of people (shiminbyōdō 四民平等) was joyfully welcomed at the

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7 Translator’s note: Benedict translates bushidō as “the way of the samurai” in the Glossary [E: 317].
8 Translator’s note: Benedict points out that “[t]he true national epic of Japan is the Tale of the Forty-Seven Ronin” [J: 243; E: 199] and gives a detailed account of the story [J: 243-251; E: 199-205].
beginning of the Meiji period. But because the superiority of the “samurai” status had been accepted for a long time, there was absolutely no attempt to reduce their status and assimilate them into the way of life of the other three classes, the peasant, artisan and merchant. Somewhere along the line, society was pervaded by the idea that it would be sufficient to continue all the material and non-material customs of the samurai class. This idea guided aspects of education in particular. Here is one point that we must begin to reflect upon due to the hint given by Benedict’s book. The samurai’s way of life had several characteristics. First of all, it was impossible to make everyone follow this way. It was also unnecessary and often harmful to do so. Our studies in history were still very much inattentive about the early modern period and described features of the samurai class only through concepts. It is fashionable in recent years to explain away whatever we find a little objectionable by using the term feudalism. This is rather crude, but it can also be seen as the birth of a spirit of criticism. Previous introducers of Japan had not even been able to doubt and see the danger in this. Even if we have no ulterior motive of teaching lies, if we just conduct research passively we will only be able to acquire the samurai way of thinking. That was how biased the books we read and theories we heard were towards the samurai class who constituted less than ten percent of the population. Moreover, only those who were educated in this way went on to meet foreigners. Such an earnest piece of work as The Chrysanthemum and the Sword happens to be a result of this, so we should not blame the author but rather thank her for letting us discover our own weaknesses.

5.

Incidentally, there are many good hints in this book for those who are trying to start reflecting again on the way of life of the past with a renewed attitude and method. For instance, many words used in the Japanese language today have their origin in precisely the section of the population and period of history we know least about, namely among the masses of the early modern era. Regardless of differences in strength and weakness in political power between the classes, only things that the majority of the people were able to invent, uphold and spread remained strong, and hence have been passed down over a long period of time. Of course, the theories of leaders must have interfered in the process of these things becoming unconsciously authorized and appearing in books as part of the written language. But since the words were born from needs that were independent of this process, they continued to maintain their old meanings, betraying the commentaries of scholars. Or else they contained two incongruent meanings. If the debate is within the country, there is plenty of room for distortion and deception. But this is not possible for a foreigner since the words must be understood through direct translations of the original. That is why the most ordinary everyday words used by old women remain a mystery that cannot be clearly understood even by adding a great number of explanatory notes. We hope that intelligent scholars from abroad will pose questions about the meaning of words, so that we can begin to investigate their history. But the problem is that these scholars from abroad, including the
Kunio Yanagita

author of this book, believe too much in what the translators say. Thus these scholars have no choice but to indirectly refer to explanations which are not necessarily lucid.

In the end, it would be best if those who have been living with a particular language for generations could take the initiative to think about it. But since we have neglected doing so until now, we are very grateful for this kind of warning. It might become a lengthy discussion, but I would like to say in passing that the words “arigatō” (有難う), “kinodoku” (気の毒), “sumimasen” (すみません) and several others are used to acknowledge kindness. The book first takes up these three words and tries to explain them, but somehow it seems to get it wrong. These three words are only a little similar in their usage. They were formed at different historical periods, and the processes of their formation also differ. We would not put them together and examine their common meaning. Firstly, arigatashi (有難し) was originally a word for praising God. Later it came to be used when one came across happiness in life and felt the grace of God anew. It then came to be understood as something that is directed to the person who brought about this happiness. The same process can also be seen in the use of merci and grazie in Christian countries. Secondly, kinodoku (気の毒, literally ‘poison for the spirit’) is rather a negative word. It was originally used in opposition to the happiness and pleasure of “kinokusuri” (気の薬, literally ‘medicine for the spirit’). It became an expression of concern for the trouble that a person went through to show kindness, only when the receiver of the kindness imagined himself in that person’s place. That was why it was usually applied with honorifics such as okinodoku (御気の毒), okinodokusama (お気の毒様) and so on. This changed completely as it came to be used to describe the regret of asking someone to do something. The nuance of the word then became very different. Thirdly, sumimasen is the most recent word and means that one cannot control the worries of receiving unexpected kindness. Sumu (スム) was probably the same word as clear (sumu 澄む) of clear water and not equivalent to the English translation, never ends (ネバアエンズ). As we can see from how the three words are used today, they are each slightly different and we cannot freely choose between them. Arigatō is the highest compliment for expressing gratitude, but its effect has diminished due to its cumulative usage over a long period. Today it is used only by children when they are given something, and has become simply an exclamation to express the state of being happy. As opposed to this, okinodoku is used when one is conscious about having caused trouble for someone, and sumimasen is used to clearly declare that this trouble should not have been caused. These two ways of expressing gratitude would have been redundant when the so-called system of “indebtedness” (on no seido 「恩」の制度) existed and on was systematically applied down the hierarchy. Unless one was expressing one’s heartfelt joy by using the very simple meaning of arigatō, there would have been other ways of conveying thanks in response to some kind of indebtedness. That probably would

Translator’s note: Benedict lists “this never ends” as one of the translations of sumimasen in the Glossary [E: 320].

Translator’s note: Benedict defines on as “obligations passively incurred” [E: 116] and “a category of incurred obligations” [E: 319]. I have translated on as “indebtedness” or “obligation” according to the context in which the word is used in Yanagita’s article.
have been “katajikenai” (かたじけない), but today even this word is used only in wrong ways. In other words, we can see from these words, which are used out of mere habit, that time has moved on. We have carelessly summed up the hundred to two hundred years of transformation that has created the present by the sweeping use of a single word, feudalism. We are made to regret this now that it has been pointed out by a kind scholar from abroad. Even if there are points in Benedict’s conclusion that we cannot approve of, we should gratefully accept them as warnings against the weaknesses of Japanese historiography.

6.

I think this memorable book will gradually introduce into Japan a method of study that tries to discover the underlying view of life or social norms from words in daily use. Scholars of the folklorist school in this country today should welcome this most enthusiastically. However, unfortunately, there is just one feature of this book that they would find difficult to sympathize with: and I think this is the reason why the book cannot find many sincere admirers amongst the Japanese people, who are its very subject. It has been standard practice to assume that observations by foreigners are all wrong, and to dismiss whatever that is written which we do not like as lack of knowledge. But this is absolutely not the case with regards Benedict. Once she caught on to a fact, she did not stop until she ascertained its meaning even at the expense of logic. She collected a tremendously wide range of materials, but still made so many mistakes. This was not due to the imperfection of her method, but rather her lack of preparation in analyzing the materials. This was not a deeply-rooted weakness due to her being a foreigner, and thus was not something that was impossible for her to escape. From my point of view, it was a most disappointing mistake, a kind of mistake that one need not commit twice if one noticed it once.

The Japanese may have been responsible for inducing this, but it can also be said to be a theoretical problem for ethnology. An ethnologist examines the mentality of other peoples by analyzing their language and tries to infer patterns of culture based on this analysis. If this ethnologist has not considered how these words have been passed down and transformed, especially the method of their transfer in the past one to two generations, it would have been through lack of preparation on her part. I suppose that there would have been more than enough such preparation in America when studying the language of black people. But that would have been easier compared to the changes and chaos of Japanese national language education in the past century. There has been a very clear distinction between spoken and written languages in Japan since the medieval period. Only writing and reading were taught in schools, so that education was limited to written language. Spoken language was left to the natural influence of families and village neighborhoods, so countless dialects sprung up leading to obstruction in communication with faraway places. In spite of the fact that many people were aware that this was a problem, there was no method of teaching spoken language to school children even after the introduction of compulsory education. People picked up and used whatever words they liked from books, and even girls and children
started to mix and use many classical Chinese words. As a result, the content of spoken language today is extremely inaccurate. Yet many people in the country have still not noticed this.

It was with an astonishingly keen sense that Professor Benedict noticed from the other shore of the Pacific so many discrepancies in the meaning of words and the contradictions between the concepts that these words represented. However, there was one thing that she was not told by anybody. This was the fact that contemporary Japanese language is mixed with many words which have not been used often enough and whose usage is still very unstable. If it were a new word for a new thing, the Japanese would use it without any mistakes in most cases since they are quick at understanding. The most problematic are words that have existed from the past and have very different meanings in spoken language and written language. Such words are sometimes used in confusing ways even by people who have received a considerable amount of education. They are also used by some people in deliberately ambiguous ways to leave room for interpretation. Unless one is aware of this beforehand, I think it will actually be impossible to discuss the patterns of culture of a nation simply by synthesizing the analysis of words.

7.

If I am told to give actual examples, there would be all sorts of other things I want to say, but that might result in danger of going outside the scope of ethnological research. So let me prove that my critique is not baseless by taking up two words that are most related to *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. One is the word *giri* (義理) which appears most frequently in this book. This was originally an imported word and there are only a few people who use it today in written language since it can be found only rarely in books, and the original meaning of the imported word is so different from its meaning in Japanese today. But its origin is very clear, so those who have been educated in literature tend to think rather too highly of this word. Today its value is much lower in actual usage. If we look at literary works of two hundred years ago, we see that the meaning of the word referred to something much more refined. For example, it seems to have been used to represent the overall behavior of a samurai, and was close to the meaning of “*gi*” (義) in classical Chinese. But it is difficult to discern such moral force in this word, at least in its spoken form today. It is increasing used simply in the context of social customs, where one would do something in a certain way because anyone would usually do the same in similar circumstances. In fact, in Tokyo, there are even people who are content to just regard the visits before and after a funeral as *giri* (ギリ). Of course, this is probably a step towards the word’s disintegration from the point of view of its history. But this word is falling into disuse because its meaning is wide-ranging and so many meanings are encapsulated in it that it has become differentiated into various other words. New words with more specific meanings have been created, such as promise (*yakusoku* 約束), and the word *giri* is gradually becoming unnecessary. At least I have not heard of such phrases as, “*giri* to one’s name” (*na ni taisuru giri* 名に対する義理) mentioned in
Benedict’s book [J: 179; E: 145]. Assuming a consistent pattern of culture over several hundred years by combining old documents and present day usage is difficult for a country like Japan where the method of teaching the national language is rather special. This problem has still not been completely solved.

There is another word, obligation (on 道), which is easy to remember and is taken up as a special object for investigation in The Chrysanthemum and the Sword. This word too has undergone considerable changes. On is no doubt an important word in the political history of Japan, but its origin is Chinese. There was no word corresponding to it, and apart from the special term go-on (ゴオン), it has not yet been completely assimilated into Japanese spoken language. There is a famous term, four kinds of on (shi-on 四恩), in the section of the remonstrance by Shigemori (Shigemori kangen 重盛諫言) in The Tale of the Heike, popular literature of the medieval period.11 As we can see from this, the term is written in Chinese characters, but the philosophy behind it probably originated in India. When Buddhism recognized the existing order of the country and tried to take up the role of rope and string that connected this order to the people, it was a good idea to line up these four kinds of on. It was most necessary to make use of this concept where the order was based on plans by men rather than the natural relations which had existed from the past, such as those with parents and the country. So next to those who aimed to spread Buddhism, it was the land owners who aimed to make on permanent as an institution. There is no need to explain in detail since feudalism in both East and West are very similar in this regard. During a particular period in Japanese history, “on” was more powerful than morality (dōtoku 道徳) and it could unite society quite simply. But such a simple society does not last forever. More and more new kinds of relationship were forged between people. From the Ashikaga Period, many horizontal contracts were made between equals that were apart from vertical hierarchical relationships. Conservatives tried to extend the concept of “on” to an extreme because they did not want to consider such horizontal associations as being completely different. But this had the effect of making the meaning of on vague. On became something to be avoided, like debt, as people’s individuality developed. The term selling on (on wo uru 恩を売る) was born in ancient China, and making someone wear on (on wo kiseru 恩を着せる)12 came to refer to a particularly base motive for people’s actions in Japan. I think the simple reason why one of the rare customs of early modern Japan, the giving and taking of gifts, became extremely popular was because the people had long lost the ability to sustain such obligation (ongi 恩義). Our concept of on became diffuse, and on became something to be loathed. It was only politicians who continued to try to make use of it in their writings till recently, which meant that they did not know anything about early modern history. It seems

11 Translator’s note: In a famous passage in Book Two of The Tale of the Heike, Shigemori pleads in protest to his father, “There are in this world, you see, four great obligations: to heaven and earth, to sovereign, to father and mother, to sentient beings. That to the sovereign is greatest” (The Tale of the Heike. Translated by Royall Tyler. New York: Viking, 2012, p.93).

12 Translator’s note: Benedict uses the term “[t]o wear an on’ when citing the novel Bochan by Natsume Sōseki [J: 133; E: 107].
a habit of polemics nowadays to call feudal all customs of the past that are difficult to understand, but we have the hope of correcting such mistakes in the near future. It is indeed a great shame that we let such a kind foreign observer as Benedict believe this all her life. We must try to think more about the transformation of semantics in the Japanese language as atonement for our sins.

8.

Finally, I would have liked to express my gratitude in greater detail about the enlightening aspects of *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. But an old man’s account is rambling, and I have already taken up too many pages. However, I would like to point out just one problem which I want to continue dealing with in the future. The phrase “typical Japanese boredom” [J: 207; E: 168] 13 will not be understood by people of other countries unless more explanation is provided. I do not know whether even we would understand it if this was translated as ennui unique to the Japanese. But since I happen to be in the middle of thinking about it, I feel it is a pertinent point. I do not think that boredom here means ennui, but rather it is the opposite of perseverance. If we were to express it in positive terms, it would be giving up vain hope (mikiri ga hayai 見切りが早い) or accepting an inevitable situation (akirame ga yoi あきらめが良い). In other words, it is frailty against blows. Since animals also differ in this respect according to species, this feature may be one of the patterns of Japanese culture from the past to the present. I cannot say whether or not this was the case since the age of Emperor Jimmu, but I imagine that it is related to our environment of living on a small island for thousands of years. Fortunately or unfortunately, this was the first time that the whole country was defeated. If we take individual battles in the country, there have been countless clear and blatant cases of victory and defeat. I am definitely not saying this to flatter, but such a generous enemy as the one in this war was rare, even compared with those in wars between our fellow countrymen. Since the country was small and the dead end was close by, the defeated could not escape and create a new world as they could have done in the case of a continental nation. Even if the people did not face massacres in vain, no conqueror would try to consider their peace and safety. Many died because they were left unprotected to cry and worry. On top of that, the teaching of shame was enforced to the extreme. It was considered duty at least among the samurai that even women and children should commit suicide if the castle fell. There were many romantic stories, such as a nanny carrying and hiding away a two year-old prince. It was also common practice that peasants would leave the land and disperse. The blood line may have continued, but the organization would disintegrate, and hence it seems to have been difficult for the group to continue to exist for a long time. We can trace some evidence of this in the case of a very small island, but in the end, it appears to have been difficult for a group or village to continue existing permanently in this country. This seems to be the reason why in spite of

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13 Translator’s note: This is a direct quotation by Yanagita from Benedict’s original English, though he does not specify the page number.
being such an ancient country, it had a rapid metabolism. The history of the defeated would be passed down probably for the first time after our defeat in this war. The defeated used to scatter and hide from society, and even those who managed to remain alive would forget the sorrow of their downfall within a few generations and continue a normal life anew. At any rate, old prospering families disappeared one after another and not a single one remained. They were then replaced by new ones, which in turn repeated the struggle. If the science of genetics were to progress rapidly, we might be able to discover a law behind this cycle. Prosperity in a country with limited space was probably based on a rather hasty adaptation to the majority as we see today. I hope that someone else will take up this issue and think about it again in future.

I am not fluent in English so I cannot decide whether boredom refers precisely to such matters. At least this was thought to be a kind of common destiny of people who lived on scattered islands, and it seems that this tendency is particularly clear in the case of individuals rather than the group. Large-scale competition for survival had disappeared for a long time due to the passive policies of the Edo Shogunate, but in the small-scale lives all over the country, the sudden decline in will power, or a feeling of desperation, often led to abrupt and unexpected changes such as what has happened this time. For instance, when one house or one person’s life is pushed out of its regular course by a blow, it is extremely difficult to recover from it and stand firm. It almost always resulted in destruction. Of course, there are accounts of examples of splendid recovery from every possible kind of hardship and these are highly praised. But in terms of numbers, such cases have been very rare. Situations may have changed according to the times, but villages that had once been praised as an embodiment of peace are especially full of history of ruin and are easily forgotten. How a household (ie 家) came to an end or perished is a problem that has never been considered. But this is common sense that should not be forgotten, especially for people who are newly prospering. If we generalize from many examples, effects of poverty such as illness and decline in nutrition were some of the causes, but I think a more serious cause was feebleness of will, especially succumbing to bad habits such as drinking to forget many unbearable hardships. But what is more worrying is that such cases are not considered to be so dangerous.

9.

The concept of function or effect of alcohol in Japan seems to have been different to that in the West right from the beginning. This is a problem which needs to be considered very carefully with the help of ethnology. In Japan, hand-made sake was not at all tasty until very recently, and it was only drunk out of necessity or attraction for intoxication. The taste of sake suddenly improved when it became commodified for the purpose of taxation. Its consumption expanded limitlessly and its use was not at all restricted. Many people continue to accept drinking as a part of life, even when the world has changed as it has today. This is in spite of the fact that the damage it causes has been pointed out by statistics
showing how the capacity of people to think about things carefully is reduced by alcohol consumption. They offer vain excuses for all sorts of debauchery, recklessness, and giving up on life easily. This is not merely a problem related to physical aspects. If this were a marked tendency that guided the lives of ordinary people for many years in Japanese history, more detailed materials should have been gathered about it by such an intelligent scholar as Benedict. Or we can say that there are two sides to this bad habit. On the one hand, the Japanese are careful, quick-witted, and freely enjoy dreams of success by exercising their imagination in minute detail. On the other, if they feel that the time is not right, they immediately start worrying unnecessarily. In other words, they have lost the old-fashioned sense of trust of leaving everything up to the larger forces of nature. Instead, they infer things from the limited cases of precedence around them and have become unable to bear the burden of their thoughts and fantasies. There used to be all kinds of ways to seek temporary freedom from these matters. Suicide was probably one of the rather common ways in an age when people thought that they were reborn many times and could start life all over again. But today, this has come to be seen as a kind of apathy and vice that wastes life. If we look back to the history and literature of the distant past, renunciation of the world (tonsei 遁世) was seen as a more highly valued stage of evolution in life. Hence there are many actual examples of this, and at times it is supposed to have given a better state of intoxication and forgetfulness of the self than sake. But, since it was a path chosen by those who turned their backs on the world, believing that they did not fit in the world and had no place there, it obviously had little to do with society and was not enough to be a guide for a new way of life. Many arts, starting with poetry, take pride in poverty, and even today artists take pains not to live in the same way as worldly people, at least on the surface. This is probably because all these arts had a common starting point of choosing this path as one of the ways to escape life’s adversity. The arts were indeed a peaceful means compared with some others. But because of this, their numbers have grown, and we fear that there might be another power struggle that would create new vulnerable persons.

Scholars who try to compare the differences in patterns of culture must question the causes thoroughly, and moreover consider future limitations and revisions. What will happen to Japan in the future? How should we hope for it to change? Sadly there are still few people in Japan or abroad who are able to answer these questions. Those who are involved in the so-called science of culture in Japan maintain a sense of seclusion to a greater or lesser degree even today. Their eloquent discussions in the bamboo groves away from worldly life (chikurin seidan 竹林清談) are refreshingly invigorating; but they are, in a word, elitist. They are exacting about ridiculing stupidity and spend too much energy complimenting great men. If what they say are true, I cannot ask them to stop. But I would like them to realize that if that is all they do, the ordinary person will not get any wiser. A recluse’s power of foreseeing the future actually does not amount to any guidance. Rather, if more people are overly influenced by them and jump to hasty conclusions, public opinion will end up being even more confused. Decisions should be made by individuals, and to make
these as safe and free as possible, there is no other way but to provide as many sure facts with evidence as possible. If there is something one wants to add, one should be clear about why one thinks in such a way and make sure that a mistake in deduction will be discovered immediately. I think this is the right way to proceed for those of us who are involved in empirical research. The author of *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* anticipated that the book would eventually be widely read in Japan. It was a brave enterprise of a world-class public figure to endure the cumbersome task of arranging and leaving behind all the available material as she thought appropriate. That is why we also cannot just let it pass by merely showing ceremonial respect.