ABSTRACT

A study of collective memory and its psychological significance in the NAMAHAGE festival of Akita

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In the Oga Peninsula, located in the north end of the Honshu island of Japan, there is a new year festival called Namahage practiced for more than 100 years. Namahage in a peculiar fashion has been considered a deity which lives in a deep mountain, comes down and visits the village people on New Year's Eve in order to punish lazy children, and also to promise good fortune. In this paper, the psychological significance of Namahage and its manifestation in the modern psyche are discussed from the viewpoint of depth psychology. Through careful investigation of its attributes and their symbolism, it turns out that Namahage belongs to the archetypal realm in our collective unconscious with layers of ambiguities. With its outrageous appearance, bringing confusion and wildness to the people, readers might notice Namahage as an antithetical existence of the so-called Apollonian one-sided attitudes of ego-consciousness in our modern era. Recent study on skin also helps us to understand the psychological meanings of flaying. Lastly, how Namahage expresses itself as a psychological phenomena is discussed.

Key Words: Namahage, flaying, archetypal psychology