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# **Pollution and Vitality:**

**The Process of Death in a Japanese *inaka* (rural) Town**

**Hyunchul Kim**

**PhD in Social Anthropology**

**University of Edinburgh**

**2011**



## **Declaration**

This thesis has been composed entirely by myself, Hyunchul Kim, PhD candidate in Social Anthropology. All work, unless otherwise specified, is entirely my own, and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

26 April 2011

**Hyunchul Kim**

## **Abstract**

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This thesis is based upon twenty-one months of fieldwork (including four months at a local funeral home) carried out in Makabe, a small town located in Ibaraki prefecture within the central region of the main island of Honshū in Japan. Engaging with anthropological approaches to death and mortuary ritual, it aims to produce a new ethnographic investigation of death and its related beliefs and practices. More precisely, it attempts to explore the way in which people in Makabe deal with the dead and ‘perceive’ death in and through various mortuary rites.

Since the rapid economic growth of the 1960s, Japan has been considered one of the most developed, modernised and urbanised countries in the world. The rapid urbanisation and modernisation have brought fundamental social changes not only to urban but also to rural districts. In these circumstances, mortuary rituals have also changed from community-based ‘traditional’ funerals to ‘commercialised’ ones managed by professional undertakers. Nonetheless, many important aspects of the ‘traditional’ perception of death and its ritual articulation remain more or less unchanged in Makabe. The most important of these aspects is the ‘traditional’ idea that the pollution of death (*kegare*) is extremely dangerous, powerful and contagious, an idea which continues to have an important influence on the treatment of the dead. Thus, the ritual imperatives still place considerable emphasis on the purification or elimination of death pollution and the replenishment of vitality.

Along these lines, the thesis attempts to illuminate death and the articulation of mortuary rituals in and through their relation to pollution and vitality. In order to do so, it focuses on the exploration of several major themes including the connection between different kinds of death and persons, the spirit of the dead, the sources of pollution and its purification, the expression of grief, and the exchange of gifts. All of these themes are meant to illustrate the way in which pollution and vitality are implicated in the process of death. Thus, the analysis as a whole seeks to elucidate why local perceptions of death and the articulation of the actual mortuary rituals must be understood, first and foremost, in terms of pollution and vitality; indeed, grasping the relationship between pollution and vitality is crucial in order to understand not only the conjunction between mortuary rituals and people’s perception of death but also a number of important features of the ‘traditional’ Japanese Cosmos that I encountered in Makabe.

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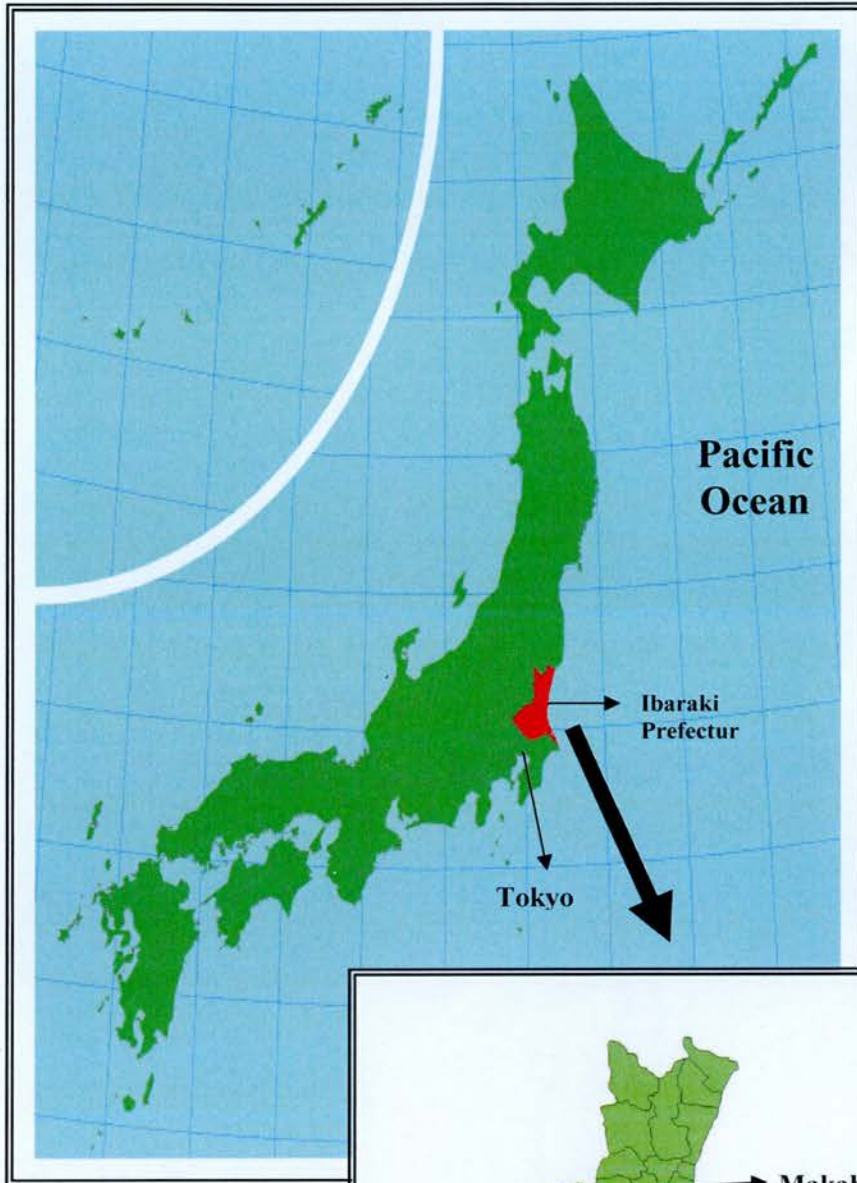
H. K

*Chrystal Macmillan Building*

*Edinburgh*

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**Map1. Japan**



**Map 2. Ibaraki Prefecture**

## ***A note on language and conventions***

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All names of Japanese individuals in this thesis are presented using the Japanese practice of writing the family name before the given name. As is common in ethnographic writing, the names of all individuals who participated in the research have been altered or concealed in order to protect their identities. Pseudonyms have been used also for some groups, organisations and companies. Although I have written most Japanese words in italics, with a general explanation of their meaning in English given the first time they occur, people's names, well known words, titles and geographical areas such as Shintō, kamikaze, Tokugawa shogunate and Tokyo are written in non-italic form. All Japanese terms are spelled according to the Hepburn Romanisation system, with the exception of terms directly quoted from previously published texts and proper names whose orthography is publicly known. All monetary values are expressed in yen when discussing financial issues because translation into pounds sterling is rendered almost meaningless by the rapidly changing exchange rates between Japan and the UK. Nonetheless, for the purpose of comparison, 1 GBP was approximately 220 JPY in 2006.

## Introduction

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It was a sunny and bright afternoon in early March in 2006. Just after Wakairo-san's<sup>1</sup> large and elaborate funeral, Yamaguchi-san and I were standing in the front yard of Wakairo-san's house, basking in the warmth of the noon sun and waiting for the funeral procession to walk to the grave with the other participants and onlookers. Yamaguchi-san was in his early seventies and a former head of the hamlet (*kuchō*). He told me, 'It's wonderful weather, and a great time for holding a funeral and a burial, because it's not too cold, not too hot and not raining'. He continued, 'It's lucky not only for the deceased but also for his family and guests to avoid winter, summer and the rainy season'. While we were talking about the weather, the deceased's family and relatives were ready to depart for the grave. They then suddenly scattered coins to the assembled people. All the guests and onlookers crouched down to the ground at the same time and started to pick the coins up as if it was a competition. Yamaguchi-san was no exception. I was very puzzled as to what to do. Since I was standing there without doing anything, he shouted to me, 'Kim-san! What are you doing? Pick some up!' The scattered coins disappeared from the ground almost instantly. Although I could not pick up as many coins as Yamaguchi-san, I managed to pick up some. After the procession, he gave me some coins which he had managed to pick up and said, 'If you buy bottles of juice or tea with the coins and drink them, you will be blessed with good health and a long life like Wakairo-san'. He also added, 'But be careful, you must spend all of your coins before you go home because the coins are contaminated by death pollution (*kegareru kara*)'. 'If you take any of them into your house, they may cause harm to your family' he said.

\* \* \*

It was after encountering this scene of scattering and collecting coins that my curiosity about pollution and vitality was aroused. Why did the bereaved family

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<sup>1</sup> The suffix -san is a polite honorific attached to a person's name.

members scatter coins for the non-bereaved? Why did the non-bereaved pick the coins up and spend them on drinks? Why must they not take the coins into their homes? Why does this practice of scattering coins not occur at all funerals? As my fieldwork proceeded and I encountered more and more death and funerals, I gave much thought to pollution and vitality. What is pollution and how does it occur? Why is it dangerous, fearful and contagious? What is vitality and how is it related to pollution? Why do the ritual imperatives still place a great deal of emphasis on the purification or elimination of death pollution and the replenishment of vitality, even though mortuary rituals have changed from community-based 'traditional' funerals to 'commercialised' ones managed by professional undertakers, due to recent rapid industrialisation and modernisation?

I came to realise that grasping the relationship between vitality and pollution is crucial in order to understand not only the conjunction between mortuary rituals and people's perception of death but also a number of important cosmological implications of death and life not only in my fieldwork site but also more broadly. In this thesis, I shall attempt to explore death and the articulation of mortuary rituals in and through their relation to pollution and vitality. More precisely, the thesis as a whole seeks to elucidate why local perceptions of death and the articulation of the actual mortuary rituals must be understood, first and foremost, in terms of pollution and vitality. In order to do so, it focuses on several primary themes such as the connection between different kinds of death and persons, the spirit of the dead, the sources of pollution and its purification, the expression of grief, and the exchange of gifts. All of these themes are meant to illustrate the way in which pollution and vitality are implicated in the process of death.

## **1. Gaining access to the field site**

I carried out my ethnographic fieldwork from October 2005 to June 2007 in Makabe, a small *inaka* (rural) town of the Ibaraki prefecture in central Japan. Before going to Japan, I made contact with Professor Furuie, a folklorist, and established an institutional affiliation as a foreign researcher (*gaikokujin kenkyūsha*) with the Department of History and Anthropology at the University of Tsukuba. In the first



stage of my fieldwork, I based myself in Tsukuba, the second largest city of the Ibaraki prefecture, located in its southern part, and spent several weeks travelling around the prefecture to choose my primary fieldwork site. I wanted to select a small *inaka* town of fewer than 20,000 inhabitants or fewer than 6,000 households where a town centre (*machinaka*) and its peripheral hamlets would be located within 20 minutes walking distance, because that size would make it a more manageable research site than larger towns where many hamlets (*buraku*)<sup>2</sup> are scattered over relatively much larger areas. In other words, it would make it possible for me to collect both hamlet and town level data in one place. More importantly, this size of rural town usually has two or three local funeral homes (*sōgisha*) which are located in a suburb, between a town centre and its peripheral hamlets. As most funerals are nowadays held in funeral homes, the funeral home was another important consideration when I was selecting the fieldwork site.

My plan was to begin fieldwork at a single small hamlet, collecting household and hamlet level data, and then gradually expand the site to several neighbouring hamlets and eventually to the town centre. While continuing my fieldwork and expansion of the site, I also planned to make contact with a local funeral home and spend several months working as an undertaker. I talked to Professor Furuie about my research and explained my fieldwork plan. I received some useful information and advice about choosing my field site from him and was encouraged to visit several places. I travelled around the prefecture and visited different towns each day in the first two weeks, but it was not easy to find an appropriate field site.

In the third week, when my wife and I travelled to the west side of Mt. Tsukuba, we arrived in Makabe, which appeared to be exactly what I had been searching for. Indeed, on the day that we visited Makabe for the first time, I decided to conduct my fieldwork there and visited the local Town Office (*yakuba*) to ask for help. I handed in my business card (*meishi*)<sup>3</sup> to the reception desk and briefly

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<sup>2</sup> The hamlet (*buraku*) is a basic agricultural unit. It is a cluster of households, surrounded by its fields, where the residents work together to maintain the local irrigation system, roads, paths and ditches to transplant and harvest their rice (see Smith 1961, 1978).

<sup>3</sup> Before I had started my fieldwork, I was advised by Professor Furuie to make a *meishi* that identified me as a foreign researcher (*gaikokujin kenkyūsha*) under the University of Tsukuba, because I was told that whenever I met someone on the field site, it would be made much easier to gain access to people,

introduced myself. After a while, I was led upstairs by one of the receptionists to meet the head of the education section. I introduced myself again to the head of the section and also briefly explained my research. After he heard about my research, he made a phone call to a local history museum (*shiryokan*) and arranged a meeting with Terazaki-san who was working there as a town official, a researcher and a historian. I met Terazaki-san at the museum in the late afternoon of the same day. I handed my *meishi* to him and explained my research and fieldwork in more detail and asked for help in gaining access to local hamlets and people. However, he did not immediately accept my request on that day. Instead, he asked me to make an official request to the museum through my institutional affiliation.

After I returned to the University of Tsukuba, Professor Furuie made contact with Terazaki-san and arranged a meeting with him. A few days later, Professor Furuie and I visited Makabe and met Terazaki-san at the museum and ‘officially’ asked for help with my fieldwork. Terazaki-san kindly drove us to one of the hamlets called Hatori where he introduced me to Yamaguchi-san and Kurusu-san, a former and a current head of the hamlet (*kuchō*). I handed my *meishi* to them and explained my research and fieldwork. They willingly consented to help and to introduce me to other residents. In this way, I could gain access to the hamlet and get started with my fieldwork. In my case, gaining access to the research site seemed very straightforward and relatively simple due to the direct support of the Town Office and my institutional affiliation. However, as my fieldwork progressed, I realised that it is hard for foreign researchers to gain access to Japanese society, especially the rural community, without the support of the Town Office, because people in rural districts view foreigners with great suspicion.

## **2. Makabe: The site**

Makabe, located at the western central part of the Ibaraki prefecture in the Kantō region<sup>4</sup> of the main island of Honshū, is a small *inaka* (rural) town of approximately

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places and events if I first proved my social identity with my *meishi*. Soon after I started my fieldwork, I realised how important a *meishi* was for a foreign stranger when meeting someone who looks at me suspiciously. I handed out several hundred *meishi* during my fieldwork.

<sup>4</sup> The Kantō region is the most highly developed, urbanised, industrialised and populated part of Japan.



19,000 people and 5,700 households (as of 1 October 2005) occupying 37.75 square miles. Although Makabe is about 50 miles away from Tokyo and lies in the Kantō region, it is quite an isolated and remote inland town, and visiting the town is not convenient because there is no direct train or bus service from Tokyo to Makabe. It takes more than two and a half hours to get from Tokyo to Makabe by a train-and-bus combination (taking the hourly train and changing at Oyama for the half-hourly train heading to Iwase, and then taking a local bus to Makabe). Makabe has mountains along its east side, named Kaba (709m) and Ashio (628m), running from north to south. Mt. Tsukuba (877m) dominates the southern side. The western part of Makabe lies in a flat paddy field by the Sakura River.

Makabe has long been best known throughout the country as a stone-producing place, and for its stone articles, since good quality granite (*mikageishi*) is quarried in the Mt. Kaba area. The stone industry rapidly developed with Japan's economic success between the 1960s and the 1980s. There were a great number of quarries, stone carving factories and stone article wholesale companies in which many local people were employed. According to the local town's annual statistical report, one in four of Makabe's working population was engaged in a stone-related occupation in the 1980s (Makabe-machi 1998: 9). However, the industry declined after the collapse of the 'economic bubble' in the early 1990s, since it had to compete with much cheaper imports from Korea, China, India and other Asian countries. As a result, many quarries, stone-related companies and shops became bankrupt and were closed down. Nonetheless, the stone industry still remains one of the main pillars of the Makabe economy, along with the brewing and agricultural industries. During my fieldwork in Makabe, granite was still quarried in the Mt. Kaba, although its outturn was small, and there were several hundred stone carving factories in which various stone articles such as tombstones, stone lanterns, monuments, and Buddhist and Shintō statues were produced.

Like many other Japanese *inaka* towns, Makabe is composed of a town centre (*machinaka*) and its peripheral hamlets. The town centre has approximately 1,600 residents living in 500 households. It is located under the Makabe castle ruin and its townscape is very old and historical because of the *machiya* (traditional Japanese

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It includes the seven prefectures of Chiba, Gunma, Ibaraki, Kanagawa, Saitama, Tochigi and Tokyo.

townhouses), which are made of wood and have *tatami* (woven straw mats) floors, wooden walls, sliding doors and traditional tile roofs (*kawara*). There are about 260 *machiya* and almost half of them are from the Edo (1603-1868) and Meiji (1868-1912) periods. Most of them are very well maintained and are still used as small shops (*mise*), *sake* breweries, storage buildings (*kura*), restaurants, and traditional Japanese inns (*ryokan*). All the public facilities such as the Town Office (*yakuba*), schools, the local museum, the police station, the bank, the post office, the health centre and the big modernised supermarket are also located in the town centre. It takes less than half an hour to walk around the town centre.

There are about 20 hamlets of 70 to 1,600 people and 20 to 500 households each around the town centre. Although some young people work as salaried employees in the town centre or the neighbouring big cities, such as Shimotsuma, Tsukuba, Tsuchiura, or Mito, most of the hamlets' residents are engaged in rice farming. They have their own family rice farms called *tanbo* on which all family members work. Nowadays, rice farming is highly mechanised and uses various machines for rice cultivation. Small tractors are used to plough the rice paddies and harvest rice, and transplanters for planting the rice seedlings. In the past, it would take 20 to 30 people to transplant the seedlings of one rice paddy; now a single mechanical rice transplanter can do the job in about two dozen paddies in one day. Since the population has declined, agricultural machinery has been used in place of manpower.

### **3. Methodological concerns**

During my fieldwork, I primarily collected data on death and its related beliefs and practices in the context of mortuary rituals. For this data collection, I used the traditional anthropological methods of fieldwork: 'participant observation' and 'informal interviewing', which made me able to obtain a deeper and more nuanced insight into the activities which the individuals of a group perform and the ways in which they think. I attempted to avoid any formal and structured interviews during my fieldwork. After the initial entry period I often used 'in-depth interviews' involving specific questions related to research topics. The in-depth interview is an

unstructured way of asking specific questions in the form of conversation (see Burgess 1982, 1984).

I worked with several primary groups of informants such as local households, undertakers, and Buddhist priests. During the initial stages of the fieldwork, I got to know a former and a current head of the hamlet (*kuchō*) through the town official. They facilitated my entry into the community, as they functioned as ‘gatekeepers’ and became ‘key informants’ during my fieldwork. I became acquainted with other residents, households and groups of people. I joined a local quoits club (*wanage-kai*) and played a game of quoits with local elderly people in front of the village community centre (*kōminkan*) three times a week. Incidentally, anyone wanting to join the club must be sixty years of age or over. However, they allowed me to join the club as an ‘honorary’ member. I also joined a local *zazen* (meditation in Zen Buddhism) group and attended a group meditation class which took place in a local Buddhist temple every Sunday morning. I was able to meet a local Buddhist priest and many ‘believers’ there. Through the expansion of my contacts, and through socialising with them, I was able to collect various data on death and its related beliefs and practices. I was also able to attend various household rituals such as regular or occasional memorial services for recently departed individuals or groups as a friend, guest, researcher or onlooker.

Nonetheless, although I could attend various household rituals, it was especially hard for me to attend any funerals during the initial period of my fieldwork. I asked my informants to let me know when there would be a funeral, and to take me to it when they were attending themselves, but they did neither of these things despite there being several funerals in Hatori where I had started my fieldwork. For the first three months of the fieldwork, I could not attend or observe any funerals. At that time, I thought that I would have to wait until I became better acquainted with my informants and had a more intimate relationship with them. However, as my fieldwork progressed, I realised that it was difficult for them to bring me to a funeral because it was considered impolite to bring and introduce a ‘strange foreigner’ to the bereaved during a funeral. I therefore decided to contact the bereaved family or members of the neighbourhood funeral cooperative (*kumi-ai*) directly.

In this manner, I was able to attend several funerals which mainly took place at the deceased's house (*jitaku*). If the funeral took place at the deceased's house (*jitaku-sō*, literally 'house funeral'), it was much easier to get consent from the bereaved or members of the *kumi-ai*, because they did not care about me witnessing the funeral with other villagers, neighbours and onlookers from outside the house. However, if the funeral took place at the funeral hall (*saijyō-sō*, literally 'hall funeral'), it was more complicated acquiring consent to enter the hall because I had to contact the professional undertakers first, and then they also had to ask the bereaved family or the *kumi-ai*. In this case, I was not always granted entry into the hall. It was also hard to ask the professional undertakers each time because the bereaved family paid them for their services, thus the undertakers did not want to cause any trouble for them.

After the initial period of my fieldwork, I discovered the limitation of this methodological approach. I realised that although my strategy was a good starting point, it was not enough to attend only the funeral in order to understand the mortuary process, because the funeral is just one part of it. I became aware that it was important to observe the overall mortuary process. In other words, I needed to find out more about the ways in which the bereaved, the *kumi-ai* or undertakers prepare the deceased before the funeral and deal with the deceased or the remains and the spirit after the funeral. In order to do so, I changed my plan in order to work at a local funeral home sooner than intended. I tried to find someone who could help me work at a funeral home, because at that time I could still remember that when I directly asked the town official to help me gain access to local hamlets, he did not immediately accept my request. For this reason, I thought it better to contact a local influential person to help me to work at a funeral home.

I made contact with Karube-san who was in his late fifties and a local *sake* distiller. I met him at a local funeral and I briefly explained my research. At that time he gave me his *meishi* and said, 'You can contact me anytime you need help'. When I met him to ask for help, he introduced me to Nishioka-san who was also a local *sake* distiller, a member of a local Rotary Club and the president of a local association of commerce and industry (*shōkōkai*). Nishioka-san was well acquainted with Machida-san, the head of the Machida funeral home where his father's funeral

had been held several years previously. He made contact with Machida-san, and arranged a meeting with him. On the following day, Nishioka-san and I visited the funeral home and Nishioka-san introduced me to Machida-san. I explained to him my research and fieldwork. Although he could not fully understand why I had to work at a funeral home, he kindly allowed me to work in his funeral home.

I worked at the Machida funeral home as a kind of ‘apprentice’ undertaker for approximately four months between March and July in 2006. I worked with six male undertakers and five female undertakers. The female undertakers usually worked in the funeral hall at desk jobs and guided guests in the funeral hall. Male undertakers mostly worked outside of the hall performing hard, physically demanding and difficult tasks at the funeral home. Their job is to carry the deceased’s body from the hospital to the deceased’s house, from the house to the funeral home and from the funeral home to the crematorium. They deliver various large and heavy funeral items such as funeral altars, grave markers, dry ice and funeral wreaths, and set them up at the deceased’s house or the funeral hall. They often dig a grave or open the concrete lid of a grave compartment (*karōdo*) and bury or lay the urn in the grave. During the wake and the funeral they change their working clothes into suits for greeting the guests and preparing a banquet. It is also very common for them to stay with the deceased, the bereaved and guests at the wake until midnight. When I was working at the funeral home I was able to attend and observe a large number of funerals. I was also able to interview my colleagues when I needed to talk to them.

After four months of work at the funeral home, I contacted local Buddhist temples to talk with priests about their ideas about how a funeral and the concept of death fit in with Buddhism. In particular, I discussed with them their ideas of the spirit of the dead, its whereabouts and the afterlife. There were six Buddhist temples in Makabe at the time of my fieldwork. Although these temples belong to four different Buddhist sects, the ways of dealing with death, and their notion of death, were more or less the same. I also contacted several local Shintō shrines and met Shintō priests to discuss the Shintō concepts concerning death, the dead and views on the afterlife. However I could not get much information on death and mortuary rituals because funeral and death-related rituals have long been abandoned by Shintō due to the pollution of death. Although in recent years very few Shintō funerals



(*shinsōsai*) have been conducted for Shintō families in some parts of Japan (see Hendry 2003 [1987]: 157; Sakurai, H. 1985), in Makabe death and mortuary rituals are still strongly associated with pollution and thus Shintō priests entirely reject any rituals related to death. Instead, Shintōism is associated with auspicious celebrations of life and its development, such as births and weddings (see also Hendry 2003 [1987]: 130). For this reason, there is a common saying in Japan that ‘People are born Shintō and die Buddhist’. In many urban districts in recent years, weddings influenced by Christian ceremonies are becoming increasingly popular for young couples and so there is another saying ‘People are born Shintō, marry Christian and die Buddhist’.

Unfortunately, I did not come across any Christian clergy in Makabe, because there were no Christian churches there during the time of my fieldwork. Nonetheless I did encounter Nakamura-san who was in her eighties and a former Christian. According to Nakamura-san, there was a small Protestant Christian church which was established by Swiss and German missionaries after the Second World War but it was closed in the late 1970s. Nakamura-san started to go to the church when she was in her twenties and stopped when it was closed and since then she has been going to a local Buddhist temple. She remembered that seven or eight Christians went to church with her at that time but they all had household Shintō shrines (*kamidana*) and Buddhist altars (*butsudan*) at their houses and worshipped Shintō deities and their ancestors. Although some of them were married in the church, they conducted Buddhist funerals when their family members died. She told me that although they knew that Christians are not allowed to worship any other gods or spirits, there was nothing strange or surprising in the fact that they worshipped different beings at the same time.

My fieldwork was carried out in both the standard Japanese language (*hyōjungo*) and a local dialect (*Ibaraki-ben*) because although the Ibaraki prefecture is one of seven prefectures of the Kantō region where people usually speak standard Japanese, many people in rural districts of the Ibaraki prefecture (especially middle-aged and elderly people) speak *Ibaraki-ben*. Although I began to learn Japanese when I was an undergraduate student at home in Korea, undertook Japanese language training in Tokyo, and since then have spoken Japanese for more than a decade, it

was especially difficult for me to understand *Ibaraki-ben* at the beginning of my fieldwork because I had standard Japanese, a school-taught language. Many of my informants were middle-aged and elderly people who spoke *Ibaraki-ben*. Although they were taught to speak standard Japanese at school, they grew up speaking *Ibaraki-ben* and did not begin to learn standard Japanese until they attended school. Thus, in their homes and in community life, virtually all of their communication was in *Ibaraki-ben*. While I was struggling with *Ibaraki-ben*, I was also told by my informants that even for those who come from outside of the prefecture it is hard to understand *Ibaraki-ben* although they live in the Kantō region and grew up there. For this reason, I was often told, ‘the Ibaraki prefecture is not part of the Kantō region’ (*Ibaraki wa Kantō ja neiyō*). It seemed to me that Ibaraki people are very proud of their language and are not happy to be treated as Kantō people.

#### **4. Continuity and change in mortuary rites**

As I have noted already, nowadays a funeral usually takes place at a commercial funeral hall (*saijyō-sō*). However, it is still often held at the deceased’s house (*jitaku-sō*) and, very rarely, at Buddhist temples (*tera-sō*, literally ‘temple funeral’). During my fieldwork, I made a point of reading the funeral column (*okuyami*) of a local newspaper (*Ibaraki Shinbun*) every morning before I left home, as it provided me with information about how many people had died the previous day in Makabe, whether they were male or female, young or old, their places of residence, when and where the funeral would be held, and who the chief mourner was going to be (whether s/he was the eldest son, the second son, a daughter, a son-in-law, a wife or a husband of the deceased). When I counted the number of funerals which had appeared in the funeral column in 2006, I found that a total of 227 funerals had been announced in one year and among them 166 funerals had been held at funeral halls, 57 funerals had been held at the deceased’s home, and 4 funerals had been held at Buddhist temples. Thus, more than a quarter of the total number of funerals had been held at the deceased’s home in 2006.

However, according to my informants, before the first funeral hall was built in 1995, almost all funerals were held at the home of the deceased (*jitaku-sō*). Ever

since the first funeral hall managed by professional undertakers was opened, it was in great demand because many Makabe people realised that it was easy and convenient to use the funeral hall and its facilities not only for the deceased's family but also for guests. For instance, nowadays each Japanese rural household usually has at least one or two cars and one or two small trucks. There is a lack of public transport not only in Makabe but also in many rural districts of Japan. For this reason, wherever people go, they drive a car. In other words, if 100 guests attend the funeral, they will all need places to park their cars. However, the funeral hall has its own car park in which more than 100 cars can be parked. Therefore, if the funeral is held at the funeral hall, guests do not need to struggle to find parking places on the street. The second funeral hall was opened in 1999 and the third one in 2005 during my fieldwork.

However, most importantly, wherever the funeral takes place, it is carried out by professional undertakers (*sōgiya-san*) hired by the deceased's family. In other words, the family must purchase almost all of the funeral accoutrements and pay the professional undertakers for their services. According to my elderly informants, the funeral was principally handled by the neighbourhood funeral cooperative (*kumi-ai*) until professional undertakers appeared in Makabe. The *kumi-ai* was not an organization involved only in the funeral, but also formed a part of the neighbourhood association dedicated to the general welfare of the neighbourhood. But, nowadays, the *kumi-ai* is mostly involved in funerals rather than other neighbourhood duties, although its role and duties have decreased from what they were in the past when the *kumi-ai* made its own coffins (*hitsugi*), grave markers (*bohyō*), wooden grave tablets (*sotoba*), mortuary tablets (*ihai*), and funeral wreaths (*hanawa*) with materials procured at its own expense.

Although most funerals today are carried out by professional undertakers (*sōgiya-san*), the *kumi-ai* still plays an important role by overseeing the entire mortuary ritual process. Members of the *kumi-ai* hold a consultation with the deceased's family and professional undertakers about the arrangements for the funeral. They also negotiate with undertakers when they have different opinions about dealing with the dead and different ways of performing mortuary rituals. They are still stationed at the entrance of the funeral hall to greet guests, receive monetary



offerings, and distribute gifts because these are the most important parts of the mortuary rituals not only for creating, maintaining and strengthening social relationships or cooperation between the surviving relatives and their guests but also for the distribution of pollution and vitality. They also provide salt, water and towels to the bereaved relatives and guests for the purification of death pollution when they return from the crematorium and the grave. Additionally, the ritual framework and practice remain the same as before; in particular, they still place emphasis on the purification or elimination of pollution and the replenishment of vitality.

## **5. *The structure of the thesis***

As a first step towards contextualising the theoretical framework of the thesis and articulating my argument, in Chapter One, I illustrate some of the principle ways in which death has been examined and theorised within anthropology, with specific attention paid to mortuary rituals and practices. I particularly highlight the major shifts in anthropological approaches in the study of death and mortuary rituals, the key theoretical debates, and methodological advances. This chapter therefore takes the form of a literature review. However, my aim is not simply to introduce some of the different approaches to death and mortuary rituals but rather to formulate my own approach which articulates the main argument of the thesis. I also introduce some ways in which anthropologists and folklorists have examined Japanese mortuary rituals in order to situate my argument in the particular ethnographic context in which my fieldwork was carried out.

Before proceeding to the main chapters, I provide in Chapter Two, by using my fieldwork information, a detailed descriptive narrative of the overall mortuary process to serve as a basic framework for not only analysing the complex mortuary ritual system but also for understanding the process of death (the way in which the spirit is separated from its body and transformed into a household ancestor) as well as the process of purifying the pollution of death (the way in which the defiled state of both the living and the dead is transformed into a state of purity). Although different deaths elicit different mortuary rituals and practices, there seems to be a basic shared framework to the ritual procedure. Rather than focusing on the

variations, I shall place emphasis on a description of the most fundamental mortuary processes of a 'typical death', as it normally occurs in the particular place, Makabe.

In Chapter Three, rather than examine a 'typical' death from old age, I look at various kinds of death according to the age, gender, and social and economic status of the deceased as well as the cause of death, and I attempt to find the significance of the differences among these deaths. By doing this, it makes it possible to elucidate social and cultural variations in the idea of 'personhood' and through these to understand the particular Japanese concept of the person. More specifically, if there are differences in dealing with death, these differences probably illustrate or imply not only different kinds of death but also different categories of persons. I attempt to examine the ways in which different kinds of persons are associated with different kinds of death in and through their relation to different amounts of vitality and pollution.

Chapter Four focuses on the process by which the dead are transformed into different kinds of spirits in and through their relation to vitality and pollution. I elucidate the way in which spirits of the dead are associated with different amounts of vitality or pollution and how they supplement their own vitality and diminish or eliminate their pollution. I suggest that the most important factor which may affect the transformation of the spirits of the newly dead is the intimate relationship between the dead and their surviving descendants, because the dead can only supplement their own vitality and diminish or eliminate their pollution through various forms of formal or informal veneration and offerings from their descendants. Thus, I also look at how the spirits of the dead and their surviving descendants become 'entangled' in everyday household life.

In Chapter Five, I firstly elucidate whether the contemporary Japanese mortuary ritual is still concerned with pollution and its elimination or purification through various ethnographic examples. I then explore the social and cultural implications of the pollution of death because investigating death pollution is extremely significant not simply for understanding the Japanese notion of death but also for grasping the efficacy of Japanese mortuary rituals as a whole. I also investigate the relationship and interaction between pollution and vitality through various kinds of beliefs and practices surrounding death and mortuary rituals, and the

ways in which pollution can be eliminated or purified and vitality can be replenished or supplemented.

In Chapter Six, I explore the way in which grief is experienced and expressed during the period of mourning through various ethnographic examples and I attempt to interpret people's outward emotional actions or behaviour in their relation to pollution and vitality. More specifically, I attempt to discover particular patterns or features of emotional responses to death and analyse their social and cultural implications and associated values.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, I explore the system and the process of gift exchange in order to delimit the characteristic patterns of gift-giving behaviour in mortuary rites. More specifically, I analyse the way in which mortuary exchanges establish, adjust and maintain not only social relationships between the bereaved and the non-bereaved, but also the 'spiritual' relationships between the living and the dead. However, mortuary rituals provide an arena not only for the reciprocal exchange of gifts but also for the exchange of pollution and vitality and thus, in this chapter, I particularly focus on the process of mortuary gift-giving in and through its relation to the flow of pollution and vitality.



Plate 1. Town centre (*machinaka*) of Makabe



Plate 2. A local hamlet (*buraku*) and a paddy field



Plate 3. A local quits club (*wanage-kai*)





Plate 4. Machida funeral home



Plate 5. The author loading a new coffin into a funeral car



Plate 6. An undertaker digging a grave

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# *Death and mortuary rites in anthropology*

### *Introduction*

Death has been of enduring interest to social scientists because it has involved social relations, cultural ideals, and the human body. For anthropologists, in particular those from Western societies, death and its related beliefs and practices have long been a central topic, not only as an integral part of ‘primitive’ religions but also as a way to understand societies and cultures.

In this chapter, as a first step towards contextualising the theoretical framework of my thesis and establishing its main argument, I shall introduce previous anthropological works on death and its related beliefs and practices in the context of mortuary rituals. I would also like to highlight some of the major paradigmatic shifts in anthropological approaches to the study of death, key theoretical debates, and methodological advances. This chapter will therefore take the form of a comprehensive literature review focused on various issues surrounding death and its related beliefs and practices. It is intentionally split into two sections. In the first section, I shall attempt to illustrate some of the main ways in which death has been examined and theorised within anthropology, with specific attention paid to mortuary rituals. However, my goal is not simply to highlight some of the different approaches to death and mortuary rituals but rather to formulate my own approach which may articulate the main argument of the thesis. In the second section, I shall briefly introduce some of the ways in which anthropologists and folklorists have examined Japanese mortuary rituals in order to situate my argument in the ethnographic context.

## **1. Theoretical issues in the anthropology of death**

Early anthropologists such as Edward Tylor and James Frazer explored 'primitive' beliefs relating to death and mortuary practices in order to evaluate the evolutionary process which religion and society were thought to undergo. As social evolutionists, Tylor and Frazer believed that there was a functional basis or necessity for the development of religion and society, which they asserted was 'universal'. They introduced the so-called 'intellectualist' approach which suggests that belief or religion can best be understood as a way of explaining events. In other words, as Horton (1971: 94) notes, the belief or religion is a 'theoretical system' intended for providing explanation and, thus, it can be thought as akin to science. However, it is hardly plausible to contrast religious explanations of events with those of science (see Morris 1987: 98-106). Tylor and Frazer asserted that 'primitive' people possess the same amount of intelligence as 'civilised' people. They interpreted the 'primitive' belief or religion on the basis that 'primitive' people made a mistaken logical inference because they confused subjective and objective reality in their belief that the soul is detachable and capable of independent existence in its own mode.

Nonetheless, both Tylor (1903 [1871]) and Frazer (1890, 1933) seemed to make a distinction between the 'civilised' and the 'primitive' by considering the fear of death. They maintained that for the 'primitive', the fear of death (or the afterlife) leads to the creation of the concept of the spirit and a belief in its continued existence after death, and consequently brings on the worship of ancestors and the practice of making offering to ancestors. According to this view, it can be understood that the 'primitive' performed mortuary rituals and ancestor worship in an attempt to cope with their fear of death. For both Tylor and Frazer, the 'primitive' were thought to be different from the 'civilised' and thus 'primitive' societies had taboos but 'civilised' societies had developed the concept of the sacred. They viewed 'primitive' cultures as culturally inferior. Although it is hard to deny the fact that the works of Tylor and Frazer influenced the next generation of anthropologists and made an important contribution to the anthropological study of death, their works

have been criticised on numerous grounds, varying from their idea of 'primitive' to their ethnocentric scheme of universal cultural evolution.

After the initial momentum of Tylor and Fraser, a quite different tradition emerged in the anthropological study of death. The work of Emile Durkheim directly opposed the 'intellectualist' approach which was the most influential tradition within British anthropology. According to Metcalf and Huntington (1991: 28), Durkheim argued that 'religion expressed the moral cohesion of society rather than the fears and imaginings of individuals'. They also noted that '[w]hereas for Frazer and Tylor primitive beliefs relating to death provided easy solutions to questions about the origins and nature of religion, for Durkheim conceptions about death were part of the problem, not a solution' (ibid.) because 'from his point of view, the very nature of the individual as an entity differentiated from the group is the central problem to be investigated' (ibid.). The works of Durkheim essentially focused on the integration of individuals into 'society'. In his book *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912), he argued that the death of an individual strengthens social ties and reinforces the social structure of a group by calling forth feelings of togetherness and social solidarity. Durkheim has had a lasting influence on the anthropology of death by emphasising that socially dictated expressions of grief are often out of proportion to the strength of individual emotions (Durkheim 2001 [1912]: 295-297).

[M]ourning is not the spontaneous expression of individual emotions. If the relatives weep, lament, and beat each other and themselves, it is not because they feel personally touched by the death of their kinsman. No doubt it may happen, in particular cases, the sorrow expressed is sincerely felt. But more generally, there is no connection between the feelings experienced and the gestures performed by the actors of the rite. ... Mourning is not a natural impulse of the private sensibility bruised by a cruel loss; it is a duty imposed by the group. They lament, not simply because they are sad, but because they are obliged to lament. This is a ritual attitude they are compelled to adopt out of respect for custom, but which is in large measure independent of the affective state of individuals. (Durkheim 2001 [1912]: 295)

For Durkheim, grief is not an individually or personally expressed emotion, but rather, it is the collectively forced reaction to the death of social members. In this sense, it can be understood that the mortuary ritual or gathering to mourn the dead



becomes a means of 'representing' or 'reproducing' the group's collective sentiments or the 'collective consciousness' - the most essential element for the unity of a social group. However, although for many Durkheimian anthropologists it has long been accepted that death and mortuary rituals represent or reproduce a society, some recent anthropologists have suggested that death and mortuary rituals themselves do not represent or reproduce the society, but rather, they 'constitute' and 'create' the society (see Metcalf & Huntington 1991; Bloch & Parry 1982: 6). Although the debate on whether death represents or creates society is still ongoing, I would rather not position myself because, in my view, it seems to constitute a rather circular debate which is rather similar to the one about which is more important – society or the individual?

Elements of this Durkheimian approach to the study of death and the mortuary ritual have been carried forward by many anthropologists, in particular Hertz (1907), Van Gennep (1909), Radcliffe-Brown (1922, 1952) and Malinowski (1925). Although they focus on different aspects of death and their explanations may differ, they all agree that the death of an individual can contribute to the solidarity of the social collective. However, it is important to note that they cannot transcend the methodologically or theoretically limited boundary of the Durkheimian approach when dealing with death. Most of the works of Durkheimian anthropologists tend to restrict death within a specific culture or society as a determined social factor. From this Durkheimian perspective, it seems that death does not have its own efficacy, rather it dramatises something else as a sort of allegory. These Durkheimian anthropologists attempt to decipher death, and its related beliefs and practices, for understanding the social collective and social structure.

Following on from Durkheim, Robert Hertz, who was Durkheim's pupil and based his work on the Durkheimian model, explored the concept of death and the complexities of death rituals. His classic essay, 'A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death' (1960 [1907]), is a short paper but has endured as the single most influential text in anthropological research concerning death and mortuary rituals. Hertz primarily built his theory on data from South Asian 'tribal' societies, and focused his attention on the practice of secondary burial. He analysed the mortuary ritual as part of a tripartite relationship which includes the relation

between the living and the corpse; the relation between the corpse and the spirit; and the relation between the spirit and the living. The moment of death can be considered the starting point for this tripartite relationship: the corpse becomes unanimated and the process of decomposition starts; the taboos concerning the living become effective; and the spirit starts its existence in the intermediary realm between the world of the living and the realm of ancestral spirits. This intermediary period ends with the rite of the secondary burial, which involves the exhumation of the corpse and its burial in a new tomb. This rite also ushers the spirit of the dead safely to the other world, through it the spirit is integrated into the realm of ancestral spirits. The same rite removes the taboos of the living and thus cleanses them from the pollution of death.

Like Durkheim, Hertz concentrated on the social aspects of death and not on its biological or psychological components. For Hertz, the death of a human being is not entirely a biological reality nor confined to the individual grief of the surviving relatives, but rather, death brings about social obligations expressed in culturally determined mortuary practices. For instance, he postulated that the fear of death experienced by the living depends upon the social status of the deceased. To quote Hertz:

The horror inspired by the corpse does not spring from the simple observation of the changes that occur in the body. ... [I]n one and the same society the emotion aroused by death varies extremely in intensity according to the social status of the deceased, and may even in certain cases be entirely lacking. At the death of a chief, or of a man of high rank, a true panic sweeps over the group .... On the contrary, the death of a stranger, a slave, or a child will go almost unnoticed; it will arouse no emotion, occasion no ritual. (Hertz 1960 [1907]: 76)

This illustrates, in part, why some funerals are large and some are small, and consequently how funerary rites may represent social and political differentiation by distinguishing among people of distinct social status. Hertz pointed out that human death, its related emotions, beliefs and practices are primarily social products, integrated parts of the society that reflect the sociocultural context within which it takes place. Although it is obvious that the work of Hertz has significantly influenced the growing literature on the anthropological study of death, it is hard to

avoid a critical remark on the problem of exceptions and the dangers of the overgeneralisation of the model of Southeast Asian secondary burials.

While Hertz analysed death rituals with the notion of spatial relationships among the living, the corpse and the spirit, Arnold Van Gennep analysed them within the passage of time. Van Gennep was also influenced by Durkheim and his school. His work focused on totems, taboos, rituals, and myths as systems of classification and mechanisms of social integration and developed ideas closely related to Durkheim's functionalism. Nonetheless, Van Gennep had never been accepted into Durkheim's inner circle and his work on folklore had been ignored and criticised by Durkheim and his followers who ignored folkloristic methodology and data more generally (see Belier 1994: 142; Lukes 1973: 524). Van Gennep also strongly criticised Durkheimian scholarly practices and methods, something that assured him of the hostility of the, then, dominant Durkheimian school.

Although Van Gennep treated death rituals to less than 20 pages in his seminal work *Les Rites de Passage* (1960 [1909]), he made an extremely significant contribution to the anthropological study of death by interpreting death as one of a series of ritual passages in the life cycle: 'The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another' (1960 [1909]: 2-3). These transitions, such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death are life crises and become, therefore, the subject of elaborate elevation rituals as an individual makes progress from one social status of life to the next:

Transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence, so that a man's life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings. (1960 [1909]: 3)

In *Les Rites de Passage*, Van Gennep described death rituals on the axis of time and divided them into three phases: the rites of separation, the transitional rites, and the rites of incorporation. The first phase is death itself, in which both the deceased and the mourners become separated from their previous social condition. The second phase Van Gennep described as a 'marginal' phase, during which mourners adopt special modes of behaviour and dress, while the spirit of the dead is believed to be either making a long journey, or lingering, rootless and restless, close to home. In

the third phase, the mourners return to their previous social state and everyday life, while the spirit of the departed is supposed to have reached its ultimate destination, which can then be marked by a further form of ritual<sup>5</sup>. Van Gennep applied his theory regarding the rites of passage in a universal way. He postulated that no matter how much the final detail may differ in various communities around the world, the generalities of behaviour around the time of someone's death remain the same.

The Durkheimian approach to the study of death also pervaded the writings of many British social anthropologists. Durkheim is often described as the founder of structural-functionalism, although this was developed by British anthropologist Alfred Radcliffe-Brown. Strongly influenced by Durkheim and his school, Radcliffe-Brown, focusing on one aspect of death that Van Gennep and Hertz did not discuss in sufficient detail, tried to demonstrate in his ethnography *The Andaman Islanders* (1964 [1922]), how weeping is a collective performance rather than a spontaneous personal expression of sorrow. Radcliffe-Brown observed seven occasions of ritual weeping related to initiations, marriages, friendships, peacemaking and deaths. He divided these seven occasions into two varieties of ritual weeping: one is reciprocal weeping (both parties are active), and another is one-side weeping (one person is passive while another weeps over him/her). For the Andaman islander, weeping is a general response to loss not only in mortuary rituals but also in weddings and initiation rituals. They cry on demand when required by society. Radcliffe-Brown suggested that these cultural practices produce the emotions that they are obliged to express in public, and so affirm the existence of social attachments that hold social members together. He repeats Durkheim to a certain extent:

The weeping ... is ... not a spontaneous expression of individual emotion but is an example of ... ceremonial customs. In certain circumstances men and women are required by custom to embrace one another and weep, and if they neglected to do so it would be an offence condemned by all right-thinking persons. (Radcliffe-Brown 1964 [1922]: 239-240)

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<sup>5</sup> However, according to Van Gennep, the unburied dead or those who have died bad deaths, such as suicides, do not allow for the proper performance of these rites; thus these dead sustain themselves as ghosts at the expense of the living and become enemies to survivors (see Van Gennep 1960 [1909]: 161).

The ritual weeping, on the occasion of death, manifests the social attachment of the living and the dead, and restores and strengthens the social solidarity of the survivors when it is being weakened (Radcliffe-Brown 1964 [1922]: 245). It has a definite role or function to play in the life of that society. In addition to Durkheim's social function, Radcliffe-Brown offered a psychological explanation of ritual weeping, suggesting that it provides relief for individuals from emotional tension (Ebersole 2000: 238). This view was clearly expressed by another social anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski. Although Radcliffe-Brown developed the perspective of structural-functionalism and greatly influenced later British anthropologists, his work had many theoretical and methodological limitations. For instance, he believed that in any society, weeping always functions in a similar way. In this universal sense, however, there seems to be no need to study individual ritual performances in detail, nor does it focus on individual participants. Radcliffe-Brown consequently overlooked the ways in which individuals use or manipulate the social expectations and ritual requirements surrounding ritual weeping for their own intentions and purposes (Ebersole 2000: 238).

Bronislaw Malinowski was also influenced by Durkheim and followed his sociological approach to the study of death and mortuary rituals. Nonetheless, he explicitly rejected Durkheim's ignoring of the individual experience of emotion (1954 [1925]: 59). Developing his work about the importance of the reaction to death as a source of religion, Malinowski was concerned with the fear of death. In his study *Magic, Science and Religion* (1954 [1925]), Malinowski proposed that mortuary practices are a social mechanism for allowing relief of emotional tension in individuals - a simple readjustment of normal conditions. He maintained that the death of an individual provokes strong and conflicting emotions: on the one hand, a horror of death; but, on the other, a persisting love for the departed, and a desire to sever ties with the dead but also to maintain them (1954 [1925]: 48). Simply put, surviving relatives want to both break and prolong their association with the deceased simultaneously. These contradictory impulses find expression in the mortuary rites, which 'endorse and ... duplicate the natural feelings of the survivors; they create a social event out of a natural fact' (1954 [1925]: 52). Malinowski emphasised that 'the whole of mortuary ritual' must provide 'some biological



function of religion' (1954 [1925]: 52) that 'saves man from surrender to death and destruction' (1954 [1925]: 51). In this sense, as Davies (2002 [1997]: 16) notes, mortuary rituals help individuals over the period of their suffering as well as expressing the loss of a social member. For Malinowski, the mortuary rituals - and their related religious significance - are intended to counteract 'the centrifugal forces of fear, dismay and demoralisation, and provide the most powerful means of reintegration of the group's shaken solidarity, and of the re-establishment of its morale' (1954 [1925]: 53).

As an alternative to focusing on the continuation of communal bonds or the religious dimensions of death and mortuary rites, later anthropologists analysed the effect of death and mortuary rites on social integration from different perspectives. For instance, Maurice Bloch attempted to add a new dimension to earlier anthropological interpretations of death and mortuary rituals. As Davies (2002 [1997]: 19-20) remarks, rather than simply assenting to the Durkheimian assumption that mortuary rituals reintegrate society, or agreeing with Van Gennep's assertion that the social status of individuals is changed by rituals, or even with Malinowski's view that mortuary rituals helps the surviving relatives during their period of mourning, Bloch's perspective on these rituals added the 'new dimension of power', because Bloch thought that 'individuals gain a sense of having encountered some sort of transcendent power or dimension' through rituals.

In his monograph *From Blessing to Violence* (1986), Bloch examined the circumcision ritual in history, specifically how it has been changed over time. Although he focused mainly on the circumcision ritual, his perspective can also be applied to the mortuary ritual. He stated that ritual form may remain constant in the face of dramatic historical changes, which place rituals at the service of various social groups. For Bloch, rituals have the power to legitimate social and political hierarchy over historical time periods. This hierarchy is continued and rituals are effective because of the collusion between inferior social members or groups and superior social members or groups. While inferior social members or groups may have to submit to the power and authority of superior members or groups, in the future they will be in the position of superior members or groups and so they have an involvement in the perpetuation of the hierarchy. In this sense, the mortuary ritual



has a timeless quality and an ability to provide an arena for the perpetuation of social and political hierarchy among differently powerful members or groups.

Additionally, Bloch (1968, 1971, 1981, 1982, 1986) mostly focused on the significance of tombs among the Merina of Madagascar. For the Merina, tombs are a central symbol which implicates various factors to specify Merina society as well as cosmology. The relationship between the people and land takes a material form in the tombs of members of the '*deme*' (an exclusive kinship group) (Bloch 1981: 139). These tombs are placed in the land of the *deme* and it is the most important duty of any Merina to ensure that all members of the *deme* are physically regrouped in tombs of the *deme* when they are dead (ibid.). When a corpse is buried in the tomb of the *deme*, the deceased is surrounded by the ancestral land that is shared collectively (ibid.). This means that by placing the corpse in the tomb, it makes it possible for the deceased to closely associate himself or herself with the lost society of the ancestors and thus creates the land of ancestors (*tanindrazana*) (Bloch 1968: 100). The tomb for the Merina is not a glorification of death but a material manifestation of the descent group's symbolic victory over individuals and death itself, a victory extensively elaborated in mortuary rituals (Bloch 1982).

Jonathan Parry (1982, 1994) looked at Hindu mortuary rites among the Aghori in the Indian city of Banaras, specifically how the individual, the social order, and the entire cosmos are represented and reproduced through the dealing with the physical remains of the dead. In Hindu mortuary rituals, the deceased's body is cremated on the funeral pyre in order to separate flesh from bones. After the cremation, the skull is cracked by surviving relatives and then the remains are thrown into the sacred river to allow their rebirth. The individual death is assimilated into the process of cosmic renewal and regeneration, and thus 'cremation is cosmogony' (Parry 1994: 31). Parry stated that 'cremation is a kind of sacrifice and that sacrifice is a re-enactment of cosmogony' (1994: 31). Therefore, 'since cremation is a sacrifice, since sacrifice regenerates the cosmos, and since the funeral pyres burn without interruption ... creation is here continually replayed' (1994: 32). Additionally, he noted that death pollution springs from the act of breaking the skull (1982: 79) and is repayment for the sin of burning the flesh (1994: 181-184). This pollution has a central role in maintaining the boundary between different castes.

However, once a body has been disintegrated by cremation and the remaining bones have been placed into the sacred river, the class boundary of the deceased is eliminated. The cosmos is represented in the relationship between the flesh and the bones, whereby the flesh and the bones have symbolic qualities, incorporated in cultural and cosmological re-constructions.

Together with Maurice Bloch, Jonathan Parry added further new ideas to the anthropological study of death by focusing on the significance of symbols of male fertility as opposed to female sexuality and good death versus bad death in the context of mortuary rituals. In their edited volume, *Death and the Regeneration of Life* (1982), they suggested that the symbols of fertility are prominent in death rituals because of the conception that death is a source of life. In a similar way to other anthropologists, they also drew upon Durkheim when dealing with death and mortuary rituals but they wished to go a step further. They shared the Durkheimian concern with the social implications of death and mortuary practices, but did not share his view of society as an entity acting by itself (Bloch & Parry 1982: 6). They argued that mortuary rituals themselves are an occasion for 'creating' the society which Durkheim speaks of, as an apparently external force (ibid.). For example, mortuary rituals create kinship, inheritance, the social power of man, etc. In this sense, it is fair to say that death is not only destructive of society but also profoundly creative of society.

From another perspective, the system of property and inheritance can affect the behaviour of individuals, maintain social order and organise social groups, rather than manifest issues of power, pollution, rebirth and fertility among social classes. Following on from Hertz's analysis, Jack Goody, in his study of *Death, Property and the Ancestors* (1962) among the LoDagaa of Northern Ghana, attempted to illuminate the way in which the pattern of inheritance of property can restore the social fabric of a group after death has threatened it. He focused on the structural and functional differences in the inheritance systems between two LoDagaa communities, the inhabitants of which are known as the LoWiili and the LoDagaba. Although both the LoWiili and the LoDagaba have similar forms of inheritance, there is one striking difference between them. Among the LoWiili all property is inherited patrilineally, whereas among the LoDagaba, though immovable property

passes patrilineally, movable wealth is inherited matrilineally. This difference derives from a pattern of labour service and interpersonal ties among close kin (Goody 1962: 426). For example, the LoDagaba sons are expected to farm for their mother's brothers, whereas the LoWiili sons work on their father's farms. Goody noted that 'working on somebody's farm is the most concrete way of establishing a claim upon that person's resources' (ibid.). In this respect, it can also be said that the system of property and inheritance influences the organization of descent groups and the kind of relationships that exist among close kin. Goody stated that 'without some system of inheritance and succession of intergenerational transmission of these exclusive rights, social life would be marked by disorganisation rather than by relative continuity' (1962: 30).

Those who have followed in the wake of Durkheim and his school have been devoted to illuminating the way in which the death of an individual can contribute to the solidarity or framing of the social collective. They have attempted to look at death and mortuary practices and their relation to the social group from various perspectives by focusing on religious frameworks, rites of passage, grief, property, inheritance, exchange, class or caste relations, fertility and rebirth. However, they have all tended to emphasise the social implications of death and mortuary practices rather than death itself and individual experience of death.

Over the last thirty years, this Durkheimian approach to the study of death has been severely criticised by other anthropologists, for example, Loring Danforth (1982), Renato Rosaldo (1984, 1989), Linda Connor (1995) and Nadia Seremetakis (1991). These anthropologists sought to recover 'emotions' or 'personal experiences of emotions' which had been excluded by Durkheimian anthropologists. Danforth argued that an understanding of grief is missing from the anthropological study of death and he criticised Durkheimian anthropologists who have depreciated the value of the individual experience of grief. He attempted to understand death as a universal human experience, and suggested that we can arrive at a general understanding of this experience by analysing death and mortuary rituals of one particular society. His analysis attempted to move beyond functionalism and structuralism as exemplified by Durkheimian anthropologists. Instead, Danforth followed the lead of Clifford Geertz in employing the methods of interpretive

anthropology (see Danforth 1982: 27-29). This approach aimed to draw out the meanings embodied in the socially established systems of symbols through which people order their experience and make sense of the world.

Rosaldo recast the form of functional and structural analyses of mortuary rituals derived from Durkheim and Hertz as the 'microcosmic view', where ritual is 'a self-contained sphere of deep cultural activity' (Rosaldo, R. 1989: 17). He recounted his personal experience of returning to his field study among the Ilongots<sup>6</sup> of northern Luzon in the Philippines after the accidental death of his wife in a fall (see Rosaldo, R. 1984: 183-184, 1989: 9). Previously he had had little understanding of why, for the Ilongot men he was interviewing, 'grief, rage and headhunting go together in a self-evident manner' (1989: 1). Whilst not wishing to posit universalising models of emotion, he argued that his own overwhelming rage when he discovered his wife's body helped him to grasp the experience of Ilongot men. Following this account, Rosaldo questioned the tendency of anthropological accounts which tend to discount or even to exclude the grief of survivors as an individual experience, criticising the accounts for their over-tidy, intellectual models of ritual, which take little account of 'the informal practices of everyday life' (1989: 16). He construed emotion as 'the great shaper of human actions' (Metcalf & Huntington 1991 [1979]: 4). Rosaldo's personal experience of grief moved him from a Durkheimian view of death to one which focuses much more on the personal experience of an individual.

Linda Connor also criticised Durkheimian anthropologists who 'valorise the study of bounded events and the perspective of the detached observer' (1995: 537) and marginalise 'the study of grief and bereavement as experiences integral to the ongoing processes of social life' (ibid.). To transcend this theoretically infertile ground, she suggested 'reflexive involvement on the part of the anthropologist, and the opening up of new areas of sociality to serious analytical scrutiny' (ibid.). Connor sought to discover the ways in which the individual experience of death and bereavement can be constituted and manifested through multiple and contested

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<sup>6</sup> The Ilongots, in their pre-Christian day before the 1970s, were headhunters. They believed that the death of a relative made one's heart 'heavy and distraught' and that through killing and the taking of a head of an enemy, the men, at least, were able to 'cast off the weight of grief and pain' (Rosaldo, M. 1980: 157).

discourses in shifting contexts of sociality. She explored processes of bereavement through Balinese corpse washing, which has particular salience as a context for the expression of suffering in the face of death.

In a similar manner, Nadia Seremetakis, in her book *The Last Word: Women, Death, and Divination in Inner Mani* (1991), explored death through a focus on embodiment, voice and emotion, and in particular, through the culturally configured concept of 'pain' which entails all these elements. She attempted to demonstrate a striking contrast between her work and conventional Durkheimian accounts of ritual structure (see 1991: 47-48). She criticised Hertz, Van Gennep and other anthropologists who follow the Durkheimian approach to the study of death because, in her opinion, they focus too narrowly on the internal periodisation of the process of death, that is, on the containment of physical death, culminating in burial or cremation and the departure of the spirit. Seremetakis regarded these Durkheimian anthropologists as overly concerned with the management of disorder and the restoration of society to its 'normal', integrated, 'predetermined homeostatic condition' through mortuary rituals (1991: 48). She also criticised Bloch and Parry as well as Huntington and Metcalf for dealing with mortuary rituals as 'passive repositories of economic and/or reproductive norms' (1991: 14). She noted that they placed mortuary rituals in a 'mimetic and subordinate position' (ibid.).

More importantly, Seremetakis criticised the works of Rosaldo and Danforth too. She asserted that both Rosaldo and Danforth in essence mistakenly introduced a philosophical anthropology, which may be termed a 'universal humanism' in their works. In other words, according to Rosaldo (1984) - and it is this point with which Seremetakis disagreed - there are universal biological emotions such as grief and anger, and all societies are forced to mediate these pre-given or inherent emotions as unavoidable natural forces. However, in Seremetakis's view, this simply replaces 'the classic culture/nature opposition with a culture/emotion polarity' (1991: 13). This approach therefore essentially maintains the Durkheimian dualism of the individual versus the collective.

For Seremetakis, all of the above approaches attempt to observe or understand death through the lens of society, social structure, or culture versus nature (1991: 14). In order to transcend this methodologically and theoretically limited



boundary of previous works of death and mortuary rituals, she employed the intriguing terms 'the optic of death' and 'defamiliarisation' (ibid.). She suggested a methodological inversion of the existing approach to the study of death: 'from the familiarisation of death to the defamiliarisation of social order through the optic offered by death' (1991: 14-15). In other words, she focused on the defamiliarising and decentralising aspect of death through 'the optic of death'. Seremetakis attempted to look at Maniat society through the lens offered by examining death and mortuary rituals.

However, there are other anthropologists who have criticised the emphasis on emotion and, at the same time, they have also criticised the Durkheimian emphasis on society. In other words, rather than assuming that there is a society or social structure in the way that Durkheim, Hertz and other Durkheimian anthropologists thought of it, and emotion in the way that Danforth, Rosaldo, Connor and Seremetakis formulated it, they placed the emphasis on personhood, memories and sociality (see, e.g., Battaglia 1983, 1990, 1993; Helander 1988; Taylor 1996). These anthropologists attempted to examine death and mortuary rituals within specific contexts without assuming the overarching matrix of Society (with a capital 'S') or emotion.

For instance, Debhora Battaglia (1983, 1990) used the theme of personhood to link several fields of social life of the Sabarl people who live on a tiny island in New Guinea, such as the physical person and the symbolism of substance and growth, the metaphysical personhood of spirit forces, and the 'relational personhood' based on exchanging foods, ceremonial valuables, and human substance. Her theoretical stance is formulated according to the relational personhood of self and other, where mortuary rituals are performed as both an act of construction and deconstruction. These are enacted, for example, by the gathering and the exchanges of matrilineage, paternal kin, and affines of the deceased, and by the assembling and symbolic consumption of corpses, food and ceremonial valuables. Through the ritual feeding of valuables to the relatives of the deceased's father, Sabarl people compensate for the paternal nurturing which the deceased received in life (Battaglia 1990: 76-78). Battaglia argued that the mortuary ritual does not mimic life and rebirth, as in the Durkheimian model, but rather that it mimics death (1990: 199). It is a public,



official, multiply-authored memory of the dead, but it is also a forgetting of the dead, the end to relations of kinship and exchange that have outlasted the dead. This projective remembrance of the dead makes up the social fabric not only to create personal and private feelings and memories but also to build new relations and memories with others.

Battaglia is just one example of an anthropologist who is working at re-fashioning the ways in which death and mortuary rites are theorised and conceptualised. Of course there are other anthropologists who have shared themes surrounding death and mortuary rituals other than society, emotion, memory or personhood but it seems to me that these latter themes are the most important and will be most relevant to my own work on death and mortuary rituals. I would not like to position myself according to only one particular theme because it is quite possible to bring together all of these themes in this thesis.

In this thesis, therefore, I adopt the idea of Seremetakis's 'the optic of death' to look at the Japanese rural community. More precisely, I attempt to examine different kinds of persons, different spirits of the dead, the expression of grief, and the exchange of gifts through death and mortuary rituals. In other words, I seek to bring together the Durkheimian emphasis on society, Rosaldo's, Danforth's and Connor's emphasis on emotion, and Battaglia's emphasis on personhood through 'the optic of death'. However, most importantly, even though I adopt Seremetakis's 'the optic of death', I do not place emphasis on the 'defamiliarisation' of death but rather on its 'familiarisation' because a main part of my argument in this thesis is that rather than defamiliarisation or destruction there is an ongoing or new set of relationship between the dead and the living. The familiarisation of death is the most important and relevant concept for understanding not only the relationship between the dead and the living but also the relationship between pollution and vitality: the ways in which the living and the dead replenish their own vitality and diminish pollution in their relationships. In this perspective, as Tsintjilonis (2007) describes for the Sadan Toraja of Indonesia, the mortuary ritual is ultimately nothing more than a continuation, a reproduction or a (re)creation of relationships between the living and the dead. In other words, as Straight (2006) notes, the living and the dead are mutually 'entangled' by the mortuary ritual. The relationship between the living and

the dead, in a sense, is no different from any other relationships among the living. In essence, a series of formal and informal mortuary rituals sustain and (re)create the actual intimate relationship between the living and the dead. By enhancing the intimate relationship, both the living and the dead can supplement their own vitality which may have the power to negate death and eliminate pollution.

## **2. Previous research on Japanese mortuary rituals**

There have been a great number of works on Japanese mortuary rituals concentrating on various topics such as ancestors and ancestor worship (Akata 1986; Mabuchi 1976; Newell 1976; Ooms 1967, 1976; Plath 1964; Smith 1974, 1976; Takeda 1957; Yanagita 1970), the pollution of death (Namihira 1984, 1985, 1987; Sekine 1995; Shintani 1987, 2000, 2001), graves and grave systems (Mogami 1956, 1959, 1963; Shintani 1985, 1991; Rowe 2003), gift exchange and social relationship (Ishimori 1984; Tsuji 2006), and the transition of mortuary rituals (Fujii 1983; Murakami 2000; Nakamaki 1986; Rowe 2000; Suzuki 1998, 2000, 2003, 2004; Yamada 1995, 2004). There also have been studies of mortuary rituals as a process of social integration (Bachnik 1995). Another area of focus has been the company funeral (*shasō*) and its relation to religion, commerce and social integration (Murakami 1999a, 1999b; Nakamaki 1995, 1999a, 1999b, 2002). Nevertheless, the great majority of these studies have been carried out by Japanese folklorists rather than by anthropologists. Japanese mortuary rituals have never been at the centre of anthropological studies in Japan, despite the fact that these rituals are at the heart of religion, the household system and ideas about social integration. In this section, I am not going to cover every single piece of work, but rather I shall briefly introduce a few major works on Japanese mortuary rituals.

Among the various issues, ancestors and ancestor worship have been the most prominent in the study of Japanese mortuary rituals and have attracted the attention of a large number of scholars, not only Japanese but also foreign. It is no exaggeration to say that most studies of Japanese mortuary rituals have focused on the process of achieving ancestorhood that illuminated Japanese cosmology, and the significant relationship between the living and the dead in the household system.

Like other Northeast Asian countries such as China and Korea, ancestor worship in Japan is closely bound up with the patrilineal descent system and patriarchal household system. For instance, it has been argued that Japanese ancestor worship is the key foundation of the structure of the household and guarantees the continuity of the household (see, e.g., Brown 1979; Hozumi 1943; Ooms 1967, 1976; Smith 1974, 1976; Takeda 1957; Yanagita 1970 [1946]).

Yanagita Kunio, one of the first researchers in the fields of Japanese ethnology and folklore, focused on ancestor worship as based on the Japanese household system (*ie*). *About our ancestor* (1970), originally published in 1946, is a collection of Yanagita's short essays on the subject of the ideas and practices concerning the 'traditional' household system and ancestor veneration. In this book, Yanagita begins with a discussion of the term 'ancestor' (*senzo*) and its various meanings and uses, and continued with an examination of some of the social aspects of ancestor worship and their relation to inheritance and branch household. He finishes the book with a discussion of the distinction between ancestors and the newly dead. According to Yanagita (1975a: 170-174), there are two ways in which one can become an ancestor. One, in the case of an inheriting son (usually the eldest son (*chōnan*)), is through primogeniture, by leaving an authorised successor to ensure the succession of the household. The other way, in the case of non-inheriting sons, is to leave the father's household (main household (*honke*)) on marriage and establish a new household which is regarded as a branch of the main household (*bunke*). Yanagita fused his conception of ancestors and ancestor worship with the patrilineal descent system and the continuity of the household. However, his work has been criticised on numerous counts, varying from his assumption that there is an unchanging, universal character common to all Japanese in all regions and all times to his idea that ancestral spirit is unique to Japanese culture (see also Knecht 1975).

Robert Smith (1974, 1976) attempted to illuminate the way in which the Japanese treat their dead by analysing memorial tablets (*ihai*) in the household Buddhist altar (*butsudan*). In his major work, *Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan* (1974), the first comprehensive treatment of Japanese ancestor worship in a Western language, Smith described in detail various Japanese beliefs and ritual practices associated with death and the care of the spirits of the dead. The spirits of

the dead or ancestors depend on the living for memorial rites, which normally extend over a period of thirty-three to fifty years. These memorial rites provide comfort to the dead, and attempt to guide them on their way to the other world. By caring for the dead, the living expect to receive their beneficial protection and to avoid any disasters which might happen to them should the dead be neglected.

Smith's unique census of memorial tablets (*ihai*), based on a survey of some 600 households in both urban and rural communities during the 1950s and 1960s, disclosed an increasingly common trend, namely, that of venerating nonlineal ascendants tablets. From this survey he could find out exactly who were memorialised, and their relationship to the living. It turns out that although all deceased persons are generally referred to as ancestors (*senzo*), a great number of the memorialised dead investigated by Smith were not actually ancestors in the strict sense of being lineal ascendants. About 25 percent of them were children of the household head, and almost 10 percent were nonlineals and occasionally even non-kin. From all of this, we may conclude that Japanese ancestor worship cannot be limited to only adult members of the lineal group, rather it venerates all the dead. In this sense, ancestor worship might more accurately be called the worship or veneration of 'the departed'. However, it seems to me that Smith paid too much attention to the statistical significance of memorial tables rather than actual relationships between the living and the dead. I would, therefore, cautiously suggest that Smith's work on Japanese ancestor worship is, in a sense, partial and superficial.

In relation to ancestor worship, pollution has long been a central concern in Japanese mortuary practices because it has been considered contagious and dangerous not only to the living but also to the benevolent spirit. Pollution and its related beliefs and practices are found almost without exception in Japanese mortuary rituals. In other words, Japanese mortuary rituals place great emphasis on the pollution of death and its purification. However, although many indigenous Japanese folklorists have dealt with pollution and its purification partly or entirely within Japanese folklore (see, e.g., Gorai 1992; Inoguchi 1965; Miyata 1981, 1983; Okiura & Miyata 1999; Saitō 1986; Sakurai 1974; Shintani 1987, 2000; Yanagita 1975), it is notable that very few anthropologists who were trained in the United States such as Namihira (1984, 1985, 1987) and Ohnuki-Tierney (1987) have

focused on this issue. What is more, they have not explicitly been concerned with the pollution of death and its purification in the context of mortuary rituals but rather they have attempted to elucidate the concept of pollution and its importance in everyday Japanese life.

Namihira Emiko has attempted to understand a series of Japanese mortuary rituals as a process of purifying the pollution of death. When a person dies, a funeral and a series of memorial rituals are set in motion, culminating in the observance of a final memorial service most commonly held on the thirty-third or fiftieth anniversary of the death. The funeral is only the first of a series of mortuary rituals conducted on behalf of the spirit of the deceased, as well as the living hoping to decrease the pollution of death. Although the funeral ritual takes place, the spirit is still an unstable, polluted and dangerous being that needs to be purified by a further series of rituals. Although various kinds of materials such as water, fire and salt are used as purifying agents during or after the funeral, all of them are merely temporary agents and cannot completely and permanently purify or eliminate the pollution of death at once, because the purification is a gradual process that ought to be accompanied by a regular series of rituals over a certain period of time.

For Namihira, mortuary rituals function as devices to eliminate or diminish the pollution of death and, thus, finally recover a state of purity. According to Namihira (1985: 235-236), the pollution of death may be diminished by both the passage of time and a series of rituals, but the series of rituals is more important than the time taken to purify the pollution of death because pollution cannot be fully purified only by the passage of time. However, although Namihira has dealt with pollution and its purification to find out the concept of pollution, she has not explicitly elucidated the way in which pollution is generated, increased and terminated in the context of death and mortuary rituals. Thus, in this thesis, I shall further explore pollution and its relation to vitality in order to understand the way in which the dead and the living become polluted beings and the process of purifying the pollution of death.

A recent anthropological study, *The Anthropology of Administration: Company Funerals* (1999) by Japanese anthropologist Hirochika Nakamaki and ten other Japanese scholars, has focused on various aspects of the company funeral



(*shasō*). The ‘company funeral’ generally describes the funeral service for the founder or top administrator of a company. It is now found not only in major companies but also in smaller companies. The funeral is entirely sponsored by the company in terms of both finance and personnel because it costs large amounts of money and requires a great number of funeral staff and conductors. It also takes time to arrange a large-scale funeral, and thus a private funeral (*missō*) is generally held first for family, relatives and close friends, and some weeks later a company funeral is conducted for the company’s business connections and its employees. Hundreds or thousands of company employees are mobilised in the preparations for and management of the funeral. By being so, they become mourners during the funeral and the employer-employee relationship is temporally transformed into a kinship or friendship relationship.

For Nakamaki, the company funeral provides an arena for strengthening business connections and relationships between employers and employees (Nakamaki 1999a, 2002). The company also has an opportunity to build up its prestige and demonstrate this to those inside and outside of the company through the company funeral (Nakamaki 1999a: 24-28). Nakamaki has attempted to illuminate the innovative aspects of the company funeral and analysed the ways in which Japanese funeral practices are transformed in this massive funeral. However, apart from maintaining or strengthening social relationships, in Chapter Three, I shall also briefly describe the company funeral and how it is different from other funerals, in order to demonstrate how different kinds of persons are thought of as having different amounts of vitality which may negate death and pollution and thus are dealt with in different ways when they die.

An even more recent study of Japanese mortuary rituals by Japanese anthropologist Hikaru Suzuki (2000), who was trained in the United States and carried out fieldwork at an urban funeral company, based in northern Kyushu, examined the highly commercialised contemporary Japanese ‘funeral ceremonies’ by combining secondary source historical materials and her own ethnographic data. Suzuki made a distinction between two terms, ‘funeral rituals’ (*sōshiki*) and ‘funeral ceremonies’ (*sōgi* or *osōshiki*), and used the former to mean ‘community-based funerals’ organised in and by the local community, and the latter to refer to the



‘commercialised funerals’ serviced by the funeral company (Suzuki 2000: 4). She stated that “‘funeral rituals’ was the only term used for funerals in Japan before World War II’ (ibid.). In other words, Japanese funerals have moved away from community-based funerals to commercialised ones. This terminological shift, she argued, reflects changes not only in the image of death and funerals but also, more importantly, in the structure of funerals and the values surrounding death (ibid.). She also maintained that the shift from community-based funerals to commercial ones is closely linked to the process of modernisation, urbanization and commercialisation occurring in Japan, and that the funeral industry plays a significant role in generating these changes. However, during my fieldwork I found that many people in rural Japan still use the term ‘*sōshiki*’ (funeral rituals) rather than ‘*sōgi* or *osōshiki*’ (funeral ceremonies). The term *sōgi* or *osōshiki* tended to be used by professional undertakers out of politeness when referring to the funeral. It seemed to be a commercial or business term which was used by professional undertakers when they were confronted with their customers (the bereaved family and participants of the funeral).

Suzuki made a great effort to illustrate the shift from community-based funerals to commercial ones, and to make a comparison between community-based and commercial funerals through the concept of ‘commoditisation’. By this comparison, she attempted to find out the meaning of the modern commercial funeral. The community-based funeral had the major function of protecting the living from the pollution of death because death was considered to be a source of pollution, and communal support was crucial for this task. By contrast, the commercialised funeral has the function of supporting ‘a family in creating a positive memory of the deceased, to remove and transform the corpse to ashes, and to provide the bereaved an opportunity to reinforce social ties’ (2000: 178). Suzuki attributed these differences to ‘the transformation of value’ (2000: 7): the negative image of pollution, which ‘traditionally’ characterised death, has virtually disappeared from contemporary Japanese ‘funeral ceremonies’, and the basis of social ties has changed from large family networks in communities to urban neighbourhoods. However, in many parts of the country, not only rural but also urban and suburban districts, death, the dead person or the dead body, its spirit and the family of the deceased are still

regarded as being polluted, contagious and dangerous in the present day, although there are differences in degree. One of the major problems of Suzuki's work seems to be that she attempts to apply the findings of a single case study to the whole of contemporary Japanese society, in all its complexity.

Finally, another important topic not only for the anthropology of death but also for the anthropology of Japan as a whole is 'brain death' (*nōshi*) which has been explored by some medical anthropologists such as Namihira (1988), Ohnuki-Tierney (1994) and Lock (1995, 1996, 2002). Although I shall not deal with brain death in this thesis, it is useful to introduce some works on it briefly in order to understand the wider Japanese perception of death. Brain death has been a controversial concept in Japan ever since the first heart transplant there was carried out in 1968, because brain death is not accepted by the Japanese as actual death. After the organ transplant law was passed in 1997, brain death was legally recognised as death (Lock 2002: 3). Nonetheless, brain death is still not equated with death, because if patients have not specified in writing that they wish to become organ donors or if their families overrule these wishes, they cannot be considered dead even though they may have been diagnosed as brain dead (*ibid.*). Many Japanese still hesitate to accept brain death because it is not recognised as the end of life. In other words, death is not a biologically or clinically determined moment but a socially and culturally determined complex event or process in which the spirit must be ritually separated from the body. In the case of brain death, the heart is still beating and the blood is also circulating and, thus, the body is warm and soft. It makes the spirit still possible to dwell in the body. Therefore, in my ethnographic experience, brain death cannot be recognised as proper death of a person in Japan.

In this thesis, I shall attempt to illustrate this complex and gradual progress of death through the relationship between vitality and pollution. Indeed, during my fieldwork in Makabe, apart from brain death, I discovered that even 'natural death' (*shizenshi*) is not recognised as the end of life. In other words, the dead are not considered as really dead but rather as still living. For example, they still share food, drink, stories and their everyday lives with the surviving family members as if they are still alive. In other words, they are thought of as 'entangled' beings who continue to participate in the everyday world. Therefore, as I have previously noted, 'the

‘familiarisation’ of death and the continuity of the relationships that it implies is extremely important for understanding not only the connection between the dead and the living but also the actual progress of death. If we look carefully at these relationships and the ways in which they are implicated in the progress of death, it is not hard to understand why the Japanese are extremely uncomfortable with the idea of brain death; an idea that seems to draw a clear line between nature and culture in spite of fact that there has long been no clear boundary between nature and culture in the context of Japanese death.

## Chapter Two

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# ***The process of death: Mortuary rites in Makabe***

### ***Introduction***

Before turning to the main chapters, in this chapter, using a variety of my fieldwork information, I shall carefully provide a detailed narrative of the overall mortuary process of a 'typical death'. Through this I shall attempt to elucidate the way in which the spirit (*tamashii*) is separated from its body (*karada*) and transformed into a household ancestor (*senzo*) as well as how the defiled state of both the living and the dead can be transformed into a state of purity. Moreover, this detailed description of the mortuary process will serve as a basic framework for analysing the complex system of the mortuary ritual itself, as well as for understanding the process of purifying the pollution of death and achieving the pure status of the household ancestor that illuminates Japanese cosmology.

Japanese mortuary practices vary widely from region to region and indeed variations exist even within a small district. Many factors have a bearing on the mortuary ritual such as the religion of the deceased or of his/her family, the age at which the person died, gender, his/her social status, the family's economic circumstances, and whether a death was a suicide, a miscarriage, an abortion, an accidental death or, indeed, a violent death. However, although there are many differences in dealing with different kinds of death, there seem to be a basic framework for the ritual procedure which can be used in almost all kinds of mortuary rituals. In this chapter, therefore, rather than describing and investigating the variations and their significance, I shall place the emphasis on a description of the most typical mortuary process of the typical death, as it normally occurs in one

particular place, Makabe. It is mostly based on the typical Buddhist style of funeral rites, as this is the type most commonly performed by people in Makabe.

In order to provide a coherent description of the mortuary procedure, I shall primarily extract information from 62 funerals and a number of subsequent memorial services. I observed and participated in these funerals and memorial services during my fieldwork as an undertaker, a guest, a researcher and an onlooker. Along with my own experience and observations, I shall include information on the 'traditional' communal mortuary rituals from interviews with local elderly informants, Buddhist priests and researchers such as folklorists and historians. In some cases, I shall also add relevant information from other ethnographic works on mortuary rituals in order to explain how my information is different from that of other ethnographies.

### **1. *Becoming dead***

At the beginning of my fieldwork, a local Buddhist priest told me that each person has a spirit (*tamashii*) within his/her body (*karada*) and when a person dies, the *tamashii* leaves the *karada*. However, as my fieldwork progressed, I discovered that not only the Buddhist priest but also many other informants seemed to assert a similar belief in the separation of the *tamashii* from the *karada* at death. In this sense, the death of a person (*hito no shi*) is a result of disembodiment of the *tamashii*. Here, the *tamashii* refers to both the spirit of the living and the spirit of the dead. Thus, it can also be understood that so long as the *tamashii* remains within the *karada*, a person is alive. During this time, it is said that the *tamashii* controls not only the *karada* but also the mind (*kokoro*) at will in order to fulfil its own desires. Additionally, Matsudaria remarks that '[s]enses, judgment, thinking, feelings of joy, resentment, pleasure and sorrow - all of these may be considered the operations of the *tamashii*' (1963: 182). In other words, the *tamashii* is a force that brings about all kinds of psychological and emotional reactions. However, at the same time, the *tamashii* is also influenced by the *karada*. For example, when the *karada* feels hungry, the *tamashii* also feels hungry and when the *karada* is gratified, so is the *tamashii* (*ibid.*). In this sense, each person is controlled by the operations of both the *tamashii* and the *karada*. One example of this mutual interdependence between the

*tamashii* and the *karada* is the consensus that when a person dies, his/her *tamashii* will suffer if the corpse is mistreated and is able to cause harm to the living.

At this point it is also important to examine how a person (*hito*) dies and when the *tamashii* is separated from its *karada*. A person who is alive (*iki te iru hito*) has vitality (*seimeiryoku*), although each person possesses a different amount of vitality. This vitality can be identified as *ki* or *genki* which can also be defined as a ‘vital force’ or ‘energy’ of human life. Due to vitality, the heart beats and blood circulates and thus the *karada* is warm and soft. It makes it possible for the *tamashii* to dwell in the *karada*. In this case, both the *tamashii* and the *karada* can mutually operate, and thus a *hito* can think, feel and behave. On the other hand, when vitality is exhausted, the heart stops beating and the blood stops circulating and thus the *karada* becomes cold and hard, and the *tamashii* eventually leaves the *karada*. In this way, a *hito* becomes a dead person (*shinda hito*).

Although the heart stops beating and the blood stops circulating and thus a doctor pronounce a *hito* dead, that is not normally considered the end, because the *karada* is still warm and soft and the *tamashii* still remains in the *karada* for a certain period of time. In this sense, as Lock (1995, 1996, 2002), Namihira (1996, 2004) and Ohnuki-Tierney (1994) note, the biological or medical death cannot be conflated with social and personal death in Japan. When the *karada* is cold and hard, the *tamashii* goes out of the *karada*. Yet, this does not mean that the *tamashii* is completely separated from the *karada* at this point because the *tamashii* wanders near the *karada* and keeps going in and out of the *karada* until the *karada* is cremated or buried in the ground. During this initial transition period, the *karada* starts to decompose and thus not only the *karada* but also its surroundings are considered to be extremely contaminated by the pollution of death. At this point, the *tamashii* is also considered contaminated by pollution. Death pollution is gradually eliminated or purified by a continued series of mortuary services. Therefore, to a certain degree, the process of death in Japan can be construed as the process of purifying the pollution of death.



## 2. Preparing the dead

When a person passes away (*nakunaru*), the first thing that the family does for the deceased is to attend the deathbed. The family moistens the lips of the deceased with water, using a cloth or a piece of absorbent cotton attached to the end of a bamboo stick. This ritual is called *matsugo no mizu* (literarily meaning ‘the last water’) or *shini mizu* (literarily ‘water of death’). According to a local undertaker, the deceased’s family often omits this act because nowadays many people die in hospital and nurses immediately clean the corpse.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, according to several informants, this act is sometimes performed in hospital after a doctor has pronounced a person dead. It is normally said that the purpose of the *matsugo no mizu* is a final attempt to resurrect the dead or dying person. In this ritual, the water is used to supply vitality (*seimeiryoku*) to the deceased or dying person for resuscitation, because water has long been considered as a source of vitality in Japan. Moreover, if water has the function of replenishing and increasing vitality, it may also have the power to eliminate or diminish pollution because there is an inverse relationship between vitality and pollution. I shall explore the significance of the relationship between vitality and pollution further in Chapter Five.

After performing the *matsugo no mizu*, the deceased is left on his/her bed until a doctor arrives to verify the death and to provide a death certificate so that the family can obtain permission from the local government to cremate the deceased. If the person dies in hospital, the family can get the death certificate directly from the hospital and then can contact a local funeral home (*sōgisha*) which will transport the deceased from the hospital to the deceased’s house. Upon reaching the house from the hospital, professional undertakers lay the deceased down on his/her *futon* (mattress) in a *washitsu* (Japanese-style room)<sup>8</sup>. At this point, the professional undertakers always ask the family which direction is north because it is important to keep the deceased’s head pointing toward the north (*kita makura*). According to a

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<sup>7</sup> During my fieldwork in Makabe, more than 70 percent of people died in hospital.

<sup>8</sup> A *washitsu* is a Japanese-style room with *tatami* (woven straw mats) flooring, *shoji* (a room divider or door consisting of translucent white paper over a wooden frame) and a *tokonoma* (a small raised alcove).

local Buddhist priest, *kita makura* originated in Buddhism because when Buddha (*oshakasam*) passed away, his head was pointing to the north. It is also said that this position is taboo in daily life because it brings bad luck if you put your head to the north when you sleep. Thus, the north is considered as the direction of death, bad luck and pollution.

The palms of the deceased are then joined together on the chest, as if in prayer (*gatshō*). Several rectangular dry ice blocks wrapped in white cotton cloths are put on both sides of the face, between the legs, and on the chest. The blocks of dry ice are used for preventing the decomposition of the deceased's body and are replenished by undertakers every twelve hours. A quilt is then put over the body and *haori hakama* (a traditional Japanese piece of clothing) is placed over the quilt in reverse. The face of the deceased is covered with a thin white towel. A knife (a sword was used in the past) or scissors (according to local elders, a knife is for a man and scissors are for a woman), which is believed to drive evil or wandering ghosts (*muenbotoke*) away from the deceased, is placed on the chest.

After the deceased's body is laid out properly, the deceased's family informs the closest relatives and then contacts the head of the neighbourhood funeral cooperative (*kumi-chō*) and a Buddhist priest from their family temple (*dannadera*) before deciding on the date, the place, and the chief mourner (*moshu* or *seshu*) for the funeral. In most cases, the chief mourner is generally the closest male relative on the paternal side of the deceased. The funeral normally takes place at the commercial funeral halls (*saijyō-sō*, literally meaning 'hall funeral') or at the deceased's house (*jitaku-sō*, literally 'house funeral') on the third day after the death. There is usually a *karitsuya* (a temporary wake) for the deceased's family (*miuchi*) and close relatives (*shinseki*) on the day the person dies and on the following day, there is a *hontsuya* (the wake itself) for all the mourners. The funeral (*kokubetsu shiki*) is held on the day after the wake. However, if this event occurs at the beginning or end of the year, or a day of *tomobiki*<sup>9</sup>, the funeral ritual is advanced or postponed, because crematoriums are closed on those days.

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<sup>9</sup> The term *tomobiki* is one of six terms (*sensho*, *tomobiki*, *senbu*, *butsumetsu*, *taian*, and *shako*) printed on the Japanese lunar calendars that indicate the auspiciousness of a given day. This six-day cycle of fortune, called *rotki*, was imported from China in the fourteenth century and has since been adhered to in Japan. According to local elders, *tomobiki* (*tomo*: friend, *biki*: pull) translates as pulling a friend. It brings to mind the image of being pulled into death to go with your friend and thus people

In the next stage, professional undertakers decorate the pillow-side of the deceased. If the family members have not closed the household Shintō shrine (*kamidana*), the professional undertakers close it and cover it with a piece of white paper (*washi*) to keep the pollution of death and malevolent spirits out. This is called *kamidana fuji* (confining a household Shintō shrine). The paper remains there for forty-nine days, until the spirit of the dead goes to the other world and death pollution is lifted from the house. They then cover all the walls of the room from the ceiling to the floor with white sheets and place a small low table (*kyōzukue*) covered with a white cloth or a piece of white paper at the pillow-side of the deceased for displaying offerings. An incense pot, a candlestick, a vase with a white chrysanthemum in it, a bell and food offerings are arranged on the table. The family should keep the incense and candle burning at all times because it is believed that the incense smoke and the candlelight drive malevolent spirits or wandering ghosts (*muenbotoke*) away from the deceased as well as disperse or purify the pollution of death. A bowl of rice (*makurameshi*), a plate of sticky-rice balls (*dango*), a plate of *miso* soup, and a glass of water or green tea are placed on the table. A rice-bowl that the deceased used when s/he was alive is heaped with rice, and a pair of chopsticks is erected vertically in the middle of it. The rice-bowl will be smashed by the deceased's family at the grave immediately after the remains of the deceased is interred.

An upside-down folding screen (*sakasa byobu*) is also often placed at the pillow-side of the deceased. This screen is used in accordance with a Buddhist custom for funerals called *sakasa goto* (upside-down things: a reversal of normal practices). These practices highlight that people are performing actions in reverse during a funeral; for example, dressing the deceased in a death robe (*kyōkatavira*) with the right side overlapping the left (*sakasa kimono*), pouring hot water into cold water to make it lukewarm (*sakasa mizu*), and putting a quilt over the deceased in reverse (*sakasa futon*). These practices of *sakasa goto* are strongly avoided in everyday life. The purpose of manoeuvring these objects in this way seems to be to differentiate the funerary period of time from ordinary days. In other words, these upside-down things emphasise the contrast between life and death that implies the

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avoid scheduling funerals on *tomobiki*.

interaction between vitality and pollution. These practices can also be interpreted as implying that the family members do not want to acknowledge the death of their loved one, so they execute *sakasa goto* as a disobedience of the natural order, thereby expressing their veneration to the deceased.

After the decoration of the pillow-side, professional undertakers have a consultation (*uchiawase*) with the deceased's family (*miuchi*) and the head of the neighbourhood funeral cooperative (*kumi-chō*) about the arrangements for the funeral. One senior professional undertaker pulls all sorts of pamphlets and sample photographs of funeral accoutrements and items out of his bag to explain the process and the price range. The deceased's family first have to decide how much they can spend in total on the funeral which allows the professional undertaker to predict the size and the scale of the funeral and thus recommend an appropriate funeral 'package' with optional extras to them.<sup>10</sup> When all accoutrements and items have been chosen by the deceased's family, the professional undertakers make out a schedule for the funeral. The time of the funeral depends not only on the preference of the deceased's family, but also needs to be negotiated with the priests, and depends on the traditional Japanese lunar calendar that indicates whether a certain day is auspicious or inauspicious for a funeral. The time also depends on the funeral home's availability of funeral halls and the crematorium's availability of furnaces.

In the next stage, the deceased's family receives visitors. These are people who were close to the deceased such as close relatives (*chikai shinseki*), intimate friends (*shitashii tomodachi*) or neighbours (*tonari*), who come to express their sympathy. At this time, each visitor brings a monetary offering, called *omimai* (literally meaning 'an expression of one's sympathy'), on his/her first visit to the deceased's house. The visitor kneels down on *tatami* in front of the small low table

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<sup>10</sup> Although there is a variety of the funeral package according to price to make a selection from, the professional undertaker usually recommends two kinds of standard funeral package. One is the 335,000 yen (approximately 1,523 GBP) package and the other is the 395,000 yen (approximately 1,795 GBP) package. The only difference between the two is the style of the coffin and the urn. These standard packages only include indispensable funeral accoutrements and items such as the funeral altar, coffin, mortuary tablets (*karihai* and *noihai*), urn, death robes, a photograph of the deceased (*iei*), candles, incense, dry ice, and post funeral altar (*atokazari*), etc. The deceased's family usually have to pay more for optional extras such as flower decorations (*sēka*) for the funeral altar (100,000 yen or 200,000 yen), a grave marker (*bohyō*) (15,000 yen or 20,000 yen), hiring of the funeral car (*reikyusha*) (35,000 yen) and bus (30,000 yen), return gift items (*kōdengaeshi*) for guests (about 2,000 yen per guest), food and drink items for the commensal feasts after the wake and funeral (about 3,000 yen per person), etc.

(*kyōzuke*), places *omimai* on the table, performs a *shōkō* (offering burning incense), taps a small bell, makes a bow with folded palms (*gatshō*), and then enters into silence for a little while. After performing the *shōkō* and *gatshō*, the deceased's family usually suggest that the visitor should look at the face of the deceased. The visitor moves close to the deceased, kneels down and performs a *gatshō*. When the deceased's family takes the small white towel off the deceased's face, the visitor says a few words to the family. The visitor usually says that 'S/he looks very peaceful' (*yasurakana kao dayone*), and finally performs the *gatshō* again in front of the deceased before leaving the seat. When the visitors leave the deceased's house they wash their hands with water and scrub them with salt to cleanse the pollution of death in front of the entrance of the house where water, salt and towels are provided by the members of the neighbourhood funeral cooperative (*kumi-ai*).

During this period of receiving visitors, a Buddhist priest from the temple of the deceased's household (*dannadera*) also visits the deceased's house to chant a sutra (*makurakyō*, literally meaning 'pillow sutra'). The sutra is a piece of Buddhist holy writing which is chanted at funerals and in the rituals following death so as to purify the spirit and to transform it into a state of enlightenment (see Reader 1991: 34). According to one of my main informants, Yamaguchi-san, the Buddhist priest offers a short sutra chant (*okyō*) on his first visit instead of offering *omimai*. The Buddhist priest kneels down on *tatami* (woven straw mats) in front of the small low table, performs a *shōkō* (offering burning incense) first and then chants the sutra for about five minutes. After chanting the sutra, the deceased's family ask the Buddhist priest to give a Buddhist posthumous name (*kaimyō*) to the deceased. According to a local Buddhist priest, the purpose of giving *kaimyō* to the deceased is to separate the unstable and dangerous spirit (*tamashii*) from the physical body (*karada*) and eventually transport the *tamashii* safely to the realm of the Buddha (nirvana). He also told me that *kaimyō* is determined by many factors such as the deceased's status while alive, age, gender, achievements, character and contributions to the temple.

However, in reality, it is widely known that *kaimyō* has ranks related to the amount of remuneration given to the temples (*ohuse*), which may range from a cheap or free name to the most elaborate names for one million yen (approximately 4,545 GBP) or more. Since the increased growth of the Japanese economy in the 1960s,



the price of *kaimyō* has also increased with other prices. When I asked the local Buddhist priest about the relationship between *ohuse* and *kaimyō*, he lapsed into silence for a while and then said carefully, ‘Well, there is no bad *kaimyō* but there is good *kaimyō*’ (*warui kaimyo wa nai kedo ii kaimyo wa arimasu*). It seemed that he did not want to admit that *kaimyō* is ranked by *ohuse*. The high prices charged by the temples have become a controversial issue in Japan, especially since the newspapers reported that some temples put pressure on families to buy a more expensive *kaimyō*.<sup>11</sup> After the appropriate *kaimyō* has been selected, the priest writes it down on two temporary mortuary tablets made of white wood: one is called *kariihai* (interim tablet) which will be placed on the funeral altar (*saidan*) during the funeral and then will be placed on the post funeral altar (*atokazari*) until the forty-ninth day after the death, and the other is called *noihai* (field tablet) which will be placed with the urn in the grave (*ohaka*) after the funeral. The *kariihai* and the *noihai* are placed together until the funeral ends and the cremated remains are entombed. Although my informants did not directly note when *tamashii* is separated from its *karada*, at this point it can be presumed that the *tamashii* is separated from its body and will stay at home until the forty-ninth day after the death.

The deceased’s family (*miuchi*) and the closest relatives (*shinseki*) hold a temporary wake (*karitsuya*) on the day that the person died. They spend the night watching over the deceased on the *tatami* (woven straw mats), keeping sticks of incense and candles burning all night. The deceased’s family and close relatives stay with the deceased, or close by, until it is time to put the deceased’s body into the coffin for the wake (*otsuya*) on the afternoon of the second day. By this time all the family members and close relatives will have changed into funeral garments. If the funeral is being held at the deceased’s house, professional undertakers will have set up a funeral altar (*saidan*) by this time. At the wake ritual and the funeral, the deceased family and relatives wear special and formal clothes. Although, in former times, according to local elders, white kimonos were worn for funerals, nowadays men wear a black suit with a white shirt, a black tie and black socks, and women

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<sup>11</sup> During my fieldwork I often came across articles in newspapers or programmes on TV that criticised the high fees for funerals and *kaimyō*. The *kanji* (Chinese characters) for these *kaimyō* are usually very old and rarely used, and few people nowadays can read and understand them. Even some Buddhist priests, especially young priests, tend to avoid explaining the detailed meaning of the posthumous name.



wear a black *kimono* or a black dress without patterns. Guests are also expected to come in appropriate attire. They dress in black suits, *kimono* or dresses. Attendees normally bring Buddhist prayer beads (*juzu*) when they participate in wakes and funerals. When they pray, they join their palms together, putting the fingers of both hands in a loop around the prayer beads, supporting them with their thumbs and index fingers.

However, although the deceased's family, his/her relatives and guests wear appropriate funeral attire, members of the neighbourhood funeral cooperative (*kumi-ai*) wear everyday attire. Female members of the *kumi-ai* usually wear aprons over their everyday dress, and work in the kitchen of the deceased's house or assist the deceased's family in receiving guests at the funeral hall. Male members wear their everyday clothes and are stationed at the entrance of the funeral hall to greet the guests and to receive monetary gifts. Among the male members of the *kumi-ai*, six male members (*rokushaku*) wear working clothes (*sagyōhuku*), sports shoes, and white cloth headbands (*hachimaki*), and drape long white cloths from the right shoulder to the left hand side of the body. They will later carry the coffin from the funeral altar to the funeral car before the departure for the crematorium. They also carry a wooden grave marker (*bohyō*) from the funeral hall (or the deceased's house) to the grave and erect it. It is also their job to dig a grave hole (*anahori*) or open the concrete lid of a grave compartment (*karōdo*) and bury or lay the urn in the grave. According to elderly informants, in the past, they were considered to be extremely polluted because of their job and therefore needed to purify the pollution of death immediately after they buried the coffin. They drank *sake* (rice wine) and ate tofu (bean curd) at grave sites because, by doing so, it was suggested that they could eliminate pollution and replenish vitality.

### **3. The encoffining service**

In the late afternoon of the second day, the deceased's body is encoffined by the family members (*miuchi*) under the guidance of professional undertakers. This service is called *nokan* (literally meaning 'encoffining the dead'). At the encoffining service, before the deceased is placed in a coffin, the deceased's body is

briefly cleaned by members of the family. In the past, according to elderly informants, the deceased's body was washed with water in a process called *yukan* (literally meaning 'washing a corpse with lukewarm water') for the purpose of cleansing or purifying the pollution of death.<sup>12</sup> However, nowadays many people die in hospital, where nurses clean them with antiseptic alcohol. This is why some of the professional undertakers who I worked with during my fieldwork told me that the deceased's body does not need to be wholly bathed in water as it would have been in the past. Thus, in Makabe, disposable moist cotton wipes (*sējyōmen*) are now used to clean only the exposed parts of the body such as the face, arms, hands, legs and feet.

Although the practice of cleaning the deceased's body has now been dramatically simplified and water has been replaced by moist cotton wipes, it seems to have the same function of cleansing or purifying the pollution of death. After cleaning the deceased's body, members of the family dress the deceased in a death robe, called *kyōkatavira* which is made from thin white cloth. The death robe is always put on with the right side overlapping the left side (*sakasa kimono*). The back of the hands and wrists are covered with a pair of hand guards (*tekkō*) and the knees are covered with a pair of gaiters (*gyahan*); then a pair of white socks (*shirotabi*) is put on, and finally Buddhist prayer beads (*juju*) are placed in the hands. If the deceased is a woman, female members of the family apply light makeup (*shinigeshou*) to the deceased's face, and hair is carefully combed.

After the death robe and makeup are put on, the deceased is placed in a coffin (*hitsugi* or *okan*). At this time, the professional undertaker usually asks the male members of the family for help in encoffining the deceased. When the deceased is placed in the coffin, the professional undertaker puts several blocks of dry ice on the deceased's body. Straw sandals (*waraji*), a wooden stick (*tsue*) and a white cloth shoulder bag (*zuda bukuro*, literally meaning 'an ascetic pilgrim's bag') containing imitation paper money (*rokumonsen*, literally meaning 'six coins') for the crossing of the thorny mountain (*tsurugi no yama*, literally meaning 'sword mountain') and the river (*sanzu no kawa*, literally meaning 'the river of three crossing')<sup>13</sup> on the way to

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<sup>12</sup> According to Gorai (1992: 1002), there was another purpose for performing the *yukan*: to wash away the deceased's past sins so that s/he would be able to achieve Buddhahood.

<sup>13</sup> It is believed that the spirit of the dead must cross the river on the way to the other world. For this

the other world are also placed into the coffin. At this point, some small items that the deceased liked to use when alive, such as books, glasses, photos, clothes, shoes, an alarm clock, etc. are usually put into the coffin, apart from items made of metal and glass, because the coffin will be cremated later. Some other favourite things such as candies, sweets, green tea, cigarettes, etc. are also put into the coffin. A thin white blanket is then put over the body and the lid of the coffin is lifted up by the hands of all the family members and is then slowly closed.

After the deceased's body has been properly encoffined, the coffin is transported by the undertakers from the house to the funeral hall (*saijyō*) where the wake and the funeral will take place. If the funeral is going to take place at the deceased's house (*jitaku*), the coffin is placed directly on the funeral altar of a Japanese-style room (*washitsu*). The coffin is carried out of the house by male members of the family and put in a funeral car (*reikyusha*). At this point, one female member of family, usually a daughter-in-law or a daughter of the deceased, carries a food-offering tray on which a bowl of boiled rice (*makurameshi*), a plate of sticky-rice balls (*dango*), a plate of *miso* soup, a glass of water or green tea are placed, and then sits in the front of the funeral car. All the family members come out of the house, and neighbours or community members gather around the funeral car to see the deceased off. As soon as the professional undertaker has bowed deeply to the family, he gets into the funeral car and starts the engine. He honks the horn for a few seconds and then the funeral car starts to move slowly. At this point, all the members of the deceased's family, relatives and neighbours make a deep bow with folded palms (*gatshō*) until the funeral car goes out of sight. After sending the deceased off, the deceased's family and members of the *kumi-ai* also travel to the funeral hall on the bus provided by the funeral home or they go in their own cars.

Just before the funeral car reaches the funeral hall, all the professional undertakers and funeral assistants (*seremoniya-san*) go out into the hall and line up in front of the main gate. When the funeral car arrives at the porch entrance of the funeral hall, they all bow at the same time to the funeral car. The male undertakers open the back door of the car, unload the coffin, lift it onto the coffin trolley and roll it into the funeral hall. The coffin is arranged just in front of the elaborate funeral

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reason, the river is symbolically interpreted as the boundary between this world and the other world.

altar decorated with flowers at the forefront of the hall. While the male undertakers are dealing with the coffin, the female funeral assistants open the door of the front passenger seat, receive the food-offering tray from the female member of the deceased's family, help her out of the funeral car, and lead her into the hall. After a while, other family members, relatives and members of the *kumi-ai* arrive at the funeral hall and are also led into the hall. They usually look around the inside and outside of the funeral hall before the wake ritual (*otsuya shiki*) starts. The deceased's family carefully look at the elaborate funeral altar and offerings (*kumotsu*) with their names written on boards placed at both the right and left sides of the funeral altar to check whether the offerings are correct and their names are correctly inscribed.

Whether the funeral is held at the funeral hall or the deceased's house, the funeral altar is set up by the professional undertakers. The funeral altar is decorated with fresh flowers (*sēka*) and is composed of two temporary mortuary tablets (*kariihai* and *noihai*), lights, two candlesticks, a incense burner, a photograph of the deceased and some offerings (*kumotsu*) brought from guests such as baskets of fresh flowers (*sēka*), bundles of fruits, bottles of *sake* or canned food (*uchimorikago*) and food offerings (a bowl of rice, a plate of sticky-rice balls and a glass of water or green tea). Meanwhile, several male members of the *kumi-ai* go out of the hall and count *hanawa* (funeral wreaths) and *sotomorikago* (funeral wreaths with a bundle of offering attached to them). A board displaying the donor's name and title is attached on each funeral wreath. They also record each donor's name and the kind of wreath and offering. At this time, the wake conductor (*shikaisha*) hired by the funeral home explains to the deceased's family the sequence of the wake ritual and where they will be seated.

#### **4. The wake**

It is quite a new trend to hold a wake ritual (*otsuya shiki*) in Makabe. According to local elders, the wake ritual was not held in the past and the priest was not called on to perform the ritual. It was only the deceased's family, close relatives and community members who spent the night drinking *sake* (rice wine), talking and preparing the funeral. One of the local Buddhist priests told me that the professional

undertakers introduced the wake ritual when they started managing the funeral proceedings. He also told me that when he was first invited to perform the wake ritual, he did not know what to do and asked the funeral professionals about the wake ritual and what the priest should do.

The wake ritual usually takes place on the evening of the same day the deceased is encoffined and transported to the funeral hall. Before the ritual starts, the deceased's family, the members of the *kumi-ai* and the professional funeral assistants (*seremoniya-san*) receive guests who come to express their sympathy. At this time, guests usually bring monetary offerings such as *omimai* (monetary gift of sympathy) or *kōden* (incense money or condolence money, literally meaning 'an offering of incense'). They receive gift bundles in return (*okaeshi*) for *kōden* or *omimai*, and are guided to their seats by the funeral assistants.

There are two sections of seats (the right and the left section), which are divided by the central aisle in the hall. Members of the deceased's family are seated at the first and second rows of the right section, and the other relatives are seated behind them. Guests and members of the *kumi-ai* are seated at the left section. After all the attendees have taken their seats the wake ritual starts with an opening address from the wake conductor (*shikaisha*). It usually starts at 6:00 pm and generally lasts for an hour. At the beginning, the conductor announces the arrival of the Buddhist priest, his rank, sect and temple. When the Buddhist priest comes into the hall, all the attendees stand up with folded palms (*gatshō*) if they are sitting on chairs, or make a bow if they are kneeling down on *tatami* (woven straw mats) in a Japanese-style room. The Buddhist priest is seated at the very front of the altar, burns an incense stick, and starts to chant a sutra (*okyō*) aloud which takes approximately twenty minutes.

When the priest has completed the sutra chanting, the conductor announces the incense offering (*shōkō*). The chief mourner, followed by the other members of the deceased's family, relatives, guests and members of the *kumi-ai*, in turn perform a *shōkō* while the priest is chanting a sutra. After performing the *shōkō*, the deceased's family holds a feast, called *tsuyaburumai* (literally meaning 'wake feast') and entertain relatives and guests with food and *sake* (rice wine) as an expression of gratitude for their attendance. At this time, all the chairs in the hall are stacked away



and tables are set with dishes, food and drink by the professional funeral assistants (*seremoniya-san*) and female members of the *kumi-ai*. The deceased's family and guests share stories of the deceased over food and drink. After the feast, in the case of *saijyō-sō* (hall funeral), the coffin is moved from the hall to the *otsuya sitsu* (the Japanese-style room with *tatami* for the wake) where the deceased's family and close relatives spend the night watching over the deceased in the coffin keeping sticks of incense and candles burning all night.

### **5. The private funeral**

Early in the morning on the third day and just before the departure for the crematorium, the private funeral (*missō*, literally meaning 'secret funeral') takes place without guests. Only the deceased's family, some close relatives and intimate friends, and members of the *kumi-ai* participate in this ritual. According to a local Buddhist priest, *missō* was not held in the past, because the deceased was buried or cremated straight after the funeral and thus there was no need to hold a separate ritual for the departed. However, since the only crematorium in Makabe was closed in the 1970s and people had to go to other towns to cremate their deceased family members, it has become more frequent for the funeral to be held after the cremation and thus there is a need to have an additional ritual for the deceased before the departure for the crematorium. The closest crematorium is about an hour from Makabe. It takes more than four hours in all to go to the crematorium, to have the cremation and to return home. Thus, if the cremation takes place after the funeral, it is hard to lay the cremated remains in the grave before it is dark, especially in the winter season.

The private funeral ritual usually starts at 8:00 am after the arrival of the Buddhist priest and normally lasts for half an hour. First, the priest offers a burning incense stick on the altar and starts to chant a short sutra which takes no more than ten minutes, after which the chief mourner, followed by the other members of the deceased's family and close relatives, offer incense (*shōkō*) while the priest continues to chant a sutra. When all the participants have finished performing a *shōkō*, the professional undertakers take the coffin down from the altar and take the lid off. The family members and close relatives have a last look at the deceased.



They stand in a line putting the flowers (usually lilies and chrysanthemums) that were displayed on the altar and the favourite things of the deceased such as candies, sweets, cigarettes, etc. into the coffin. They then lift the lid up and put it on the coffin together. The professional undertaker drives half of a nail into the corner of the lid, and the chief mourner hits the nail twice with a large pebble, followed by the other members of the family, close relatives and friends. According to a local Buddhist priest, this pebble represents a pebble from the *sanzu no kawa* (literally meaning 'the river of three crossing') and thus hitting the nail with the pebble illustrates a desire of the deceased's family for the spirit of the deceased to cross the river safely.

After all the members of the family have hit the nail, the professional undertaker drives the remaining length of the nail into the coffin and drives more nails into several other places in the lid. The coffin is then carried out of the hall and put in the back of a long black funeral limousine (*reikyusha*) by six male members (*rokushaku*) of the *kumi-ai*. At this time, the chief mourner and several members of the deceased's family, carrying the photograph of the deceased, two temporary mortuary tablets, the food-offering tray and two bunches of flowers, sit in the front of the limousine. Other members of the deceased's family, some close relatives and friends, and some members of the *kumi-ai* get into the bus. The Buddhist priest gets into the lead car, which is driven by a member of the *kumi-ai*. The lead car, followed by the funeral limousine and the bus, in turn starts to drive towards the crematorium (*kasōjō*).

## **6. The cremation**

The cremation (*dabi*) for the deceased from Makabe is usually scheduled for 10 in the morning and it normally takes two hours for the whole process to be completed. The funeral limousine arrives at the porch entrance of the crematorium (*kasōjō*) about ten minutes before the scheduled time. When the professional undertaker opens the back door of the limousine, two crematorium assistants make a bow with folded palms (*gatshō*) to the deceased's coffin, and then unload the coffin and lay it on a special coffin trolley (*kandaisha*), which they roll into the crematorium. The

chief mourner, other members of the family and relatives follow the crematorium assistants to the farewell room (*kokubetsu shitsu*). The trolley loaded with the deceased's coffin is arranged in front of the small altar in the room. The photograph of the deceased, two temporary mortuary tablets, the food-offering tray and two bunches of flowers are handed over from the members of the family to the crematorium assistants and placed on the altar. Meanwhile, the professional undertaker goes to the reception desk and hands in the cremation certificate issued by the local government authority. As soon as the altar is set with the photograph, mortuary tablets and offerings, the Buddhist priest comes in and stands at the front of the altar. He then offers incense (*shōkō*) and starts to chant a very short sutra which takes approximately five minutes, after which the chief mourner, followed by the other members of the family, close relatives and friends, and members of the *kumi-ai*, in turn perform a *shōkō* while the priest is chanting.

When all the attendees have finished performing the *shōkō*, one crematorium assistant rolls the trolley loaded with the deceased's coffin out of the farewell room, and the family and relatives, carrying the photograph, mortuary tablets, the food-offering tray and flowers, follow the assistant to the incinerator. As soon as the trolley is stopped in front of the incinerator, the assistant sets the small altar with the photograph, mortuary tablets and offerings just beside the door of the incinerator. The crematorium assistant then fits a key into a keyhole in the wall and turns it to open the door of the incinerator. When the coffin starts to roll into the incinerator, all the attendees perform a final *gatshō* (making a bow with folded palms) until the coffin is out of sight and the door is closed. This is the final intense moment of distress for the deceased's family and close relatives. After the final *gatshō*, the deceased's family and relatives are led to the waiting room. Before they enter the waiting room and take their seats on the *tatami*, the female members of the *kumi-ai* set the tables with sushi *bentō* (lunch boxes), sweets and drink. The deceased's family and relatives spend some time remembering the deceased over food and drink while the deceased is transformed into bones and ash.

When the cremation is completed after approximately one and a half hours, the crematorium assistant opens the door of the incinerator and checks the cremated remains. The wooden coffin has been burnt away, and white bones and ashes remain

on the concrete tray. The crematorium assistant slides the tray out of the incinerator and lays it on the trolley (*kandaisha*), which he rolls into the ash collecting room (*shūkotsu shitsu*) to prepare the ash collecting (*shūkotsu*) for the deceased's family and relatives. He wears a white gauze mask, gloves, cloth wristlets and an apron before starting to separate the dust and small pieces of ash and set the proper bones on the tray. He picks up the metal nails, hinges and handles of the coffin with a horseshoe magnet, sweeps up the dust and small pieces of ash, and then puts them into an ash bin. When the bones are properly arranged on the tray and ready to be picked up, the crematorium assistant takes off the mask and gloves, and announces the ash collecting to the deceased's family. The family and the closest relatives are led into the ash collecting room by the professional undertaker and gather around the tray.

The deceased's family and the closest relatives get into pairs and put some of the pieces of bones into the urn (*kotsutsubo*) with long wooden chopsticks under the direction and guidance of the crematorium assistant. Two people usually hold the same bone at the same time with their chopsticks to transfer them to the urn. The crematorium assistant told me that this act is strictly taboo in ordinary life and this explains why when two people reach for the same piece of food at the same time with chopsticks during a meal, they both quickly pull their chopsticks back. The bones of the feet are picked up first, and the skull is last. According to the crematorium assistant, this is to ensure that the deceased is not upside-down in the urn.

When all the members of the deceased's family and relatives have finished picking up the bones and placing them into the urn, the crematorium assistant put the rest of the bones into the urn. If there are any big or long bones inside the urn, he crushes them down with a wooden stick (*rokkakubō*) to make enough space and then gathers up all the ashes by sweeping them with a brush and dustpan and puts them into the urn. At this time, a special piece of bone, *nodobotoke* (literally meaning 'throat Buddha', so-called because it looks like a sitting Buddha), is picked up and put into the urn by the chief mourner. The crematorium assistant finally lays the skull on top of the bones in the urn and closes the lid. He then puts the urn into a white wooden box and wraps it with a white cloth. A male member of the

deceased's family, or sometimes a male member of the *kumi-ai*, carries the wooden box with both hands to the funeral hall (or the deceased's house).

## **7. The funeral**

The funeral (*kokubetsu shiki*, literally meaning 'the farewell ceremony') usually takes place in the afternoon of the same day the deceased is cremated. The deceased's family and relatives arrive at the funeral hall (or the house) from the crematorium about half an hour before the funeral starts. The wooden box containing the urn is handed over to the professional funeral assistants (*seremoniya-san*) and arranged on the centre of the funeral altar. The photograph of the deceased, two temporary mortuary tablets, the food-offering tray and two bunches of flowers are also placed on the altar by the funeral assistants.

Before the funeral starts, the deceased's family, the members of the *kumi-ai* and the professional funeral assistants (*seremoniya-san*) receive guests. At this time, all the guests bring *kōden* (incense money) and receive gift bundles (*kōdengaeshi*) in return for *kōden*. They are then guided to their seats by the funeral assistants. When all the members of the deceased's family, relatives and guests have taken their seats, the funeral starts with an opening address from the funeral conductor (*shikaisha*). It usually starts at 1:00 pm and lasts for about an hour. At the start, the Buddhist priest comes in and all the attendees make a bow with folded palms (*gatshō*). The Buddhist priest offers a burning incense stick (*shōkō*) on the altar and starts to chant a sutra (*okyō*), which takes approximately half an hour. After the sutra chanting, the priest offers a burning incense stick again. When the conductor announces the incense offering (*shōkō*) to the attendees, the chief mourner, followed by the other members of the deceased's family, relatives, guests and members of the *kumi-ai*, in turn perform a *shōkō* while the priest is chanting a sutra. At this time, the chief mourner and several members of the family stand on the left side of the altar after their offering and greet the guests who have finished the *shōkō*.

After all of the participants have finished performing the *shōkō* and are seated again, the funeral conductor announces the beginning of the seventh day (*shonanoka*) memorial service, or sometimes both the seventh day and the thirty-fifth day

(*itsunanoka*) memorial services according to the Buddhist sects. There are seven seventh-day memorial services which were originally performed on each seventh day until the forty-ninth day after the death. However, nowadays, among the seven seventh-day memorial services, the first (*shonanoka*), the fifth (*itsunanoka*) and the last (*shijūkunichi*) seventh-day memorial services, which are regarded as important, are performed and the rest of them are omitted. The first and the fifth seventh-day memorial services are usually performed with the funeral and the last seventh-day memorial service is separately performed on the forty-ninth day after the death. According to local Buddhist priests and professional undertakers, nowadays it is difficult to gather relatives on each seventh day memorial service because many of them have to go back to work after the funeral and thus the first, or both the first and the fifth seventh-day memorial services are usually performed at the same time as the funeral.

After the announcement of the beginning of the memorial services from the funeral conductor, the Buddhist priest burns an incense stick again and begins to chant a short sutra, which takes approximately ten minutes. When the priest has completed the short sutra chanting for the memorial services, the conductor announces the incense offering (*shōkō*). At this time, only the deceased's family and relatives perform the *shōkō* while the priest continues to chant a sutra. After the family and the relatives have performed the *shōkō* for the memorial services, the funeral conductor announces the departure of the priest. When the priest goes out of the hall, all the attendees make a bow with folded palms (*gatshō*). The priest is led to the waiting room by the funeral assistant and takes a rest until the deceased's family and relatives are ready to depart for the grave.

The conductor then reads out telegrams of condolence. Most people who cannot attend the funeral send a telegram. There are usually large numbers of telegrams, particularly if the funeral falls on a weekday. The conductor reads out several important telegrams in full and only the names of the senders for the rest of them. After reading the telegrams, the chief mourner and several other members of the deceased's family carrying the photograph of the deceased, two temporary mortuary tablets (*karihai* and *noihai*), the wooden box containing the urn, the food-offering tray and two bunches of flowers, stand in a row with their backs against the



funeral altar. Two members of the *kumi-ai* carrying a wooden grave marker (*bohyō*), also stand beside the deceased's family. The chief mourner makes a short speech about the cause of death and the deceased's life in general and finally ends the speech with the thanks to everyone for attending the funeral (*kaisō*) and then bows deeply to the audience.

After the appreciation speech, the conductor announces the end of the funeral and a short funeral procession walks (*kado okuri*) to the car park. At this time the priest joins the deceased's family for the procession. When the priest ringing the bell and the deceased's family carrying the photograph of the deceased, temporary mortuary tablets, the wooden box containing the urn, the food-offering tray and two bunches of flowers, go out of the hall, all the participants stand up and make a bow with folded palms until the priest and the deceased's family have passed and then they go out after them. The priest, the chief mourner and other members of the deceased's family turn counter clockwise three times in front of the funeral hall. According to a local Buddhist priest, turning counter clockwise before going to the grave confuses the spirit of the deceased and makes it difficult for it to find the route from the home to the grave and thus prevents the spirit from returning home. The deceased's family then scatters coins (*makisen*) to the assembled people in front of the funeral hall (or the deceased's house). The scattered coins are competitively picked up by the guests and onlookers. I shall describe the *makisen* and discuss the relationship and the interaction between pollution and vitality with this scattering of money in more detail in Chapter Three and Chapter Seven. After scattering *makisen*, the priest, the deceased's family, relatives, close friends, and members of the *kumi-ai* get onto the bus and move to the household grave (*ohaka*).

When the priest and mourners arrive at the graveside, the priest, ringing the bell, and followed by the chief mourner and several members of the deceased's family, slowly turn a low stone table (*daisu*), located in the entrance of the cemetery, counter clockwise three times to prevent the spirit of the deceased from following the family home. The deceased's family then place the wooden box containing the urn, the photograph, temporary mortuary tablets, the food-offering tray and two bunches of flowers on the *daisu* and gather around it. The priest chants a final short sutra for several minutes while the deceased's family and relatives bow their heads with



folded palms (*gatshō*). Meanwhile, several male members (*rokushaku*) of the *kumi-ai* open the concrete lid of the compartment (*karōdo*) located under the tombstone to prepare for laying the urn into the compartment of the grave. Occasionally, if there is no compartment, they dig a hole for the interment of the urn a day beforehand.

When the priest has completed the short sutra chanting, the *rokushaku* move the photograph of the deceased, temporary mortuary tablets, the wooden box containing the urn, the food-offering tray and two bunches of flowers from the *daisu* to the grave. They take the urn out of the wooden box, lay it on the upper shelf<sup>14</sup> within the compartment and close the concrete lid. At this point, one temporary mortuary tablet (*noihai*) is placed with the urn in the compartment within the tombstone or buried with the urn at the grave if there is no compartment. After the urn and the *noihai* are placed into the grave properly, the wooden grave marker (*bohyō*), made of long rectangular pieces wood on which the deceased's secular name, the Buddhist posthumous name, age and the day of death are written, is erected in front of the grave. Two bunches of flowers are put in stainless steel vases. The photograph, the other temporary mortuary tablet (*kariihai*) and other food offerings are placed in front of the tombstone. When all the offerings are arranged in front of the tombstone, the chief mourner, followed by the other members of the deceased's family, close relatives, friends and members of the *kumi-ai*, in turn perform the final *shōkō* (offering burning incense) while the priest chants a sutra. After the final *shōkō* and just before leaving the grave site, the deceased's family carrying the photography and the *kariihai* stand in front of the grave and one member of the family smashes the deceased's rice-bowl on the ground. According to informants, by doing this, it is thought that the spirit of the deceased cannot return home in search of food.

Upon reaching the funeral hall (or the house) from the graveside, all the mourners are ritually purified by pouring water over their hands and scrubbing them with salt before entering the hall. According to my informants, by doing so, the mourners cleanse the pollution of death (*kegare*) because salt and water are considered to be effective in repelling *kegare* and any malevolent spirits that may

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<sup>14</sup> There are usually two concrete shelves for urns in the compartment. The most recent urn is placed on the upper shelf and the previous generation on the lower shelf. When there is no space for the new urn, the oldest one is thrown in a heap on the bottom of the compartment.

have followed the living from the grave. After cleansing death pollution, the deceased's family hold a banquet, called *kichūbarai* (literally meaning 'getting out of the period of pollution' also called *shōjin-otoshi*, literally meaning 'dropping the state of abstinence') for the relatives, the guests and members of the *kumi-ai*. The participants share stories of the deceased over food and drink in the feast. The main purpose for holding this feast and sharing food is to commemorate the deceased as well as to offer thanks and remuneration to the guests who have attended the funeral and also to the priest and the members of the *kumi-ai* who have assisted the deceased's family in holding the funeral.

According to elderly informants, the *kichūbarai* was originally held on the forty-ninth day (*shijūkunich*) after death (counting from the day of the deceased's death) to celebrate the end of the forty-nine day mourning period, called *imiake* (literally meaning 'the lifting of pollution'). It is now moved to the day of the funeral in most parts of Makabe, not only in the town centre but also in suburban and rural districts, because nowadays many people work in the town centre or neighbouring cities as company employees and thus have to go back to work after the funeral. One of my informants told me that it is very inconvenient to both the deceased's family and the guests if the feast is held on the forty-ninth day.

After the feast, the *kariihai* is placed on the post funeral altar (*atokazari*), which is set up by the professional undertakers at the Japanese-style room of the deceased's house, until the forty-ninth day after the death, because according to a local Buddhist priest, the spirit of the deceased is still in transition and is not yet able to be placed inside the household Buddhist altar (*butsudan*) as an ancestor. The post funeral altar is much smaller and simpler than the altar used at the funeral. It is a low table with two raised shelves and is covered with a white cloth. The photograph of the deceased, the *kariihai*, the incense burner, a bell, a candlestick, two vases of flowers, a bowl of rice, and fruit offerings are usually placed on the altar. The deceased's family rings the bell and performs a *shōkō* (offering burning incense) twice a day. When those who could not attend the wake ritual (*otsuya shiki*) or the funeral (*kokubetsu shiki*) visit the deceased's house, they also perform the *shōkō* in front of the post funeral altar during this period.

## 8. The post funeral services

As I have indicated previously, the seven seventh-day memorial services, which culminate on the forty-ninth day after the death of the deceased, follow the funeral rite (*kokubetsu shiki*). According to a local Buddhist priest, formerly, the seven seventh-day memorial services were performed in full at each seventh day until the forty-ninth day after the death. On each occasion, the Buddhist priest was invited for the sutra chanting, and the deceased's family, relatives and close friends were gathered. The priest also told me that it was strongly believed that if the deceased's family failed to perform the seven seventh-day memorial services, then the spirit will be condemned to ceaseless wandering and may pose a threat to the living.

However, some of these services are now omitted or advanced by the date of the funeral. The first seventh-day (*shonanoka*) memorial service, or both the first and the fifth seventh-day (*itsunanoka*) memorial services are moved to the day of the funeral and performed immediately after the funeral. Although the fifth seventh-day memorial service is occasionally held separately on the thirty-fifth day according to the Buddhist priests, the last seventh-day (*shijūkunichi*) memorial service is always held separately on the forty-ninth day after the death because it is regarded as the most important service for the departed. The local Buddhist priest told me that the spirit of the deceased wanders this world for thirty five days and then departs for the other world on the thirty-fifth day after the death, and arrives at the other world on the forty-ninth day after the death, and thus the last seventh-day memorial service is the most important for the departed spirit, and cannot be omitted or failed.

The last seventh-day memorial service is performed by calling in a Buddhist priest who chants a sutra. It also involves gathering the deceased's family, close relatives and other people who were close to the deceased and sharing a formal meal to commemorate the dead. At times, if the family is large and the house is not big enough to hold the service, the service is held at the household Buddhist temple (*dannadera*), after which participants move to a restaurant to hold a banquet. On this day, the *kariihai* is replaced by the permanent mortuary tablet (*honi hai*) made of black-lacquered wood on which the deceased's posthumous Buddhist name is written

in gold, and it is placed on the *butsudan* with those of the deceased's predecessors. After the service of the forty-ninth day, the spirit of the deceased is expected to have arrived at the other world, and this signals the end of the initial mourning period, *imiake* (literally meaning 'the lifting of pollution'), which entitles the living to return to normal life. It seems that the living and the dead are fully purified by holding the last seventh-day memorial service.

However, according to local Buddhist priests and elderly informants, although after the forty-ninth day, the spirit of the deceased is integrated into the realm of the *hotoke* (Buddha), the spirit is still an unstable, polluted and dangerous being that needs to be purified and protected by a further series of formal services. There remain three sets of services to be held after the forty-ninth day. One is the *maitzuki meinichi* (monthly death day service), which marks the date of death on a monthly basis. The second is the *shōtsuki meinichi* (annual death day service), which marks the date of the person's death every year. However, nowadays the monthly and annual death day services are not generally held, and most family members especially of the younger generations pay no attention to these monthly and annual death day services. The third is the *nenki* (periodic anniversary service), which is usually held on the first, third, seventh, thirteenth, seventeenth, twenty-third, twenty-seventh, thirty-third, fiftieth, and hundredth anniversaries of the death of the deceased. The earlier ones are the most observed. If there are more than two anniversaries, which are for the multiple family members now deceased, in one year, the memorial services are usually combined. The first and the third periodic anniversary services are generally held at the household Buddhist temple (*dannadera*) with some degree of pomp and splendour. The family invites close relatives, intimate friends, business associates of the deceased, and neighbours. The Buddhist priest chants a sutra (*okyō*) and all the participants offer burning incense (*shōkō*), after which they visit the household grave to perform a *shōkō* again and then move to a restaurant or hotel to have a banquet.

Although there is variation in the choice of year for the final anniversary memorial service (*tomuraiage*), the most favoured are the thirty-third and fiftieth anniversaries of death. On the final anniversary of death, according to a local Buddhist priest, the spirit of the deceased has achieved the pure and stable status of

the household ancestor and is able to protect the house and the household members. Most importantly, at this point, the pollution of death has permanently disappeared. He told me that the final anniversary means the end of the condolences and the purification, and the *honihai* in the *butsudan* is deposited in the *dannadera*. At this time, the *honihai* is replaced by the *senzodaidai ihai* (ancestral tablet inscribed with all the generations of the ancestors), which is placed on the *butsudan*. In the grave, the final stupa (*sotoba*) which is made of an evergreen tree (*sugi*) is erected with the Buddhist posthumous name of the deceased written on it.

There still remain other memorial services, which are not for the individual dead but for the collective dead in the household. The memorial services for the collective dead are held on *shōgatsu* (New Year's Day), *bon* (festival of the dead, August 13th-16th), and *higan* (vernal and autumnal equinoxes, March 18<sup>th</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> and September 20<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup>). In these memorial services, the spirits of the dead are honoured collectively every morning and evening when family members offer food, flowers, and incense at the *butsudan*. However, in the case of the first *bon* festival after death (*hatsubon* or *shinbon*), the spirit of the newly dead is singled out for the special memorial service. There are three kinds of spirits who are worshipped at the *bon* festival: the spirit of the newly dead (*shinbotoke*), ancestor (*hotoke* or *senzo*) and wandering ghost (*muenbotoke*). I shall describe and discuss these spirits in more detail in Chapter Four.

The *bon* festival is the most elaborate among the services directed to the collective spirits of the dead. The spirits of the dead are thought to return to this world and visit their relatives during the festival. Before the *bon* festival, the house, the *butsudan* and the grave are cleaned, and the favourite foods of the newly deceased and other ancestors are prepared. In many households, members offer a miniature horse and ox made of aubergine and straw. According to a local Buddhist priest, the spirits of the dead ride the miniature horse for a quick return from the great distance at which they reside, and when they return to the other world they ride the miniature ox for a slow return. Members of each household go to their household grave in the late afternoon of the first day (on the 13<sup>th</sup>) and light a paper lantern (*chouchin*) to guide their ancestors to their home. At the end of the *bon* festival (on the 16<sup>th</sup>), they bring their ancestors back to their household grave, hanging *chouchin*



to guide the ancestors.

At the equinoxes (*higan*, literally meaning ‘the other world’), family members visit and clean the grave, and they sometimes schedule a special memorial service for the spirits of the dead to be held at home or the temple. According to a Buddhist priest, this memorial service is held to wish the departed spirits a safe journey to the other world during these equinoctial weeks. Similar to the *bon* festival and the *higan* memorial service, at *shōgatsu* (New Year’s Day) family members also visit their household grave, clean it and offer abundant offerings.

### **Concluding remarks**

In this chapter, I have described in some detail the mortuary process of a typical death in order to illustrate the way in which a person dies and *tamashii* is separated from its *karada* and transformed into the household ancestor (*senzo*). How are we to understand these complex and drawn out processes of formal ritual veneration? There can be many possible explanations for holding a continued series of formal services. For example, the series of services may placate, pacify or appease the spirits of the dead and send them to the other world without wandering this world and without bothering or harming the living, and finally help them to achieve ancestorhood. By providing comfort to the spirits of the dead through the continued services, the living may also drive out the fear of retribution from them and thus enhance their relationship with the spirits of the dead. The series of services may also reaffirm the family solidarity of the living. In other words, it provides an opportunity or even an obligation for family members to gather and thus serves to consolidate ‘the sense of family identity’ which makes it possible for the surviving family members to strengthen their motivation to continue their household.

However, apart from the religious, social and psychological aspects of the services, in my own experiences and observations, I found out that the complex and continued series of formal services is above all else concerned with the purification or elimination of death pollution and the distribution or replenishment of vitality. In other words, the series of services has the most important and indispensable function of cleansing or purifying the pollution of death and of supplying vitality. More



specifically, it produces vital energy for both the living and the dead through the offering and sharing of food and drink during or after the rituals that might transform the defiled state of both the dead and the living into a state of purity. Although the single ritual itself cannot fully and immediately exterminate the pollution of death, the continued series of services gradually increases the vital force and so may have the power to lead towards a gradual decrease in pollution.



Plate 7. Hall funeral (*saijyō-sō*)



Plate 8. House funeral (*jitaku-sō*)



Plate 9. The entrance of the deceased's house



Plate 10. A funeral procession walks (*kado okuri*)



Plate 11. Members of *kumi-ai* burying the coffin in the grave



Plate 12. A crematorium assistant rolling a coffin into the incinerator



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# ***Kinds of death and kinds of persons***

### ***Introduction***

Although death is common to all human beings, it not only varies between cultures but also within each culture. The meaning of death, the types of rituals surrounding death, the attendant emotional expressions, the disposal of the body and views concerning the spirit of the dead may vary depending on the kind of person.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, this connection of different persons with different kinds of death was suggested by Robert Hertz, one of the earliest anthropologists to explore the social complexities of death, in his classic paper, 'A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death' (1960 [1907]). Hertz notes that 'the death of a stranger, a slave, or a child will go almost unnoticed; it will arouse no emotion, occasion no ritual' (1960 [1907]: 76). On the other hand, the passing of a high-ranking person will result in 'a true panic [which] sweeps over the group' (ibid.). He also points out that the intensity of fear experienced by the living depends upon the social status of the deceased; the corpse of a man of high rank is more powerful and threatening than that of a man of low rank and, therefore, the first requires a more elaborate mortuary ritual (ibid.). His analysis illustrates, in part, why some deaths are momentous and some are relatively unnoticed and only have small commemorating rituals accompanying them, and consequently how mortuary rites re-present social and political differentiation by distinguishing between people of differing social statuses.

Additionally, Hertz calls attention to certain kinds of death which society cannot contain and thus they cause 'numerous exceptions to the normal ritual' (1960 [1907]: 85). To quote Hertz:

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<sup>15</sup> For example, these may include differences associated with a death occurring in old age, the death of a child, a miscarriage, a woman's death versus a man's or the death of a poor person versus the death of a rich person.

All those who die a violent death or by an accident, women dying in childbirth, people killed by drowning or by lightning, and suicides, are often the object of special rites. Their bodies inspire the most intense horror and are got rid of precipitately; further more, their bones are not laid with those of other deceased members of the group who have died a normal death. Their unquiet and spiteful souls roam the earth forever; or, if they emigrate to another world, they live in a separate village, sometimes even in a completely different area from that inhabited by other souls. (Hertz 1960 [1907]: 85)

Although Hertz's essay has influenced many subsequent studies of death, most anthropological studies on death are still concerned with 'typical' deaths, for example, how a society views the 'natural' death of an elderly person. In other words, many anthropologists have looked at societies and cultures only through the 'natural' death, especially death associated with old age. More specifically, although there has been a great deal of work on death and mortuary rituals concentrating on various topics such as the spirit of the dead, the pollution of death, gift exchanges and social relationships, and death rites as a process of social integration, most studies have investigated these topics only through the perspective of a 'normal' death from old age.

For this reason, even if these studies seem to indicate something about a society and its workings through the repercussions of a 'typical' death, they may not properly and sufficiently explain the diversity of mortuary rituals since this 'typical' death is both one of many ways of dying and focuses often on only one type of person. However it is imperative that anthropologists examine the social and cultural variations of death and their similarities and differences for conceptualising and understanding the society and indigenous notions of personhood more explicitly; as Lévi-Strauss notes, 'anthropology ... takes man as its object of study but differs from the other sciences of man in striving to understand that object in its most diverse manifestations' (1985 [1983]: 25) and, of course, such manifestations may be significant both within a single society and between different societies.

Therefore, in this chapter, rather than focus on the 'typical' death from old age, I shall explicitly look at various kinds of death which vary according to age, gender, social and economic status of the deceased as well as the cause of death, and attempt to find differences among them. By doing this, it makes it possible to

elucidate social and cultural variations of persons through which we may also understand the particularity of the Japanese concept of the person. In contemporary Japan there seem to be many similarities or, rather, no great differences in dealing with various kinds of death since professional undertakers (*sōgiya-san*) became widespread throughout the country. In the context of the commercialised funeral managed by professional undertakers, it can also be suggested that ‘traditional’ and characteristic ways of dealing with various kinds of death have been altered, intertwined, and homogenised. Nonetheless, during my fieldwork, I discovered that there are still many distinct differences in dealing with different kinds of death, and even some of them have newly appeared or have been reinvented. These differences will be described in more detail below.

If there are differences in dealing with death, these differences will probably illustrate or imply different categories of persons. I shall look at the connection between different kinds of death and different categories of persons, and attempt to elucidate the way in which different categories of persons are dealt with differently when they die. Moreover, it may be thought that if there are different categories of persons or ideas of personhood, each category may have a different kind of body and, thus, this body demands different funerary rites, because concepts of ‘personhood are contingent on the social meanings given to bodies’ (Conklin & Morgan 1996: 657). For example, in Japan, elderly people, the emperors, and the war dead might be thought of as having more vitality than other people, or simply as having different kinds of bodies compared to ordinary people and, thus, they are dealt with differently when they die.

Moreover, it can also be suggested that if there are different kinds of bodies, each body may have a different kind of spirit. For example, the emperors and the war dead might be seen as having exceptional bodies that have sufficiently strong vitality to negate their death and pollution. Thus, they are believed to become gods (*kami*) directly, without the long purification process. In this sense, it can be argued that the differences in dealing with death illustrate not only different kinds of persons but also spirits. Although a person and a spirit are considered to be slightly different concepts, they are strongly linked together in the context of death. In other words, although persons are constructed in the world of the living, they may be transformed



into different kinds of spirit after death in order to transcend the border between the world of the living and the dead. Thus, in this chapter, I shall conclude by arguing that different persons are associated with different kinds of death because they embody different amounts of vitality and pollution.

## **1. Normal death variations**

### **1.1. The elderly**

In contemporary Japanese society, like everywhere else, death is more frequent among the elderly than in other age groups in the population. This is probably because life expectancy has been dramatically extended for both men and women since the end of the Second World War.<sup>16</sup> Although death occurs mainly among the old, the death stemming from old age is still the ideal death in that the person has lived to see his/her grandchildren or great grandchildren. It is also considered a ‘good death’ (*daiōjō*, literally meaning ‘peaceful death’) and thus the most elaborate, magnificent and joyous funerals are usually held for those who have lived out their full lives and have had many descendants.

As I have indicated in Chapter Two, each person has vitality, but when vitality is exhausted, the body (*karada*) stops operating and then the spirit (*tamashii*) leaves the *karada* and thus a person dies. However, in the case of the elderly, it may be hard to explain their death as the ‘exhaustion of vitality’ since, although the *karada* stops operating, they still seem to have sufficient vitality which can be transferable and which has the power to eliminate or diminish death pollution (*kegare*). In this sense, they are thought of as having exceptional *karada* that still embodies vitality after death. In other words, death due to old age is considered full of vitality. In this respect, it may be consistent with Bloch and Parry’s analysis that ‘[t]he good death ... is a kind of handing over of a vitality which can then be recycled’ (1982: 17). This is why, in funerary rites, the elderly are dealt with elaborately, magnificently and vigorously when they die. Moreover, their *karada* are dry, thin and light and thus when they decompose they are less contaminated by the

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<sup>16</sup> In 1947, Japanese average life expectancy at birth for women was 53 years and for men 50 years; by 2005 these figures had increased to 85 years and 78 years respectively (The Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2005).

pollution of death and when they are cremated they are quickly transformed into pure white ashes. It may also be suggested that their *tamashii* also contain sufficient vitality and, thus, they are more easily transformed into household ancestors (*senzo*).

In Makabe, for those who die aged eighty or over and have many children, their death is generally called *tenju* (natural death or death in old age). In this case, people usually say, ‘The funeral is a celebration for the dead because of death in old age’ (*tenju wo mattō shita kara oiwai datbe*). It is also common to hear jokes and laughter burst out when they prepare the funeral or even during the funeral. People will also typically say, ‘On this occasion, we cook *sekihan* (red rice) and distribute it’ (*kono toki wa sekihan wo taite kubaru monon dayo*). *Sekihan* is sticky-rice (*mochigome*) steamed with red beans (*azuki*) which give a red colour to the rice. At times, sticky-rice and red beans are cooked separately and served together. A pack of *sekihan* is offered as a gift to each participant at the funeral. *Sekihan* is also served with other food and *sake* to all relatives and guests at the banquet (*kichūbarai*) after the funeral. It is usually served on ceremonial or joyous occasions (*oiwai goto* or *omedetai koto*), such as after childbirth, on birthdays, graduations, weddings, moving into a new house, New Year’s Day, and other holidays. *Sekihan* is strongly connected with celebration because of its red colour which symbolises life, vitality and happiness not only in Makabe but also in many parts of Japan (see, e.g., Ohnuki-Tierney 1993: 14; Rupp 2003: 65).

In recent decades, other kinds of auspicious items, also coloured red and white (symbolising a good death), are also used on the occasion of *tenju*. For example, *kōhaku mochi* (pairs of red and white rice cakes), *kōhaku manjū* (pairs of red and white steamed rice cakes with sweet beans fillings) or *kōhaku taoru* (pairs of red and white towels) on which the word *tenju* is written are also offered as gifts to all relatives and guests at the funeral of the elderly. In contrast with red, black is used for inauspicious occasions such as funerals and memorial services, because this colour generally symbolises death and death pollution (*kuro fujyō*, literally meaning ‘black impurity’). Its symbolic relation to death and death pollution may be derived from the physical facts of actual decomposition, because the corpse is inevitably accompanied by black bodily fluids through the process of decomposition.

Additionally, although one or two Buddhist priests are invited for chanting a sutra at a funeral, in the case of *tenju*, it is common to invite three or even five priests if the deceased's family is wealthy enough. The number of priests is usually commensurate with the size of the funeral and the household's wealth because it costs a considerable amount of money to invite several priests. When people talk about how a funeral is 'large' and 'splendid' (*rippana sōsiki*), they are almost always referring to the number of priests. Furthermore, when an elderly person turns 100 years old, they receive a congratulatory letter (*iwaijyō*) and a silver *sake* cup (*ginpai*) from the Prime Minister. When they die, the congratulatory letter and the silver *sake* cup are displayed on the funeral altar during the funeral, and then on the household Buddhist altar (*butsudan*) during the memorial period. It is also a great honour for the deceased's family to hold the funeral of a centenarian family member.

Although death from old age is considered a good death and people celebrate it, it does not mean that the death does not contain any death pollution (*kegare*). To a certain degree, the corpse and its surroundings are still considered impure, contagious and dangerous. For example, in a similar way to other funeral rites, at the funeral of the elderly the family members close the household Shintō shrine (*kamidana*) and cover it with a white piece of paper to keep out *kegare* in order to protect the Shintō deities (*kami-sama*). When mourners return to the funeral hall from the crematorium or the grave, they are ritually purified by pouring water over their hands and scrubbing them with salt to cleanse or purify themselves of *kegare* before entering the hall. They also sprinkle salt over their shoulders when they return home from the funeral hall so that they do not carry *kegare* into their daily lives. Thus, it is important to note that the death from old age contains not only vitality but also *kegare*.

During my fieldwork, I witnessed very intriguing scenes where the deceased's family scattered coins to the assembled people in front of the funeral hall after the funeral. This practice of scattering coins is commonly observed not only in Makabe, but also throughout the Ibaraki prefecture. However, and most importantly, it does not occur at all funerals. The practice is only performed at funerals of the elderly (*tenju*). In the case of *tenju*, several male members of the neighbourhood funeral cooperative (*kumi-ai*), or sometimes professional undertakers, prepare

bundles of coins, called *makisen* ('scattering coins') which will be distributed later to the deceased's family and scattered to participants of the funeral during a funeral procession. They change banknotes into coin rolls of brand new 5, 10, 50 and 100 yen coins at a local bank. The total amount of coins is usually no more than ten thousand yen (approximately 45 GBP). They unwrap the rolls of coins and mix all the denominations together on a table. They then grab a handful of randomly mixed coins and wrap them up in a white paper or handkerchief. These wrapped coins are piled up on a wooden plate which is then placed beside the coffin until the funeral ends. In this respect, they can correctly be seen as mortuary offerings to the spirit of the deceased. In a similar way to other mortuary offerings such as food, drink, flowers and incense, the coins can also be intended to appease or comfort the unstable and dangerous departed spirit and, thus, usher the spirit safely into the other world without wandering around this world and without bothering or harming the living. However, more importantly, the coins are considered to be extremely contaminated by the high density of death pollution while they are placed beside the coffin. But, at the same time, they can be intended to absorb vitality from the corpse because, as I have previously noted, death due to old age contains not only pollution but also vitality.

After the funeral and just before the departure for the grave, the deceased's family scatters coins (*makisen*) to the assembled people in front of the funeral hall (or the deceased's house). As if it is a competition, these scattered coins are picked up by community members, guests, children and onlookers. It is the most delightful, enjoyable and energetic scene of the funeral. The gloomy, solemn and morose aspects of the funeral are absent in this scene. On their way back home after the funeral procession, using the coins they managed to pick up, people buy drinks such as cans of green tea and bottles of fruit juice or water, and drink them at once or take them home for other family members. By doing so, it is believed that they will be blessed with good health, rejuvenation and a long life because death due to old age is generally considered to be full of vitality.

Almost paradoxically, those who have gathered coins must spend all their coins on that day and must never take them into their homes, because the coins are also considered to be extremely contaminated by the high density of death pollution

and thus may cause harm to other household members as well as to benevolent spirits such as household Shintō deities (*kami-sama*) and ancestors (*hotoke-sama*). For this reason, in the past, some elderly informants told me, those who picked up coins often gave their coins to beggars or vagrants on their way back home because such people did not have their own homes and were considered to be polluted. When I attended the funeral of a local Buddhist priest's mother, I actually witnessed one male homeless beggar among the assembled people who were waiting for 'scattering coins' in front of the temple. As soon as the coins were scattered by the deceased's family, he picked up the coins with an air of desperation, while other participants enjoyed picking up them. Although he had picked up quite a lot of coins, some elderly participants gave their coins to him when they left the place. At that time, I simply thought that the reason why the participants gave their coins to the beggar could be because they felt sympathy for him. However, when I talked to some of my informants about 'scattering coins', I found out that the participants had trouble in managing a small number of their coins because they could neither buy a drink with the coins nor take them into their homes and thus their coins were given to the beggar.

It is also intriguing that certain rules are prescribed for the coins' use: mourners may purchase only certain kinds of drinks, not food or sweets. When I asked several informants why they have to buy certain drinks rather than others, they could not explain it sufficiently for me. The response was usually brusque, 'That is our old custom' (*sore wa mukashi kara no fūshū datbe*). We can of course conjecture why they buy and drink such beverages. It seems that drinks such as tea and water spread to the inside of their bodies more rapidly than others, and more importantly water has long been considered as a 'source of vitality' in Japan. Thus, by drinking such drinks, in a short time people may supplement their own vitality which has been weakened by the pollution of death during the funeral. As described in Chapter Two, this practice is very similar to 'the last water' (*matsugo no mizu*). When the deceased's family attends the deathbed, they moisten the lips of the deceased with water to finally attempt to resurrect the dead or dying person. In this case, water is also used in the hope of supplying enough vitality to the deceased or dying person for resuscitation.



The most important role of the ‘scattering coins’ is to distribute vitality as well as pollution to the non-bereaved because the coins contain both vitality and pollution. As a result, the deceased and the family may have the opportunity to diminish their high density of death pollution by distributing the coins, and the non-bereaved may have the opportunity to supplement their own vitality by collecting the coins and ingesting drinks. The vital energy may outweigh the pollution of death and thus ultimately transform the defiled state of both the bereaved and the non-bereaved into a state of purity.

## 1.2. Men and women

Although there are no striking differences in the practices of men’s and women’s funerals, within the same household a man’s funeral will be more elaborate and magnificent than a woman’s in spite of the fact that women generally live longer than men. If a husband dies after his wife, children will generally purchase a more expensive and splendid coffin, funeral altar, mortuary tablet, wooden grave marker (*bohyō*), offerings, and other funeral accoutrements for their father than for their mother, and they will also call more priests for their father’s funeral. If a wife dies after her husband, children do not exceed their father’s funeral expenses for their mother’s funeral. When I was working at the local funeral home during my fieldwork in Makabe, I found much evidence of the inequality of funeral expenses between husbands and wives by looking through the funeral home’s business account book where the detailed purchase cost paid by each family has been recorded since the funeral home was founded.

This inequality of funeral expense and scale might be related to the ‘traditional’ male dominant household system, *ie*<sup>17</sup>, the ‘elementary structure’ upon which Japanese society was based. *Ie* is the archetypal patrilineal and patriarchal household structure supported by Confucian ethical ideas in which the father, as a senior male member of the household, had absolute power, and the eldest son

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<sup>17</sup> According to Tsuji (2002: 180), the Meiji Civil Code of 1898 established the *ie* as a legal unit to which every subject must belong. By granting its head authority over other members and imposing on him the responsibility for their behaviour and maintenance, the state used the *ie* as a shrewd means to control every citizen. To assure *ie* continuity, the Civil Code made male primogeniture the rule of succession and specified alternative rules in case this ideal was not achieved. Additionally, to legitimize the *ie* as a perpetual unit, ancestor worship was demanded and the family grave became its locus.

inherited the family estate (see Befu 1963, 1968, 1971; Hamabata 1990; Hendry 2003 [1987]). In this *ie* system, women were subordinate to the dictates of men. Wives could be divorced without any substantive grounds and at any time by the husband and his family. Childbirth was women's most important work, and any wife who failed to produce male heirs was likely to be returned to her own family and she had no claim to children or property in that family and remained essentially an outsider (see Hunter 1989: 138; Nakane 1967: 21). Until 1908 a woman could be killed with impunity by a husband who discovered her in an adulterous act, while for men, affairs outside the home were not only accepted, but also even expected (Hendry 2003 [1987]: 39).

Moreover, if a woman died without children during a period of her probation her body or bones were not entombed in the family grave and the body or bones would be returned to the grave of her family of origin (Plath 1964: 306). Although, the body is entombed there, the spirit is unable to join the same line of her natal ancestors because there are only two permanent ancestor positions, the household head and household wife; the returned spirit cannot therefore change its position within the household (Ooms 1976: 69). In this case, the spirit is condemned to become a wandering ghost (*muenbotoke*) (ibid.). Additionally, it was also very common that although a woman had many children her name was often omitted from genealogies and was not always inscribed upon family gravestones (Picone 1984: 249). It was also said that female spirits could 'wreak vengeance as "angry spirits" or ghosts for wrongs suffered in life' (ibid.).

Although the *ie* system was dissolved with the 1947 revision of Japanese family law<sup>18</sup> under the influence of the Allied occupation authorities, and the family began to transform to a more westernised nuclear family type in which men and women alike are guaranteed equal rights, the *ie* ideology lingers in many contemporary Japanese families, particularly in rural and suburban families (see Moon 1986; Smith 1987: 10-11). There is an old Japanese adage which is still used among contemporary Japanese: 'Woman does not have her own fixed home in the three periods of her life' (*onna wa sangai ni ie nashi*) because she should obey her

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<sup>18</sup> Article 14 of the 1947 Constitution provides: '[a]ll the people are equal under the law and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic or social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status, or family origin' (Itoh & Beer 1978: 258).

father when she is young, her husband when she is married, and her son after her husband dies (Storm 1992: 169).

The Japanese language itself reflects the status of these relationships between men and women. When Japanese people introduce their spouses, they do not introduce them by their names. Expressing the word 'husband' in Japanese, most wives use the word '*shujin*', which literally means 'master'. On the other hand, '*kanai*', which literally means 'inside house', is used by men as the word for wife. In my view, these expressions illustrate certain Japanese ideas about the family and the relationship between husbands and wives, such as the belief that husbands are superior to wives and that wives should always be at home and obey their husband. Nowadays, it seems that although women may be important, powerful and influential in the public sphere, they are still associated with the domestic arena and then in turn marginalised from their houses and communities in many parts of rural Japan, because it is believed that gender equality could destroy the household by introducing destructive competition between men and women (see Smith 1987: 25).

However, apart from these wider contextual differences between men and women (the patrilineal and patriarchal household structure, for instance), it is more germane to this study that all of these inequalities between men and women may originate from differing amounts of vitality and pollution in death. In other words, men and women are viewed differently because their bodies (*karada*) embody different amounts of vitality and pollution. Men's *karada* are considered to be hard, dry and hot and thus they are thought of as having more vitality than women. In contrast with men's *karada*, women's *karada* are considered to be soft, wet and cold and thus they are thought of as having more pollution than men. For example, menstruating or postpartum women had to be secluded and avoid contact with their family members because they were considered to be polluted by 'blood pollution' (*aka fujyō*). I would suggest that these changing amounts of vitality and pollution in the bodies of men and women probably generate various inequalities not only on the household structure but also on the mortuary practice.

### 1.3. The poor and the rich

Not only in Japan but also throughout Northeast Asia it is almost certain that wealth signifies prosperity, happiness, luck, good health and long life. In this sense, wealth is a sign of vitality whether it is inherited or acquired; thus, the rich are viewed as having more vitality than the poor. More specifically, the rich and the poor are considered to be different persons because their *karada* embody different amounts of vitality and thus they are dealt with differently when they die.

As I indicated in the previous chapter, Japanese mortuary rituals are considered arduous and expensive processes and require lengthy formal rituals. Above all, the rites of memorial services are very strictly scheduled rituals that continue until the final rites, which are held on the thirty-third or fiftieth year after death, when the deceased has been transformed into a household ancestor (*senzo* or *sosen*). However, destitute families find it hard to carry out the necessary rituals for the dead because of their lack of wealth. According to informants and Buddhist priests, if they do not carry out the proper rituals for the dead, the spirit of the dead cannot be transformed into a household ancestor, and the spirit may become a wandering ghost (*muenbotoke*) engaged in an endless search for food and comfort, and who may cause harm to the living.

It costs exorbitant amounts of money to hold a proper funerary ritual and using the commercial funeral services constitutes a heavy burden for many families who often go into debt to provide a proper funeral for their parents or other relatives. A questionnaire survey conducted in 2003 by the Japan Consumer Association found that the average cost of a funerary ritual nationwide was 1.5 million yen (approximately 6,800 GBP) (The Japan Consumer Association 2003). This does not include the 380,000 yen (approximately 1,700 GBP) for expenses associated with the wake, and the 480,000 yen (approximately 2,200 GBP) paid to the Buddhist priest for various services such as sutra chanting, the Buddhist posthumous name (*kaimyō*), etc. Thus, the total average cost of a funeral ceremony for a family is 2,360,000 yen (approximately 11,800 GBP), roughly the same as purchasing a new car. If the deceased's family does not have a household grave, it costs more to buy a new grave plot and tombstones. However, according to my informants, it is almost impossible

to buy a new grave plot in big cities such as Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto because of its exorbitant price. In this context of the commercialised funeral managed by professional undertakers, poor families cannot afford to hold a proper funeral ritual.

Nowadays, the situation in which both elderly spouses living together with their adult children under one roof can no longer be seen as a typical Japanese family neither in urban districts nor in rural areas. Many poor people live alone, although in the past many have been married and had children. For example, as I have already indicated, Makabe was one of the most famous stone-producing districts in Japan, and the stone industry rapidly developed with Japan's economic success in the 1960s and 1980s. There were a great number of quarries, stone carving factories and stone article wholesale companies where many local people were employed and gained fairly good incomes. One of my informants, Yamanaka-san, a formal stone worker, said:

It was the happiest time for me and other stone workers in the 1980s. There were many work places for local people who could easily get a job in stone related companies without any special skills or careers. My monthly salary was enough to buy a nice car and I freely spent a lot of money without any savings because no one could expect Japan's economic crisis.

However, after the collapse of the 'economic bubble' in the early 1990s, many stone-related companies and shops were closed and many local people lost their jobs. They could not get a job for a long time and some of them tried to start their own businesses such as restaurants, cafes or noodle bars; most of these failed in a short time and accumulated large debts. Some of these people divorced or separated from their wives and their children also left them. Many families were broken by the collapse of family finances.

When I was working at the funeral home, I witnessed several funerals for the poor who lived alone. Osawa-san, a 59-year-old, was found dead in his home in June 2006, approximately 10 days after his death. As soon as we had received a phone call from one of his relatives, I accompanied two of my colleagues to collect the deceased's body. When we arrived at his home there was a strong smell and flies were swarming inside the house. Several police officers, who were in gauze masks, had just finished the investigation concerning a suspicion of murder. One of them



said, 'There is no reason to believe that it is a murder or a suicide'. They concluded that Osawa-san died from chronic heart failure. I was told by my colleagues later that Osawa-san was a former stone worker. He lost his job in the early 1990s and since then he had begun his own businesses several times but he failed each time. After that, he became an alcoholic and stayed at home all day. In the end, his wife left him and his children also left.

When we entered the room to collect the deceased's body, we found the body was lying on *tatami* (woven straw mats) in front of the *butsudan*. My colleague Inose-san told me that Osawa-san might want to be with his ancestors at the moment of his death. The body was surrounded by flies and maggots which were crawling on the body, and wet with black fluids which flowed out from the body. When my colleague Ukaji-san looked at the rotten body and smelled it, he vomited and rushed out of the room. Inose-san scolded him for running out of the room and poured a bottle of vinegar on the deceased's body to drive away flies and maggots (vinegar, in Japan, was often used to clean an outdoor toilet), and then we put the body into the large black plastic bag with several blocks of dry ice and zipped it up. We placed the plastic bag into a coffin and put the lid on it with special glue and drove nails close together to prevent odours and liquids from leaking out, and we transported the coffin to the funeral hall.

That evening, some close relatives (three married sisters of the deceased and their husbands) got together for a consultation (*uchiawase*) with the professional undertakers about the arrangements for the funeral. After the consultation, they decided to have a very simple and small funeral for the deceased because they could not afford to hold a proper funeral and they, as married sisters, were not responsible for holding the funeral of their brother. The wake was absent and only the funeral was held the next day, without guests because it was not announced. Inose-san told me that if they announced the funeral and invited guests then they would need to spend more money for food and *okaeshi* (gifts in return for the incense money (*kōden*))<sup>19</sup>, and the most important reason for not inviting guests is that there are no descendants to succeed Osawa *ke* (the household of Osawa) and return the incense

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<sup>19</sup> As mentioned previously in Chapter Two, offering the incense money is the most important obligation for each guest participating in the funeral and the incense money must always be reciprocated on some other occasion.

money to the guests. For these reasons, only a few close relatives attended the funeral. Inose-san also said, 'One of the relatives told the deceased's ex-wife and children about his death but they did not want to attend the funeral'. Nonetheless, on the day of the funeral, the ex-wife appeared at the funeral hall just before the start of the funeral and performed a short *shōkō* (offering the burning incense for the spirit of the deceased) and disappeared while people were whispering about her sudden appearance. Inose-san said, 'She perhaps had compassion for his death or she was afraid to get the blame for not attending the funeral and be called *tsurenai onna* (cold woman)'.

The funeral lasted for approximately 20 minutes including 10 minutes of the priest's sutra chanting (*okyō*). The Buddhist priest left the hall immediately after the first sutra. He did not chant a sutra during the *shōkō* and also omitted a short speech (*hōwa*) about the deceased and the explanation of the deceased's Buddhist posthumous name (*kaimyō*). It was one of the simplest, shortest and quietest funerals among many funerals which I attended during my fieldwork. I was told by Inose-san later that the Buddhist priest came from the deceased's nominal household temple after a pressing request made by the deceased's sisters and that the priest received a very small amount of offering money (*ohouse*) for chanting a sutra and giving the *kaimyō*. He also added, 'The length of sutra chanting always goes with the amount of *ohouse*'.

The corpse of Osawa-san was cremated after the funeral and his ashes were placed in an urn that was interred in his household grave that day. In Makabe, it is still common that the grave, like the *ie*, follows patrilineal lines and is passed through the eldest son, who is expected to care for the grave, and carry out annual memorial services. However, Osawa-san had no male descendants to pass the household grave to. He might be the last household member who is entombed in the grave if his married sisters do not return to the household, and there is very little possibility of that happening. His death resulted in the collapse of the household (*ie*) and this means that Osawa *ke* (which includes not only living members of the household but also ancestors) has ended. Although the memorial tablet (*ihai*) is placed in the *butsudan* (family ancestor altar) and family members regularly offer incense, food, *sake* or cigarettes, in the case of Osawa-san, his memorial tablet as well as other

ancestor tablets including his father's and mother's, were entrusted to the household temple. When I asked a local Buddhist priest about entrusted tablets, he told me that these ownerless tablets will be burned with a ritual one day when there is no more space for other new ownerless tablets, and the grave will be removed for the new dead when it has no visitors to provide financial and ritual care and become a *muenbaka* (literally meaning 'disconnected grave'). In Japanese ancestor worship, the spirits of the dead are entirely dependent on their descendants to become fully-fledged ancestors (see Hendry 2003 [1987]: 25-45; Kawano 2003; Plath 1964; Smith 1999; Takeda 1979). However, in Osawa-san's case, there is no doubt, if the folk belief is true, that the spirit of Osawa-san and other spirits which have not reached the ancestral status will become wandering ghosts (*muenbotoke*) sooner or later because they have no descendants to provide such care.

Thus, although death might be the 'great equaliser', the dead can still be classified according to the degree of their wealth. In other words, the rich are thought of as having more vitality and less pollution and the poor are thought of as having more pollution and less vitality and thus they are dealt with differently when they die. The recent commercialised funeral ceremonies have applied new criteria to subdivide existing classes more distinctly. The commercialisation of the treatment of the dead requires households to spend more money for the dead and bring households into competition with other households for the expression of their wealth. In other words, the funeral can be used for displaying the wealth of the deceased and the bereaved family. It is similar to Chinese death rituals; there, as Whyte notes, 'funerals provide an arena of status competition, as wealthier families use their resources to engage in lavish displays and processions to demonstrate their superiority (and perhaps persuade their poorer neighbors that in doing so they are ensuring the continued prosperity of their descendants)' (1988: 294).

#### **1.4. High status and famous people**

Success and wealth were often defined in terms of money or material possessions in pre-industrial Japan. For example, those who had a lot of money, children<sup>20</sup>, houses, lands or rice fields were thought of as wealthy and successful people. However,

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<sup>20</sup> Children are a valuable resource for families involved in agriculture and domestic industries.

apart from the material dimensions of success and wealth, in modern industrialised Japan success and wealth can be defined more broadly. For example, those of high status and fame, such as politicians, founders or presidents of companies, high-ranking Buddhist priests, and public entertainers are also considered to be wealthy and successful people. In this respect I could also suggest that they embody more vitality than other ordinary people and thus they are dealt with differently when they die. For the wealthy, publicly prominent and famous people, a large-scale public funeral is held. It usually takes time to organise such an extensive funeral and thus a private funeral (*missō*, literally meaning 'secret funeral') is held first for family, relatives and close friends, and some days or weeks later a public funeral as a *honsō* (literally meaning 'main funeral') takes place for other people. At the *missō*, a wake, funerary ritual, and cremation are carried out but the *honsō* includes only a large-scale public funeral.

For example, if a founder or a top administrator of a company dies, the company usually organises a company funeral ceremony (*shasō*) as a *honsō*. According to Yamada (1999: 70), the term 'company funeral (*shasō*)' was used for the funeral of the president of a newspaper company in 1912 for the first time, and it became a fixture of the Japanese mortuary scene. It is now very easy to find announcements for a company funeral in most Japanese newspapers nearly every day. It is also quite common throughout the country; they are not only found in major companies and in urban districts but also in smaller companies and in rural areas. The company funeral is fully sponsored by the company both financially and through staff, because it is quite costly and requires many funeral staff and conductors. Although the procedure of the company funeral is similar to other ordinary funerals, each event in the company funeral is more elaborate and hundreds or thousands of mourners attend. Some company funerals in big cities have been held in large dome-style stadiums with tens of thousands of mourners.

During my fieldwork, I had an opportunity to attend a company funeral which was given for a president of a local amusement company. The company has about 30 amusement stores and about 700 employees all over the Ibaraki prefecture. The president died at the age of 65 after a long battle against cancer. Two days after his death, the family held a separate private funeral attended only by family, relatives

and very close friends before the company funeral took place; four weeks later the grand company funeral was held at Tsukuba International Auditorium, which can hold 1,300 guests. Most employees of the company were drafted to help with the preparations for and management of the funeral, for example, sending out notices, the reception of mourners, controlling traffic and greeting guests. Their role is very similar to that of the neighbourhood funeral cooperative (*kumi-ai*) for ordinary funerals, which I described in the previous chapter.

On the day of the funeral, about 20 male employees who were wearing black suits and white gloves controlled traffic and guided guests into the building. Hundreds of funeral wreaths (*hanawa*) with the giver's name written on boards were placed on the outside and inside of the building and some guests looked around the funeral wreaths and tried to find their names to check whether they were inscribed correctly. Inside the building, about thirty male and female employees were stationed at a long reception desk at the entrance of the hall to receive the incense money (*kōden*) and record the name of the guests, and give them a funeral program and a gift bundle in return. After offering incense money the guests were guided to their seats by other employees. Some important guests from other companies, banks and the local government officials were guided to reserved seats which were usually arranged in the second or third row with white paper boards on which their names were inscribed. Members of the deceased's family and company executives were seated at the first row when the funeral started.

The procedure of the company funeral was quite similar to ordinary funerals, but it was more elaborate, larger and took much longer, and participants offered flowers (*kenka*) instead of incense (*shōkō*) in spite of the fact that the funeral was conducted according to Buddhist rites. When I asked one of the undertakers why they offered flowers he told me that they were not allowed to burn incense inside the auditorium because of the strong smell which would provoke an unpleasant association for other people at subsequent events at the auditorium. In other words, people tend to associate the incense smell with death pollution, although the death associated with those of high status and fame is considered to be a good death and full of vitality. The funeral altar was composed of a wooden box with the cremated remains of the deceased, two temporary mortuary tablets (*karihai* and *noihai*), a



light, a large photograph of the deceased, a large company logo made of various kinds of flowers, and offerings such as wreaths of flowers and fruits. There were also two large video screens at both ends of the funeral altar. On these video screens a video of the life of the deceased played and provided the guests with a good view of the funeral proceedings. One undertaker told me later that it took one week to set up the funeral altar which was decked with scores of red roses because the deceased liked red roses.

Five Buddhist priests were invited for chanting a sutra (*okyō*). After an opening address from a funeral conductor (*shikaisha*), priests chanted a sutra for thirty minutes. After that, the memorial address (*chōji*) was read by the chief mourner (a company executive), and a secretary of the deceased read out telegrams of sympathy. Then the chief mourner, followed by other family members, company executives and other important guests, in turn offered flowers while the Buddhist priests were chanting a sutra again. The rest of the guests, including relatives, employees and business acquaintances, had to wait until later, and they offered flowers after the Buddhist priests left the hall. After the funeral the deceased's family members and company executives stood at the gate of the hall to say thank you to the guests and bowed each time a guest passed them. The remains of the deceased were interred in the company grave which is for former company employers and their relatives.

## 1.5. Emperors

Although I was not able to observe anything regarding the death of an Emperor during my fieldwork, it seems useful to look briefly at how the death of the Emperor is dealt with in order to indicate any differences from other kinds of death and elucidate how the Emperor differs from other kinds of persons.

With the Meiji Restoration of 1868, the Tokugawa Shogunate was overthrown, and Emperor Meiji became the head of state. Under the new Meiji constitution, the Emperor held sovereign power, and his political and military power was theoretically close to absolute until 1945. The constitution stated that the Emperor was 'sacred and inviolable', and required the Japanese people to obey absolutely and have loyalty to the Emperor as a 'living god' (*arahitogami*: a god who

is a human being). His divine quality was derived from the presumption that he was the lineal descendant of the 'Sun Goddess' (*Amaterasu Omikami*), the mythological founder of Japan (see Befu 1971: 30; Benedict 1989 [1946]: 126-127). In practice, however, the real power first lay with the oligarchy and later with the generals and admirals. The Emperor lost all his power with the introduction of the Constitution of Japan which went into effect following Japan's defeat in the Second World War. During the Allied occupation, the Emperor declared to his people that he was not a god (*akitsumikami*)<sup>21</sup>, but a mortal and a mere man. The reaction was one of shock and disbelief to the people. Since then, the emperor has existed as a symbol without a proper function in the administration of government, and he only participates at national ceremonies and diplomatic meetings. Nonetheless, many Japanese, particularly Japanese nationalists, still believe that the Emperor is divine.

Before the Meiji period (1868-1912) imperial funerals and memorial services were conducted as Buddhist ceremonies and even Shintō priests were given Buddhist funerals (see Mayer 1989: 5). However, at the beginning of the Meiji period, the Meiji oligarchs established 'National Shintō' as a state religion with a nationwide system of shrines and they excluded Buddhist protocols from imperial ceremonies (Smith 1974: 28). The non-Buddhist rites were labelled *shinsō* or *shinsōsai*, where the character for *shin* is the same as that for 'kami' (God). Furthermore, the imperial funeral rites were regulated by the 'Rescript on Imperial Funeral Ceremonial' of 1926 and its addendums. It was stipulated that the remains of the Emperor were to be interred in the imperial mausoleum after they had been laid to rest in the imperial coffin, moved to the temporary imperial mortuary and following the proclamation of the posthumous title and the performance of the Shintō funeral ceremony (*rensō no gi*), at the temporary funeral hall. Further regulations held that the spirit of the deceased Emperor was to be worshipped at a temporary shrine building called *gonden*, located in the grounds of the imperial palace until the first anniversary of his passing away, and that after the end of the mourning period,

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<sup>21</sup> The emperor Hirohito's 'declaration of human being (*ningen sengen*)' aroused controversy because of the word *akitsumikami*. He used the unusual phrase *akitsumikami* instead of the common word *arahitogami* for 'living god'. So there could be little doubt about its sincerity and some people have argued that Hirohito did not deny his divine descent from the Sun Goddess and he could be still an *arahitogami* even if he is not an *akitsumikami*.

the spirit was to be transferred to the *kōreiden*, where it would be enshrined alongside the other imperial spirits.

The imperial funeral thus is a state event called *taisō* (grand funeral) which is a very complex, lengthy and elaborate Shintō ceremony consisting of at least sixteen significant different rites. For example, in the case of the funeral of the Emperor Taisho who died on December 25, 1926, the first rite was performed on December 26, and after many other rites the burial rite was performed for two days from February 7 to February 8, 1927. The last rite, which is the rite of driving away malevolent spirits, was performed on February 10, 1928. It thus took one year and two months for completing the proper funeral ceremonies including sixteen major rites, which could also be subdivided into twenty-eight smaller rites (Murakami, cited in Han 2004: 117).

The most recent imperial funeral was held in 1989. The Emperor Hirohito of the Shōwa era (1926-1989) died on January 7, 1989, at the age of 87, after prolonged illness, and his death was officially announced by the grand steward of the Imperial Household Agency (*kunaichō*) who also revealed details about his cancer for the first time. For three days, TV networks stopped regular program broadcasts and the public mourned. Six weeks after his death, on February 24, the imperial funeral took place in Tokyo, but it was not done in a strictly Shintō manner as it was for his predecessor. On the morning of the funeral, a huge crowd gathered outside the gates of the Imperial Palace to wait for the Emperor's funeral cortege. The funeral cortege left the Imperial Palace at 9:30 a.m. The funeral hearse was preceded by an honour guard of thirty-two police outriders and followed by thirty-eight cars, forming a motorcade 1,000 meters long (Kawahara 1990: 3-4). About 570,000 people gathered along the funeral motorcade's route to pay their respects (*Asahi Shinbun* 25 Feb. 1989).

The final destination of the cortege was the Shinjuku Imperial Gardens where there was a specially constructed temporary Shintō shrine (*sōjōden*). Two separate funerals were held in the same place at intervals of ten minutes. The need for two funerals was occasioned by the clause in Japan's post-war constitution that forbids the state cooperating with any form of religious activity (Kawahara 1990: 4; Macé 1989: 26). The compromise reached by the Imperial Household Agency and the

government was to hold two separate ceremonies (Kawahara 1990: 5). The first was a private Shintō funeral (*sōjōden no gi*) for the imperial family and close associates, which began as soon as the cortege arrived at the imperial garden. The imperial coffin was carried into the temporary shrine on a palanquin weighing one and a half tons, carried by 51 members of the Imperial Guard dressed in the style of the Heian period of some one thousand years ago. The funeral was carried out by Shintō priests with various Shintō ritual offerings, which came from the land, the mountain, the sky and the sea, such as *sakaki* tree leaves, rice, quails, a wild duck, carrots, radishes, apples, red bean paste, dried fishes and *sake*.

After the first private Shintō funeral, the Shintō ceremony objects were removed for the next event. The second funeral was a carefully orchestrated public and non-religious state ceremony (*taisō no rei*, literally meaning ‘great mourning ceremony’) attended by the Prime Minister, cabinet members, Japanese dignitaries, and the representatives of 164 foreign countries and 28 international organizations (ibid.). It began with a very short memorial address which was read by the new Emperor, who was followed by the prime minister and three other important dignitaries. The speeches took up little time and were followed by the representatives of the foreign countries being called up one by one to pay their respects to the deceased Emperor, simply by bowing to the coffin, a procedure which lasted for about an hour and which completed the state funeral. The Japanese government spent 74 million USD for this imperial mourning event (*Time* 6 Mar. 1989: 29). Although almost all Japanese are cremated as it is illegal to bury a body in many big cities such as Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka, the Emperor Hirohito was buried in the imperial mausoleum (*tennō misasagi*) alongside the Emperor Taishō, his father.

The Emperor himself is considered to be a ‘source of vitality’ of the nation and thus he is thought of as having brimming vitality (see Bloch 1992: 59). It is almost certain that the Emperor has more vitality than anybody else. It is also thought that the spirit of the Emperor is immutable, and passes from the dying Emperor into his successor before the burial (see Mayer 1989: 5) and thus after the funeral there seems to be no need to hold any subsequent rituals for transforming the spirit into the god. In this sense, the death of the Emperor does not seem to be accompanied by any

death pollution. On the other hand, in the Buddhist funeral for ordinary people, as I stated in a previous chapter, it is believed that the spirit of the deceased wanders between this world and the other world for forty-nine days after death, and after this transitional period, the spirit of the deceased arrives at the other world.

## **2. Violent deaths**

### **2.1. Accidental death**

Death does not always take place at a prepared place with a prepared time and in a prepared way. In contemporary Japanese society tens of thousands of people die in accidents such as a traffic accident, a fall, a fire, drowning, a natural disaster, etc. According to Japan's National Statistics Centre, 48,744 people died in accidents in 2004 (The Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2004). Among the accidental deaths that occurred in Japan during that year, 10,551 people died in traffic accidents (*ibid.*). Traffic accidents have been the leading cause of accidental death since the 1960s. Thus, in Japan, it is not unusual to hear from someone about the accidental death of his/her family members, relatives or friends. During my fieldwork I often heard about people who had died in accidents and when I was working at the local funeral home, I observed three funerals for those who died in traffic accidents.

As indicated previously, those who are old, wealthy and have many descendants are thought of as having sufficient vitality in their *karada*. Although they die, their *karada* still contain vitality and thus their death is dealt with elaborately and magnificently. However, if they die tragically, violently or unnaturally, their own vitality is precipitously drained away from their *karada* at the moment of their death and they are extremely contaminated by the high density of death pollution (*kegare*); if this happens their death is dealt with in different ways and they are thought of as having overflowing pollution. It is also said that their spirits become wandering ghosts (*muenbotoke*) or hungry ghosts (*gaki*) and roam this world in search of comfort and food because they died at an unprepared place (usually outside the house) at an unprepared time without any proper resurrecting rituals such as *matsugo no mizu* ('the last water'), or without any offerings such as a



bowl of rice (*makurameshi*), a plate of sticky-rice balls (*dango*) and a glass of water or green tea which are all offered immediately after death. For this reason, apart from the funeral, people often hold special rituals for those who have died tragically, violently or unnaturally.

In Makabe, for those who die in accidents, the deceased's family usually perform the *kawa segaki* ritual privately at the riverside or at the rivulet, in both cases near to the grave. The word *kawa* means 'river' or 'stream' and *segaki* means 'feeding the hungry ghosts'. According to Inoguchi (1954, 1974, 1977), a Japanese folklorist, the *kawa segaki* ritual is called *nagare kanjō* (*nagare* means stream and *kanjō* means baptism, or head-sprinkling) or *arai zarashi* (wearing out by washing) in other parts of Japan and, in former times, the ritual was usually performed for a woman who died in childbirth, but the ritual became obsolete because the mortality rate of women in pregnancy and childbirth had rapidly decreased. However, the *kawa segaki* ritual is still carried out for those who die in accidents in many part of rural Japan, and I was able to observe it during my fieldwork.

At the beginning of my fieldwork, Kitajima-san and his wife who were in their sixties were involved in a car accident. Kitajima-san died on the spot while his wife died in hospital two days later. The deceased's family omitted wake rituals (*otsuya shiki*). Only two separate funerals quickly took place at the house of the deceased at two-day intervals. The first funeral was held for Kitajima-san and the second was for his wife. After finishing the second funeral, some male members of the neighbourhood funeral cooperative (*kumi-ai*) set a structure called *ondodai* into the bed of a stream under the direction of a Buddhist priest. It consisted of four bamboo sticks, which were constructed to form a rectangle, with a sheet of white cotton cloth stretched somewhat loosely between them. The cloth was tied on the top of posts with strings. On the cloth the Buddhist scriptures were written in Japanese and Sanskrit diagonally and a Buddhist symbol, the swastika (*manji*), was inscribed on the centre of the cloth. In front of the structure, a wooden stupa (*sotoba*) was erected with the Buddhist posthumous name of the deceased written on it. Two ladles with long handles were also placed at both sides of the structure.

After completing the structure, the Buddhist priest chanted a sutra while members of the deceased's family, followed by close relatives and friends, in turn

poured a dipperful of water over the cloth. This temporary structure usually appeared until forty-nine days after the death, because according to Buddhist priests it is believed that the spirit of the deceased wanders between this world and the other world for forty-nine days after death, and after this period, the spirit arrives in the other world. During the period of forty-nine days the family members perform the ritual every day, and acquaintances, the village and even passers-by also pour water over the cloth, in the belief that the spirit may safely proceed to the other world if the Buddhist symbol, the swastika, fades from the cloth.

I asked several informants and local Buddhist priests why people perform the *kawa segaki* ritual, but they could not explain the reasons sufficiently. They simply told me that it was their long-established custom for appeasing hungry ghosts and sending them to the other world without wandering or keeping the hungry ghosts from falling into the realm of the ghosts. However, it seems that the most important reason for performing the *kawa segaki* ritual is that those who have died in accidents are contaminated by the high density of death pollution and their pollution is considered to be especially powerful and dangerous. They thus need to be ritually purified with water poured over the cloth to cleanse death pollution, as the water is considered the necessary medium to diminish or dissolve pollution. When people pour water over the cloth the water only partly wets the cloth and most of water passes through it, and so this action is continuously repeated by various people for a certain period of time. It may be suggested that those who have died in accidents need to have their pollution purified from many people and it takes a long time, because the high density of pollution cannot be easily diminished or eliminated.

It is also very common to erect a small stone altar for those who have died in traffic accidents at the place where the accident occurred, and a periodic service is held for the spirits of the dead. According to Inose-san, this stone altar is usually erected for those who died on the spot (*sokushi*), not for those who died in hospital after the accident, because if the death occurs at hospital then the spirit of the dead is not considered to be wandering at the accident spot. The purpose of the street altar seems to be very similar to that of *ondoda*, the structure for the *kawa segaki* ritual, but it is not a temporary structure. It seems to commemorate the dead as a kind of monument. The deceased's family regularly visits the street altar and performs

*shōkō* (burning incense) or offers flowers, drink or food. According to a local Buddhist priest, this street ritual is performed to placate the wandering ghost and thus prevents the ghost from causing further accidents at the same place. However, it also seems that the ritual is performed for purifying the pollution of death because the place where the tragic death occurred is considered extremely contaminated by the high density of death pollution.

## **2.2. Suicide**

Japan has one of the highest suicide rates in the world, with 32,552 people committing suicide in 2005 (The Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2005). Every day nearly 100 people take their own lives, at a rate of almost one every 15 minutes. Deaths resulting from suicide have been on a steady increase since the economic decline of the early 1990s. Middle-aged Japanese men commit suicide more frequently than other age groups or women, their suicides being almost entirely provoked by unemployment (see Snyder 1990), bankruptcy, or financial crises (see also Araki & Murata 1986, 1987). It is therefore not at all unusual for people to hear about someone's suicide in contemporary Japan.

Nonetheless, suicide is still considered the most shameful way to die and to be a very bad death according to the influence of Buddhism and Confucianism. In a similar way to the accidental death, suicide is also considered to be a tragic, violent and unnatural death and thus those who have committed suicide are not thought of as having vitality although they may be old, wealthy and have many descendants. Instead, they are considered to be extremely contaminated by the high density of death pollution and thus they have different funerary rites.

When working as an undertaker, I observed several funerals for those who had committed suicide. Among them I still clearly remember Yoshida-san, a 45-year-old man, who committed suicide by jumping in front of a train in Tsuchiura, a neighbouring town. He owned a small *sushi* restaurant in the town centre of Makabe, but business had been bad for years since people had less money to spend. His debts mounted and his business began to fail. He was divorced from his wife and his two children also left with his wife. He died after jumping in front of a train at a station. He was struck by the train and killed on the spot. When we arrived at the station, the

police had finished their investigation and several members of his family were waiting for us to collect the body. We collected the body parts and put them into the large black plastic bag with a zipper which was then placed in a coffin.

As soon as we finished the collecting, we transported the coffin directly to the crematorium. Only his mother, his younger married sister and her husband followed us and attended the cremation ceremony which was very briefly performed by crematorium assistants before the coffin started to roll into the incinerator. After the cremation, his bones were put into an urn by crematorium assistants and carried to the funeral hall. That night, the wake ritual (*otsuya shiki*) was omitted. Instead, some relatives and several male members of the neighbourhood funeral cooperative (*kumi-ai*) drank *sake* and talked in order to console the deceased's family. The funeral (*kokubetsu shiki*) was held the next day, but it was not announced and guests were not invited. Only family members, close relatives and some members of the neighbourhood funeral cooperative attended the funeral. The funeral was very simple, small and quick. During the funeral there were no loud tears, but the atmosphere was very sad compared to other funerals.

One of my colleagues, Inose-san, told me later that Yoshida-san's father also committed suicide by hanging himself several years earlier after his wife's death and the funeral was held at the same place, but at that time the funeral was announced and many guests were invited. When I asked him why Yoshida-san's father was accorded the normal funeral in spite of the fact that he also committed suicide, he told me that because he was old enough, his body was not dismembered unlike his son's and, thus, the deceased's family did not intentionally need to let people know about his suicide, and that is why many guests did not realise he committed suicide. At this point, it is worthwhile to explore in more detail why Yoshida-san's and his father's death were dealt with in different ways in spite of the fact that they both committed suicide. As Inose-san told me, Yoshida-san's father was 'adequately' old and his body was not damaged, while Yoshida-san was still young and his body was badly mutilated. According to Inose-san, it seems that the age at death and the condition of the corpse were the main reasons for according the father a normal funeral while hiding his son's. However, it seemed to me that these were not the main reasons. In my view, the 'real' reason seemed that the deceased's family did

not want to let people know about Yoshida-san's father's suicide, because suicide is still considered the shameful way to die and thus it disgraces the whole family.

In Yoshida-san's father's case, the age and the condition of the corpse helped to support the deceased's family's intention of hiding his suicide. It is also important to note that although Yoshida-san's father was old enough to die naturally, and thus, had more vitality than his son, he died in a less tragic way compared to his son, and therefore was accorded the normal funeral; in principle, there is no doubt that his death would be invariably considered a bad death, his *karada* is contaminated by pollution, and his spirit must wander this world as a lonely and malignant ghost (*muenbotoke*). However, in practice, although his death was considered a bad death, his spirit had been treated as a household ancestor until Yoshida-san died because he was a senior member of the household and his status allowed his descendants to venerate him as an ancestor for the continuation of the household (*ie*). If the spirits of the senior dead become wandering ghosts, the continuation of the *ie* and the safety of its members cannot be guaranteed because the ancestors and their worship have been always required for perpetuating the *ie*. It is consistent with what Smith stated in his work: '[s]enior ascendants ... are accorded normal treatment by the household and are not conceived of as joining the wandering spirits and hungry ghosts' (1974: 54).

However, in pre-industrial Japan suicide was often considered an honourable death in certain situations. For example, samurai warriors would often kill themselves by cutting their stomach with a knife (*seppuku*)<sup>22</sup> to avoid shame or to apologise for mistakes in battle. *Seppuku* was also used both voluntarily by samurai to die with honour rather than fall into the hands of their enemies, and as a form of capital punishment for samurai who committed serious offences. It came to involve a detailed ritual. A samurai was bathed, dressed in white robes, fed his favourite meal, and when he was finished, his weapon was placed on his plate. He selected as his second an attendant (*kaishakunin*), received official witnesses, and thrust a short sword into the left side of his abdomen, and drew it across to the right; his second then beheaded him with one stroke of a sword to end the pain. Although the

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<sup>22</sup> The method is generally called *harakiri* in the West. The word, which literally means 'belly cutting', has the same two ideograms as the word *seppuku*, but in reverse order, and is rarely used by the Japanese.



honourable suicide is clearly seen as a tragic, violent and unnatural death, it was not considered to be a bad death but rather an honourable death and was dealt with elaborately and magnificently. In this sense, those who committed honourable suicide can be thought of as having brimming vitality.

Obligatory *seppuku* was abolished by law in 1873, shortly after the Meiji Restoration, but in its voluntary form the ritual has persisted. It was performed by forty men of the Japanese military in 1895 as a protest against the return of conquered territory to China; by General Nogi on the death of Emperor Meiji in 1912; and by numerous soldiers and civilians as an alternative to surrendering in the Second World War. A more recent voluntary form of *seppuku* was performed by Mishima Yukio, one of the most famous Japanese novelists of his time and a right-wing political leader, in 1970. He dressed in the uniform of his small paramilitary group and went with four other members of the group to the Tokyo headquarters of the Japan Self-Defence Forces. They occupied the office and tied the commandant to his chair. Mishima stepped onto the balcony to address a thousand soldiers gathered below. His speech was intended to inspire a coup restoring the powers of the Emperor, replacing the un-patriotic government, and re-arming Japan openly. After his speech he walked back into the office and committed *seppuku*, followed by one of his assistants (*Asahi Shinbun* 26 Nov. 1970). His funeral was attended by tens of thousands of mourners and his museum was built several years later.

A more honourable form of suicide was inaugurated with kamikaze attacks during the Second World War. Kamikaze pilots would attempt to intentionally crash their aircraft into Allied warships. Ceremonies were carried out before kamikaze pilots departed on their final mission. They were given the flag of Japan, inscribed with inspirational and 'spiritual' words, a short sword and a drink of *sake* before they took off. The Japanese have been led to venerate kamikaze pilots as if they were saints since the end of the Second World War. Benedict (1989 [1946]: 167) stated that '[t]hey choose to dwell on events of self-destruction instead of on destruction of others' when she explained the honourable Japanese methods of suicide. However, although kamikaze pilots' suicides were honourable acts, their suicides were different from other honourable suicides because their behaviours were 'other-destructive' rather than 'self-destructive', and more purposeful. These ritualistic or

conventional forms of suicides were labelled ‘altruistic suicide’ by Durkheim (1952 [1897]). A person who is strongly and completely integrated into society or a group and is willing to die for the group is more likely to commit suicide with altruistic intent.

However, during my fieldwork, I discovered that suicide is still an honourable way to alleviate shame in contemporary Japan. In May 2007, the agricultural minister, Mr Matsuoka, hung himself hours before facing a bribery probe. Not only the people in Makabe but also the majority of Japanese were shocked when they watched the news because his suicide was the first one by a Japanese cabinet minister since the Second World War, when the army minister committed suicide on the news of Japan’s surrender. Matsuoka had left a note: ‘With my death, I would like to take responsibility and apologise’ (*Asahi Shinbun* 28 May 2007). His suicide became an issue among the people in Makabe. Some elderly male members of the community praised his suicide because he protected his political group and they called him a ‘real samurai’. A private funeral was held in his hometown, Kumamoto Prefecture, two days after he committed suicide. However, unlike other private funerals for those who committed suicide which I observed in Makabe during my fieldwork, his funeral was elaborate, magnificent and hundreds of local people, political colleagues, the premier’s wife and a provincial governor attended the funeral which was broadcast nationwide. At the end of the funeral, Matsuoka’s wife as a chief mourner read the memorial address, in which she said ‘I feel proud that he has fulfilled various duties as a cabinet minister’ (*Kyodo News International* 30 May 2007). Although he committed suicide, he was given a proper and large funeral because his death was not considered a bad death but rather a good death and was full of vitality.

### **2.3. The war dead**

According to several members of the local association for the war-bereaved families (*izokurengōkai*), during the Second World War, in Makabe, about 10,000 young people were drafted into the army and over half of them were killed on the battlefield. During my fieldwork, it was not difficult to meet former soldiers or members of their families. One of my principle informants, Kurusu-san, a man in his seventies, lost

his two elder brothers during the war. One was killed in Indonesia in 1943 and another was killed in the Philippines in 1944. When I visited his house, large portraits of his two brothers in military uniform were hanging on the wall of the living room with their parents' and grandparents' portraits. Their mortuary tablets and photos were also placed at the Buddhist household altar with their parents' and other ancestors' tablets and photos. According to Kurusu-san, most war-bereaved families in Makabe, including his own, could not receive any remains of the war dead from the military authorities. Instead, his family, like most families, received a small white wooden box covered with a white cloth which contained a piece of white paper called *reiji* (a spirit paper tablet) in which the name of the war dead was inscribed. Kurusu-san told me that only very few of them could get ashes or some body parts such as hair or nails which were collected by the military authorities before the men were sent to the battlefield.

I heard about the war dead and how they were dealt with during the war from several former soldiers. Sakairi-san, who is in his eighties, was conscripted into the Japanese Imperial Army and deployed in Manchuria. He told me that in principle, the remains of the war dead must be collected, cremated and sent back to their home but, in practice, it was not always possible to collect them on the battlefield, especially after a hard fight when most of the dead would be roughly buried or just left on the spot. Although bodies were collected and cremated successfully, sometimes a very small amount of ashes were repatriated. On some battlefields, only some body parts such as a hand and a finger were cut off and cremated for repatriation, and other parts were buried or left. However, during the final stage of the Second World War, most of the war dead could not be repatriated because it was getting harder to collect and cremate the remains as furious battles continued.

Kurusu-san's brothers' funerals were held publicly at a schoolyard by the local government and the association of former soldiers. The procedure of the funeral was similar to other ordinary funerals but it was more elaborate, magnificent and many local people, students, teachers, ex-soldiers, town officials and influential people attended. Nonetheless, the principle difference was that funerals were held without any remains of the dead. Kurusu-san told me that the white wooden box with the white paper they received from the military authorities was treated like

human remains. The white wooden box was placed at the funeral altar during the funeral ceremony and after the ceremony it was transported by a funeral car to the family grave and buried there like a coffin or an ash urn. After the war, at the place of the burial, Kurusu-san's family, who are typical of other war-bereaved families, erected a large memorial stone (usually two or three times as large as an ordinary tombstone) on which the names of two brothers, their regiment, rank and date and place of death were inscribed. However, their Buddhist posthumous names (*kaimyō*) were not inscribed on the memorial stone. These were inscribed only on the household memorial stone with other posthumous names of deceased household members, but their posthumous names were different from others'. Those who died in the war usually received a higher ranking posthumous name, but it was also determined according to their military ranks (see also Tanakamaru 2002: 105).

According to Oguchi and Takagi (cited in Smith 1974: 51), in Japan, no one should be worshipped as a god (*kami*) after his/her death unless s/he is particularly outstanding. Nonetheless, those who were killed in wars or have died for their country are considered gods, which is probably the only way to reach the stage of divinity as an ordinary person (see Bloch 1992: 59; Smith 1974: 51-52). It is believed that the spirits of the war dead must return to their country, and protect the country as 'national gods'. They are therefore worshipped not only as household ancestors at their homes by their family members but also as national gods at Yasukuni Shrine by the Emperor himself (Smith 1974: 52). This shrine was founded in Tokyo in 1869, and was renamed Yasukuni Shrine in 1879. It was built in order to commemorate and worship those who have died in wars for their country and sacrificed their lives to help build the foundations for a peaceful Japan (the meaning of Yasukuni is 'peaceful country')<sup>23</sup>. Since then, many national and private shrines have been established throughout the country, all enshrining the spirits of those who died in wars. In most schoolyards, a memorial stone inscribed *chukon* (loyal souls) was erected to remind young people of the patriotic dead and the nobility of their sacrifice. Furthermore, devotion to the country meant being willing to die for the

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<sup>23</sup> Yasukuni Shrine is problematic and controversial as a symbol of national unity because it memorialises and commemorates those who died not only in wars but for the cause of wars Japan fought, including the war criminals who were tried in the Tokyo war tribunal and hanged for their crimes against humanity (Befu 1992: 39).

Emperor. Thus, children were taught in school from a very young age to willingly give their lives to defend their leader. Young people were taught that they were *aohitogusa* (growing human weeds) who were to protect the Emperor by serving as his shield. This was seen as a great privilege, and to die for the Emperor was the highest honour.

Although the death of a soldier in a war is clearly tragic, violent and unnatural, it is understood differently compared with other unnatural deaths. The funeral for the war dead is more elaborate and magnificent than any other funeral for those who have died unnaturally (such as accidental deaths and suicide) or even than a funeral for those who have natural deaths. Their posthumous names are also more elaborate than other ordinary posthumous names. Their spirits are not considered to be wandering as ghosts at the places where they are killed but to return automatically and immediately to their country and home without any placatory or purifying rituals for them, and to become national gods and household ancestors. In this respect, it also seems that they are never considered to be contaminated by any death pollution, but rather they are thought of as brimming with vitality, which may have strong power to negate their death and pollution.

Additionally, it is almost certain that this national god idea was a political construct and controlled by the state to continue soldiers' sacrifices and to keep bereaved families silent. Moreover, although war-bereaved families grieve the loss of their sons, husbands, fathers or brothers, many of them might anticipate their deaths, to a certain extent, when they were sent to the battlefield. The death of soldiers in the war is thus not shockingly sudden like an accidental death or suicide, and it is not considered more traumatic than other unnatural deaths. The war-bereaved families also comfort themselves with the belief that the spirits of soldiers must return to their homeland and become their ancestors and national gods. It also seems that some of them are proud of their sons, husbands or fathers who were killed in the war for the state and the Emperor.



### 3. *Immature deaths*

#### 3.1. **Babies and children**

According to indigenous Japanese folklorists, in many parts of Japan in the past, if children died at seven years of age or less, parents paid very little attention and generally did not organise a funerary ritual (see Asano 2005: 133; Yanagita 1970: 172-173). Only members of the family and next of kin disposed of the body. Those who died in childhood were buried in particular parts of the cemetery or in a separate place from the adult section called *kobaka* (children grave) without any grave markers or stones. During my fieldwork I found that many children's cemeteries still exist not only in Makabe but also throughout the Ibaraki prefecture. Although it is certain that a grave is a sign of respect and fondness, and erected with the intention of commemorating and remembering the dead, an unmarked grave for a child is not worthy of commemoration, and is therefore completely ignored and forgotten. It is consistent with what Hertz analysed in his work: 'the death ... of a child will go almost unnoticed; it will arouse no emotion, occasion no ritual' (1960 [1907]: 76). He continued to note that '[t]he deaths of children thus provoke only a very weak social reaction which is almost instantaneously completed. It is as though, for the collective consciousness, there were no real death in this case' (1960 [1907]: 84). In a similar manner, as Davies (2002 [1997]: 55) also notes the change of English social terms on the death of a family member, in Japanese social terms a wife or a husband becomes a '*yamome*' (a widow or a widower) on the death of their spouse, and children become '*minashigo*' (orphans) on the death of their parents, but there is no name change for parents whose children have died. This may illustrate that the death of children does not change the social status of the family members and it is not considered as a significant event for the family.

In the past, according to some elderly informants, if infants died, their remains were buried at their homestead especially under the floors of houses at night without any offering and rituals because it was thought they would be reborn in the same house soon. According to Japanese folklorists, in some parts of Japan such as Aomori, Ehime and Okayama prefectures, if children died, they were dressed in

purple (symbol of gods), and then buried with raw fishes (dried sardines or shads were put into their mouths, hands or coffins) because, by doing so, it was believed that their bodies would decompose quickly and they would be quickly born again (see Asano 2005: 133; Isaka 2005: 150; Yanagita 1970: 173). Additionally it seems that people did not want to have their children as *hotoke* (ancestors), because they believed that once spirits of dead children were transformed into their ancestors, they cannot come to life again and have to stay in the other world eternally. Thus, the purpose of this practice seemed to prevent the spirits of dead children from attaining ancestorhood and to allow them to be reborn in this world. Moreover, it is also believed that children aged seven or under have not fully entered the human world. Since young children were considered to be closer to the spirit world rather than this world, they were referred to as '*kami no ko*' (children of the gods) (see Namihira 1996: 66-71; Kuraishi 1999: 87-90). As 'children of gods' it is believed that they would return to the spirit world without careful funeral treatments such as graves, rituals and offerings and that they would come back to this world easily and quickly. For this reason, it seemed that people omitted or ignored graves or rituals to send unstable child spirits back to the other world.

In the past, the high mortality rates of infants obliged parents to expect that not all of their children would live to adulthood and that some of their children would die very young. For this reason, although the death of a child was distinctively tragic and unnatural, it might be viewed as natural and familiar based on its prevalence. Thus, historically the deaths of young children occasioned only abbreviated rituals, and 'grief' was almost immediately completed. However, after the Second World War, changes in nutrition and medical advances contributed to a sharp decline in childhood mortality rates. At the same time, the birth rate decreased with rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, and Japanese society tended to centre on small nuclear families. As a result, childhood deaths have become a rarity, and are likely to be perceived as more tragic and unnatural. Nowadays, it seems that the loss of a child is generally considered far more traumatic than the loss of a parent, let alone of a grandparent. For this reason, the funeral or memorial service for a child is frequently conducted by the family. Nonetheless, the death of the child is still dealt with differently. The funeral is an extremely scaled-down version of an ordinary

funeral, and some offerings and rituals are omitted or ignored. I did not encounter any funerals for children during my fieldwork but I heard about them from some of my informants. Inose-san, a senior professional undertaker at a local funeral home, told me that most funerals which he organised for children were held by the parents, and they were not announced and guests were not invited. Only close relatives attended the funerals. One Buddhist priest was invited for chanting a very short sutra.

Through this description I have illustrated that children are considered to be not yet fully developed persons or human beings in Japan. In other words, their personhood is still only partial because they are thought to be lacking vitality compared to fully-fledged, older persons and thus they are considered as physically, mentally and socially weak and unstable beings. In this respect, it can be understood that children become fully-fledged persons by increasing their own vitality which may take a long time. If this is so, at this point, it is important to illuminate how they increase their own vitality. I could perhaps suggest that their vitality may gradually increase from birth onwards not only by physical growth and health but also by social growth in shared ideas, customs, wisdom, experience and knowledge.

### **3.2. Foetus**

In a similar way to children, aborted or stillborn fetuses or those who die soon after birth are also considered as less than fully-fledged persons because they are thought to lack vitality. Their parents neither hold a funerary ritual nor build a grave. However, in most parts of Japan, it is very common to hold memorial services (*mizuko kuyō*) for the spirits of these fetuses who are given posthumous names (*kaimyō*). The Chinese characters in the word *mizuko* are literally translated ‘water baby’. It is a description of the unborn, a being who floated in a watery world awaiting birth. The word *kuyō* is the Japanese translation of the Sanskrit *pūjā* or *pūjanā*, which literally means ‘to offer’ and ‘to nourish’ (Fujii 2005: 273). The underlying meaning of this word is to offer what is needed to nourish vitality after it is no longer perceptible in the form of a human.

The performance of *mizuko kuyō* is linked to a shadow population of tens of millions of spirits of dead children created through abortions in the post-war period. Since abortion was legalised in Japan after the Second World War, it has been a

common form of birth control, and a large number of women have undergone abortions due to various circumstances.<sup>24</sup> Doctors and medical assistants began *mizuko kuyō* and it has become widespread in Japan since the 1970s (see Komatsu 2003: 259). *Mizuko kuyō* was used to make offerings to *mizuko jizo*, a Bodhisattva who is believed to protect the spirits of dead fetuses. Although the specifics of the ritual vary from temple to temple and sect to sect, it is common for many temples to offer small *mizuko jizo* statues for a fee, which are then dressed in red bibs and caps, and displayed in the temple yard, and temples organise regular ritual activities instead of the parents. Often other offerings are made of flowers and various objects such as dolls, toys, food and drink. The most common days for *mizuko kuyō* are during the three traditional Buddhist holidays when offerings are made to ancestors: *bon* (festival of the dead) in the summer, and vernal and autumnal equinoxes (*higan*).

Through such processes those who have abortions are able to express parental grief and provide comfort to the spirits of the foetus, and drive out fear of retribution from vengeful and wandering ghosts (*muenbotoke*). These memorial rites may be similar to the rituals performed for ancestors, aimed at transforming the spirit after death and making it into a benevolent guardian of the living (see Reader 1991: 152; Hardacre 1997; also La Fleur 1992). In this respect, *mizuko kuyō* is a particularly clear example of the concern among the living about the power of the dead. According to a local Buddhist priest, some Buddhist temples ask women or couples to donate a large amount of money to mourn their aborted baby, claiming that otherwise, they will be possessed by the evil spirits of aborted babies.

During my fieldwork, I did not have many opportunities to meet and talk to women who had an abortion, and it was also very difficult to talk to them about such a private experience. At that time, I was convinced that many Japanese women are reluctant to discuss an abortion because they may fear being judged or misunderstood, and they feel that it is a painful part of their lives. One of my informants, Kawatsu-san, who is in his forties and working at a local funeral home, said:

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<sup>24</sup> A peak was reached in 1955, when more than 1,170,000 abortions were reported against about 1,731,000 officially registered live births. Thereafter, the number of induced abortions gradually decreased. As of 2004, slightly over 301,000 cases were reported (Johnston 2008). However, this is only the official figure as given by medical doctors. It is also said that a more realistic estimate would be at least twice the number cited.

My sister had an abortion many years ago and to some degree I think she never got over it. It really isn't talked about [the abortion experience] in our culture. People also didn't know how to talk about aborted babies around her after that, and that made it even more awkward for her.

Nonetheless, I did encounter Sakayoshi-san, who is in her early fifties and a housewife, at a local Buddhist temple right after she had offered burning incense and flowers to a *mizuko jizo* statue. Although I met her several times at a *zazen* (sitting meditation as practised in Zen Buddhism) group in that temple, I had not talked to her very much and I did not know her family history at all. When I bowed and got near to her, she explained the *mizuko jizo* and told me about her abortion in spite of the fact that I did not ask her anything. She had abortions both before and after the birth of her second son. She was twenty-two years old when she had the first abortion soon after the birth of her first son. Although she had bad feelings, she did not feel very guilty because she thought that her decision was inevitable due to her family's poor financial situation. She also could not afford to perform the *mizuko kuyō*.

However, she had very strong feelings of guilt after her second abortion, and thought that she must do something for the aborted foetus. She asked the Buddhist priest of her household temple to erect a small stone *mizuko jizo* statue and performed a *mizuko kuyo* for her two aborted foetuses. She also performed the *mizuko kuyō* at her household altar (*butsudan*) for a long time. When she visits her household grave and offers incense and flowers to her household ancestors she also offers some offerings to the *mizuko*. However, it is important to stress that although Sakayoshi-san treated the *mizuko* spirits as her ancestors, in principle they are incapable of attaining ancestorhood because they never entered life. In other words, they have never been persons. Furthermore, in the case of *mizuko*, there is obviously a fundamental inversion of the typical and expected sequence in the relationship between ancestor and descendent: The child has died before its parents (Smith, B. 1988: 9). In this respect, the *mizuko* spirits may belong to the category of vengeful and wandering ghosts (*muenbotoke*).



### 3.3. Unmarried people

During my fieldwork, I soon realised that the ideal person in Makabe is one who gets married, has many children and lives out his/her full life. Those who are unmarried are not considered to be fully-fledged persons, even though they are adults and have lived their full lives, because they are not thought of as having enough vitality. Those who get married and have children are intertwined with others in the space of not only their biological and affinal relationships but also their social relationships; thus they can supplement their own vitality because as I have mentioned, vitality is increased by having shared ideas, customs, wisdom, experience and knowledge in relationship with others.

According to Yamaguchi-san who is in his seventies, when he was married in the 1960s, his parents bowed to their relatives and neighbours, and said, 'Our son has just become a person. Please give help and guidance' (*uchino musuko ga hito ni nattande yoroshikune*). Yamaguchi-san also added, 'Men as well as women are able to share the work as full-fledged persons in their households or villages through the marriage' (*otoko mo onna mo kekkon shite kara ichininmae ni narun datbe*). Therefore, those who are unmarried are treated as children despite the fact that they are grown up. Marriage plays an important role for both individuals who become socially approved persons and collectively as they continue to keep the household (*ie*), the ancestor worship or work in the local community. For these reasons, although funerals for those who died before marriage are held by the surviving family, their funerals are much simpler and smaller than other ordinary ones. In other words, unmarried persons embody less vitality than other ordinary persons who get married and have children and thus they are dealt with differently when they die. Their spirits cannot also be transformed into household ancestors and they wander this world as ghosts (*muenbotoke*) because they have no descendants to venerate them and thus cannot supplement their own vitality. In this sense, these spirits are especially polluted and dangerous, and are likely to stay close to the world of the living and cause misfortune to the living (see also Yoshida 1984).

Apart from the funeral, in some parts of Japan, especially in the northeast (*Tōhoku*) such as the Aomori, Yamagata, Miyagi, Iwate and Akita prefectures,

people arrange a special kind of marriage ritual, a so-called ‘ghost marriage’ (*meikon* or *shirō ketkon*), to be performed for the spirits of their deceased sons or daughters who died before marriage due to an accident, illness, suicide or sometimes abortion (see Van Bremen 1998). These ghost marriages are usually performed by female shamans (*itako* or *onakama*), Buddhist priests, or more rarely, Shintō priests.

Most ghost marriages in Okinawa (the southernmost part of Japan), China, Korea, Taiwan, and many other parts of Asia involve real partners, dead or alive (see, e.g., Choi 1993 [1986]; No 2007; Takeda 1990; Tong 2004; Wolf 1974). However, in Japan in almost all cases, the spirit of the dead is married to an imaginary partner, although several cases of the ghost marriage between a living person and a spirit of the dead or between spirits of the dead have been reported (see, e.g., Blacker 1975: 158; Matsuzaki 1993a: 88-89). The ghost marriage can be represented by the deceased’s picture in a glass box which is married to a spirit spouse embodied in a consecrated figurine in the same box, a figurine ‘which is believed to have been animated with the miraculous power of *jizo*, a prominent Buddhist Bodhisattva (deity)’ (Schattschneider 2001: 854). The ‘couple’ is enshrined in the temple from five to thirty years, during which ‘*jizo* is believed to guide the dead, stranded between worlds, toward successful rebirth and eventual salvation’ (ibid.).

There is another type of ghost marriage which involves the use of *ema* (votive tablet). *Ema* are wooden plaques, often with roof-shaped tops, on which Shintō or Buddhist worshipers write their prayers or wishes. They are then hung by string in special areas of temples or shrines where the *kami* (Shintō deities or gods) or Buddha can read them. In general, *ema* are not used for celebrating or commemorating death. However, *mukasari ema* belong to the special category of votive tablet that addresses the fact of death, but only for the purpose of serving as a medium for conducting marriages between a spirit of the dead and an imaginary spouse. These are large and either decorated with a scene from a wedding ceremony or a photographic collage showing a real dead person and his/her make-believe partner in wedding regalia. *Mukasari* means ‘marriage’ in the Yamagata dialect and the term is now used to identify such *ema*.

Although there is no ghost marriage practice in Makabe, many people knew the practice very well, and some of them visited northeast Japan in order to perform

ghost marriages for their family members. I first heard about ghost marriage from one of my informants, Tomida-san, who is in his sixties and a retired schoolteacher. When he and his wife travelled to the Yamagata prefecture, they visited the Jyakushō-ji temple in Tendō city and encountered *mukasari ema* and ghost marriage, which reminded them of their deceased son who died at age seven from illness. They thought that if their son was still alive, he would now be in his thirties and would get married. They decided to wed the deceased son on the thirty-third anniversary of his death. Several months later, on the day of the thirty-third anniversary, they visited the temple again to offer *mukasari ema* for the deceased son. The Buddhist priest wrote their son's name, his age at death and his Buddhist posthumous name (*kaimyō*) on the *mukasari ema*, and chanted a short sutra. After the sutra, the *mukasari ema* was enshrined in the temple.

It seems that through the rituals of ghost marriage parents who lost their unmarried children are able to express parental grief and provide comfort to the spirits of their dead children and, more broadly, to drive out fear of retribution from vengeful and wandering ghosts. More importantly, parents may comfort themselves with the thought that their sons or daughters are happier with their marriage in the other world. It is also important to point out that although Van Bremen notes that the ghost marriage enables the spirit of the unmarried dead to reach adulthood and eventually ancestorhood (Van Bremen 1998: 134), in my view, the ghost marriage may not be seen as the ritual which is aimed at transforming the spirit of the dead, because as mentioned previously, the spirits of the unmarried dead have no descendants to venerate them and thus they cannot supplement their own vitality.

### **Concluding remarks**

In this chapter, I have examined different types of death and their relationship to different categories of persons, and attempted to elucidate how and why people are dealt with differently when they die through the interpretation and examination of various mortuary practices and rituals. I found out that different kinds of persons are thought of as having different kinds of *karada* because their *karada* embody different amounts of vitality (which may negate death and pollution) and thus some people's

deaths occasion great ceremony while others are virtually forgotten. For those who have sufficient vitality, their death is considered a good death and dealt with elaborately, magnificently and vigorously. There is no need to hold complicated and long purification rituals for them. On the other hand, for those who have a lack of vitality, their death is considered a bad death and funerary rites are simple and abrupt. For example, if they die tragically, violently or unnaturally, their own vitality is suddenly exhausted from their *karada* and they are extremely contaminated by the high density of death pollution. Their death is then considered a bad death and dealt with in different ways. In this case, they are often required to have special and long purification rituals. However, unlike other unnatural deaths, those who have committed honourable suicide or have died in wars for their country are thought of as having brimming vitality and their death is considered a good death, although their death is clearly tragic, violent and unnatural. All of these differences in dealing with the dead stem from differing degrees of vitality. In this context, it seems that vitality is created and increased in a person's space of social and political relationships.





Plate 13. A funeral altar of a centenarian (A congratulatory letter and a silver sake cup are displayed on the centre of the altar)



Plate 14. Assembled people picking up coins with delight



Plate 15. *Makisen* (scattering coins)





Plate 16. A company funeral (*shasō*) in an auditorium



Plate 17. A street altar



Plate 18. *Ondodai* for performing the *kawa segaki* ritual



Plate 19. A statue of a kamikaze pilot at Yasukuni Shrine



Plate 20. Photos of kamikaze pilots at Yasukuni Shrine



Plate 21. *Kobaka* (children graves)



## Chapter Four

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# The spirits of the dead

### Introduction

Death may be considered either as the end of existence or as a transition to another state of being or consciousness. In some societies, death is the last journey which a person undertakes and such a passage is concretised by the requirements of funeral procedures. However, in other societies, such as Japan, death does not coincide with the end of biological activity (see, e.g., Bloch & Parry 1982; Davies 2002 [1997]; Hertz 1960 [1907]; Metcalf & Huntington 1991 [1979]; for relation to Japanese society see Bachnik 1995; Bloch 1992; Lock 1996, 2002; Namihira 1996, 2004; Smith 1974; Stefánsson 1995; Wöss 1992; Yanagita 1970). As I suggested in Chapter Two, Japanese funerals are not only moments for managing the material remains of the dead as they are in many other cultures, but also one which deals with an immaterial element which remains after death, usually the 'spirit' or 'soul' in English.

According to Maurice Bloch (1996: 150), in some societies, people believe that spirits may travel after death to several destinations and, therefore, a part of the funerary or memorial ritual may involve preparing them for their journey and guiding them to their destinations. Many Japanese people also tend to believe in the existence of spirits and that these spirits travel from the deceased's bodies to other locations (see, e.g., Bachnik 1995; Bloch 1992; Smith 1974; Stefánsson 1995; Wöss 1992).<sup>25</sup> They believe that when a person dies, his/her spirit (*tamashii*) is gradually separated from the tangible body (*karada*), and transferred from this world to another world. In this sense, one of the primary purposes of Japanese death rituals is to usher the spirit of the dead safely to the other world.

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<sup>25</sup> In one survey, half of the respondents remarked that they believe in the existence of a spirit, while 38 percent do not believe in its continued existence after death; additionally, another 12 percent found themselves unable to answer the question (*Asahi Shinbun*, September 12, 1995).

On the other hand, concern with spirits of the dead in mortuary rituals is often not so much a matter of ensuring their safe journey to the other world as of ensuring that they do not bother or harm the living given that they are considered to be unstable, dangerous and polluted beings that need to be purified by a series of rituals. Although it is believed to be inevitable that most spirits of the newly dead are extremely polluted, fearful and dangerous due to the decomposition of *karada*, if they receive proper ritual veneration and offerings from their surviving descendants, then they can supplement their own vitality which may outweigh the pollution of death and thus easily achieve the pure status of the household ancestor. On the other hand, if they are not cared for and do not receive proper ritual veneration and offerings from their descendants, then they become ghosts (*muenbotoke*) who wander about causing trouble because they cannot restore their own vitality enough in order to negate the high density of pollution. They become engaged in an endless search for food and comfort to supplement their own vitality. Such spirits may harm not only the living but also benevolent spirits such as household ancestors and Shintō deities.

In this chapter, I shall look explicitly at how people are transformed into different kinds of spirits after death, in and through their relation to vitality and pollution. More specifically, I shall attempt to elucidate the way in which the spirits of the newly dead are associated with different amounts of vitality or pollution and how they supplement their own vitality and diminish or eliminate their pollution. In order to explore this association between the spirits of the dead and vitality or pollution, I shall also look at the relationship between different kinds of spirits and their surviving descendants and how the living deal with the spirits of the dead in their everyday lives through various forms of formal and informal veneration and offerings.

### **1. The spirit of the newly dead**

Before proceeding further, it will be useful to look briefly at the process of becoming the spirit of the newly dead (*shinbotoke*) and what *shinbotoke* is about. Spirit or soul is usually known as *tamashii* or *reikon* in Japan. These two Japanese terms are often

used interchangeably and are in very common parlance. Because there seems to be no clear distinction between these two terms, I shall use them interchangeably. As mentioned in Chapter Two, each person (*hito*) has a *tamashii* within his/her *karada* as long as the *karada* embodies vitality. However, when vitality is exhausted from the *karada*, the *tamashii* is separated from its *karada* and the *hito* becomes dead. Once *tamashii* leaves its *karada*, it is no longer called *tamashii* because the term *tamashii* is normally used when the spirit remains within the *karada*. Instead, the recently separated *tamashii* from the *karada* is usually called *shiryō* (or *shirei*, literally meaning ‘the spirit of the dead’) or *shinbotoke* (or *nibotoke*, literally meaning ‘new buddha’). However, *shiryō* or *shirei* seems to be used more frequently by Buddhist priests than by ordinary people. Although there is no strict distinction between *shiryō* and *shinbotoke*, using the term *shiryō*, in my experience, makes people feel more fearful than *shinbotoke* because *shiryō* connotes a broader category of the spirit of the dead and includes not only the spirits of the newly dead but also *muenbotoke* and other non-ancestral spirits (see ‘ghost marriage’ in Chapter Three).

According to my informants, *shinbotoke* floats in the air in the shape of a small flame in the darkness. Although they had never seen such a flame in their lives, they described it clearly as if they had seen it because they heard about it many times from their grandparents, parents and older relatives. One of my informants told me that the flame is to be seen near the house of the newly dead and is sometimes found near graveyards but that it fades away after being exposed. Although it is considered to be far less malicious than *muenbotoke*, it still seems unstable, potentially dangerous, and its behaviour is similar to *muenbotoke*, because it is contaminated by the pollution of death when its *karada* is decomposed, and it wanders near the *karada*, the house and the graveyard until it is transformed into a stable, protective, and purified ancestral spirit.

During my fieldwork, I found much evidence that the spirit of the newly dead, although it is not a *muenbotoke*, is considered as a fearful, dangerous and polluted being. For example, in Makabe, after the funeral and just before the departure for the grave, the bereaved family members, Buddhist priests and members of the *kumi-ai* turn counter clockwise three times in front of the funeral hall or the house of the deceased for the purpose of confusing the spirit of the dead and making it difficult



for the spirit to find the route from the home to the grave and thus prevent it from returning home. In a similar manner, it is also often the case that when the deceased's family members return home from the crematorium or grave, they make a detour on their way home to prevent this spirit from following the family home.

According to local Buddhist priests, it is normally believed and known that the spirit of the newly dead wanders between this world and the other world for forty-nine days after death, and after this transitional period, the spirit arrives at the other world and becomes an ancestral spirit. However, during this transitional period, if the family fails to perform proper rituals (the funeral and the seven seventh-day memorial services) and fails to make proper offerings, the spirit can neither purify the pollution of death nor supplement its own vitality. In this case, the spirit cannot reach the other world and will become a *muenbotoke*, condemned to ceaseless wandering, and thus posing a threat to the living.

## **2. *Kami* (god) and *hotoke* (buddha)**

The term *kami* refers to the divine in the Shintō religion and is normally translated as 'divinity', 'deity' or 'god' although it is often claimed that the Japanese word *kami* and the English word 'God' are quite different concepts. In modern monotheism, 'God' is the single entity who has the power to create all things existing in the world, or even the world itself. However, *kami* is not the creator. The notion of exactly what constitutes a *kami* is hard to define. Because it has been variously interpreted by the Japanese to denote a superior and mysterious power of either creative or destructive character whose location is changeable (it may reside in nature, natural or man-made objects and animals, as well as certain human beings, usually but not always after they have died) *kami* causes both fear and gratitude, and is the focus of ritual behaviour (Grapard 1983: 125). For a more detailed explanation of *kami*, let us turn to Motoori Norinaga, an eighteenth and nineteenth century Japanese Shintō scholar:

I do not yet understand the meaning of the word, '*kami*'. Speaking in general, however, it may be said that *kami* signifies, in the first place, the deities of heaven and earth that appear in the ancient records and also the spirits of the shrines where they are worshipped. It is hardly necessary to say that it

includes human beings. It also includes such objects as birds, beasts, trees, plants, seas, mountains and so forth. In ancient usage, anything whatsoever which was outside the ordinary, which possessed superior power or which was awe-inspiring was called *kami*. Eminence here does not refer merely to the superiority of nobility, goodness or meritorious deeds. Evil and mysterious things, if they are extraordinary and dreadful, are called *kami*. It is needless to say that among human beings who are called *kami* the successive generations of sacred emperors are all included. The fact that emperors are called 'distant *kami*' is because, from the standpoint of common people, they are far separated, majestic and worthy of reverence. In a lesser degree we find, in the present as well as in ancient times, human beings who are *kami*. Although they may not be accepted throughout the whole country, yet in each province, each village and each family there are human beings who are *kami*, one according to his own proper position. (cited in Earhart 1974: 10-11)

This neatly sums up the entire connotations of the concept of *kami*. Many Japanese scholars conclude that after a final memorial service called *tomuraiage* is held (that is, the concluding memorial service for the spirit of the dead in the thirty-third year after a man's death, or in some cases, in the fiftieth year), the spirit of the dead is believed to lose its individual characteristics, and becomes fused with household ancestors and eventually becomes a *kami* (see, e.g., Ooms 1976: 63; Smith 1974: 69, 96; Takeda 1961: 104; Yanagita 1970: 118-119). According to Yanagita (1970: 118), in some districts it is often believed that the spirit of the dead person is integrated into the realm of ancestral spirits after the forty-ninth day from the death, although the spirit is still an unstable and dangerous being that needs to be purified by a further series of memorial services, and that it finally becomes a *kami* after the final memorial service (the thirty-third or fiftieth anniversaries of death). Therefore, although scholars differ concerning the amount of time it takes to achieve ancestorhood and thereafter deity status, it is still widely believed that the spirit of the dead eventually becomes a *kami*.

However, as Bloch (1992: 59) indicates, not every spirit of the dead becomes a *kami*. Those who can become gods (*kami*) are of two kinds: either people who are thought to have been brimming with vitality in their lives or those who can be seen as the source of vitality. If their vitality is sufficiently strong to negate their death and pollution, these exceptional persons would not need a long purification process when they die and they can become *kami* immediately. As mentioned in Chapter Three, typical examples of these kinds of *kami* are the Emperor, represented as the

vital source of the nation, and the war dead, thought of as having negated their death by making it brim with vitality. In this respect, *kami* may be considered as different from other kinds of spirits of the dead, although the *kami* often has the same attributes as an ancestor and is not always clearly differentiated from other spirits in ritual practices. It also seems that the *kami* has a higher rank in some unspecified hierarchy and is purer and more powerful compared to other spirits.

Although there are many previous ethnographic works concerning Japanese ancestor worship which focus on the transformation from an ancestor to a *kami*, I found out during my fieldwork in Makabe that ordinary people do not often use the word *kami* to refer to the ancestor, and even neglect to use it after the final memorial service. Moreover, they do not seem to feel that the spirits of the dead or ancestors become converted into *kami* once the final memorial service is complete. Instead, they seem to believe that the deceased or the spirits of the dead become a ‘*hotoke*’ (buddha). They most frequently use the word ‘*hotoke*’, ‘*hotoke-san*’ or ‘*hotoke-sama*’<sup>26</sup> when they refer to the deceased and the spirits of the dead, whether the final memorial service has been held for the deceased or not.

Like *kami*, the term *hotoke* carries multiple meanings, but it does not denote a god. It is widely used for describing the recently deceased (*kojin*), the deceased’s body or corpse (*itai*), the spirit of the newly dead (*shinbotoke*), ancestor (*senzo*), and even the wandering ghost (*muenbotoke*), although it was originally used to describe a person who achieved status as an ‘enlightened being’ and it refers to ‘Gautama’ in Buddhism. The term *hotoke* is indiscriminately used for all deceased persons and their spirits. Nonetheless, it is most frequently used to refer to an ancestor. During my fieldwork, most of my informants used the word *hotoke* or *hotoke-san* rather than any other words to refer to their ancestors although a few of them used the word *senzo* (ancestor) or both *hotoke* and *senzo* interchangeably. For example, when I encountered one of my informants Hagiwara-san, a 73-year-old man, in front of his household grave, he said after finishing his household grave cleaning that ‘The first and most important thing is to take good care of our *hotoke-san* (ancestors)’ (*yatba hotoke-san wo dijini suru no ga ichiban datbeyo*). However, when I met him to conduct an interview at the beginning of my fieldwork, he often used the term *senzo*

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<sup>26</sup> Similar to the suffix -san, -sama is an honorific suffix but more respectful than -san.

when we were talking about his ancestor and ancestor worship. At that time, I did not realise how *senzo* is different from *hotoke*, and what *hotoke* connotes in Japanese mortuary rituals and ancestor worship. However, I soon realised that people are not usually using the term *senzo* to refer to an ancestor. It seemed that the term *senzo* is usually used in the context of formal conversation while the term *hotoke* is used in very informal conversation. In my view, the reason why Hagiwara-san used the term *senzo* rather than *hotoke* when we met at the beginning of my fieldwork is that he wanted to use a formal term and make a foreigner understand his meaning more easily.

There is in fact no decisive distinction between *hotoke* and *senzo* as to their content and implication, but it is quite clear that the term *hotoke* is more familiar, intimate and informal than *senzo* to ordinary people. If it is necessary to distinguish between *hotoke* and *senzo*, it may be possible to say that *hotoke* are more 'intimate beings' rather than *senzon*. As Dore noted, one's close relatives such as grandfather, grandmother, father, and mother may be conceived of as *hotoke* after their death, and more remote kin are conceived of as *senzo* (Dore 1958: 457). However, during my fieldwork, I found that many people do not use the term *hotoke* or *hotoke-san* when they refer to their close deceased relatives. Instead, they use their everyday kinship terms to describe their deceased members, as if they are still alive, for example, *obāchan* (grandmother), *ojīchan* (grandfather), *otōsan* (father) and *okāsan* (mother). Dore's view about *hotoke* and *senzo* is therefore not applicable to all districts or all households in Japan. Moreover, I also found that other people use the term *hotoke* when they refer to the recently departed and use *senzo* when they refer to a whole group of their deceased household members. When I was working at the funeral home, I realised that even professional undertakers often use the word *hotoke* or *hotoke-san* to refer to the dead or a corpse in informal conversation although they use the word *kojin* or *kojin-sama* to refer to the deceased and the word *itai* to refer to the deceased's remains out of politeness when they are talking with the bereaved family members about a deceased relative.

Additionally, the term *senzo* is connected with Chinese pronunciation, while *hotoke* is very Japanese. According to Takeda (1976: 131), in ancient Japan, there was no specific word for ancestor. The term *senzo* is a Chinese import, and before

this borrowing, the Japanese word *tōtsu oya* (parents of older generations) was used to indicate lineal ascendants (ibid.). This may also indicate another reason that people are not very familiar with using the term *senzo*. Moreover, dying is often called '*hotoke ni naru*' (becoming a buddha) in many districts. 'Becoming a *hotoke*' may describe the person's state after death. In this respect, death came to be understood as something that allowed continued existence after death as a 'Buddha', and the Japanese consider their ancestors as living in the realm of the Buddha (nirvana) (Smith 1974: 51). According to Takeda (1961: 221-222), it might be that the Buddhist idea of nirvana is fundamentally misunderstood by people, dating from a very early period in Japanese history. Also, this does not coalesce with 'traditional' Buddhist beliefs concerning reincarnation, which teaches that the Ten Buddhist Kings of the underworld passed judgement on each spirit of the dead regarding which of the six realms of rebirth the spirit should be reborn into.

Furthermore, Yanagita does not accept that *hotoke* means 'Buddha' in the context of ancestor worship (1970: 107). He states that the word *hotoke* was not the true name for Buddha and that this word was not found widely throughout the country. The Sanskrit word Buddha was usually rendered as the Chinese pronunciation '*butsu*' although now it can be pronounced as either *butsu* or *hotoke*. Yanagita attempts to prove that the *hotoke* came from the word *hotoki*, meaning the container for food offerings made to the spirits of the dead at *bon* festival (festival of the dead) in medieval times, and showing that the same container (*hotoki*) was used in making offerings to the Buddha in Buddhist rituals. He argues that because of the same ritual container (*hotoki*), the spirits of the dead and the Buddha (*butsu*) were gradually called by the name *hotoki* and later transformed into *hotoke*. He doubts that the spirits of the dead can obtain buddhahood automatically, and wonders why people have to hold a great ceremony every year to help them go to the realm of the Buddha or Paradise (1970: 112).

However, Aruga objects to Yanagita's etymological analysis and suggests that the word *hotoke* was already used in Japan since it was found in *Nihonshoki* (*The Chronicles of Japan*), compiled in the early eighth century (Aruga 1979: 93-113). He provides more evidence that the word *hotoke* was found in 'The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter' (*taketori monogatari*), a tenth-century Japanese folktale, in which,



the word clearly referred to the dead and to an ancestor. He follows the existing interpretation that *hotoke* came from the word '*futoki*', indicating the branch used in the ceremony for the Buddha. When Buddhist rituals were widespread, the word *futoki* continued to be used for both the spirits of the dead or ancestors and the Buddha, and this was gradually transformed into *hotoke*. The word *hotoke* for the dead was widely used during the Tokugawa period (1603-1868), and it was also believed that the deceased was transformed into a *hotoke* (buddha) after his/her funeral was performed (Yagi 1986: 210).

Additionally, during my fieldwork, I found out that the word *hotoke* is still used for the dead not only in Makabe but also in many parts of Japan because I heard the word in many Japanese films and TV dramas although the religious meaning of *hotoke* seems to have almost disappeared in ancestor worship. Accordingly, it seems that anyone can become a *hotoke* after death. In this sense, the term *hotoke* is no more or no less than the spirits of the dead. However, most importantly, I would argue that although any spirit of the dead can become a *hotoke*, this does not mean that every spirit would be a 'household ancestor'. For the attainment of ancestorhood, the spirits of the dead need to supplement their own vitality and purify the pollution of death through proper rituals and offerings. It is therefore necessary for the deceased's family to carry out a complex and long process of formal and informal ancestral veneration for the spirits of the dead. Otherwise, the spirits will become *muenbotoke*.

### **3. *Kamidana* (household Shintō shrine) and *butsudan* (household Buddhist altar)**

The *kami* and *hotoke* are enshrined at domestic altars to protect and watch over a house and its inhabitants. During the period of their dwelling at domestic altars, they can also continue to supplement their own vitality by receiving various ritual veneration and offerings from household members. By doing so, the *kami* is able to retain the fully recharged state of purity and the *hotoke* keep continuing to purify the pollution of death. Many households in Makabe have two sacred domestic altars, one to the *hotoke* (*butsudan*) and one to the *kami* (*kamidana*). A *butsudan* is a

household Buddhist memorial altar dedicated to ancestors as well as to the spirits of the recently dead of the household, and a *kamidana* (literally meaning ‘god shelf’) is a household Shintō shrine dedicated to the guardian *kami* connected to the household. The *butsudan* and the *kamidana* are generally located in two different rooms, but in some households they may be in two separate spaces of the same room. Surprisingly, during my fieldwork, I also found *kamidana* at most local Buddhist temples. One Buddhist priest told me that the Shintō *kami* protected his temple and family members.

The *kamidana* is usually located or hung high up on the north wall, but if it cannot be put there then it should be on the west wall (so that the *kamidana* faces south or east), because it is very bad luck to put it on the south wall or the east wall. People often consult a local Shintō priest (*kannushi*) when considering the installation of a *kamidana*. The *kamidana* is generally made of plain and unfinished wood in the shape of a miniature Shintō shrine with roof and doors. It may contain a mirror and different kinds of talismans and amulets from various shrines, associated with particular gods such as guardian gods or local tutelary gods (*ujigami*) that symbolically represent the *kami* (gods), providing good luck and protecting the house and its inhabitants from bad luck and any hindrances that might obstruct the successful pursuit of a goal. Some of these talismans may be specific to a particular wish, purpose or benefit, while others may be more general. One of the most common types of talismans or amulets is an *ofuda* (paper-covered wooden prayer plaque), which is inscribed with written prayers and blessed by a Shintō priest. Another very common type of talisman is a Daruma<sup>27</sup> doll which brings good fortune in a specific endeavour. These various talismans and amulets are changed with new ones at the beginning of every year. Old items are not simply thrown away as rubbish but burned at the *dondoyaki* (communal burning) festival which is held on 14<sup>th</sup> of January.

In front of the *kamidana*, household members make a polite bow twice, clap their hands twice, and bow once again. After the prayer is given, they again bow twice, clap their hands twice, and bow. This is the basic procedure of Shintō worship

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<sup>27</sup> Daruma is the Japanese name for the Indian priest Bodhidharma who was the founder of Zen Buddhism in China. As he sat in meditation until his legs fell off, he is remembered as a legless doll called Daruma in Japan.

at *kamidana* called ‘*nirei nihakusyu ichirei*’ (literally meaning ‘twice bow, twice clap and one bow’). According to a local Shintō priest, in principle, every morning and evening the head of the household or his wife change the water of the vase holding evergreen branches and make offerings and greetings. It is also ritually important for family members to cleanse their hands before worshipping at the *kamidana*. However, most of my informants in Makabe did not make daily offerings and greetings to their household Shintō gods, although they do make offerings once or twice a week. The most ‘traditional’ and common offerings are uncooked rice (*okome*), rice wine (*osake*), water (*omizu*), salt (*oshio*) and evergreen branches (*sakaki*). They are offered in small, symbolic quantities and presented in small white pottery containers. Depending upon the season and festival, local or seasonal produce such as sticky-rice cakes (*kagami mochi*, literally meaning ‘mirror rice cakes’), fruits or fish might be offered as well. There is also twisted rice straw rope (*shimenawa*) adorned with *shied* (zigzag strips of white paper) which is overhung across the front of the *kamidana*. In a similar fashion to a Shintō gate (*torii*) found at the entrance of a Shintō shrine, *shimenawa* seem to mark the boundary between the sacred and the profane. They keep impurities out and purify the space within, and therefore indicate the space which is holy, or where *kami* dwell.

Additionally, as previously mentioned, according to Japanese folklorists and some other scholars, the spirit of the dead eventually becomes a *kami* after the final memorial service (*tomuraiage*), and this *kami* protects a house and its inhabitants. Although they did not note where this transformed ancestral *kami* is enshrined, it can be presumed that the ancestral *kami* will be settled in the *kamidana* as a household guardian god. However, in reality, after the final memorial service, the memorial tablet (*ihai*) is not transferred from the *butsudan* to the *kamidana*; instead, this memorial tablet is usually deposited in the household temple (*dannadera*) and will be burned one day. In this respect, it is hard to say that the transformed ancestral *kami* is lodged in the *kamidana* without its tablet because, as Nakamaki (1983) noted, the governing principle is that the *kami* need a symbolic material object in which to settle. It is through this material object that the household members can communicate with the *kami*, and this object must periodically be the focus of ritual performance.

Let us now turn to a household Buddhist altar. The *butsudan* was originally an altar for the worship of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, but in reality these were generally worshipped together with memorial tablets of deceased household members (see Nakamaki 1983: 69). Both maintaining a *butsudan* and ancestor worship in the house became popular during the Edo period (1603-1867) when every household was required to register its membership with a local Buddhist temple, called *dankaseido* (the parochial system) (see Mori 2005: 241; Takeda 1979: 25-26). In contemporary Japan, the main function of the *butsudan* is ancestor worship.

Although some Buddhist sects, such as the *Nichiren Shōshō* sect and *Sōka Gakkai*, advise their members to acquire their own special *butsudan*, most *butsudan* are very similar in style and shape (see Reader 1991: 92). The *butsudan* looks like a cabinet with open doors, often ornamentally finished with black-lacquered wood and elevated platforms on several levels, on which are usually memorial tablets (*ihai*) bearing the posthumous names of former family members, and some subsidiary religious items called *butsugu*, such as a statue of a bodhisattva, a small metal bell, sutra tables, candlesticks, incense burners, and platforms for placing offerings. At times, there are framed pictures of the recently deceased family members, genealogical scrolls, and *kakocho* (literally meaning ‘registers of the past’) recording the death-days of former members of the family. In some households, the *butsudan* become another opportunity to illustrate the family’s wealth with lacquered black wood, gold, brass, silk brocade and precious iconography (see Buckley 2002: 57). Some large and ornate *butsudan* may cost 2 million yen (approximately 9,100 GBP) or more. However, in recent decades, due to Japan’s rapid urbanisation and industrialisation, there are also smaller and simpler ones designed to fit into small modern flats.

In front of the *butsudan*, household members sit on *tatami* (woven straw mats), tap a small bell, make a bow with folded palms (*gatshō*), and enter into silent and commemorative prayer. Additionally, offerings of incense, flowers, fruits, cooked rice, water or tea and a variety of everyday cooked food and drink are placed on the *butsudan*, and these offerings are kept fresh and replaced regularly; gifts brought to a household by guests are also often placed at the *butsudan* before they are opened or used. A household Buddhist priest may be called to the household to

chant a sutra (*okyō*) in front of the *butsudan* on the anniversary of the death of family members.

During my fieldwork in Makabe, I was invited into many homes and was able to look at many *butsudan*. Whenever I stood in front of a *butsudan*, I was seized with fear because the shape of the *butsudan* looked like a kind of entrance connected to the passage of the other world and it might be imagined that the spirits of deceased family members can freely come in and out through this entrance. I was also very surprised that people ate, drank, talked, watched television, and even slept in the room where the *butsudan* was placed. At that time, for me (as a Korean), it was hard to understand such behaviour because their behaviour was quite different from that of family members in Korea where, in my experience, the spirits of deceased family members or ancestors (*chosang sin*) are considered to be very ‘frightening beings’ to the surviving family. However, in Japan, in my observation, the spirits seem to be very ‘intimate’ and friendly with the living family members. I also felt that the living family members strongly believe that their ancestors are always with them, watching, protecting and guiding them. I could not find any fears associated with their nearness to *butsudan*. However, most importantly, this does not mean that they have no fear of the spirits of the dead or ancestors and their capacity to punish, but rather that they are confident in their ability to gain favour with the ancestors by drawing on this special ‘intimacy’. Moreover, there seems to be a distinct difference in the level or degree of ‘intimacy’ in the relationship between household members and their ancestors compared to any other Northeast Asian countries’ ancestor worship and the place of the worship, because most household ancestral altars in China, Korea, and Taiwan are generally located in a separate hall from the living area of the house, and household members do not usually make daily offerings to their ancestors (see, e.g., Ahern 1973; Janelli & Janelli 1982).

#### **4. Who becomes an ancestor?**

The answer to the question of who becomes an ancestor has not always been obvious, although it has been either implicitly or explicitly considered not only by indigenous Japanese folklorists but also Western anthropologists. Nonetheless, many of them



have followed the idea that the Japanese notion of ancestors stems from the structure of the household (*ie*) and guarantees the continuation of the household line (ancestral line) (see Akata 1986; Brown 1979; Hozumi 1943; Ooms 1967, 1976; Smith 1974, 1976; Takeda 1979; Tamamuro 1964; Yanagita 1975b). In this respect, if the *ie* disappears, its ancestors and ancestor worship will disappear, while if the *ie* continues, so will ancestors and ancestor worship. The ancestors are therefore entirely dependent on the *ie*. Such a strong connection between the *ie* and ancestors persistently influences Japanese people as a continued 'traditional' custom, even after the patriarchal *ie* system was abolished after the Second World War and Japan experienced a series of rapid social, economic, and political changes. As briefly mentioned in Chapter One, according to Yanagita (1975a: 170-174), there are only two ways of becoming an ancestor. One is by inheriting the *ie* as the eldest son. The other is by leaving the *ie* on marriage and establishing a new *ie* as the younger sons. Yanagita's view of Japanese ancestors is limited to only male members of the patrilineal line. However, in each household, whether it is a main household or not, there are two permanent positions, the household head and the household wife, for the attainment of ancestorhood. For this reason, although the household wife is not a natal member of her husband's family, she becomes a household ancestor of her husband's family after her death.

In principle, not all married dead would be ancestors. They must die well and happily, bear children, and receive proper ritual veneration from their direct descendants. Those who die badly and unhappily, accidentally or violently, or without descendants to care for their departed spirits, or without the correct funeral and post-funeral services, become *muenbotoke* who wander about causing trouble, and thus they must be appeased and purified with proper rituals. Nonetheless, according to Smith (1974: 54), although it is true in principle that the spirits of those who die unnatural deaths are usually believed to belong to the category of wandering ghosts, some spirits that would be in that category become household ancestors. He also states that '[t]he decisive issue [in becoming a wandering ghost] is the status of the person in life. Senior ascendants such as grandparents and parents who meet an untoward end are accorded normal treatment by the household and are not conceived of as joining the wandering spirits and hungry ghosts' (ibid.). This abnormal way of

becoming an ancestor may come from the structure of the household (*ie*) and its continuity, because if the spirits of the senior household members once take a position in the realm of wandering ghosts at the moment of their death then their spiritual status cannot ever be changed; thus the descendants do not need to enshrine the wandering ghosts in their *butsudan* and do not also need to worship them as their household ancestors, and therefore the continuation of the household and the safety of its members cannot be guaranteed (see Ooms 1976: 69). Additionally, in my view, it is also important to note that apart from the status of the person or the spirit and the continuation of the household, the bereaved descendants may not want to believe that the spirits of their beloved family members become wandering ghosts. Instead, they may believe that the spirits of their dead family members can be transformed into the household ancestors by their ritual veneration.

For example, in Chapter Three I described the case of Kitajima-san and his wife's accidental death; Kitajima-san and his wife were an elderly married couple, and they were senior members of the family and had many children and grandchildren. Their funerals were held by their descendants without any salient differences compared to other normal funerals and after the seven seventh-day memorial services (after the forty-ninth day from the death) their temporary memorial tablets (*noihai*) were replaced with permanent memorial tablets (*honihai*) which were then placed on the *butsudan* with those of the older ancestral dead. Although the family members performed the *kawa segaki* (feeding the hungry ghosts ritual at the riverside) for forty-nine days to appease the spirits of Kitajima-san and his wife, they did not seem to believe that the spirits of the dead belonged to the category of wandering ghosts, and could inflict harm to the living. Additionally, the case of Yoshida-san's father's suicide also described Chapter Three, is a similar example. Although Yoshida-san's father committed suicide, his spirit was venerated by his descendants as a household ancestor because he was a senior member of the household.

More than that, in practice, it has often occurred that in the case of married couples who do not have any surviving descendants, they adopt a male child as their successor for ensuring ancestor worship and the continuation of the household. If they have only daughters, they may adopt the oldest son-in-law (*mukoyōshi*) into

their household as their successor. This assumes a form of marriage arrangement in which the husband marries into his wife's natal family and takes on her family name. Although this practice of husband adoption tends to be seen as a legacy of a premodern patrilineal system, it still occurred frequently in Makabe and many other parts of rural Japan (see, e.g., Knight & Traphagan 2003: 9).

Even when an unmarried adult male dies, his spirit can be worshipped as an ancestor by one of his brother's sons who has no right of succession in his natal household and thus he can establish a branch household. In other words, when a nephew gets married and establishes a branch family, he brings out his unmarried dead uncle's memorial tablet from his natal household and places the tablet on his new *butsudan* of his new branch family and treats it like his own father's, so that the unmarried uncle can acquire a stable status as an ancestor of this branch family. I heard a very similar case of 'adopting' the spirit of the dead uncle from one of my informants, Yaguchi-san, who is in his seventies. When he was married and established a new branch family, he 'inherited' his uncle's memorial tablet from his father and enshrined it in his new *butsudan* as a first ancestor. During the Second World War, his uncle was conscripted into the army soon after he was married, he then established a branch family and had a baby, but later was killed in battle. His wife remarried after the war and although he had been a head of a branch household and had a wife and a daughter, his memorial tablet was deposited with his main household, because his widow was not able to bring her dead husband's memorial tablet to her new husband's house.

After many years passed, his grown-up daughter married a German man. The daughter talked with her mother about her father's memorial tablet and got her father's tablet back from the main household, because she was not required to look after any memorial tablets of her foreign husband's ancestors. However, she had to deposit it again in the main household when she and her husband emigrated to America because she thought that she could not take proper care of it there. This tablet was transferred between the branch household and the main household, and it finally settled in Yaguchi-san's new *butsudan* as a first household ancestor. However, in the case of an adult woman who dies unmarried or returns to die at her natal family after a divorce, her memorial tablet cannot be treated like an unmarried

adult male, and it is also thought that her spirit cannot be transformed into a household ancestor. As I have already mentioned in Chapter Three, the spirit of an unmarried woman or a returned woman from the conjugal family is destined to become a *muenbotoke* who may cause harm to the family members.

Accordingly, the single most important factor in becoming an ancestor is the surviving descendants. In other words, whether or not people die unnaturally, if they have their surviving descendants or relatives who can take care of their spirits, they seem to become ancestors. They can continuously receive various ritual veneration and offerings from their surviving descendants and thus can increase their own vitality which may have the power to negate death and purify the pollution of death. In this manner, they can eventually reach the household ancestorhood.

### **5. The living dead**

As many Japanese people believe in the existence and movement of the spirits of the dead, they place a great deal of importance on their manipulation through formal, informal, individual and collective veneration. During my fieldwork, I found that although the spirits of the recently dead family members are thought to be potentially dangerous to the living, they are considered and treated as if they are still living members of the household. For some time, they continue to hold on to their social identities and personalities. They also occupy specific individual social positions and positional titles such as grandfather (*ojisan*), grandmother (*obāsan*), father (*otōsan*) or mother (*okāsan*). They remain accessible to the surviving members of the family in human form. In this context, it is also imagined that the spirits of the dead or ancestors are eating, drinking, talking and expressing emotions. In this section, I shall particularly focus on the way in which the spirits of the dead are 'entangled' with their surviving family members. The living dead may characterise the Japanese perception of death and the relationship between the living and the dead.

In many households, living family members regularly offer ordinary food, drink, sweets and a packet of cigarettes to the spirits of the dead. In some households these offerings are made both morning and evening, in others only once a day before the family eats. The favourite foods of the recently deceased are prepared

by family members on death-days or at other memorial services. When a guest brings a special gift of food, a portion of it will be placed on the *butsudan* before the rest is eaten. During my fieldwork I attended a *zazen* (meditation in Zen Buddhism) group and I met many *zazen* members. At that time, I could speak with the members about offering food to their ancestors. One of the *zazen* members, Nakamura-san, a 78-year-old widow living with her eldest married son, a daughter-in-law and three grandchildren, told me her own story. She and her daughter-in-law prepared and offered food and drink on the *butsudan* at every dinner. One day, just after offering food on the *butsudan* and when all family members had started dinner, her eldest granddaughter suddenly asked her ‘Granny! How many family members are in our house? Six? Seven? I think we are still a family of seven because granny and mom always prepare one more portion of food for granddad and offer it on the *butsudan*’. Nakamura-san could not answer concerning the number of family members, but she was very happy that her granddaughter was still thinking of her grandfather as a member of the family although the girl had a very dim memory of him. She was also very thankful for her granddaughter’s consideration for her grandfather. This story illustrates how the surviving family members settle their deceased members down in their everyday household lives.

It is also very common for household family members to talk regularly to their recently deceased relatives in front of the *butsudan* or grave as if they are still alive. The household members often talk or report to their deceased relatives about not only significant events in their lives such as joyful occurrences (the birth of a baby, the entrance into a school, passing an examination, getting a new job, etc.) and sorrowful ones (illness, accidents, failure in an examination, death, etc.) but also their everyday lives. They even ask for help when they are in trouble, or for guidance before making important decisions. Kitamura-san, a 68-year-old retired postman, goes to his household grave every day in the late afternoon since the death of his wife six months ago after a terminal illness. He cleans the grave, changes the water for the flowers, offers some food and drink and then talks to his deceased wife about his daily life, such as who he has met and where did he go, for about half an hour. He told me that it is his great pleasure to talk to his wife everyday. When he is in trouble, he comes to the grave and asks his wife: ‘Mama! Help me! What should I



do?’ He said, ‘I can hear her responses in my head and she always gives me a better solution’.

I also found that even popular culture often reflects this kind of two-way conversations between the living and the dead. During my fieldwork, I very much enjoyed watching a comic TV drama called ‘*Oni yome nikki*’ (Diary of a diabolic wife) every Tuesday night. This drama portrays the daily life of Kazuma who is often bullied by his wife, Sanae. Every time, I found that Kazuma’s father always spoke to his deceased wife toward the end of the episode. He talked or reported to his deceased wife about his family’s everyday life in front of the *butsudan* before going to bed. The conversation scenes were always very solemn and impressive. Although this sitcom seems to be a little exaggerated and comic, it depicts everyday life of the contemporary Japanese very well.

Although biological death may have taken place some years ago, as Davies (2002 [1997]: 174-179) notes, the image of the deceased is still kept very much in the present, and visualised in human form. The image of the deceased is captured by the surviving family members and this image makes it possible for the spirits to participate in the life of the living. However, a most intriguing thing is that although the image of the deceased is still kept in the present and it can be unchangeable, the deceased continue to age with their living relatives as time goes on, and their specific individual household positions and positional titles are also changed when the living relatives’ positions and titles are changed. For example, if a man’s wife has a baby and the man thus becomes a father, his deceased father becomes a grandfather, his deceased grandfather becomes a great-grandfather and his deceased brother or sister become an uncle or aunt. The deceased household members are continuously involved in everyday lives of the living members by ascending their household positions.

How are we to understand these various activities toward the spirits of the dead? The sharing of food and eating together with the spirits of the dead in everyday household life are not surprising at all in Japan. When the surviving family members share food and drink, they also share their stories and their lives with their deceased members. By doing so, they can create or strengthen an intimate relationship with the deceased members. These activities can be understood as a

kind of ancestral veneration, but they are much more informal, secular and individualised because they are spontaneously performed by the living without any demanding or forcing from the dead (cf. Smith 1999). For this reason, many indigenous folklorists and anthropologists have not focused on these informal and individualised activities toward the spirits of the dead as a kind of ancestral veneration. They have dealt with only formal, sacred and structuralised ritual veneration which has to be strictly performed by the living with demanding from the dead (cf. Langford 2009; Ooms 1976; Smith 1974; Tsintjilonis 2004). However, I would argue that although these individualised and informal activities are not understood or accepted as proper ancestor worship for many folklorists and anthropologists, it seems that they have the profound quality of ancestral veneration. These activities make it possible for the spirits of the dead to supplement their own vitality because vitality for the dead is increased by having an intimate relationship with the living. Thus, the spirits of the dead can also eliminate or purify the pollution of death through their sufficiently increased vitality and they can eventually achieve the pure status of the household ancestor.

## **6. Wandering ghosts (*muenbotoke*)**

Wandering ghosts have been a very serious concern in Japanese folk beliefs as well as in ancestor worship, because they are considered polluted, fearful and dangerous not only to the living but also to benevolent spirits such as household ancestors. The notion of who become wandering ghosts and the practice of dealing with them are enormously significant not simply for understanding the whole progress of achieving ancestorhood but also for grasping Japanese cosmology.

As mentioned in the previous section, it is not every spirit of the dead who is welcomed back to the house and who becomes an ancestor. Those who die unhappily, accidentally or violently, or without a surviving family to look after their spirits (to keep their memorial tablets, *butsudan* and graves tidy and to offer flowers, incense, food, etc.) are thought of as having a lack of vitality and thus become ghosts who wander the earth in search of food and comfort, and who may cause harm to the living. The concept of wandering ghosts can be therefore defined by contrast to who

the ancestors are. David Plath (1964) divided the spirits of the dead into three categories (the departed, the ancestors and the outsiders) and designated the wandering ghosts as 'outsiders':

The outsiders form a residual category. They are at the fringes of institutionalization, where conditions of membership are not easy to state with precision. They include all homeless souls who are not regularly affiliated with any household line, or whose line has lapsed. But they also may include the souls of dead guests, probationary members, etc. who remain nearby but who eventually should return to join the departed in their own household.

Outsiders are not usually admitted to the household shelf. Some families provide a separate shelf for them, outside the house or on a veranda. Usually this is a temporary shelf, erected only on a few ceremonial occasions during the year. The household shelf, by contrast, is permanent. Nor is there ordinarily a household tablet for the outsiders, although communities sometimes collectively honor their unknown dead. Retirement is undefined, and about all that can be said of tenure is that the outsiders are generally suspect. Presumably they are quite unhappy over their situation - e.g. having died away from home, or having no heirs to care for them - and they deserve at least an occasional charitable nod. (Plath 1964: 304)

The wandering ghosts have been given various names, such as *muenbotoke* (literally meaning 'buddhas without affinity'), *muensama* (literally honourable ones without affinity), *gaki* (hungry ghosts), *yurei* (tormented ghosts), but they are most commonly called *muenbotoke* or simply *muensama*. They may include different categories of spirits<sup>28</sup> (see Smith 1974: 49-50, 1999: 261) but they are all united in the same unhappy, angry and suffering fate, destined not to follow the normal course to ancestorhood because they have been neglected, and are thus seen as the cause of potential problems and unrest for the living (Reader 1991: 48). Nonetheless, as mentioned in the previous section, although in theory the spirits of those who die unnatural deaths belong to the category of wandering ghosts, not all of them would be *muenbotoke*. If they have surviving descendants to look after their spirits, *butsudan*, or graves, they are accorded normal treatment by the descendants and thus supplement their own vitality and eventually become household ancestors.

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<sup>28</sup> For example, Suzuki divides the *muenbotoke* into three categories: 'non-kin who died while travelling, from a natural catastrophe or through violence, such as in war; nonlineal kin members who had no offspring or spouse, as well as lineal kin, including mothers who died in childbirth, stillborn children, children, unmarried daughters, and divorced/ returned daughters; and the family members' siblings or one's own siblings who married out' (Suzuki 2000: 32).

Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter Two, it is widely believed that the wandering ghosts try to enter the body of the newly dead and that is why a bladed object such as a sword, knife, scissors or razor is placed on the chest or beside the corpse to ward off wandering ghosts. According to one of my informants, the wandering ghost may first enter the body of a domestic cat in order to approach the corpse and enter it in turn. If the cat jumps over a corpse, the corpse will become a wandering ghost and thus precautions must be taken against letting cats come near the newly dead. This practice is intriguingly akin to the Chinese one that 'domestic cats are physically restrained (tied to doors) until the coffin leaves the village' although the reasons for these two practices are somewhat different (De Groot cited in Watson 1982: 183). This Chinese practice is related to the symbolic equation between cats and tigers because '[s]ome domestic cats are thought to have inherited the magical hair of tigers and, should such an animal leap over the coffin, it is feared that the corpse would be transformed into a terrible monster' (ibid.).

As also mentioned in the previous section, in my observations, if the spirits of the dead or ancestors take a position in the realm of wandering ghosts their spiritual status cannot be changed. Although the wandering ghosts can be collectively venerated by the living, it does not seem that they can change their state of *muenbotoke* and move onward to the state of ancestral spirit. Ooms also stated his impression of the state of the *muenbotoke*:

It seems that the status of the *muenbotoke* is unchangeable and intrinsically linked with the position they had, while still alive, in the *ie*: they are the souls of those members who were unable to join some line of ancestors or to start their own. From the moment of their death, these souls cannot change their position within the *ie*. If at this time they were still members of their family of orientation and had never established their family of procreation, they are condemned to become *muenbotoke*. (Ooms 1976: 69)

On the contrary, although the spirits of the dead have already been integrated into the realm of ancestral spirits through the various ritual veneration by their surviving descendants and have the individual or collective status of the household ancestor, their ancestral status is not eternal and can easily lapse into *muenbotoke* unless they are cared for continuously and properly by the descendants. For example, as described in Chapter Three concerning the case of Osawa-san who died alone

without any household attendants and was found dead in his home, it is considered a matter of course that the spirit of Osawa-san cannot achieve ancestral status and that he will become a *muenbotoke* because apart from his tragic death, he has no descendants to carry out any formal or informal veneration for the replenishment of vitality and the attainment of ancestorhood. In the same manner, other spirits of Osawa-san's household who have already reached the ancestral status such as ancestral spirits of Osawa-san's father and grandparents will be turned into *muenbotoke* sooner or later because they also have no descendants to provide such care and vitality.

Although wandering ghosts are not welcomed by the living, and their status and roles contrast with those of the ancestral spirits, they are collectively worshipped along with ancestral spirits during the *bon* festival (festival of the dead). However, the characters, styles and purposes of the veneration for the wandering ghosts considerably differ from those of the veneration for the ancestral spirits. Offerings for the wandering ghosts are made to a small altar set up below or next to the *bon* festival altar, sometimes outside the house under the eaves. The normal spirits of the dead are venerated by surviving descendants to replenish their own vitality and thus achieve ancestorhood and later continue to hold up their spiritual status lest they lapse into wandering ghosts. On the contrary, the wandering ghosts are collectively venerated through formal rituals by the living not to replenish their vitality but to placate, pacify or appease their rage, resentment, or melancholy, or to keep them from falling into the realm of the ghosts.

### **7. *The whereabouts of the spirits***

The conviction that although the body ceases to exist the spirit is immortal entails belief in the existence of a world where the spirits of the dead reside. However, it is not easy to find convincing evidence concerning the location of the spirits of the dead or ancestors. The Japanese concept of the other world has been influenced by various folk beliefs and religions not only from Japanese indigenous religions but also from abroad such as Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and Christianity. During my fieldwork in Makabe, I asked many informants about where the spirits of the



dead or ancestors go and reside, but they had many different opinions about the spirits' whereabouts. Many places are considered to be the other world: from a place near the house, memorial tablets or *butusdan*, graves, mountains and the sea to heaven and the underworld. These various opinions about the whereabouts of the spirits of the dead or ancestors demonstrate the diversity of beliefs about the other world. However, as Smith stated, wherever spirits are it is important for the living to know where they are, because the living need to call on them for veneration and send them back after veneration in memorial services, especially at the *bon* festival (festival of the dead) (Smith 1974: 66).

One of my informants aged in his sixties told me, 'I don't know where the ancestors are staying but I'm sure they are coming back home every year at *bon* festival from somewhere else'. He also added, shakily, 'They may be staying at household graves (*ohaka*) because we welcome and send them off at the graves at the *bon* festival every year'. During the *bon* festival (August 13-16) in Makabe, members of each household go to their household graves in the late afternoon of the first day (on the 13<sup>th</sup>) and light a paper lantern (*chouchin*) to guide their ancestors to their home. At the end of the *bon* festival (on the 16<sup>th</sup>), people bring the ancestors back to their graves, hanging *chouchin* to guide the ancestors. Because of the relation to the custom of welcoming and sending-off spirits at graves, some people consider that the spirits of the dead or ancestors are located in their family graves. However, some other informants told me that the spirits of the dead go to mountains which are located nearby. When I asked a local Buddhist priest why some people believe that the spirits of the dead go to mountains, he told me that it is because of the geographical location of Makabe which is completely surrounded by many high and small mountains. However, the idea that spirits of the dead go to mountains is not only for people who live in Makabe, but is widely shared all over Japan. It may be inferred from the fact that seventy percent of the country is mountainous. It may also, from my view, imply the following widespread idea, that the dead must cross a thorny mountain (*tsurugi no yama*, literally meaning 'sword mountain') on the way to the other world after the thirty-fifth day from the death.

In many parts of Japan, the spirits of the dead are believed to go to the tops of mountains in spite of the long influence of Buddhism<sup>29</sup> (Yanagita 1975b: 282). The relationship between the spirit of the dead and the mountain was elaborated by Yanagita:

[T]here is some relationship between the idea that the spirit leaves the body to go to a high peak and the custom of carrying a coffin to a place near mountains. And there was a belief among us that as the body disappeared by degrees, the spirit could ascend from the base of the mountain until it finally reached the sacred boundary closest to the sky, where it could join the others and spend its time tranquilly. (Yanagita 1970: 157-158)

On most Japanese islands there are many mountains and the tops of such mountains are considered to be sacred and pure places where benevolent spirits are believed to dwell. These holy mountains are thought of as having sacred energy or vitality which is offered to the spirits of the dead to purify or eliminate the pollution of death. The belief that these purified spirits of the dead return from these mountains at stated seasons to protect and succour their surviving relatives is still widespread. Although there are many different beliefs and opinions about where the spirits of the dead are after death, one of the oldest and most widespread beliefs as to the final destination of the spirits is that they go to the top of holy mountains.

### **Concluding remarks**

In this chapter, I have mostly looked at different kinds of spirits and their relation to vitality and pollution. As I indicated, when a person dies, *tamashii* is separated from its *karada*. The recently separated *tamashii*, called *shinbotoke* (the spirit of the newly dead), can be transformed into one of three different kinds of spirits: a god (*kami*), ancestor (*hotoke*) or wandering ghost (*muenbotoke*). More specifically, those who are thought of as having brimming vitality in their lives or those who can be seen as the source of vitality become *kami* immediately after death without a long purification or veneration process. The Emperor and the war dead can be typical

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<sup>29</sup> In Mahayana Buddhism, it is believed that the spirits of the dead go to *gokuraku* (*Sukkāvātī* in Sanskrit: the Pure Land).

examples of *kami*. Those who have surviving descendants or relatives become *hotoke* whether they die well or not, because they can supplement their own vitality (which may have power to negate the pollution of death) by receiving various formal and informal ritual veneration and offerings from the descendants. On the contrary, if they do not have surviving descendants they become *muenbotoke*. Moreover, although they have already achieved ancestorhood, their ancestral status is not eternal because they can lapse into *muenbotoke* unless they are cared for continuously by their descendants.

What is the most striking feature of the spirits of the dead is that these spirits remain an integral part of everyday household life and are considered and treated as if they are still alive among their surviving family members. They continue to hold up their social identities, positions and personalities. They also age with their surviving relatives as time goes on and their household positions and positional titles are also changed as the relatives' positions and titles are changed. The surviving family members regularly share ordinary food, drink and stories with their deceased members in their everyday lives. Although these various activities involving the spirits of the dead are informal, routine, secular and personal, they sustain the actual ancestor worship because they create or enhance the intimate relationship between the living and the dead which then makes it possible for the dead to settle down in their households as the 'living dead'. By creating and enhancing an intimate relationship, both the dead and the living replenish their own vitality which has the power to negate death and pollution and thus they can be transformed into a state of purity.



Plate 22. A *butsudan* (household Buddhist altar)



Plate 23. A household grave with various offerings



Plate 24. A man and woman washing a gravestone



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# ***Pollution and the power of death***

### ***Introduction***

Ever since the publication of Mary Douglas's work, *Purity and Danger* (1966), there has been a great deal of work on impurity and pollution within anthropology. However, although many anthropologists have attempted to articulate what pollution is and to grasp its social and cultural implications, very few anthropological works on death are explicitly concerned with pollution and its implications, despite the fact that this pollution is always found in the context of death and mortuary rituals.

In Japan, pollution has long been a serious concern in folk beliefs and practices because it has been considered fearful, contagious and dangerous not only to the living but also to benevolent spirits such as Shintō deities and ancestors. Many indigenous Japanese folklorists have dealt with pollution to some degree and have developed the concept of pollution within Japanese folklore (see, e.g., Gorai 1992; Inoguchi 1965; Miyata 1981, 1983; Okiura & Miyata 1999; Saitō 1986; Sakurai 1974, 1975; Shintani 1987, 2000, 2005b; Yanagita 1975a). However, although pollution has been explored by Japanese folklorists, very few anthropologists, such as Norbeck (1952), Namihira (1984, 1985, 1987) and Ohnuki-Tierney (1984, 1987, 1993) have focused either implicitly or explicitly on its significance. Pollution has never been at the centre of anthropological studies on death and mortuary rituals in Japan, despite the fact that Japanese mortuary rituals are exemplary practices of managing such pollution. Furthermore, investigating the social and cultural implications of the pollution of death is extremely significant not simply for understanding the Japanese notion of death but also for grasping Japanese cosmology.

Therefore, the primary focus of this chapter is the exploration of the social and cultural implications of the pollution of death. I shall also investigate the



relationship and interaction between pollution and vitality through the various kinds of beliefs and practices surrounding death and mortuary rituals, and the way in which pollution can be eliminated or purified, and vitality can be supplemented or replenished.

### **1. *Is pollution still a part of Japanese mortuary rituals?***

Before proceeding further, it will be useful to clarify whether the contemporary Japanese mortuary ritual is still concerned with pollution and its elimination or purification because some anthropologists such as Fujii (1983), Nakamaki (1986) and Suzuki (2000) have tended to reject the existence of pollution, its association with death and mortuary rituals, and its social and cultural significance. For example, a recent anthropological work on death and mortuary rituals by Hikaru Suzuki (2000), who was trained in the United States and carried out fieldwork at an urban funeral company, based in northern Kyushu, examined the highly commercialised contemporary Japanese 'funeral ceremonies' (*sōgi* or *osōshiki*). Suzuki argues that in contemporary Japanese society, people no longer associate funerals with the pollution of death due to the development of a commercialised funeral industry which eliminated the 'traditional' idea that death is dangerous and fearful, and causes pollution (2000: 3). She states that, '[c]ontemporary funeral ceremonies not only suppress the concept of impurity but also distance themselves from the very idea' (2000: 92).

However, in many parts of the country, not only rural but also urban and suburban, the deceased and the deceased's body, spirit and family are still considered to be polluted, contagious and dangerous, although there are some differences in degree (see Bachnik 1995; Hamabata 1990: 54-75; Hendry 2003 [1987]: 158-159; Lock 2002: 211-226; Smith 1999; Wöss 1992). I would suggest that Suzuki overgeneralised the contemporary Japanese mortuary rituals which she encountered and their lack of association with pollution. There is also doubt about the extent to which one funeral company can represent contemporary Japanese mortuary rites, and their modernisation and commercialisation. Perhaps this was a particular concern in the funeral company where Suzuki worked during her fieldwork period in the

southernmost part of Japan. Nonetheless, as I have already noted, I believe that she attempted to apply the findings of a single case study to the whole of contemporary Japanese society with all of its complexity.

Apart from the overgeneralisation of her statement, the most fundamental issue that I have with her work is that her assertion that people today no longer associate funerals with pollution (Suzuki 2000: 3) is inconsistent with her own observations and interpretation. For example, Suzuki was very surprised when she heard from one senior undertaker that he felt ashamed that he worked as an undertaker and that he would never go out in public without first changing his suit for one that did not smell of incense, otherwise people would know immediately that he is either a priest or an undertaker (2000: 124). Suzuki carefully considered how this senior undertaker's unexpected feelings of shame and his behaviour should be construed. She wrote that '[i]ncense simply did not bother me, and it had never occurred to me that funeral staff were ashamed of the smell. I realised, however, that it is not the smell that is the problem, but the implications of the smell. In Japan, incense is a symbol of death' (ibid.). Thus, Suzuki, in her interpretation recognised that the pollution of death and its implications still affect contemporary Japanese.

When I was working at a local funeral home during my fieldwork in Makabe, I had exactly the same experience as Suzuki. However, it was not strange for me to change out of a dirty suit, because, at the beginning of my fieldwork, I had already realised that there was still a stigma attached to undertakers and their job and that they were perceived as being dirty and polluted by contemporary Japanese. One of my colleagues, Inose-san, always changed his suit after the funeral and dropped it off at the dry-cleaner's shop on his way back home from the funeral home, because he told me that his family, especially his two young daughters did not like the incense smell. I realised that, in reality, his daughters did not actually dislike the smell. They disliked their father's job as an undertaker, because they were ashamed to tell their friends at school. This is very similar to that described by Suzuki in her ethnography, in which, when one of her female colleagues decided to work at a funeral company, her parents were strongly opposed to her decision, and even after she had started working as an undertaker, they refused to reveal her job to their friends, relatives and neighbours (2000: 134-135). Suzuki also explained that many

corpse washers quit after only one or two years 'because many members of staff conceal the job from their parents, fiancé(e)s, relatives, and friends, and once the secret is uncovered they receive so much opposition that they quit' (2000: 156). Suzuki's ethnographic examples undoubtedly indicate that people still associate the dead, the corpse, the funeral and undertakers with pollution although she does not want to explore it in these terms.

Additionally, Suzuki explains the reason for the compressed and short procedure of contemporary Japanese death rituals by referring to 'the disappearance of the notion of death pollution' (2000: 94). She adds that '[i]f there is no death pollution, then equally, there is little reason to have a mourning period' (ibid.). However, I would argue that one of the main reasons why contemporary Japanese death rituals are remarkably compressed into several days, in comparison with the community-based 'traditional' death rituals, is that contemporary Japanese (both the bereaved family and guests) do not have enough time to hold and attend lengthy series of formal rituals because many of them have to return to work immediately after the funeral. In other words, the compressed and short procedure of contemporary Japanese death rituals are not products of the disappearance of the notion of death pollution but rather of a 'disappearance of time' for holding and attending drawn out rituals. Moreover, it is important to note that although contemporary Japanese death rituals are dramatically compressed, shortened and simplified in comparison with the past, it cannot be simply suggested that the notion of death pollution has disappeared. The socially and culturally established idea or concept of pollution through long standing beliefs and practices cannot easily be eradicated or changed within such a short period of time.

From my observations and my own experience of living and working with Japanese people, although contemporary death rituals are highly commercialised, modernised, simplified, compressed and predominantly managed by professional undertakers (*sōgisha*), it is hard to eliminate or prevent the long-established social and cultural association between death and pollution in Japanese society. During my fieldwork in Makabe, I found that many people still believe in the pollution of death, which exists in various forms in contemporary mortuary rituals, even though the fear of death pollution has somewhat subsided. Throughout this chapter, I shall attempt

to illustrate the fact that the pollution of death is still considered to be fearful, dangerous and contagious amongst many contemporary Japanese people through various ethnographic examples.

## **2. Pollution as disorder**

Before entering into a discussion of the Japanese concept of pollution and its systematic analysis, it is useful to look briefly at Mary Douglas's hypothesis about 'pollution as disorder' and to assess whether her perspective is relevant to understanding the Japanese concept of pollution. Mary Douglas's work, *Purity and Danger* (1966), discussed the essentials of impurity; for instance, she claimed that '[d]irt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements' (1966: 35). She further stated that impurity can be defined as 'matter out of place', which is always associated with a system (ibid.). She also indicated that '[u]ncleanliness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained' (1966: 40). She asserted that impurity cannot be a unique and isolated event because something cannot be impure without a standard of purity, and provided the following examples in support of her assertion:

Shoes are not dirty in themselves, but it is dirty to place them on the dining table; food is not dirty in itself, but it is dirty to leave cooking utensils in the bedroom, or food bespattered on clothing; similarly, bathroom equipment in the drawing room; clothing lying on chairs; out-door things in-doors; upstairs things downstairs; under-clothing appearing where over-clothing should be, and so on. In short, our pollution behaviour is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications. (Douglas 1966: 35-36)

She maintained that such disordered phenomena are regarded as impure or polluted. Moreover, she perceived impurity as an ambiguity at the boundaries of categories, which is the source of anomaly, because the ambiguity stems from something that is out of place and threatens proper order. She also ascribed the essentials of impurity to boundaries because disorder occurs at the margins of a system. She used the human body as a symbol of both a system and its boundaries. As a system, the human body is also vulnerable at its boundaries or margins, and thus the orifices of

the body can be symbolised as its specially vulnerable points (1966: 121). The substances that traverse these boundaries such as spittle, blood, milk, urine, faeces, or tears are marginal products which are considered to be polluted and dangerous (ibid.).

Although Douglas's hypothesis has been supported by many social scientists, and both Western and Japanese scholars, it has also been criticised by many anthropologists, such as Megis (1978: 310), Hershman (1974: 292-293) and Bulmer (1967: 21). Megis (1978), for example, questioned whether pollution is necessarily connected to disorder. She pointed out that disorder does not always produce pollution. She gave an example which contrasted with Douglas's example of shoes as being dirty if placed on a dining room table, and suggested that if there is a toy ship, stationery, a roll of paper towels, or a new dress on the dining room table, each of these is not dirty or polluted although each of them is as out of place as the shoes on the table (Megis 1978: 310). Many indigenous Japanese folklorists and anthropologists such as Namihira (1974, 1984), Miyata (1983), Sakurai (1974), Sekine (1995) and Shintani (1987, 2000, 2005b), do not follow Douglas's hypothesis in their works on elucidating the concept of pollution. Instead, some of them, such as Sakurai, Miyata and Sekine suggested that pollution can be defined as a 'loss or exhaustion of energy or vitality' (rather than disorder), which is a key to understanding the Japanese concept of pollution.

### **3. What is the Japanese concept of pollution?**

The term *kegare*, which has commonly been translated into English as 'impurity' or 'pollution', is a distinctive concept and has been of social and cultural significance in Japan from ancient times (see Ohnuki-Tierny 1984: 35-38). If *kegare* has long been a serious concern of the Japanese then what exactly is *kegare*, why is it significant, and how has been it conceptualised and developed in modern Japan? In order to answer these questions, in this section, I shall briefly introduce some of the main ways in which Japanese scholars have defined and construed the concept of *kegare*. I will then consider some of the ways in which Japanese people have dealt with *kegare* in their lives, through analysis of previous ethnographic works which have



been explored by Japanese ethnographers, and in combination with my own ethnographic information from my fieldwork in Makabe.

### **3.1. *Hare, ke and kegare controversy***

Japanese folklorists and anthropologists have researched and explained the concept of *kegare* as part of the triadic structure of *hare*, *ke*, and *kegare*. The relationship between these three concepts has received much attention since Namihira (1984) expounded the importance of *kegare* and its relation to *hare* and *ke*. However, the meanings of these concepts, and their relationship and interaction have long been debated among Japanese scholars. According to Shintani (2005a: 162, 2005b: 165), the controversy began with a debate over Yanagita's works on Japanese folk beliefs in which he pointed out the structural opposition of *hare* and *ke*. Although Yanagita did not clearly define the terms *hare* and *ke*, according to his theory, *hare* designated the 'non-ordinary' or 'formal' space and time of special ceremonial occasions or activities such as weddings, funerals and festivals, while *ke* designated the 'ordinary' or 'informal' space and time of everyday work and other routine activities (see Shintani 2005a: 162). Through the special ceremonial occasions or activities, people go into *hare* from *ke* and come back to *ke* from *hare*. Yanagita further maintained that Japanese folk life could be grasped if the rhythmic cycle of *ke* and *hare* were understood (ibid.).

However, his view of the structural opposition of *hare* and *ke* was challenged in the 1970s and 1980s. In contrast to Yanagita, Namihira (1974, 1984), a Japanese anthropologist who trained in the United States, defined *hare* as the pure, sacred, clean, good and happy, while *ke* was specified as the common, ordinary, profane and neutral. Namihira also introduced the term *kegare*, which is related to the filthy, impure, bad and sin. She emphasised the importance of *kegare* and its relation to *hare* and *ke*, and established a tripartite scheme of *hare*, *ke* and *kegare*. She claimed that the variations in Japanese folk beliefs or practices could be understood within the tripartite structural relationship or interaction of *hare*, *ke* and *kegare*. Although she did not make clear the exact nature of the relationship or interaction between the three concepts, she viewed *kegare* as the counter concept of *hare*. Additionally, it seems that Namihira constructed her triadic scheme of *hare*, *ke*, and *kegare* by

combining the dualism of Yanagita's '*hare* and *ke*', Emile Durkheim's 'the sacred and the profane', and Edmund Leach's and Mary Douglas's 'purity and impurity' (see Shintani 2000: 214). Through this combination, she expanded the basic categories of a binary opposition (*hare* and *ke*) into a series of tripartite relationships and interactions (*hare*, *ke* and *kegare*) which are found, for instance, in the Lévi-Straussian analysis of food as raw, cooked, and rotten (see Lévi-Strauss 1969 [1964]).

In a different approach, Sakurai Tokutaro (1974) suggested that *hare* and *kegare* did not express a contrasting relationship but rather that each was mediated by *ke*. He criticised Namihira's scheme of *hare*, *ke* and *kegare*, and their respective concepts. He viewed these three concepts as having arisen from 'agrarian' life. According to his interpretation of terms used by farmers, *ke* is identified with *ki* (literally meaning 'vapour'), implying the 'spiritual force or energy of the rice plant' (*ine no reiryoku*), which facilitates germination and growth of the crops (Sakurai 1974: 222). *Kegare* (pollution) is the 'exhaustion of *ke*', or the 'withered' or 'waned' (*kareta*) condition of *ke* (the 'spiritual energy'), and *hare* is the source of energy (1974: 224). The withered state of *ke* can be recharged or reinvigorated at events of *hare* (i.e., auspicious ceremonies and festivals) (*ibid.*). Sakurai suggested the triadic cycle from *hare* to *ke* to *kegare* to *hare*, and emphasised the importance of *ke* and its relation to *hare* and *kegae*.

Miyata (1983) also grounded his theoretical discussion of impurity within the context of the tripartite scheme of *hare*, *ke*, and *kegare*. He endorsed Sakurai's standpoint in this controversy but he added that *ke* is a term that stands for both the 'spiritual force' (*reiryoku*) of the rice plant and the 'vital force' or 'energy' (*seimeiryoku*) of humans (cited in Shintani 2005b: 165-166). He further viewed *kegare* as a subcategory of *ke*, and proposed a contrasting development on one side 'from *ke* to *kegare*', and on the other side 'from *kegare* to *hare*' (*ibid.*). Through the juxtaposition of these two sides he pointed out that *kegare* functioned to designate a liminal area between *ke* and *hare* (*ibid.*).

More recently, Shintani (1987, 2000, 2005b) criticised scholars who had followed the triadic cycle of *hare*, *ke* and *kegare*, and treated *kegare* as an independent state on the same level as *hare* and *ke*. He argued that there was no need to change Yanagita's definition of the terms *hare* and *ke*, but attention should

be devoted to a new definition of the term *kegare*, and to do this it was crucial to involve the ‘pollution of death’. According to his interpretation, the term *kegare* means ‘power of death’ (*shi no chikara*), which is characterised as filthy, dangerous, strong and infectious (Shintani 2000: 214-220, 2005b: 166). *Kegare*, in turn, is continually reproduced as a result or by-product of human life (*ibid.*). He then claimed that the term *kegare* contrasts with the term *kami* (literally meaning ‘deity’), which means ‘power of life’ (*seimei no chikara*), and introduced a new triadic relationship between *kegare*, *hare* and *kami* in which *kegare* is transformed into the state of *hare* and gives birth to *kami* (Shintani 2000: 219, 2005b: 166).

In this controversial debate, however, I would rather not support or follow one specific scholar or hypothesis. Instead, in order to reflect my ethnographic data, I would like to combine some relevant hypotheses and explain the concept of *kegare* by using the concept of *ke* as the counter concept of *kegare*, and exclude the concept of *hare* altogether. I would then argue that *ke* (identified with *ki*) is the ‘vital force’ or ‘energy’ of human life (*seimeiryoku*) and *kegare* is the ‘power of death pollution’. There is always an inverse relationship between *ke* and *kegare*. For example, if *ke* is full of vitality it may have the power to eliminate or diminish *kegare*. In this case, therefore, *ke* can be defined as a state in which *kegare* is weakened or eliminated. In contrast, if *kegare* overflows it has power to eliminate or diminish *ke*. In this case, it can also be said that *kegare* is a state in which *ke* is weakened or eliminated. However, it does not mean that *ke* becomes *kegare*, or vice versa. The role of purifying elements or rituals is to eliminate or weaken *kegare* and, at the same time, to supplement vitality for recovering the weakened state of *ke*, and ultimately transform the state of *kegare* into the fully recharged state of *ke*. *Kegare* and *ke* are always interdependently variable states, dependent on their contexts.

### **3.2. *Kegare* in the Japanese ethos**

*Kegare* has multiple manifestations. It may, for example, arise because of death, sexual intercourse, childbirth, miscarriage, menstruation, injury, illness, deformity, etc. (see Norbeck 1952: 270, 1954: 140; Namihira 1985, 1987: 65; Shintani 1987). Furthermore, various actions, such as murder, viewing or touching a corpse, killing animals, and incest or various acts of antisocial sexual conduct, are also believed to

produce *kegare*. Although all of the above may lead to *kegare*, the following two types of *kegare* are considered the most dreadful and dangerous: *shi'e* ('death pollution', also sometimes called *kuro fujyō*, literally meaning 'black pollution') and *ketsu'e* ('blood pollution', also called *aka fujyō*, literally meaning 'red pollution') associated respectively with death and blood (see Namihira 1985; Norbeck 1952: 271-275).

According to indigenous Japanese folklorists and anthropologists, blood has long been considered impure, contagious and dangerous when it flows out from the body as a result of disease, wounds, childbirth and menstruation. In pre-industrialised Japan, for example, menstruating women or those who had just given birth were considered polluted and had to avoid contact with Shintō deities (*kami-sama*). They were not able to make offerings to Shintō deities at household Shintō shrines or to enter local Shintō shrine precincts, and there were purification rituals for them to perform after their period of menstruation and after childbirth (see Kasulis 2004: 48; Namihira 1987: 68; Norbeck 1952: 271-272). In many districts of Japan, according to Namihira (1985: 93-94, 1987: 68), menstruating or postpartum women had to seclude themselves in special huts called 'monthly house' (*tsukigoya*), 'other house' (*taya*) or 'rest house' (*himaya*). In some other districts, they took meals at a separate table because if they had meals with their family members, it was believed that their family members also became impure and thus the taboos were extended to them (*ibid.*). According to Namihira (1987: 68), until 1965 in a mountain village in Niigata prefecture where she researched, it was taboo for men who worked in the mountains to eat meals in their own homes for twenty one days after a birth and some other households would serve them meals.

Although pollution connected with blood has been considered to be dangerous, as Namihira (1999: 135) notes, the negative image of blood pollution has now almost disappeared and certainly it has become much less important than it was in the past because nowadays almost all women in Japan give birth in a hospital and also they can control their menstruation cycle with birth control pills. In fact, it was hard to find any tangible examples of blood pollution during my fieldwork in Makabe. In contrast, death is still an uncontrollable event and thus the pollution of death inevitably occurs after death, due to the decomposition of the corpse. For this

reason, the pollution of death is still considered to be extremely dangerous, powerful, contagious and especially important today and it provides us with concrete examples of how the notion of *kegare* still continues to have a lingering influence on contemporary Japanese society.

In Makabe, the pollution of death can seriously inflict harm on the living if one either touches or comes close to a corpse. This pollution of death is not only spread to the deceased's family and relatives but also to the neighbourhood, members of the local community, and those who attend the funeral. As Namihira (2003: 185) noted, it has been believed that the density of death pollution differs according to the kin or members of the community. This belief also indicates that the time of disappearance of death pollution varies according to different groups of people. This is consistent with what Hertz stated in his work: '[a]lthough the funeral pollution extends to all the relatives of the deceased and to all the inhabitants of the house where the death occurred, they are not all equally affected' (Hertz 1960 [1907]: 39).

During the mortuary ritual in Makabe, as Shintani (2001: 10) noted, there are three groups of people who are involved in dealing with death: the deceased's relatives (those with consanguineal or affinal relationships with the deceased), neighbours or local community members, and funeral professionals. The deceased's family and relatives must undergo mourning for a certain period of time because they maintain either consanguineously or affinally close proximity to the deceased, and are thus considered to be extremely polluted and need to be isolated from local community members until they are released from pollution. It also takes longer to remove the high density of pollution from the relatives than from other groups of people. In general, the bereaved relatives are forced to avoid visiting sacred places such as Shintō shrines and imperial places, and attending auspicious events such as wedding ceremonies and Shintō ceremonies, for a certain period of time. They are released from pollution on the forty-ninth day (*shijūkunishi*) after the death and then the initial mourning period ends and they can return to their normal life.

The members of the local community assert 'traditionally' established beliefs and practices which demand that the deceased's family and relatives carry out proper rituals and mourning. They also practically assist the deceased's family with holding the funeral and related rituals. Although the high density of pollution does not affect



them to the same extent as the deceased's relatives, they too are thought to be contaminated by contact with the corpse or the relatives either directly or indirectly, and thus need to have their pollution purified. However, they are immediately able to remove pollution through purifying elements such as salt or water without the need for any segregation.

In the past, according to Saitō (1986: 106), it was believed that those who washed or helped to wash a corpse were affected by the high density of pollution to the same degree as the deceased's relatives, although they were not the deceased's relatives. However, these people could easily remove pollution by sprinkling salt on their bodies or bathing themselves (*ibid.*). Additionally, in the medieval period, according to Okiura and Miyata (1999: 150), as if it was an infectious disease, the pollution of death was considered to be highly contagious. For example, if a person touched or came close to the corpse, s/he was barred from entering Shintō shrines for thirty days. A second person who touched the person with death pollution had to be excluded for twenty days. A third person who touched the second person had to be excluded for ten days and a fourth person that touched the third person had to be excluded for three days.

Finally, funeral professionals who are professionally involved in dealing with death such as Buddhist priests, undertakers and crematorium assistants are free from the need to undergo mourning and eliminate or purify the pollution of death, because it can be conjectured that they do not have any consanguineal, affinal or communal relationships with the deceased. However, most importantly, this does not mean that they are not affected by the pollution of death, because it is in a sense inescapable that those who are involved in dealing with death, whether they are professional or not, are considered to be extremely polluted. Moreover, as previously mentioned, the pollution of death is closely connected with the idea that people have to consider death as something that is fearful and dangerous. With such a strong notion of pollution with regards to the matter of death, it is unavoidable that those who have a job that is related to death have been seen as humble, stigmatised, dirty and especially polluted and thus society has shunned or discriminated against them. When I was working at a local funeral home, as mentioned previously, I also realised that there was still a stigma attached to undertakers and their job and that they were

perceived as being polluted and humble by people. For example, as I already indicated at the beginning of this chapter, my colleague Inose-san, a senior undertaker, always changed his suit after the funeral before he went back home because his daughters disliked their father's job as an undertaker and were ashamed to tell their friends about it.

According to Namihira's observations (1985: 82-83), even Buddhist priests have to be segregated in order to participate in ceremonial feasts or events by Shintō shrines in some cases because although Buddhist priests do not directly handle the corpse, as they have officiated at the funerary and memorial rituals, they too have been exposed to the pollution of death. In other words, they are considered to be polluted and thus are segregated from Shintō ceremonies as a result of their role in the death ritual. In this sense, it can be suggested that although the deceased's family, relatives and local community members are temporarily contaminated by the pollution of death, which can be eliminated or purified by the passage of time, purifying elements and a series of rituals, funeral professionals are permanently contaminated by pollution which can never be removed or purified. This may not be irrelevant to the fact that funeral professionals do not care about their own purification. During my fieldwork, I never saw Buddhist priests and undertakers purify themselves of the pollution of death during or after a funeral. When I asked Inose-san whether undertakers purify themselves or not after the funeral, he smiled for a while and said, 'We don't because we are polluted (*kegareta*) people'.

Additionally, the pollution of death is considered to be contagious and dangerous not only to the living but also to benevolent spirits such as Shintō deities (*kami-sama*) and ancestral spirits (*hotoke-sama* or *gosenzo-sama*). For example, in Makabe, members of the bereaved family try not to visit Shintō shrines for a certain period of time because they are still considered to be polluted. This is to avoid polluting the Shintō deities. Moreover, as I described *kamidana fuji* (confining a household Shintō shrine) in Chapter Two, during the period of mourning, the bereaved family also cover their *kamidana* (household Shintō shrine) with a piece of white paper (*washi*) in order to protect the Shintō deities from death pollution. This practice of *kamidana fuji* is still seen at almost all funerals in Makabe. According to some elderly informants, in the past a member of the neighbourhood funeral

cooperative (*kumi-ai*) performed the *kamidana fuji* because it was believed that members of the deceased's family were polluted by *kegare* and thus could inflict harm on the Shintō deities when they performed the act.

#### **4. The polluting power of the corpse**

##### **4.1. The corpse and its surroundings**

During my fieldwork in Makabe, I soon realised that the corpse and its surroundings are seriously considered to be impure, fearful, dangerous and contagious. According to Gorai (1992: 1046), the corpse may 'traditionally' have been viewed as something to be feared in some way as a source of pollution and of malevolent spirits, and thus can inflict harm on the living if one either touches or comes close to the deceased's body. However, the defilement caused by the corpse is transferred not only to the living but also to everything coming into close contact with the corpse, as Hertz has stated:

The 'impure cloud' which ... surrounds the deceased, pollutes everything it touches; i.e. not only the people and objects that have been in physical contact with the corpse, but also everything that is intimately connected, in the minds of the survivors, with the image of the deceased. (Hertz 1960 [1907]: 38)

One reason for the idea of transferring defilement from the corpse to its surroundings may well be that the corpse is not simply a by-product of death but also a 'symbol of mortality' that reminds people of their own death and thus everything connected with the corpse or the deceased in their minds is considered fearful and dangerous. As Davies (2002 [1997]: 39) notes, another reason may be due to the physical facts of actual decomposition because in the process of decomposition the corpse is inevitably linked with bodily fluids, blood, noxious odours, maggots and flies which can contaminate the surroundings. It is therefore important to emphasise that the corpse is considered as being highly contaminating both symbolically and physically: symbolic pollution stems from the fear of one's own mortality by imagining death and dying, and physical pollution from the fear of contamination by the actual decomposition of the corpse.

When I was working at the funeral home during my fieldwork, I found much evidence to support the idea that the corpse and its surroundings are impure and contaminated by the pollution of death. For example, the deceased's body is ritually cleaned by the deceased's family to eliminate or purify the high density of pollution before it is placed in the coffin. More concretely, at the encoffining ritual (*nōkan siki*), the body is briefly cleaned with moist cotton wipes (*sējyōmen*) by all members of the bereaved family under the direction of professional undertakers. Although, in the past, the body was washed with water in a process called *yukan* (literally meaning 'washing a corpse with lukewarm water'), nowadays disposable moist cotton wipes are used to clean only the exposed parts of the body such as the face, arms, hands, legs and feet. When the bereaved family members clean the deceased's body, it is often noticeable that some of them, especially the young members, are reluctant to touch the deceased's body. They use only two fingers (thumb and index finger) to hold the moist cotton wipe and very briefly sweep the body and then quickly throw the gauze away into a plastic bag which will be collected later and burned by the undertakers. Although this practice of cleaning the deceased's body has now been dramatically simplified and transformed from what used to be the case, it is still frequently performed, in somewhat different forms, for the sake of eliminating and purifying the pollution of death because, I argue, the fear of death pollution has not changed and still continues to exist in contemporary Japan.

Additionally, the objects that have been worn, used or possessed individually by the deceased just before his/her death such as underwear, clothes, bedclothes (*futon*), rice-bowls, etc. are considered to sustain a high density of death pollution. These material items are thrown away or burned after the funeral in an attempt to eliminate or minimize the pollution of death. Some of these items are put into the coffin at the encoffining ritual (*nōkan siki*) and then cremated with the deceased's body. When I was working at the funeral home, I had many opportunities to attend the encoffining ritual as an assistant to a senior undertaker. After the body was placed in the coffin, my colleague always asked the deceased's family members to bring him some objects that have been used or possessed by the deceased. They usually tried to bring various items such as ragged clothes, *yukata* (informal *kimono*), socks, and even underwear. They would also bring some small items that the

deceased liked to use when alive, such as books, photos, clothes, shoes, hats, etc. However, some expensive and valuable items such as *kimono*, watches and jewellery are not included as encoffining items. My colleague and I would then tightly squash them into the space between the body and the coffin. We tried to put as many items into the coffin as possible, but many of them would not fit because of the limited space.

According to my colleague Inose-san, a senior professional undertaker, this practice of placing items in the coffin has a practical function of keeping the corpse in its proper place during transportation from the house of the deceased to the funeral hall or crematorium. He also told me that apart from this practical function, it has long been thought and believed that in some way those items make the departed spirit feel comfortable during their long journey to the other world. However, it seems to me that the deceased's family members exploit the opportunity to dispose of the deceased's now useless items as well as polluted ones. The deceased's family may no longer want to keep these items because they feel abhorrence towards them. They also dispose of other items of the deceased remaining after the funeral. They often ask the undertakers to dispose of large items such as *futon* (padded mattresses and quilts) because these are heavy and too big for them to dispose of themselves. I accompanied my colleagues several times to collect *futon* after funerals. We collected *futon* from the deceased's family house and took them into storage at the funeral home. When the storage was full of *futon* we transported them to the local government waste incinerator for disposal. Inose-san told me that the families are reluctant to keep or use the *futon* that belonged to the deceased until just before the body is put into the coffin because although they have cleaned the *futon*, they still have a fearful and polluted image of the corpse and thus if they use it they may feel very bad (*kimochi warui*), and have a nightmare.

Moreover, those who have died in tragic and unfortunate circumstances are considered to have a high density of pollution that is especially powerful and dangerous. I witnessed several funerals for those who died tragically when I was working at the funeral home. For example, as described in Chapter Three, the cases of Osawa-san who died alone and was found dead ten days later, Kitajima-san and his wife who suffered accidental death, and Yoshida-san who committed suicide



were all very tragic and unfortunate and their deaths were thus considered to retain a high density of pollution and they needed to be purified in a different and special way.

In the case of Osawa-san, his badly decomposed body was briefly cleaned by pouring vinegar on it to drive away the flies and maggots, and then it was put into a large black plastic bag which was then immediately placed into a coffin. The lid was put on the coffin with special glue and then it was nailed down tightly to prevent leakage of the smell and bodily fluids. In addition to these practicalities to prevent substantial and physical contamination by the decomposed body, the Buddhist priest put *mayoke* (paper amulets in the shape of a zigzag of white paper on which the word *kiyome* (purification) is written in both Sanskrit and Japanese) on the top and the four sides of the coffin to purify or eliminate pollution that is emitted from the decomposed corpse and thus protect the living from this highly contagious and especially dangerous pollution. Whether or not these activities are symbolic, they are connected with the fear of the pollution of death which is based on the disintegration of the physical body. In the case of Osawa-san's death, it may therefore be said, as I noted earlier, that pollution is derived from the physical facts of decomposition, because the corpse is inevitably accompanied by uncleanness through the process of decomposition.

In the case of Kitajima-san and his wife, the bereaved family members performed the *kawa segaki* ritual for forty-nine days to appease the spirits of the dead and to purify or eliminate pollution by pouring water over a cloth at the riverside because eliminating the high density of pollution is a gradual process which requires much assistance in the way of special purifying rituals.

Finally, in the case of Yoshida-san who died after jumping in front of a train, his suicide was also treated as an extremely tragic death, and thus it was considered to be highly contaminating and potentially dangerous. The badly mutilated body parts were collected and placed into the coffin on the spot and the coffin was directly transported to the crematorium and cremated immediately. As the condition of the corpse was extremely bad it was unnatural to hold a funeral, and so the tragically damaged corpse needed to be cremated right away. In this case, the process of the cremation has not only a substantial function in transforming the unpleasant corpse

into clean and white bones but it also has another function of eliminating or purifying pollution which emanated from the corpse because fire has long been considered a powerful means of casting out pollution. I shall deal with the power of fire as a purifying agent in more detail in the latter part this chapter.

#### **4.2. The double-grave system**

In the so-called double-grave system (*ryōbose*), two graves are utilised for the same person. One is the actual 'burial grave' (*umebaka*) where the corpse is physically interred without any markers. The other is the 'ceremonial grave' (*mairibaka*) where a monument is built. The burial grave is usually located in a remote place which is isolated from the community, whereas the ceremonial grave is built closer to the heart of the community such as in the household's land, near the house or in a cemetery attached to a household temple (*dannadera*). In the single-grave system (*tanbose*), the cremated bones or the corpse of the deceased is buried in the place where the tombstone or wooden grave marker is erected and this is where the memorial services are conducted. Although today the double-grave system is extremely rare, it used to be widespread in the southern and eastern parts of Japan (near Osaka and Tokyo).

Many Japanese folklorists have emphasised the significance of the double-grave system in Japanese mortuary practices and ancestor worship. They have focused primarily on its historical origins and the reasons for the separation between the location of the burial grave and the ceremonial grave (see, e.g., Akata 1980, 1984, 1986, 1988; Befu 1971; Inoguchi 1965, 1979; Mogami 1956, 1963; Shintani 1985, 1991; Takeda 1957). Although there are many different suggestions about its historical origins and the reasons for the separation, it has been understood that the corpse is regarded as a source of death pollution and believed to attract malevolent spirits, and thus needs to be spatially isolated in a remote place. For this reason, although the living feared the burial grave, the ceremonial grave was considered to be pure and benevolent because it did not contain the impure physical body that has the highest density of pollution.

During my fieldwork in Makabe, I found the double-grave system in use by several households in a small local mountain village called Nagaoka. In this village,

the burial grave is called *kami rantō* (literally meaning 'upper grave') and the ceremonial grave is called *shimo rantō* (literally meaning 'lower grave'). According to the villagers, these terms are probably derived from the geographical location of the burial grave, which is located at the bottom of a mountain and the ceremonial grave, which is located in the village halfway up the mountain. For example, in the case of Tsuge-san's household grave, the burial grave is located at the bottom of the mountain, about 500 metres away from the ceremonial grave. According to Tsuge-san, although today the household members erect wooden grave markers or tombstones on the burial grave site and visit it to clean, make offerings and hold individual memorial services, they still regularly offer food, drink and flowers and hold memorial services for the collective dead at the ceremonial grave at *shōgatsu* (New Year's Day), *bon* (festival of the dead) and *higan* (vernal and autumnal equinoxes), because it is still believed that the household ancestors return to the ceremonial grave from the top of the mountain. In Nagaoka village, the mountain is divided into three symbolic regions. The middle region, halfway up the mountain, where the living live is considered to be the secular, ordinary and neutral area. The bottom of the mountain where the corpse is disposed of and malevolent spirits wander about is considered to be the impure, filthy and inauspicious region. The top of the mountain where the Shintō shrine is situated and the benevolent spirits are believed to reside is considered to be the pure, sacred and auspicious area.

### **5. The purification of death pollution**

Although the pollution of death has long been considered highly contagious and especially dangerous and fearful, people have not thought of this pollution as something that is permanent. It has been considered a period of transition, so that people can try to cleanse and purify pollution by performing purification rituals with purifying elements such as water, salt, fire, etc. as quickly as possible. I also found that there are various ways of purification to remove or diminish the pollution of death during or after the funeral. In this section, I shall consider how people eliminate the pollution of death through their use of purifying elements.

First of all, water has long been considered to have a ‘supernatural’ power and has been used as a purifying agent. It is still the most commonly and widely used not only in Makabe but also throughout the country as it is an indispensable element in the cleansing and purifying the pollution of death during or after the funeral. For example, when mourners return to the funeral hall from the crematorium or the grave, they are ritually purified by pouring water over their hands and scrubbing them with salt to cleanse the pollution of death. Moreover, although nowadays moist cotton wipes (*sējyōmen*) are used to clean the deceased’s body, in the past the body was washed with water for the purpose of cleansing and purifying pollution. The reason why water is so common and is considered the most effective agent in repelling death pollution is that, according to Kasulis (2004: 50), fresh water comes directly from mountain streams winding their way down to villages below. Since the mountains are common sites of *kami* (deities), water is thought to have a supernatural power which may get rid of pollution. Moreover, as previously mentioned in Chapter Three, water is also considered to be a ‘source of vitality’, so it also functions as a device to replenish vitality and may have the power to eliminate or diminish pollution and, thus, finally recover the state of purity which has been weakened.

Water is also used both as a purifying agent and as a source of vitality. For example, as I noted in Chapter Three, in the case of Kitajima-san and his wife’s accidental death, the deceased’s family members performed the *kawa segaki* ritual for forty-nine days to appease the spirits of the dead and to purify or eliminate a high density of pollution by pouring water over a cloth at the riverside, as water is considered the necessary medium to dissolve pollution. In this case, water is also used to replenish vitality because it is considered to be a source of vitality, which may have power to eliminate or diminish pollution.

During my fieldwork, I witnessed some very intriguing scenes where participants of the funeral received a rolled moist white hand towel (*oshibori*) from professional funeral assistants (*seremoniya-san*) just after they performed *shōkō* (offering burning incense). The *oshibori* is served warm in the winter and cool in the summer. In fact, it is usually served in restaurants for customers to clean their hands and faces before drink and food are served - a ‘civilised’ tradition that became

standard practice on Japanese airlines and has spread to many other foreign airlines around the world (Kasulis 2004: 52). When I asked one of my colleagues, Inose-san, a senior professional undertaker, why the moist towels were served to participants after performing *shōkō*, he told me that when people hold the incense powder and drop it on the incense burner, the incense powder adheres to their hands and makes them dirty, and more importantly they are unhappy about the strong incense smell on their hands. According to Inose-san, the moist towels were not served in the past, so some fastidious people used to go to the toilet and wash their hands immediately after performing *shōkō*.

How are we to understand this activity of washing or cleaning the hands after performing *shōkō*? This activity, in my view, is not only about removing the smell, but also eliminating the pollution of death because, as I have already described why my colleague, Inose-san, always changed his suit after the funeral in the beginning of this chapter, the incense smell automatically implies death and funerals. In a similar manner, at the company funeral (*shasō*), which was held at the public auditorium, although the funeral was conducted according to Buddhist rites, participants offered flowers (*kenka*) instead of offering incense (*shōkō*) because they were not allowed to burn incense inside the auditorium due to the incense smell, which would provoke all sorts of unpleasant associations with death and funerals to other people at subsequent events at the auditorium.

Additionally, as water is considered effective in repelling death pollution and used for cleansing or purifying the outside of the living body as well as the corpse, it is also used for purifying the inside of the body, which has been contaminated by breathing polluted air during the funeral and eating polluted food at the funeral banquet (*kichūbarai*). For example, in the case of *tenju* (death in old age), the non-bereaved buy water or soft drinks and drink them on their way back home after the funeral. By drinking such drinks, they can cleanse and purify the inside of their body. It is very similar to the Shintō purifying practice of people rinsing out their mouths with water or drinking it as purifying act before approaching the Shintō deity at the gate of the shrine where a stone wash basin is located.

Salt has been considered to be another major element of purification. It is also very common to use salt in order to eliminate or purify the pollution of death



during or after the funeral. During my fieldwork in Makabe, I witnessed the salt purification ritual at almost all funerals I attended and observed. For example, when mourners return to the funeral hall from the crematorium or the grave, they are purified by pouring water over their hands and scrubbing them with salt before entering the hall. They also sprinkle salt over their shoulders when they return home from the funeral hall. In a similar way to water, salt is considered to be effective in repelling any malevolent spirits and death pollution that may have followed the living from the crematorium or the grave. During my fieldwork, I often witnessed how before leaving the funeral hall, the crematorium or the deceased's house, some participants would wash their hands with water and scrub them with salt so that they would not carry pollution into their daily lives. This ritual of salt purification, called *sio barai* (literally meaning 'salt elimination'), should not be omitted and it is still an essential part of the mortuary ritual in Makabe. This practice of using salt as a purifying agent may have come about because salt is extracted from the sea, which is where ancient ceremonial cleansings were performed and more importantly it is known to prevent decomposition. For this reason, in some coastal areas, according to Saitō (1986: 106), in the past, the bereaved family members or close relatives bathed themselves with seawater at the seaside to cleanse the pollution of death, and if they bathed at home, they sprinkled salt on their bodies before they washed.

Fire is also considered to be a powerful means of getting rid of the pollution of death, and is illustrated in the practice of burning incense and candles during the funeral. If the funeral takes place at the deceased's house, a torch is sometimes lit in the front yard to avoid or drive out the pollution of death. The burning of incense is inevitably required as part of the offering to appease the spirit of the recently dead, and the deceased's family necessarily keep incense burning at all times during the funeral. As indicated in Chapter Two, it is also believed that the wafting incense smoke drives malevolent spirits or wandering ghosts (*muenbotoke*) away from the deceased. However, apart from these reasons, more importantly, the burning incense can be considered to disperse or purify the pollution of death. It can be inferred that the burning incense has the substantial effect of counteracting the unpleasant smell of decomposition.

Furthermore, from the Buddhist point of view, fire is credited with the properties of expiation, purification and magical powers to get rid of malevolent ghosts. In this respect, burning a corpse to obtain white bones can be understood as a way of reducing or eliminating the uncleanness resulting from the decomposition of the body or its ghost. Thus, these pure white bones can be construed as Buddhist symbols of entering the Pure Land (*jōdo*) or Nirvana. It can also be inferred that the spirit of the dead may ascend to the other world through the cremation. The practice of burning a corpse has existed in Japan since prehistoric times and has been performed by a significant segment of the population since the medieval period, when it was popularised as a merit-generating Buddhist ritual (Bernstein 2000: 297). It may take a relatively long time to achieve the purification of the corpse in the case of a burial because it is a gradual process of decomposition that can take from months to years, depending on the environment, while in the case of a cremation; it is completed in one day. In fact, nowadays, cremation produces flesh-free white bones within several hours. Cremation thus practically mitigates fear of death pollution, which is derived from the decomposition of the corpse.

The other materials that are used during or after the funeral are also intended to purify or eliminate the pollution of death or prevent malicious spirits from entering the corpse as well as the living. For example, *sake* (rice wine) which is served to participants of the funeral at funeral feasts can also be seen as a purifying agent because *sake* has long been used and consumed as part of Shintō purification rituals and has been considered as 'holy wine'. Thus, by consuming *sake* after the funeral, the participants may eliminate or purify the pollution of death. In some districts of Japan, according to Saitō (1986: 107-109), *sake* was drunk before and after washing the deceased's body in the hope that it would prevent uncleanness. There was also a similar practice of blowing *sake* on the deceased's body to get rid of the pollution of death (*ibid.*).

Some foodstuffs that are provided to participants at funeral feasts are also thought to have power to diminish or eliminate the pollution of death. For example, rice and/or rice products such as boiled rice (*gohan*) and rice cakes (*mochi*) have long been consumed as central foods at commensal feasts after the funeral, because the rice plant is considered to be a 'source of vitality' and, as Sakurai puts it, has 'the

spiritual energy which facilitates germination and growth' (Sakurai 1974: 222). In this sense, it can be suggested that rice and/or rice products provided at funerals function as devices to replenish vitality and so may also have the power to diminish or eliminate pollution and recover the state of purity.

In Makabe, *tofu* (bean curd) is also served at funeral feasts. In the past, according to some elderly informants, *tofu* was provided with *sake* at grave sites for members of *kumi-ai* (the neighbourhood funeral cooperative), especially for those who had just finished burying the corpse because they were thought to be extremely contaminated by contact with the corpse and, thus, needed to purify pollution and to replenish vitality by consuming *tofu*. Similar to rice, *tofu* also functions as a device to supplement vitality and thus help to get over the state of purity which has been weakened, and also directly purify or eliminate the pollution of death. This may be inferred from the physical properties of *tofu*: purely white, soft and nutritious.

### **Concluding remarks**

Although some recent anthropological works on death and mortuary rituals take up the position that the contemporary Japanese mortuary ritual is no longer associated with pollution and that the notion of death pollution has disappeared, as I have shown through various ethnographic examples in this chapter, pollution is still manifested in various ways in Japanese mortuary rituals and it is still seriously feared by many people, not only the bereaved but also mourners (guests) and even funeral professionals such as Buddhist priests, undertakers and crematorium assistants. Thus, I would agree that the notion of death pollution still continues to exist in contemporary Japan because death is an inescapable event and thus death pollution inevitably occurs due to the decomposition of the corpse. It is also hard to change the long-established social and cultural association between death and pollution although the contemporary Japanese mortuary ritual is highly commercialised and entirely managed by funeral professionals, and because of this commercialisation, the practice of dealing with the dead has now been dramatically simplified and transformed. I found that various kinds of purification rituals are still vividly

performed during the process of the mortuary rites, in somewhat different forms, for the sake of eliminating and purifying the pollution of death during or after the funeral.

I have also introduced some of the ways in which Japanese scholars have defined the Japanese concept of pollution (*kegare*). Although it has been very controversially debated among many folklorists and anthropologists as to what *kegare* is, I have explained *kegare* as a counter concept of vitality (*ke*) and suggested that there is an inverse relationship between *kegare* and vitality. For example, if vitality is high it may have the power to eliminate or diminish *kegare* and if *kegare* is strong then it has power to diminish or weaken vitality. Thus, some purifying agents or elements such as water and rice or/and rice products diminish *kegare* by increasing or supplementing vitality rather than directly eliminate *kegare*. The inverse relationship between pollution and vitality is crucial in order to understand not only the way in which a person becomes the dead but also the process of purifying the pollution of death and achieving the pure status of the household ancestor. I shall explore the expression of grief through this inverse relationship between pollution and vitality in the next chapter.





Plate 25. A household Shintō shrine covered with a white paper in the centre



Plate 26. Members of *kumi-ai* cleaning their hands with water and salt



Plate 27. *Mayoke* (paper amulets)



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# *The suppression of grief: Coping with pollution*

### ***Introduction***

The emotional impact of death on the immediate survivors is not merely individual but is also shared by society members. Nonetheless, the social and cultural aspects which contribute to the emotional response to death have been explored less intensively and explicitly until recently. In fact, many anthropologists have not paid much attention to emotions. What is more surprising is the fact that such a crucial aspect of the human condition has been disregarded or even suppressed by anthropologists in spite of the fact that they have long relied on emotional relationships of rapport, empathy, and compassion to gain the trust of informants during their long-term ethnographic fieldwork. For the anthropologist, needless to say, it is essential to achieve a certain degree of emotional rapport with their informants, not only for the fieldwork to run smoothly, but also for their own research, because emotions can be viewed as significant features that implicate many social and cultural meanings, and these features contribute to an understanding of a specific society or culture. Thus, I would argue that emotions cannot be ignored or suppressed in anthropological studies and are immensely important especially when dealing with death and its rituals. Emotions or emotional expressions, no matter whether they are public or private, almost inevitably occur after death although they may vary in terms of their forms and degree.

According to Lindholm (2005: 31), the reason why anthropologists have been unconcerned with the analysis of emotions is that they have carefully heeded Durkheim's advice that 'emotions cannot be properly studied because they are fluid, mixed, not easily defined, and consequently impossible to analyse'. In other words,

it is difficult to find out whether people express their ‘true feelings’ and whether these are fully expressed; thus it is hard to articulate accurately how sad, happy or angry they are. From this point of view, it has been thought that ‘emotions are too “soft” and too subjective to be appropriate topics for research by anthropologists seeking above all to be impressively “hard” and empirical’ (ibid.). However, although Durkheim stressed the difficulty of attaining an adequate analysis of emotions, he made much of emotions in his essay on *The Rules of the Sociological Method* (1938 [1895]) and in his major work on *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (2001 [1912]). Paying close attention to the role of ‘collective emotions’ in the structuring of social interaction, he stated that ‘mourning is not the spontaneous expression of individual emotions ... it is a duty imposed by the group’ (2001 [1912]: 295), because ‘[t]he origin of mourning is the impression of diminishment that the group feels when it loses one of its members’ (2001 [1912]: 299).

Nonetheless, this crucial aspect of his work has often been forgotten by many sociologists and anthropologists who are more impressed with Durkheim’s empiricism and functionalism (Lindholm 2004: 31). Until very recently, some Durkheimian anthropologists have tried to justify the neglect of emotions. For example, like Durkheim, Metcalf and Huntington also stressed the difficulties of studying emotions. They made what I suggest is a clumsy excuse, namely that anthropologists have ‘special problems’ in dealing with emotions, because ‘[they] are not well equipped to interpret inner states’ of human beings (Metcalf & Huntington 1991 [1979]: 43). It seems that they kept psychologists in mind as well-equipped specialists for interpreting emotions or emotional expressions. However, the irony is that the emotional bonds with people that only occur during the anthropological fieldwork are never found in academic psychology. In other words, only the anthropologist has the privilege of observing and interpreting emotions in the context of anthropological fieldwork. It is therefore important to emphasise that for anthropological work, although there are some methodological and analytical limitations or difficulties when dealing with emotions or emotional expressions, taking the time to examine them is worthwhile.

Another reason why emotions or emotional expressions are neglected is that many social scientists have long stressed 'the psychic unity of humankind', i.e. that there is basically a shared humanity, and thus, whatever different beliefs people may have and whatever different types of societies or cultures they might inhabit, they share more or less the same emotional and cognitive qualities. In other words, emotions or emotional expressions are manifested roughly in the same way in different societies. In this universal sense, one may think of grief as a human universal. However, this universal view of emotions has been criticised by cultural relativists since Margaret Mead conducted her detailed observations of many relatively isolated cultures. Mead published her work on *Sex and Temperament in Three Societies* (1935), demonstrating that there are important variations in behaviour - how people live, hunt, work, form intimate partnerships and raise their children - across different cultures. She concluded that 'human nature is almost unbelievably malleable, responding accurately and contrastingly to contrasting cultural conditions' (Mead 1935: 280). Since then, cultural relativists have been keen to disengage emotions from an association with the body and instead want to view them as socially and culturally constructed rather than biologically given. In this sense, emotions or emotional expressions may be thought as quite different between societies and cultures. In other words, although some people feel this way, this might not necessarily be the case for people from other societies and cultures. There are therefore no emotions or emotional expressions that are universally shared. What emotions are felt, how they are expressed, and how they are understood may well be matters of society and culture.

In this chapter, I shall attempt to explore the way in which grief is experienced and expressed or suppressed during the period of mourning and try to interpret their outward emotional actions or behaviour. More specifically, I shall attempt to discover particular patterns or features of grief and analyse their social and cultural implications in relation to pollution and vitality.

## **1. Do the Japanese grieve?**

When I first attended a funeral in Makabe and saw members of the deceased's family, I was very surprised that they looked amazingly composed. They did not cry loudly during the funeral. I even noticed that they tried to restrain their grief and hide their tears. At that time, for me (as a Korean), it was difficult to understand such behaviour because their grieving behaviour was quite different from that of Korean family members. Korean mourners are usually very open in expressing their grief and it is very common not only for women but also for men to scream or wail (*kok*) loudly in public during the funeral. Mourners wail as loudly as possible to offer their condolence. When I recall my paternal grandmother's funeral, my parents and my father's brothers and sisters and their spouses wailed loudly. They all wailed together and sometimes took turns without a pause until my grandmother had been buried. They bitterly shouted over and over again: 'Aigo-o! Aigo-o! Aigo-o! ....' Although some Korean people openly admit that this expression of grief may be somewhat artificial, it continues because it is demanded by custom (see Janelli & Janelli 1982: 70); this ceremonial wailing is a symbol of sorrow and has long been considered to be proper filial behaviour in Korea (see Choi 2003: 84-92).

Moreover, the Japanese emotional response to death during the funeral ritual also clearly contrasts with the Chinese one. Similar to Korean mortuary rituals, people in Chinese mortuary rituals exhibit loud wailing or sobbing at various points throughout the funeral (see, e.g., Johnson 1988; Tong 2004; Watson 1982; 1988a; 1988b). For example, female members of the deceased's family burst into high-pitched and stereotypical wailing at the moment of death and they continue to take turns to wail until the deceased has been placed in the coffin (Watson 1982: 160). The wailing is then augmented by the sound of a reed instrument (*ibid.*). According to Tong (2004: 78), in Chinese death rituals, '[w]eeping is often taken as a measure of filiality' and thus 'not to show grief or not showing enough grief is perceived as being unfilial and opens the person to gossip and backbiting from others'.

In comparison with Korean and Chinese mourners, Japanese mourners hardly cry out at all during the funeral. In many cases, they silently weep with their heads

bowed. Although Korean and Chinese mourners cry loudly and show much more outward emotion than Japanese mourners during the funeral ritual, we cannot term the Korean and Chinese mourners as more emotional, more sorrowful and more sympathetic than Japanese mourners because grief (or its expression) is shaped by culture and is 'socially constructed'. According to Durkheim (2001 [1912]: 295), '[m]ourning is not a natural impulse of the private sensibility bruised by a cruel loss; it is a duty imposed by the group. They lament, not simply because they are sad, but because they are obliged to lament'. His statement can be applied not only in the context of Korean and Chinese emotional responses to death but also in the context of Japanese responses. For example, one may argue that Korean and Chinese mourners wail loudly, not simply because they are sad, but because they are obliged to wail by their group and society. In a similar manner, Japanese mourners do not wail, not simply because they are not grieving, but because they are obliged to restrain their grief by their group and society. From this social and culturally relativistic point of view, we therefore cannot simply suggest that Korean and Chinese mourners are more sorrowful than Japanese mourners.

Although Japanese mourners try not to show their grief in public during the funeral, they often express their grief in private before and after the funeral. When I was working at the local funeral home during my fieldwork, I had many opportunities to observe personal grief before and after the funeral. As soon as a person dies in hospital, the deceased's family normally contacts a local funeral home to transport the deceased from the hospital to the deceased's house. When I arrived at the hospital with my colleague as an assistant to transport the deceased, some members of the family were losing control of their emotions and weeping in front of the deceased. At times, I also witnessed some female members of the family crying loudly without being concerned about nurses and undertakers. They needed a certain amount of time to gain control over their extreme emotions. When the deceased arrived at home and was laid down on his/her *futon* (mattress) in a *washitsu* (Japanese-style room), the members of the family regained their composure.

After the deceased was laid out properly and his/her pillow-side was decorated, professional undertakers very carefully interpreted the bereaved family's emotional expressions and decided whether they were ready to talk about the



arrangements for the funeral. After the consultation, the family received visitors such as relatives, friends, neighbours and community members. At this time, they attempted to hide their grief from visitors and maintain composure. Although they tried to exhibit a peaceful and calm expression at this point, I often noticed they looked very grave and serious. I saw some male members of the family who had very serious and gloomy looks and drew deeply on their cigarettes in deep silence while female members were receiving visitors. At times, female members worked in the kitchen in silence while male members received visitors.

During my fieldwork, of course, I was not able to directly ask mourners about their emotional condition during the funeral because this would be improper and might upset them. For this reason, I tried to find someone who had recently experienced loss. Although I felt that people would not be used to sharing their personal feelings with others, especially a foreign researcher, and would tend to avoid open discussion concerning the loss of their loved one, I was able to talk to some of my informants about their emotional condition and grieving behaviour during the funeral. One man, Taniguchi-san, who is in his early forties, experienced the loss of his mother several years ago. His mother died at the age of 68 from an infection after surgery for bowel cancer. He told me that his mother's sudden death was particularly difficult for him but he could not cry in front of guests during his mother's funeral. When I asked him why he could not cry during the funeral, I was told, 'My mother's death was so sudden and I could not believe her death. You know! If we are really shocked by the sudden death of a loved one, although we are very sad (*kanashii*), we can't cry'. He continued by saying, 'But, after the funeral ceremony, when I got back home from the funeral hall and when I realised that she was no longer at home and that she was dead, I cried in front of the temporary altar with her portrait'. Finally, although he agreed somewhat that the deceased's family do not usually show their grief in public during the funeral, he did not agree that they are non-emotional or not sorrowful about the loss of their loved one and that it was much more complex than simple social expectations concerning outward expressions of grief in public.

## **2. Why do the bereaved not show their grief in public?**

In order to discover the social and cultural implications of grief, it is worth considering why mourners do not usually express their grief in public during a funeral. Although many anthropologists have dealt with Japanese death rituals, they have not paid much attention to grief or grieving behaviour of the surviving relatives. Several anthropologists have briefly mentioned grieving behaviour without any careful interpretation or analysis, and have simply stated that the Japanese try not to show their grief in front of others during the funeral (see, e.g., Choi 2003; Suzuki 2000: 148). They do not explicitly explain why the mourners tend to avoid showing their grief in public. I could not find any definitive explanations concerning mourners' grieving behaviour from previous anthropological works on the Japanese mortuary ritual. In this section, I shall try to suggest a number of reasons why the mourners attempt not to show their grief in public during the funeral. I shall suggest that one of the main reasons for not showing their grief might be linked with the pollution of death. As Taniguchi-san mentioned, it is quite possible that the mourners cannot accept the actual death of their loved one because of the sudden nature of the death and, thus, they cannot cry during the funeral, although this seems to be Taniguchi-san's personal point of view. However, apart from this personal experience, I shall try to use some explicit examples that may explain why mourners do not show their grief in public.

According to a local Buddhist priest, in Makabe, there is a religious or folk belief stating that it is taboo for mourners to weep during a funeral. When I talked to a Buddhist priest about Japanese mourners' grief and why they do not cry loudly during the funeral, he told me that a display of tears was taboo for mourners during the mourning period, because it was believed that if mourners cried, the tears would create a flood and thus the deceased would be unable to cross the death river (*sanzu no kawa*)<sup>30</sup>. It was traditionally said that, 'If you drop your tears on the deceased's body, the death river will be flooded, and thus the deceased cannot go to the other world (*jōdo*)' (*Shinin ni namida wo kobosu to sanzu no kawa ga kōzū ni natte shinda*

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<sup>30</sup> The boundary between this world and the other world.

*hito ga jōdo ni ikenai*). He also told me that although people in large cities no longer seem to be concerned with this belief, it might still affect mourners in Makabe and in many rural districts.

Moreover, there are other possible reasons why mourners do not show their grief publicly. Although public wailing by professional female criers (*nakionna*)<sup>31</sup> existed in certain coastal areas and islands in the past, this wailing custom never prevailed throughout the country (see Inoguchi 1954: 208-213). Wailing or sobbing in public during the funeral has been largely absent not only in Makabe but also in many parts of Japan. As described in Chapter Two, Japanese funerary rituals do not especially emphasise grief but rather the spiritual and social aspects of the funeral. In other words, the emphasis of Japanese mortuary rituals is not on the individual or collective grief or sorrow of the surviving relatives, but on the condition of the spirit of the dead, reaffirming family solidarity, and enhancing the social status of the surviving relatives. In this vein, for mourners, the funerary rite is not considered the occasion or the arena to grieve the loss of their loved one, and thus they are reluctant to express their individual or collective grief during the funeral.

Furthermore, the deceased's family members must entertain their guests without the slightest hint of inconvenience or trouble during the funeral. They are obliged to prepare many things and provide the best service for their guests' convenience. For example, in Makabe the deceased's family and the neighbourhood funeral cooperative (*kumi-ai*) provide free transportation for guests to travel to the funeral hall from the town centre or village. They also prepare enough chairs, food, drink and gifts (*okaeshi*) for the guests. More than that, they must offer comfort to their guests, not only 'physically' but also 'mentally'. In this circumstance, where the focus is on the guests, the sobbing or wailing of the surviving relatives can make the guests annoyed and feel uncomfortable, rather than commiserating with them. More importantly, I would suggest that for the guests, the sobbing or wailing of the surviving relatives evokes not only the fear of death but also the pollution of death. In other words, the sobbing or wailing can be a sign of death pollution which the

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<sup>31</sup> *Nakionna* (crying women) were hired for the wailing which led the ceremonial lamentation. They cried according to the amount of rice given in remuneration. The wailing performance was similar to singing, an expression that does little to connote the emotions.

guests hate so much. In contrast with grief, cheerful emotions such as laughing and smiling are thought of as signs of vitality.

The discomfort of the guests from the sobbing or wailing may cause problems for the deceased's family when strengthening social relationships with their guests. This sobbing or wailing can also be a disgrace, not only to oneself but also to one's family. In this respect, we can reaffirm that the funeral has a substantial function which may provide the opportunity for the living to strengthen social ties between the surviving relatives and their guests (community members, associates, remote relatives, etc.) and to reinforce the social and economic status of the surviving relatives. Therefore, it now seems clear that, in the context of the Japanese death ritual, consoling and comforting the surviving family is much less important than the family members caring for the guests. In these circumstances, it may not be acceptable for the surviving relatives to sob or wail in front of their guests during the funeral because it is not a socially demanded or welcomed practice.

During my fieldwork, I found decisive evidence that wailing or sobbing is not welcomed behaviour during the funeral. When I was working at the local funeral home, I always stood at the very end of the funeral hall during the funeral ritual and tried to observe the participants (not only the bereaved relatives but also the guests) and especially their emotional expressions. At the end of the funeral, the deceased's family members carry the photograph of the deceased, the mortuary tablet (*noihai*), the urn, the food offering and flowers, and stand in a row with their backs against the funeral altar, and the chief mourner makes a short speech about the deceased's life and the cause of death. S/he finally ends the speech by giving thanks to everyone for attending the funeral (*kaisō*) and then bows to the audience. At this time, the deceased's family members are usually silent with their heads lowered, although female members sometimes weep quietly.

However, I saw one widow in her fifties who had lost her husband to lung cancer, suddenly sob loudly in front of the guests during the chief mourner's speech. It seemed to me that her sobbing was noticeably loud, compared to the sobbing of other female mourners at other funerals. She burst into sobs when the chief mourner started to speak about the deceased's life with a muffled voice. Although she covered her mouth with a handkerchief, her sobbing was loud enough for guests to

hear because the funeral hall was very silent and peaceful. At that time, I witnessed several middle-aged female guests who were sitting in the back row, whispering about her sobbing, ridiculing the widow. I was very shocked by their behaviour because I had expected people to feel sympathy for her.

As soon as the funeral finished, I asked one of my colleagues, Inose-san, a senior professional undertaker, why some guests had ridiculed the sobbing widow at the end of the funeral. He immediately told me that they are 'bad people' (*warui hito*). He also added, 'It is a breach of etiquette to do so'. His answer was simple and decisive but I still was not sure why the female guests had ridiculed the widow. It seemed to me that he did not want to explain the real reason to a foreign researcher. Later, I saw that even Inose-san gossiped with his colleagues about the widow, even though he had just condemned the guests for such behaviour. He entirely confused me with the inconsistency of his words and deeds. I therefore needed to find someone who could clear up my doubts.

On the following day, I asked one of my other colleagues, Ukaji-san, who is in his thirties and has seven years' experience as an undertaker, why the sobbing widow was an issue among our colleagues. Although he was my senior colleague, I had a very close relationship with him because we were close in age and we worked as a pair. For this reason, I assumed that he might tell me the truth about the issue. He gently explained that the ridicule occurred because it was unusual to hear such loud sobbing during the funeral. After a little while he continued saying, 'It is also a breach of etiquette to sob loudly in front of the guests during the funeral, and because of this, some guests probably felt annoyed and displeased and so they ridiculed the widow'. Although Ukaji-san did not directly blame the widow and her behaviour, it seemed to me that the bereaved also must observe the rules of etiquette that have been tacitly consented to by social members.

As my fieldwork went on, I gradually learnt that sorrow or grief for the loss of a family member is a 'personal' or 'family matter' which should be handled personally or within the family. It appeared that trying not to show private emotions in public during the funeral has long been a kind of virtue for a mourning family. This distinction of emotions or emotional expressions between the private and the public realm may be explained in terms of the dichotomy of *uchi* and *soto*. The term



*uchi* can be defined as ‘inside’, ‘internal’, ‘private’, ‘our household and home’ or ‘in-groups’, whereas the term *soto* means ‘outside’, ‘external’, ‘public’, ‘outside the household and home’ or ‘out-groups’ (see Lebra 1976: 112; Nakane 1972: 120-121). The notions of *uchi* and *soto* dominate all kinds of human relationships in Japan and people intentionally or unintentionally make a distinction between inside and outside in order to establish a ‘sense of security’ and ‘stable condition’ within their groups. The origins of the dichotomy of *uchi* and *soto* can be found in the ‘traditional’ household system ‘*ie*’, because the *ie* system functions as a normative device to shape behaviour between member and non-member, between insider and outsider, and between groups (Hamabata 1990: 46).

According to Lebra (1976: 112), the Japanese distinguish one situation from another according to the dichotomy of *uchi* and *soto* and their behaviour is differentiated by whether the situation is defined as *uchi* or *soto*. This behavioural difference corresponds to the difference between *honne* and *tatemae*. The term *honne* can be defined as one’s ‘true feelings’ which cannot be expressed openly and thus they are suppressed in actual, outward behaviour; in contrast, the term *tatemae* as ‘public or outward behaviour’ is expected by the outside world (and thus in such a situation that is often far from genuine or frank) (see Hendry 2003 [1987]: 49-50; Lebra 1976: 146). These paired terms (*uchi/soto* and *honne/tatemae*) share the characteristics of relationality, so that each is defined in relation to the other. These mutual concepts may help us understand why the Japanese do not usually express their ‘true emotions’ in public during a funeral. People distinguish between their *uchi* and *soto* in their relationships, and treat and speak to other people accordingly, using *tatemae* for *soto* people (outsiders) and *honne* for *uchi* people (insiders). In other words, although they can directly express their *honne* to the group of *uchi* people, they are not allowed to express their *honne* to the group of *soto* people. Instead, they are forced to express *tatemae* to the group of *soto* people. In this context, insiders must always be attentive to social relationships with outsiders.

In the same manner, members of the bereaved family are regarded as a group of *uchi* people (insiders) and the guests as a group of *soto* people (outsiders). The members of the bereaved family can show their true emotions to the members of their same family, but they may not express their emotions in front of guests. If they

show their private emotions to outsiders, they may be thought of as impolite. This impoliteness of the insiders towards the outsiders may cause the relationship between the insiders and the outsiders to break down, because in the social relationship between *uchi* and *soto*, insiders must make great personal sacrifices to honour outsiders. Additionally, insiders must be polite to outsiders by not showing their private emotions and by maintaining a certain distance (a formal relationship) between insiders and outsiders, and therefore protecting the 'inner feelings' from the probing of outsiders (Hendry 2003 [1987]: 50). On the contrary, showing 'inner feelings' to outsiders indicates that their group is not strong enough to take care of their family matters or hardships, and therefore the 'sense of security' or 'stable condition' of the inside group may be weakened.

However, more importantly, as Hendry (2003 [1987]: 47) notes, the concept of *uchi* and *soto* can be associated with the 'clean' or 'pure' inside, and the 'dirty' or 'polluted' outside, respectively. It is not difficult to find clear evidence to support these associations between *uchi* and the pure inside of the house, and between *soto* and the polluted outside world, in everyday Japanese life. For example, when entering into their houses, people take their shoes off so as not to bring the dirt of the outside (*soto*) into their homes. At times, they change their clothes, and even wash their face, hands and feet. However, on the occasion of a death, I would suggest that these associations can be changed inversely. In other words, *uchi* can be associated with the 'polluted' inside and *soto* can be associated with the 'pure' outside because the corpse is placed within the home and is considered a source of pollution. In this manner, the bereaved family as a group of *uchi* can be considered polluted and the non-bereaved guests as a group of *soto* can be considered pure. The sobbing or wailing of the bereaved family can also be regarded as impure and polluted and thus should be handled within the polluted house. In this sense, I would argue that the sobbing or wailing can make the pure guests not only displeased but also polluted.

### **3. Women cry and men don't**

During my fieldwork, I found out that there is a subtle but important difference between men and women in terms of how they express their grief. The difference is

that male members of the bereaved family usually try not to show their grief in public during the funeral, while female members often show much more grief than male members. In this section, I would like to explore how men and women differ in expressing their grief and to attempt to articulate particular social and cultural explanations for this gender difference. From my observations, during the funeral female members often tended to sob quietly and covered their mouths with a handkerchief, while male members were usually very silent with sad faces. Although male members of the bereaved family are not socially allowed to show their grief in public, female members who do so are often, to some degree, overlooked provided that they do not wail too loudly in front of the guests.

Apart from the expression of grief in public during the funeral, more importantly in my observation there was a more striking difference in the level of grief or the expression of grief between male and female members of the bereaved family in private before and after the funeral. Male members tend not to show their grief in private places either. Most of those who I witnessed during my fieldwork tried to suppress their tears in front of their family members, although some of them, especially the young male members, tried to hide tears by lowering their heads and quickly wiping away their tears with a handkerchief. In contrast, female members expressed much more grief in private places compared to their grief in public. For example, as mentioned previously, when I arrived at the hospital to transport the deceased, I witnessed some female members of the bereaved family losing control of their emotions and crying loudly in front of the deceased, while male members were trying to suppress their grief. I also witnessed this difference in the expression of grief between male and female members when I attended the encoffining ritual (*nokan siki*) that is privately performed by the deceased's family members (*miuchi no hito*) under the guidance of professional undertakers at the family's house before the deceased is transported to the funeral hall (*saijyō*). At the encoffining ritual, after the death robe and makeup are put on, the deceased's body is placed in a coffin and then the lid of the coffin is slowly closed by all the family members. At this point, some female family members would burst into tears and wail loudly with their arms on the coffin, while male members usually tried to suppress their tears.

How are we to understand this difference in the expression of grief between male and female members of the bereaved family? The difference might arise from 'dominant gender expectations' which may affect each individual's social behaviour. In this view, each society has dominant gender expectations of social behaviour for the expression of emotions that members must consider. Therefore, how people express their grief is influenced by social expectations. Japanese society is not at all unusual in the explicitness of its expectations. There seems to exist different gender expectations for the expression of emotions in Japanese society. Men are not expected to show their emotions in public. If men show their emotions in front of others, they may perhaps get a clear message about the other person's discomfort or even be condemned by others. When they experience this kind of public condemnation of their behaviour, they are unlikely to engage in such behaviour again or allow other people to behave in this way.

In contrast, women are allowed to show their tears and to sob quietly, to some degree, as long as they do not wail loudly. In this respect, social expectations to control emotions are higher for men than for women. What is most intriguing is that if women do not express any grief in public during the funeral it may also cause social problems for them. I asked my colleague, Ukaji-san, 'What happens if women, like men, do not show any grief in public during the funeral?' He unexpectedly lapsed into silence for a while and then said carefully, 'In the same way as the widow who wailed loudly and thus she was ridiculed by others, they perhaps get the blame for not showing their emotions and are labelled as 'cold' or 'hard' women (*tsurenai onna*)'. In the case of women, they are subjected to a double standard: they may not mourn loudly but also they are not allowed to have no expression of mourning. Instead, they must show some grief, but not too much; this 'moderate' amount of emotion in public helps them to escape ridicule or blame from others.

According to Whiting (1980), this kind of gender-related social behaviour stems from early childhood experiences that are shared by society members. They are reinforced throughout the individual's life by the fact that they are shared. As this is so, it is important to illuminate here how the gender-related social behaviour for emotion is generated in Japanese society. An understanding of social expectations of gender roles may assist an understanding of why men are considered

to be unemotional and women are seen as emotional. According to Smith (1987: 3), Japanese society has a strong expectation that 'men behave like men, women like women'. From early childhood, male children are trained to be '*otokorashii*' (manly; masculine) and female children are trained to be '*onnarashii*' (womanly; feminine) (ibid.). This training of masculinity and femininity is applied to 'demeanour, activities, interests, and preferences' (ibid.). Through this early training, male children are encouraged to 'be strong' and to refrain from crying, whilst female children often allow themselves to show their tears when they are upset.

Additionally, Lutz (1988: 16) noted that '[g]ender ideologies in any society reflect the power relations between women and men, and they do this by associating the less powerful gender with culturally devalued characteristics', and, in the case of American society, 'women are that [devalued] gender and emotion is such a characteristic'. She added that in those societies '[e]motion has often been treated as a "mental health" problem or as an animal or mammalian trait rather than as a particularly human, intelligent, and social adaptation' (ibid.). Her statement on the relationship between gender and emotion can be applied to the context of Japanese women, to some degree, because in Japan, especially in rural districts, women are still considered to be weak and feeble and thus they tend to be associated with culturally devalued characteristics such as domestic work, childcare, pollution and emotion. In this respect, we can therefore conjecture that the difference in emotional expression between men and women might perhaps be correlated to the 'traditional' male dominant household system, *ie*, the 'archetypal patrilineal system' in which the father, as a senior male, had absolute power, and the eldest son inherited the family estate. In this male dominant household system, women were subordinate to the dictates of men.

Although Japan is considered to be one of the most developed, modernised and urbanised countries in the world and the *ie* system was dissolved under the Civil Law reformed after the Second World War, Japan still seems to maintain the 'traditional' *ie* ideology in terms of the unequal status between men and women. This *ie* ideology stands for the superiority of the male and the subordinate status of the female. There is still a belief in Japanese society that gender equality may destroy the household and its system by inducing destructive competition between



men and women (Smith 1987: 25). In this respect, female family members are allowed to cry in front of male members because male members do not want the female members to look as if they are on the same level as the male members. In other words, female members are compelled to cry as a way of signifying subservience to male members. In a similar manner, as I have previously indicated in the case of Taniguchi-san who could not cry during his mother's funeral, this can also be explained by the 'traditional' *ie* ideology that male members are superior to female members of the family. Although Taniguchi-san explained to me that he could not cry during the funeral because he could not accept his mother's sudden death, the actual reason for not crying, in my view, may perhaps be that he must maintain the superiority of his status as the head of the household.

I would also suggest another possible expectation of showing emotions for women. As I indicated in Chapter Five, in many districts of Japan women have long been considered as being unclean, polluted and contagious because of their relation to menstruation and childbirth. Menstruating or postpartum women had to seclude themselves from their family members for a certain period of time. Because women have long been regarded as polluted beings, they may also be easily associated with death pollution during a funeral. It seems that they are expected to expose themselves to death pollution by showing their grief. By doing this, I would argue that they may absorb death pollution and thus diminish the high density of death pollution for others and eventually protect other household members from death pollution.

#### **4. Different degrees of grief**

During my fieldwork, I found out that the degree of grief varies depending on a number of complex factors. For example, the kinds of death that occurred, the kinds of persons that died, the intimate relationship between the survivors and the deceased (how close they were to the deceased and how long they had known him/her), social expectations, all have an impact on the degree of grief. However, most importantly, all these factors are related to pollution and vitality. In this section, I explore the different degrees of grief and its relation to differing amounts of vitality or pollution.

As I previously described in Chapter Three, in the case of *tenju* (natural death or death in old age) the most elaborate and joyous funerals are usually held for the deceased who have lived full lives because a death from old age is considered to be a good death and full of vitality. Thus, there is something of a vigorous, energetic and delightful atmosphere during such a funeral. I observed many funerals for those who died of old age during my fieldwork. However, I did not find any exceedingly sad or painful expressions from members of the bereaved family before, during or after the funeral, not only in private places but also in public places. Instead, it seemed to me that they looked very composed and peaceful. Some members of the family were very proud of their deceased family member for living a full life. The bereaved family members often received guests with a slight smile. In this festive atmosphere, it is also very common to witness members of the neighbourhood funeral cooperative (*kumi-ai*) and guests making jokes and bursting out with laughter. When the bereaved family hold a banquet (*kichūbarai*) for the relatives, the guests and members of the *kumi-ai*, it is hard to find any sad or serious aspects of the funeral. Thus, I would suggest that, in the case of *tenju*, those who died of old age are thought of as having sufficient vitality which may have the power to not only negate death pollution but also mitigate grief of the surviving family. There is an inverse relationship not only between pollution and vitality but also between grief and vitality. For example, if there remains sufficient vitality when death occurred, we will find less pollution and grief. On the contrary, if there remains a lack of vitality, we can find more pollution and more grief.

Those who died tragically, violently or unnaturally are thought of as having a lack of vitality. Their death is considered bad and extremely contaminated by the high density of death pollution. The bereaved do not usually celebrate it. At times, they try to hide the cause of death and hold a simple, small and quick funeral. In the case of unnatural deaths such as accidental deaths and suicide, I found out that there is much grief and sadness. For example, as I previously indicated in Chapter Three, in the case of Yosida-san who committed suicide by jumping in front of a train, his death was considered extremely tragic and polluted. His body was collected immediately and directly transferred to the crematorium. The cremation was performed without any religious rituals. Only his mother, his younger married sister

and her husband attended the cremation. When the coffin was ready to roll into the incinerator, Yoshida-san's mother lost control of her emotions and burst into tears and wailed loudly with her hands on the coffin. She seemed to faint and was helped into the waiting room by her daughter and son-in-law. That was the saddest scene that I had ever seen during my fieldwork.

At that time, I found a subtle but important difference between Yoshida-san's mother, his sister and his brother-in-law in terms of their degrees of expressed grief. Yoshida-san's sister was weeping with her mother but her expression of grief was not as severe as her mother's. Yoshida-san's brother-in-law did not show any salient grief or struggles with emotional control. He simply stood behind his wife and remained silent with his head lowered. The reason why they exhibited differing levels of grief could be because each of them had a different degree of intimacy with Yoshida-san. For example, Yoshida-san was his mother's only son and had lived with her for his entire life until he died. However, although Yoshida-san's sister had grown up with him, she married almost 20 years ago, left the family home and was living with her husband's family in a different town. Since her marriage she had not visited the family home frequently. Yoshida-san was remotely related to his sister's husband and had an 'ambiguous' relationship with him. This may be the same as most other Japanese men who have brother-in-laws, because they are not members of a single household which shares the same surname. These different relationships between the surviving family members and the deceased illustrate that the degree of intimacy affects one's degree of grief.

Apart from these degrees of intimacy, I would also suggest that different amounts of pollution embodied by the surviving family members may also affect the degree of grief. As I have indicated previously, the deceased's family and relatives are extremely contaminated by death pollution. However, they embody different amounts of pollution according to the degree of their intimacy with the deceased. For example, if a person was very closely related to the deceased, s/he is thought to have more pollution which may generate more grief. What is important to point out here, however, is that the degree of intimacy is not always congruous with the degree of kinship proximity because the degree of intimacy is dependant on how long the survivors have shared meals, stories, emotions and lives with the deceased under one

roof rather than the systematically determined biological kinship proximity. In this sense, the idea of 'relatedness' which Carsten (1995, 2000a, 2000b) has effectively used to explore what is 'social' and what is 'biological', can be applied to the Japanese notion of intimacy between the living and the dead.

Additionally, as I briefly mentioned in Chapter Three, in the past the death of a child was considered natural and familiar, to some extent, due to the high mortality rates for infants. Parents did not expect that all of their children would live to adulthood and thought that some of their children would die. Those who died in childhood were not thought of as having a high density of pollution because their death was not considered tragic or unnatural. In the same time, they were not thought of as having sufficient vitality because, as I indicated, their partial personhood could not supplement their own vitality. There was neither pollution nor vitality and thus there was no inverse relationship between pollution and vitality. Moreover, since the child was not considered a full person, the adult parent could not fully relate to his/her child, and thus the parental grieving was quite short. Thus, there was hardly any grief to be found in the case of immature death. The bereaved parents also paid very little attention to the death of children and did not organise a formal and proper funeral ritual. Although parents at times provided extremely condensed, simple and small rituals for their deceased children, their grief was immediately completed with the rituals.

However, in contemporary Japan, it is extremely rare to find childhood deaths, due to improved nutrition, medical advances and low birth rates. The loss of a child is nowadays likely to be perceived as tragic and unnatural. It can also be considered traumatic for the bereaved parents. The funeral ritual or memorial service for a child is frequently conducted by the bereaved parents, although it is an extremely scaled-down version of the proper funeral for an adult. During my fieldwork, I did not come across any funerals for those who died in childhood but I heard about them from some of my colleagues when I was working at the local funeral home.

According to Inose-san, a senior professional undertaker, the funeral for a child is usually held on a very small scale, and is not announced and guests are not invited. Only members of the family and close relatives attend the funeral. The atmosphere during the funeral is extremely sad compared to the tragic and unnatural

deaths of adults. He also told me that although members of the bereaved family usually try not to show their grief in public during the funeral, the bereaved parents who have lost their children often cry out and other relatives also moan and sob at the funeral. He said, 'I have been working as an undertaker for more than twenty years and the majority of the funerals which I have organised have not made me very emotional because the funerals were not for members of my family but, in the case of a funeral for a child, it was very difficult to control my emotions especially when I saw the bereaved parents who were crying over their child's remains'. He continued, 'I always tried to suppress my tears all the time but I shed tears after all'. He tried to place the emphasis on the morose aspect of the children's funeral.

It seems useful and important to elucidate here why the bereaved parents have much more grief in contemporary Japan. Perhaps bereaved parents feel very guilty that their children have died so tragically and that their lives have been cut short. However, more than that, I would suggest that those who die in childhood nowadays are thought of as having overwhelming pollution because their death is now tragic and unnatural in contemporary Japan.

### ***5. The journey through grief***

I discovered that there are several points in which grief conspicuously erupts during the period of mourning. I also observed that although the degree of grief varies at these points, these intense periods are generally shared by almost all kinds of funerals that I observed during my fieldwork in Makabe. In this section, I shall explore the most distinguishable emotional responses to death that occur at certain points during the ritual procedure.

For the bereaved family, one of the most intense moments of grief occurs at the time of death. Although I did not have the chance to encounter the moment of death during my fieldwork, I was able to hear about the atmosphere during this moment from some of my informants and then I could imagine how sorrowful the bereaved family was at this point. According to my informants, at the moment of death, the members of the deceased's family lose control of their emotions and burst into tears and wail loudly with their hands on the deceased's body. This atmosphere



can also be deduced from my encounters with the deceased's family at the hospital. When I was working at the local funeral home, I had many opportunities to collect the deceased's body as an assistant because as soon as a person dies in hospital, the deceased's family contacts a local funeral home to transport the deceased from the hospital to their home. When we had just arrived at the hospital, I would encounter many families who were still losing control of their emotions and weeping or sometimes wailing loudly in front of the deceased.

The second intense moment of grief can be found at the encoffining ritual (*nokan siki*), privately carried out by the deceased's family members (*miuchi no hito*) under the guidance of professional undertakers before the coffin is transported from the deceased's house (*jitaku*) to the funeral hall (*saijyō*). As I previously described in Chapter Two, at the encoffining ritual the death robe and makeup are put on the deceased's body and then the body is placed in the coffin. After the lid of the coffin has been closed by all the family members, some female members burst into tears and sob loudly with their arms on the coffin. This moment is considered to be a time of separation from the departed and a sorrowful time for the members of the family. However, after a little while, when the professional undertaker opens a small casement window in the coffin lid and shows the face of the deceased to the members of the family, their elevated emotional tension is immediately mitigated by viewing the peaceful face of the deceased and thus the sobbing gradually ceases.<sup>32</sup>

Nonetheless, when the professional undertaker gathers the members of the family around the coffin, and gives a short speech to them about the deceased and performs a *gatshō* (making a bow with folded palms) for the deceased, female family members start to cry again and increasingly sob with the speech. For a more detailed description, it is better to quote a speech from Inose-san, a senior professional undertaker of a local funeral home where I worked during my fieldwork:

We have just placed the deceased (*kojin*) into the coffin. Thank you very much for your help. He is now lying at rest in the coffin and looks very

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<sup>32</sup> According to my colleague, Inose-san, a senior professional undertaker, in the past the coffin did not have the small casement window on the top of the lid. The window in the coffin lid was created quite recently by funeral equipment manufacturers to mitigate grief and nowadays almost all kinds of coffins have the small casement window on the lid. The window is opened all the time when the coffin is placed on the altar and the family members and relatives can have a look at the face of the deceased anytime they want.

peaceful and happy as if he is going to say to each of us, 'Thank you for your attendance' in his heart. He is still young enough to go on a journey. He has treated us kindly and with consideration. He is such a dear, kind and giving person, but now he is unable to talk to us and unable to see us. But, I believe many memories of his kindness will always remain in our heart. I also believe he will protect each of us although he is going to stay at a remote place. Please join your hands together to pray for the repose of the spirit of the deceased in the other world. [The deceased's family and relatives pray for a little while under the direction of Inose-san.] What is Mr. Toshio thinking at the moment? I can hear he is saying, 'I want to stay in this house with my mother for longer'. But, as all of you already know we are going to hold a wake tonight and a funeral tomorrow at our funeral hall. It is really regrettable we have to transport the coffin to the funeral hall.

The third intense moment of grief can be observed just after the private funeral ritual (*missō*) and just before the cremation (*dabi*). As I described in Chapter Two, after the private funerary ritual when the coffin is properly closed by driving the nails into the lid, although there are no loud sobs (unlike at the moment of death and the encoffining ritual (*nokan siki*)), female members of the family quietly weep and the male members are silent with their heads lowered. The atmosphere is very quiet, sad and sober. If there is someone who is still suffering from the sadness of this separation and weeping with tears in front of the coffin, the professional undertaker opens the small casement window and shows the face of the deceased to mitigate their high-pitched emotion.

According to Inose-san, driving nails into the lid of the coffin abruptly intensifies grief because the bereaved family still have a glimmer of hope that the deceased may rise from the coffin and open the lid. He told me that, for this reason, some other funeral homes especially those located in urban districts do not usually drive nails into the lid of the coffin, so that grief would not be intensified. He added that driving nails into the lid is entirely derived from the burial practices of protecting the corpse from birds and beasts after the burial, but nowadays almost all deceased bodies are cremated in coffins and thus in the case of cremation, nails are not necessarily driven into the lid of the coffin.

The last emotional climax of the bereaved family occurs at the crematorium (*kasōjō*) just before the cremation. When the coffin starts to roll into the incinerator, the final intense scenes of grief can be observed. Female family members usually burst into tears and sometimes cry loudly while watching the coffin until it is out of

sight and the door of the incinerator is closed. Male members are in floods of tears and try to hide their tears by lowering their heads. However, when the cremation is complete after approximately one and a half hours and the bereaved family first looks at the cremated bones and ashes, there are no tears or sobs. When they collect the cremated bones from the ash collecting room (*shūkotsu shitsu*), the sad and intense atmosphere no longer exists although it is still quiet. The bereaved family is very calm and emotionally stable during the ash collecting (*shūkotsu*). When I was working at the local funeral home, I witnessed many ash collecting scenes but I never saw any intense grief from the bereaved family at this point. Their elevated grief completely disappeared by viewing the cremated white bones and ashes. When I asked Suzuki-san, a senior crematorium assistant at a local crematorium, why the atmosphere in the room completely changes after the cremation, I was told, ‘This could be because the cremated white and dry bones do not properly remind them of their loved one and thus there is an apparent emotional change before and after the cremation’. It is consistent with what Davies (2002 [1997]: 194) notes, that ‘[a]shes are symbolically less powerful than a corpse. They present fewer triggers for grief; they represent a distancing from the dead’.

In this process of grief, I found that the intensity of grief is mitigated as time goes on and, more importantly, as the pollution of death becomes weaker, and eventually this culminates in cremation when pollution is mitigated. As death pollution is purified by holding a continued series of rituals, grief is also gradually mitigated. The intensity of grief can be mitigated by the purification of death pollution. In this sense, it could also be said that dealing with death is not only coping with grief but also coping with pollution. More intriguingly, all these emotional moments that I have described so far occur on ‘private occasions’ without any guests. This is consistent with what I have previously pointed out, that members of the bereaved family may express much more grief in private places because the sobbing or wailing in public can make guests (outsiders) feel uncomfortable due to the pollution of death and thus they are expected not to show grief in public places.

## ***Concluding remarks***

In this chapter, I discussed characteristic patterns of grief and interpreted them in relation to pollution and vitality. As I have shown through various ethnographic examples, in Makabe as in many other parts of rural Japan, mortuary rituals still do not place emphasis on the morose aspects of the funeral but rather on the funeral's social aspect. In other words, mortuary rituals primarily stress reaffirming family solidarity, enhancing the social status of the surviving relatives and maintaining or strengthening social relationships between the surviving relatives and their guests rather than on individual and collective grief or sorrow of the bereaved family members. In this circumstance, wailing or sobbing of surviving relatives makes guests (outsiders) annoyed and feel uncomfortable rather than making them feel sympathy for the relatives; it is also considered impolite, and this may cause problems for the surviving relatives when strengthening social relationship with their guests. I have suggested that the reason why wailing or sobbing is not a welcomed behaviour or a socially recognised practice during the funeral is that it reminds guests of the fear of death and thus it is regarded as impure and polluted. Because wailing or sobbing is a sign of death pollution that makes the guests feel abhorrence, it should be handled privately within the household. Otherwise, it makes the guests feel not only unpleasant but also polluted.

Although the surviving family members often express their grief in private, there is a salient difference in the level of grief or the expression of grief between male and female members. Female members express much more grief in private compared to that of male members not only in public but also in private. I have suggested a reason for the difference in the level of grief between male and female members by referring to different gender expectations for the expression of grief. In other words, women are expected to expose themselves to the pollution of death by expressing their grief because they have long been considered to be impure and polluted.

I have also illustrated different degrees of grief and how they might be linked to different amounts of pollution and vitality. Those who have died well and happily

are thought of as having more vitality and less pollution. In this case, it is hard to find any remarkably sad or painful expressions from members of the bereaved family. However, those who have died tragically and unnaturally are thought of as having more pollution and less vitality. In this case, I could find much more grief from members of the bereaved family. What I want to stress here is that different amounts of vitality and pollution embodied by the deceased do affect a person's degree of grief. Moreover, each survivor has different degrees of intimacy with the dead and this generates varying amounts of pollution taken on by the survivor; this pollution, in turn, eventually affects each survivor's degree of expressed grief.



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# *The exchange of gifts: The flow of vitality and pollution*

### *Introduction*

The exchange of gifts has long been a central topic for anthropologists, not only as an integral part of 'primitive' economic systems but also as a way to understand kinship systems (e.g., the exchange of women, see Lévi-Strauss 1949). However, although the analysis of gift exchange has a long history, it is nevertheless essential as it helps us to understand people's informal economic and social relationships in a modern industrial society. As Marshall Sahlins stated, 'the material flow underwrites and initiates social relations' (1965: 140). The economic and social functions of gift exchange go hand in hand to maintain, strengthen and create various social relationships (be they cooperative, competitive or antagonistic) between social groups or members through the binding force of moral duty and social obligation. In this sense the gift is a characteristic expression of reciprocity, where there is an obligation to give and to receive. The analytical interest in the gift lies chiefly in its social and cultural aspects rather than simply in its economic aspect. Mauss (1954) described the particular importance of such gifts as 'total social phenomena': they involve the entire person and embody through symbolic association the totality of social relations and cultural values in society. Through such 'total social phenomena', 'all kinds of institutions are simultaneously expressed: the religious, judicial, moral and economic' (Mauss 1954: 1).

Japanese culture is portrayed as a 'gift-giving culture'. The extent of ritualised gift exchange in Japan is often remarked on as one of the most important social and cultural aspects of Japanese society (see, e.g., Befu 1967, 1968, 1984; Benedict 1989 [1946]; Lebra 1976; Morsbach 1977). The exchange of gifts, known

in Japanese as *zōtō*, is a time-honoured practice that helps to create and strengthen positive social relationships between the givers and the recipients. Although gifts are often given out of a sense of obligation, giving a gift in return called *okaeshi* is usually considered a necessity. In other words, there is strong sense of obligation to give a gift in return. There are various times and situations when people give gifts. From the day of birth to the moment of death, or even before birth and after death, Japanese people give and receive various kinds of gifts.<sup>33</sup>

On the occasion of death we can find a typical example of ceremonial gift exchange, during which a series of fixed ritual events takes place and various gifts are broadly, reciprocally and systematically exchanged not only between the bereaved and the non-bereaved but also between the living and the dead. Of course, I also found the ceremonial gift exchange at weddings during my fieldwork but it seemed different from that of funerals because it was very limited. For example, those who are not family members of the bride or groom do not usually attend the marriage ceremony because the wedding is considered a private affair between the respective families (see Edwards 1989). Although some close friends can attend the reception (*hiroen*) after the wedding, they must be invited by the bride or groom. At this point, they give a gift of cash to the wedding couple and also receive a return gift from them but this gift exchange is not as conspicuous as it is during the mortuary ritual. In this respect, the gift exchange at weddings in Japan is quite different from that of other Northeast Asian countries because it is more vividly manifested during the marriage ceremony in Korea and China (cf. Kendall 1996; Yan 1996a, 1996b).

The reciprocal exchange of gifts is the most conspicuous and complicated part of the mortuary ritual and it has the essential function of creating, maintaining and strengthening social ties between the deceased's family and the guests as well as the 'spiritual' bonds between the living (the surviving family) and the dead. However, most importantly, I would suggest that it has another important function,

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<sup>33</sup> According to Befu (1984: 40-42), there are thirty-seven occasions for giving and receiving these ceremonial gifts, including becoming pregnant, giving birth, the baby's first new year, the child's first festival, and the child's first birthday. Gifts are also given upon entering and graduating school, being promoted, attaining adulthood (reaching twenty years of age), getting a job, marrying one's spouse, retiring, celebrating longevity (at ages sixty-one, seventy, seventy-seven, eighty, eighty-eight, ninety, and ninety-nine), the wake (*otsuya*), the funeral (*osōshiki*) and the memorial service (*hōji*). Some of these events are private and take place within the household, while others are public and involve all of one's relatives, community members, friends, and colleagues. They may also take the form of celebration, appreciation, or consolation.

that of diminishing pollution and replenishing vitality not only between the bereaved and the non-bereaved but also between the living and the dead. For example, in the case of the gifts offered in return for a monetary gift, they make it possible for both the bereaved to diminish their high density of death pollution by distributing gifts and the non-bereaved to replenish their own vitality by receiving the gifts.

In this chapter, I shall attempt to explore the system and the process of gift exchange in the context of mortuary rites in order to delimit and interpret characteristic patterns of gift-giving. In particular, I shall analyse the way in which mortuary gift exchanges establish, adjust and maintain harmonious and mutual relationships among the living as well as between the living and the dead. I shall also attempt to develop the existing theoretical approach to the exchange of gifts by highlighting the ‘traditional’ Japanese concepts of ‘moral duty’ and ‘social obligation’ known as ‘*giri*’ and ‘*on*’. More than this, I shall also add my own interpretation of the exchange of gifts, especially concerning mortuary exchanges, by focusing on the flow of pollution and vitality in the contexts of the mortuary ritual.

### **1. Monetary gift-giving**

In Makabe, there exists a distinctive practice of cash gift-giving during the mortuary ritual. As I briefly indicated in Chapter Two, mourners bring two different kinds of monetary gifts on the occasion of a death. The first is called *omimai* (‘monetary gift of sympathy’, literally meaning ‘an expression of one’s sympathy’) which is brought when mourners visit the deceased’s family for the first time after the death. The second is called *kōden* (‘incense money’, literally meaning ‘an offering of incense’) which is brought when they attend the wake ritual (*otsuya shiki*) or the funeral ritual (*kokubetsu shiki*).

According to local informants, although brand new banknotes (*shinsatsu*) are usually used for the cash gift on most occasions, the cash gift given on the occasion of a death should be used, worn-out, crumpled old banknotes (*urusatsu*). If mourners only have new banknotes, they must fold the banknotes in half and then unfold them (*orime o tsukete*) before they give them to the bereaved family. When I asked one of my informants, Daniguchi-san, why people should only give worn-out

banknotes I was told that giving worn-out banknotes implies a lack of preparation on the part of the donor due to the sudden nature of death. In other words, it indicates that the donor has gone to visit the deceased's family or to attend the wake or the funeral ritual as soon as they hear of a sudden death and thus s/he does not have enough time to obtain new banknotes. He also told me that, although nowadays people can easily change their worn-out banknotes for new ones at a local bank or a post office whenever they want and even if they may expect someone's death for example if s/he has a serious disease such as cancer or a cardiovascular disease, it still does not mean that they can offer new banknotes to the deceased's family because this would be upsetting for the family.

It is quite unusual for money to be used as gifts in other societies, especially in the West, where a gift of money seems to be an 'improper' gift. Giving money might be looked upon as highly suspicious and may even be considered as a form of bribery (for details about the ambiguity between gifts and bribes, see Sherry 1982). Many social scientists, especially Western scholars, have dealt with the problem of giving money as a gift (see, e.g., Bloch 1989; Caplow 1982; Webley et al. 1983). For example, according to Webley, Lea & Portalska, who conducted research into the unacceptability of money as a gift in the UK, 'from an economic point of view, money ought to be an ideal gift: it gives the recipient the maximum freedom of choice as to how he will enjoy its benefits. But at least for gifts whose social function is dominant, casual observation and introspection suggest that money is far from ideal and may be quite unacceptable' (Webley et al. 1983: 224). In addition, they stated the following in order to explain why money is unacceptable as a gift.

Gift-giving clearly fulfils an important social function and it is the act of giving and the input from the giver which are of prime importance, not the actual gift itself. Hence the thought and effort devoted by the donor in selecting the present and the surprise element involved in receiving it are important, whereas intrinsic aspects of the gift, like its monetary value (or its potential for display), are not. ... [T]herefore, money is an unacceptable present not because it reveals the amount being spent on the person or because it is an insult to the recipient's financial situation. (1983: 237)

This statement cannot be applied to modern Japanese gift-giving because money is one of the most common and preferred types of gift in this context; on the contrary, it

seems that Japanese people do not have a problem with - and in fact, welcome - offering money as a gift. Given the difference in Western and Japanese standards of gift-giving, this emphasis on giving monetary gifts should be considered socially and culturally constructed.

Interestingly, monetary gift-giving is relatively new. During my fieldwork in Makabe, some of my informants told me that when mourners visit the deceased's family or attend the funeral they used to bring their own incense, rice, *sake* (rice wine), rice cakes (*mochi*) or other foodstuffs, but these things have gradually been replaced by money and nowadays people usually bring cash in an envelope. It is intriguing to speculate how and why money became the primary gift in modern times in spite of the fact that money is often perceived as being 'dirty' in Japan. According to Ohnuki-Tierney (1993: 71), money has long been considered impure, dirty, 'secular' and degrading since it was introduced from China. She noted that during the Medieval and Early Modern periods, the merchant class was located at the bottom of the four-class/caste system because merchants dealt with dirty money (1993: 71), and people buried dirty money in the ground because it was believed that anything buried in the ground loses its ownership identity and become the property of deities and buddhas (1993: 72). She further stated that '[e]ven today, many Japanese people demonstrate an intense aversion to "dirty" money' (1993: 71), and she provided the following examples:

The Japanese who come to the United States often find it difficult to hold a sandwich in their hands after paying for it at the cash register because their hands have just touched "dirty money" that "you don't know who might have handled." Japanese children are often taught to wash their hands after handling money ... it is taboo to use hands for eating .... (ibid.)

In contrast to money, raw rice and/or rice products such as *sake*, rice cakes (*mochi*) and boiled rice (*gohan* or *sekihan*) are perceived as clean, pure and sacred. According to Ohnuki-Tierney (1993: 71), '[d]uring the Medieval and Early Modern periods rice was preferred to money as a medium of exchange because rice was considered pure whereas money was impure'. Indeed, she described how rice has cosmological implications in Japanese society. She suggested that rice was for a long time considered to provide sacred energy and power (1993: 74) because rice



was identified as the *nigitama* (the positive power of divine purity) (1993: 55), and thus rice products such as rice cakes have been traditionally eaten when people need strength, such as at the height of the agricultural season, the start of the New Year and a seasonal rite of passage (1993: 74). As a source of rejuvenating energy, even today rice gruel (*okayu*) is often given to the sick and to babies during the weaning period, as well as to young people participating in sports (*ibid.*). Rice and/or rice products play an important role in Japanese mortuary rituals, to feed the deceased's family as well as the mourners and thus rejuvenate them as they would have lost their energy or vitality because of suffering from the death of their loved one or the pollution of death. For this reason, in my view, raw rice and/or rice products used to be the most indispensable gifts in Japanese mortuary rituals until they were replaced by money.

If this is so, why has the main gift changed from 'clean rice' to 'dirty money'? One of the main reasons why 'dirty money' became the main gift is because funerals changed from being 'traditional' and community-based to commercialised funerals managed by professional undertakers (*sōgiya-san*) due to the process of modernisation, urbanisation and commercialisation in Japan. As previously indicated in the Introduction to the thesis, in the past, the funeral was entirely handled by the neighbourhood funeral cooperative (*kumi-ai*). *Kumi-ai* made its own coffins (*hitsugi*), grave markers (*bohyō*), wooden grave tablets (*sotoba*), mortuary tablets (*ihai*), etc. with materials procured at its own expense. However, most funerals today are carried out by professional undertakers (*sōgiya-san*) and thus holding a funeral service requires the deceased's family to purchase all the funeral accoutrements and to pay for the professional undertakers for their services. Therefore, it costs a lot of money to hold a proper funerary ritual. In the context of the commercialised funeral service, rice and/or rice products and other foodstuffs no longer help the deceased's family to hold a proper funeral ceremony. However, when rice and/or rice products were replaced by money, money also took over not only the clean and pure image of rice but also its symbolic function. In the same way as rice, 'clean money' functions as a device to replenish and increase vitality and so may have the power to eliminate or diminish pollution. It may also absorb pollution

and thus recover the weakened state of purity or retain a fully recharged state of purity.

### 1.1. *Omimai* (monetary gift of sympathy)

Those who were close to the deceased such as relatives, intimate friends, neighbours or other acquaintances are obliged to bring *omimai* on their first visit to the deceased's house. Each visitor kneels down on the *tatami* in front of a small low table (*kyōzuke*), places *omimai* on the table and then performs a *shōkō* (offering burning incense). As more people visit, *omimai* enclosed in an envelope are piled up higher and higher on the table. At times, these are placed under the table if there is no space left on the table. These *omimai* are displayed on the table until the deceased is encoffined and transported to the funeral hall for the wake and funeral ritual. Therefore, if anyone looks at the displayed *omimai* on the table, s/he may easily speculate how many guests have visited the house and how many social relationships the deceased or the deceased's family participate in, thus displaying the social and economic standing of the deceased and his/her family.

At the beginning of my fieldwork I was very confused about which occasions require people to give *omimai* because I found that people give *omimai* on other occasions too. I spoke with one of my principal informants, Tomida-san, who is in his late sixties and a retired schoolteacher, about *omimai* and on which occasions people give it. According to him, *omimai* is also used as a gesture of sympathy when people visit someone who is not well or in hospital. This monetary gift is designed to enable the sick person to pay medical costs or to assist the family's finances if the person is unable to work. It is also an expression wishing a speedy recovery. Nowadays, it could also be given to a household or a group that is recovering from a fire, flood, earthquake or accident. However, unlike other districts of the Ibaraki prefecture, in Makabe, *omimai* is also given when people visit the deceased's family for the first time after a death. When I asked Tomida-san why people in Makabe give *omimai* when they visit the deceased's family I was told that, in many cases, the deceased may have been seriously ill and in hospital before s/he died. He pointed out that nowadays many people are very busy with work and they may simply have

missed the opportunity to visit the person when s/he was ill and thus it became common to give *omimai* after the person died.

Nonetheless, when I asked another informant, Yamaguchi-san a man in his early seventies and a former head of the village (*kuchō*), the same question, although he did not entirely dismiss Tomida-san's explanation, he did not agree that giving *omimai* to the deceased's family was a new practice in Makabe. He suggested that the reason why people give *omimai* on their first visit to the deceased's house is that the deceased is still considered to be alive but ill. He insisted that the deceased may not be considered dead until s/he is properly dressed in a death robe and encoffined. However, during my fieldwork I witnessed how some people who had not been able to visit the deceased's house gave *omimai* at the wake ritual (*otsuya shiki*) which was held after the deceased had been dressed in a death robe and encoffined. Although there are different opinions about how people have come to give *omimai* on the occasion of a death in Makabe, *omimai* can clearly be differentiated from *kōden* because *omimai* has the function of paying medical costs or assisting the family financially rather than consoling the departed spirit.

The amount of money given is related to how close the giver was to the deceased or the deceased's family. According to Yamaguchi-san, although the amount of money given is entirely decided by the giver, there are generally several fixed amounts of money given for *omimai*. Some close relatives such as the children, grandchildren, cousins, brothers and sisters of the deceased usually give 10,000 yen (approximately 45 GBP) or 30,000 yen (approximately 136 GBP), close friends (*yūjin*) of the deceased or the deceased's family usually give 5,000 yen (approximately 23 GBP) or 10,000 yen (approximately 45 GBP) and distant relatives (*tōen*), neighbours (*tonari-kinjyo*) and other acquaintances (*shiriai*) usually give 3,000 yen (approximately 14 GBP) or 5,000 yen (approximately 23 GBP).

Each visitor receives a small yellow paper bag in return (*okaeshi*) for *omimai* from the deceased's family when s/he leaves the deceased's house. This yellow paper bag usually contains a can of green tea or a bottle of fruit juice and some sweets. All of the visitors receive the same return gift regardless of the amount of *omimai* they have brought. The cost of each gift is about 350 yen (approximately 1.6 GBP) on average. The return gift is not of the same value as the money given and

thus the deceased's family is still obliged to repay the same amount of *omimai* to the givers on other occasions. According to Yamaguchi-san, these return gifts are only distributed to those who give *omimai* on the occasion of the death. On other occasions, the gift in return for *omimai* is not distributed to visitors. Instead of giving a gift in return, a card of thanks for visiting during a person's illness is sent to each visitor by post after the person has recovered from his/her illness or left hospital.

## 1.2. *Kōden* (incense money)

The wake ritual (*otsuya shiki*) takes place on the evening of the same day that the deceased is dressed in a death robe and encoffined. Before the ritual starts, the deceased's family, the neighbourhood funeral cooperative (*kumi-ai*) and the professional funeral assistants (*seremoniya-san*) begin to receive guests who come to express their condolences. At this time many of the guests bring monetary gifts. If they were close to the deceased or the deceased's family but were not able to visit the deceased's house and this is their first visit, they must give *omimai*. If this is their second visit and they have already given *omimai* on their first visit, they are exempt from the obligation of giving a monetary gift. However, if they are not able to attend the funeral (*kokubetsu shiki*) on the following day they are obliged to give *kōden* ('incense money'). If this is their first visit and they will not be able to attend the funeral ritual they are obliged to give both *omimai* and *kōden* at this point. Additionally, if those who were not close to the deceased or the deceased's family are not able to attend the funeral, they only give *kōden* at the wake ritual.

At the funeral ritual all the guests bring *kōden*. This is the most important obligation for each guest attending the funeral ritual. According to my local elderly informants, as a joke it is often said that people attend the funeral to hand in *kōden*. Those who were close to the deceased or the deceased's family who missed the opportunity to visit the deceased's house or to attend the wake ritual are not allowed to give *omimai* at this point. They must only give *kōden*. When I asked Tomida-san why people are not allowed to give *omimai* at the funeral I was simply told, 'Because it is too late to give *omimai*'. However, when I asked Yamaguchi-san he offered a more detailed explanation. He told me that the deceased was no longer considered to be alive or ill at the funeral ritual because s/he had already been cremated and thus it

was not sensible to give *omimai* for the ‘ashes’ (*hone*) or ‘the cremated deceased’ at the funeral ritual. It seems then that giving *omimai* is not intended to console or comfort the departed spirit, rather it is intended to console ‘the living dead’ because the *tamashii* has not been completely separated from its *karada* at this point. In comparison to *omimai*, giving *kōden* is obviously intended to console the departed spirit because it mostly takes place after the separation between *tamashii* and *karada*.

At the wake ritual and the funeral ritual several male members of the neighbourhood funeral cooperative (*kumi-ai*) are stationed at the entrance of the funeral hall (or the doorway of the deceased’s house if the funeral takes place at his/her home) to greet guests and to receive monetary gifts. They record the name of the givers, their address and the amount of the donation in a book (*kōden chō*) at the time *kōden* is given. However, at this time, it is important that *kōden* are only recorded. *Omimai* are not recorded in the book. When I asked Yamaguchi-san the reason why *omimai* are not recorded he simply told me, ‘The book is specially designed for *kōden*’. He continued, ‘Unlike *kōden*, *omimai* are not given by all the guests and they are usually a smaller amount of money compared to *kōden*’. He also mentioned that although *omimai* are not recorded in the book at the wake ritual, they are received and collected by members of the neighbourhood funeral cooperative and handed to the deceased’s family after the funeral and then recorded in a separate notebook (*omimai chō*) by the family. These records are used as a reminder for the family when the need arises in the future so they can give the same amount of money to the givers in return.

When individual guests give their *kōden* to members of the neighbourhood funeral cooperative at the entrance of the funeral hall, they each receive a gift in return for *kōden*, called *kōdengaeshi* (literally meaning ‘return of *kōden*’), which usually contains a card of thanks (*reijō*) for attending the funeral (*kaisō*), a packet of green tea, a bottle of rice wine (*sake*), and a sachet of salt (to dispel the pollution of death when the guest returns home). In the case of *tenju* (natural death or death in old age), several auspicious items which symbolise a good death, such as a packet of *sekihan* (sticky white rice steamed with red beans), *kōhaku manjuu* (pairs of red and white steamed rice cakes with sweet bean fillings) or *kōhaku taoru* (pairs of red and white towels) are added to the gift. The cost of each gift is about 2,000 yen



(approximately 9 GBP) on average. At this time, those who give *kōden* on behalf of a group such as the local elder's club (*roginkai*), the school's alumni club (*dōsōkai*), the volunteer fire brigade (*shōbōdan*) and the women's association (*fujinkai*) receive two large bottles of *sake* in return for *kōden* instead of the gift that is given to everyone else. The cost of two bottles of *sake* is also about 2,000 yen. The members of the groups will drink these bottles of *sake* later when they get together.

According to my informants, although the deceased's families in most parts of the Kanto region (the centre of Japan's main island) send their guests gifts in return that are equivalent to between one-third and one-half of the original *kōden* on the forty-ninth day after the death, in Makabe, all of the guests immediately receive the same kind of gift in return, regardless of the amount of *kōden* they gave at the wake ritual or the funeral ritual. At this point, those who gave *omiami* receive a small yellow paper bag which contains a can of green tea or a bottle of fruit juice and sweets in return for *omimai*. Those who gave both *omimai* and *kōden* receive two gifts in return: the first is a small yellow paper bag in return for *omimai* and the other is a gift in return for *kōden*. However, it is important to emphasise that although the deceased's family immediately gives gifts to their guests in return for the money which they have given, it does not mean that they have cleared their 'debts' to the guests because those return gifts were not of the same value as the money that was given. According to my informants, the deceased's family gives the gift to the guests as a token of their gratitude. Therefore, they still have a 'debt' to the guests until they have repaid the same amount and the value of the gifts to the guests on other occasions.

During the initial stages of my fieldwork I asked several local informants to show me their *kōden* books but no one immediately complied with my request. At that time I was disappointed because I was positive that all of them would have gladly shown me their *kōden* books without hesitating. It was difficult for me to understand why they were reluctant to show their *kōden* books. However, as my fieldwork progressed I realised that I had made my informants feel embarrassed with my unusual and unexpected request to see their *kōden* books. Eventually, I learnt that the *kōden* book is the most important private document of each household and that it should be kept within the household. This is because it shows who attended

the wake or the funeral ritual, how much money each attendee gave, how many people attended and the total amount of money attendees gave during the mortuary ritual. This means that if we look at the *kōden* book, we are able to conjecture the scale of the funeral, the social relationship between the deceased or the deceased's family and *kōden* givers and the social and economic standing of the deceased and the deceased's family.

Nonetheless, as time went on I became well acquainted with some local people. At that point, I thought that I had had enough time to form close relationships with some of my key informants and I was sure that they would show me their *kōden* books. I asked one of my key informants, Nishioka-san, who was in his late sixties, a local *sake* distiller and the person who introduced me to the local funeral home in which I worked, to show me his household *kōden* books. Although he was a little embarrassed when I asked him, he readily showed me a *kōden* book that had been created after his father's funeral which was held in 2003. I think he showed me his book because he was aware through several meetings and interviews with me that I needed to look at a *kōden* book for my research. As I was looking at the *kōden* book, Nishioka-san kindly explained who the givers were and their relationship with his deceased father or members of his household. About 450 guests gave varying amounts of *kōden* at Nishioka-san's father's funeral which was a high number in comparison to the funerals I had observed in Makabe during my fieldwork. Nishioka-san was the head of a local *sake* distillery and a member of a local Rotary Club as well as the president of a local association of commerce and industry (*shōkōkai*). Because of his social position and influence he had many guests from his business and social-related groups.

The amount of *kōden* given varied between 3,000 yen (approximately 14 GBP) and 100,000 yen (approximately 455 GBP) according to the degree of kinship, the social distance or the intimacy of the relationship between the giver and the deceased or his/her family, and the social standing and role of the deceased or the deceased's family as well as that of the giver in the community. The deceased's children gave 100,000 yen (approximately 455 GBP), his brothers and sisters gave 50,000 yen (approximately 227 GBP), his wife's brothers and sisters gave 30,000 yen (approximately 136 GBP) or 50,000 yen (approximately 227 GBP), his nephews

and nieces gave 10,000 yen (approximately 45 GBP) or 20,000 yen (approximately 91 GBP), his grandchildren gave 10,000 yen (approximately 45 GBP), his friends, his wife's friends and his children's friends (*yūjin*), colleagues and employees gave 5,000 yen (approximately 23 GBP) or 10,000 yen (approximately 45 GBP), and his distant relatives (*tōen*), neighbours (*tonari-kinjyo*) and other acquaintances (*shiriai*) gave 3,000 yen (approximately 14 GBP) or 5,000 yen (approximately 23 GBP).

The amount of money given for *kōden* is also determined by how much the giver has previously received from the deceased or a member of his/her household. In other words, the amount of money depends on reciprocal obligations previously contracted by the deceased or the deceased's family. In Yamaguchi-san's case, he told me that as soon as he hears of the death of a relative, friend, neighbour or acquaintance he immediately looks at his recent household *omimai* books and *kōden* books to find out whether the household of the deceased had given *omimai* and *kōden*. If he finds the name of that household he checks the amount of money which that household gave. He then needs to carefully calculate the appropriate amount of his own *omimai* and *kōden* to give to that household, because it is not always appropriate to give back the same amount if many years have passed since he received the money. For example, if the deceased or a member of his/her household gave 3000 yen of *omimai* and 5000 yen of *kōden* at Yamaguchi-san's father's funeral which was held 10 years ago, Yamaguchi-san calculates his own *omimai* and *kōden* by applying the rate of inflation. This leads him to decide to give 5000 yen of *omimai* and 10,000 yen of *kōden* because when he compares the price of rice 10 years ago with the price it is today, he finds that the price has increased approximately twice. Thus, although it is difficult to calculate the exact value of money using the rate of inflation, it is important to attempt to give an equal amount of money in order to maintain one's reciprocal obligation.

### **1.3. Wrapped cash**

When mourners give cash to the deceased's family it must be wrapped correctly with a plain white sheet of paper and then placed in an envelope that has been specially designed for *omimai* or *kōden*. According to one of my informants there are strict rules for wrapping the cash with a sheet of paper. He kindly showed me how to do it.

First of all, the cash is placed in the centre of the plain white sheet of paper. The right hand side of the paper is folded over the left hand side and the top edge is folded over the bottom edge.<sup>34</sup> After the cash has been completely wrapped in the white sheet of paper it is inserted into a decorative envelope (bought at stationery or convenience stores) that has been specially designed for *omimai* or *kōden*.

The envelope designed for *omimai* has a long, thin red line printed on the left hand side of the front of the envelope and the words *omimai* (expression of sympathy) written on the top half of the front of the envelope. At times, this envelope has a thin red and white or gold string (*mizuhiki*) wrapped around it. The envelope designed for *kōden* has a thin black and white or silver string (*mizuhiki*) wrapped around it and the words *okōden* ('incense money') or *goreizen* ('before the spirit of the deceased') written on the top half of the front of the envelope. For both occasions the guest should write his/her name on the front of the envelope and the amount of money enclosed and their address on the back of it. Some guests even write their phone number as well.

During my fieldwork I realised that people spend a lot of time wrapping the money that they are going to present to the deceased's family. When I was working at the local funeral home I occasionally witnessed some guests who were embarrassed at the entrance of the hall because they had forgotten to enclose the cash because they had paid too much attention to wrapping the cash and writing their names and addresses on the envelopes. When the members of the neighbourhood funeral cooperative (*kumi-ai*) found their empty envelope on the reception desk at the entrance of the funeral hall they quickly put the appropriate amount of cash into it and handed it to the *kumi-ai* again. For this reason, one of my colleagues, Inose-san, a senior professional undertaker told me that when members of the neighbourhood funeral cooperative received the cash gift they immediately opened the envelope and unwrapped the paper in front of the guest to check whether s/he has given the correct amount of money which is written on the back of the envelope before recording the name of the giver, their address and the amount of the donation in a book.

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<sup>34</sup> On the contrary, on the occasion of auspicious events such as weddings (*go shūgi*) and births (*shussan iwai*), the left hand side of the paper is folded over the right hand side and the bottom edge is folded over the top. Smith reported that the presentation of the cash gift for the engagement of a friend of his had to be completely rescheduled when the bride's mother discovered that someone had folded the right hand side of the paper over the left hand side (Smith 1974: 94).

I also realised that the wrapping is almost as important as the content of the gift, regardless of the amount of money. Wrapping the cash is an extremely important obligation that must be fulfilled before the cash is given to the recipient. When I asked one of my key informants, Yamaguchi-san, why people wrapped cash before they presented it, he was a bit embarrassed by my unexpected and ‘absurd’ question. He simply told me that no one presents the cash without wrapping it. After a little while he offered a more plausible explanation. He told me, ‘If the cash wasn’t wrapped, it couldn’t be considered a proper gift and it may be considered to be very impolite’. Although I was expecting him to tell me some specific reasons why money must be wrapped like other gifts, he offered me the general explanation that this is not only applicable when giving cash but also when giving other kinds of gifts. When I asked why proper gifts must be wrapped and why it is impolite to present gifts without wrapping, I was simply told ‘because they are gifts’ (*sorewa okurimo da kara*). He could not offer a more detailed explanation.

However, from previous anthropological works on the exchange of gifts it is possible to infer some relevant reasons why money must be wrapped. According to Carrier (1995: 172-174), the purchased commodity has an abstract social meaning: it lacks the ‘personality’ that is necessary for a good present and, thus, when the commodity is presented to the recipient it needs to be wrapped which, in turn, represents the giver’s personal identity. In other words, impersonal commodities become gifts because they are personalised by the giver. Hendry also made this point in her study. She noted that wrapping is what adds personal meaning to a gift and thus a commodity without a wrapping is a ‘naked’ gift (1993). It is quite possible to conjecture that money can also be perceived as being impersonal and thus when it is presented to the recipient it also needs to be wrapped to indicate the personal identity of the giver. However, a recent anthropological work on gift-giving and wrapping gifts in Japan by Trias i Valls who carried out fieldwork in a rural town on the south-east periphery of Shikoku Island, suggested another reason why the gift must be wrapped. She argued that wrapping is not merely a way of personalising a gift but also a way of mystifying the commodity and this coerces the recipient to take the gift as well as encourages the giver to give it (1999: 81). In this



manner, she also argued that in order to be a gift, money needs to be wrapped because wrapping ‘mystifies’ the money’s character of market relation (1999: 232).

However, apart from money having a sort of personal identity and its relationship to the market, there is another important reason why cash must be wrapped. On the one hand, money has been perceived as being dirty and impure in Japan, and thus when it is presented it needs to be wrapped to conceal the dirt. As I have also previously mentioned, rice and/or rice products were the main gifts in the past because they were perceived as clean, pure and sacred but they have gradually been replaced by money in modern times in spite of the fact that money was perceived as dirty and impure. Nowadays mourners usually bring cash. I have previously suggested that the reason why the main gifts were changed from rice and/or rice products to money was because of the practicality of money. Money has stood out as being more important than rice as funerals have changed from community-based funerals to commercialised funerals managed by professional undertakers.

However, although money may have become the main gift because of its practicality to help the deceased’s family financially, if it had not been for the wrapping it might not have been possible to give it as a gift because of its dirt and impurity. In other words, wrapping made it possible for dirty money to be given as a gift. It seems that because of the wrapping people do not have any problem with giving dirty money as a gift. Moreover, Araki Makiko (1978) considered the wrapping to purify or cleanse the dirt or pollution rather than conceal it. According to Araki (1978: 19 cited in Hendry 1993: 23), wrapping something in a sheet of white paper, which itself has religious connotations, purifies the heart of the giver from sin, so that no bad feeling will be transferred to the recipient. In this sense, polluted money can be purified by the giver wrapping it, and thus the recipient may receive money as a pure gift without it containing any pollution.

## **2. Goods gift-giving**

Nowadays the majority of guests give monetary gifts instead of practical gifts during the funeral. However, during my fieldwork in Makabe I found that the practice of

giving practical gifts still exists. Some guests, such as close relatives, neighbours, intimate friends and business associates offer various kinds of gifts such as a box of beer, a bottle of *sake*, a fruit bowl, *uchimorikago* (a basket of canned food and bottled drink), *hanawa* (a funeral wreath) and *sotomorikago* (a funeral wreath with a bundle of offerings attached to it). Some very close relatives such as children, brothers and sisters of the deceased even offer a whole sack of rice. These kinds of gifts are displayed with the donors' names and titles during the funeral at both the right and left hand sides of the funeral altar in the case of small items and outside the funeral hall in the case of big items such as *hanawa*, *sotomorikago* and sacks of rice.

Most importantly, although they bring various kinds of gifts, this does not mean that guests are exempted from the obligation of giving monetary gifts. All of the mourners participating in the funeral must give monetary gifts, however it is not mandatory to give practical gifts. When I asked Yamaguchi-san whether it is obligatory for mourners to give practical gifts at funerals, he told me that nowadays it is optional as giving the monetary gift is now the most important obligation. He also told me that practical gifts may be considered additional gifts, which is why unlike monetary gifts, no return gifts (*okaeshi*) are given. He added that although it is entirely the mourners' decision whether they give practical gifts or not, there are basically two unspoken rules about giving practical gifts.

The first is that those who were/are intimately related to the deceased or the deceased's family usually bring practical gifts. In this case, although the donor determines the degree of intimacy between him/her and the deceased or the deceased's family, it is usually those who belong to the same kin group or social group who offer practical gifts. For example, if the deceased has five adult cousins on the mother's side and three of them decide to give practical gifts, although the rest of them are not intimately related to the deceased or the deceased's family they are inevitably forced to give practical gifts that are more or less the same value as those given by the other three cousins because all the practical gifts are displayed with their names during the funeral and thus it is easy for the participants of the funeral to find out who gave what. By offering practical gifts with the three other cousins, the rest of the cousins may avoid being blamed, not only by the deceased's family, but also by the other mourners. The other rule is that for those who do not currently

have an intimate relationship with the deceased or the deceased's family, if they have received practical gifts from the deceased or his/her predecessors in the past then they are obliged to offer gifts that are of an equal value to those given to them.

In the same way as the monetary gifts, all practical gifts that are offered by the mourners are recorded by male members of the neighbourhood funeral cooperative (*kumi-ai*). They carefully record the name and title of the givers and the types of gifts in a book called *kumotsu chō* (literally meaning 'offering book'). This record is used by the deceased's family as a reminder when they need to offer practical gifts to the giver in the future and to approximate the value of the practical gifts. For example, in the case of Yamaguchi-san, when he hears of the death of someone, he looks at *kumotsu chō* (the goods offering books) and checks what kind of gift was given by the deceased or his/her family. If he received a small sized *uchimorikago* (a basket of canned food and bottled drink) which had cost 5,000 yen at his father's funeral which was held 10 years ago, he decides to give a medium sized *uchimorikago* which cost 10,000 yen because when he compares the price of rice ten years ago with the price it is today, the price has increased twice more or less.

### **3. Moral duty and social obligation**

A key idea in understanding Japanese gift-giving (*zōtō*) culture and its related characteristic patterns of behaviour among the Japanese may stem from 'traditional' Japanese attitudes towards 'moral duty' and 'social obligation' known as '*giri*' and '*on*'. The gift exchange practice between the surviving family and the guests during the funeral has been researched and explained by many folklorists and anthropologists as 'traditional' attitudes towards moral duty and social obligation (see, e.g., Benedict 1989 [1946]; Lebra 1976; Morsback 1977; Befu 1967, 1968, 1984; Tsuji 2006). Ruth Benedict was the first Western anthropologist to attempt a systematisation of reciprocal obligations in Japan. Her work, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1989 [1946]), might be useful when attempting to understand *on* and *giri*, although her work has some mistakes and misunderstandings such as confusing *giri* with *chū* (fealty to the Emperor). According to Benedict (1989 [1946]: 99), although *on* is known as an 'obligation', it is difficult to translate *on* in English,

because the English word 'obligation' does not connote all the meanings implied in *on*. *On* denotes 'obligation' but also connotes 'debt', 'loyalty', 'kindness' and 'love', and the debt has to be carried as best as an individual can manage (ibid.). Benedict's work has had an insightful impact on later researchers working on gift-giving in Japanese society.

Befu (1968, 1974) and Lebra (1976) considered *on*, also understood according to the English word 'debt', to be the most important motivating force behind gift-giving (Befu 1974: 213). According to Lebra (1976), reciprocity is characterised by *on*. She stated that '*on* is a relational concept combining a benefit or benevolence given with a debt or obligation thus incurred. ... From the donor's point of view, *on* refers to a social credit, while from the receiver's point of view, it means social debt' (1976: 91). For Lebra, *on* is vital for understanding reciprocity and the cancellation of debt and obligation. She argued that *on* is a moral value that creates debt and enforces the repayment of such debt. In other words, *on* may create a strong sense of obligation (*giri*) that makes it possible for the recipient to repay the giver by making obligatory return gifts. However, making unsolicited gifts without considering the recipient's feelings may be considered an imposition of *on*, and leads to the recipient's strong disapproval towards gifts and debtors (Lebra 1976: 93).

The origins of *giri* are obscure, and precise definitions are difficult to formulate. Similar to *on*, *giri* does not have an equivalent concept in English (see Benedict 1989 [1946]: 133). Benedict described *giri* as a concept of 'moral obligation', which exists among individuals not only in hierarchical relationships but also in egalitarian relationships (ibid.). *Giri* is a normative force upon which one may measure interaction with another (ibid.). According to Befu (1968: 450), *giri* is both the most important motivating force and a moral imperative to perform one's duties towards other members of one's social group. She stated that 'gift-giving falls squarely in the sphere of *giri*; one is morally obligated to give a gift when custom demands it. *Giri* is bound up with the institution of gift-giving in another way, namely, reciprocation' (ibid.). She also noted that one's relationship to another is defined in reciprocal terms, in which the give-and-take of social relations should be fairly rigidly balanced; the concept of *giri* evokes the obligation to reciprocate (ibid.). In this sense, it can be suggested that although *giri* is immaterial, it can be substituted

by material goods or money through the process of reciprocal giving and receiving gifts.

This 'traditional' concept of *giri* still continues to play an important role in contemporary Japanese society through giving gifts. A typical example can be found at death when various gifts are exchanged among individuals and households. For example, once a household gives a gift for the funeral of a parent in another household, that household feels a duty to give something in return. In order to balance the relationship they will give the same value of the first gift when a funeral takes place in the other household. The two households continue to maintain and strengthen their relationship by reciprocity. Thus, it is important to note that the value of the gifts reflects the relationship between the two parties and must be equivalent to the amount of *giri* recognised by both the giver and the recipient. Their value must not be smaller or larger than the amount of *giri* because if it were smaller the recipient would be disappointed, and if it were larger the recipient would feel burdened. Sometimes, in order to carry out *giri* and to maintain harmonious relationships, people give gifts although they do not have an intimate relationship and do not particularly want to give anything. According to Ishimori (1984: 270), mourners give gifts on the occasion of a death in order to carry out *giri*, and interestingly, some people call attending funerals 'going to *giri*' (*giri ni iku*), and holding funerals is known as 'receiving *giri*' (*giri wo ukeru*). Similarly, during my fieldwork in Makabe, some of my informants told me that people go to funerals in order to give money to the bereaved household (*okane wo watasu tameni osōshiki ni iku*).

When I was working at the local funeral home, I often witnessed guests who came to the funeral before it started, to give *kōden* to the neighbourhood funeral cooperative (*kumi-ai*), to say a few words to the bereaved family, to offer incense and then they left the hall. Some of them even gave *kōden* and received their gifts in return (*kōdengaeshi*) at the entrance of the hall (or house) and then left the hall straight away without offering incense to the deceased and without offering their condolences to the bereaved family. When I asked one of my colleagues, Inose-san, why some guests just gave *kōden* and then left the hall without attending the funeral ritual (*kokubetsu shiki*), he said, 'It is very common for those who are not close to the



deceased or the bereaved family, or for those who have not had a relationship with the deceased or the bereaved family for a long time'. He continued, 'They just want to clear their debt by returning *kōden* which was given to them by the deceased or his/her predecessors in the past'. I also often saw some guests giving several cash gifts (*kōden*) to the neighbourhood funeral cooperative and receiving several gifts in return for their cash gifts. When I asked Inose-san why they had brought more cash gifts than the other guests he told me that they had brought cash gifts on behalf of other mourners such as their friends, relatives and neighbours who were not close to the deceased or the deceased's family or those who did not have time to go to the funeral. Although they were not able to go to the funeral, in order to carry out *giri* and clear their debt, they needed to offer gifts of the same value to the bereaved household through someone who was going to attend the funeral.

#### **4. The exchange of gifts between the living and the dead**

The exchange of gifts during the funeral not only affirms the social and economic relationship among the living but also the relationship between the living and the dead. During the funeral, various items such as incense, flowers, food, drink, sweets and cigarettes are offered to the deceased or his/her spirit. As described in Chapter Two, as soon as the deceased is laid out properly, the deceased's family offers a stick of burning incense, a mound of boiled rice in a bowl (*makurameshi*), a plate of sticky-rice balls (*dango*), a plate of *miso* soup, and a glass of water and/or a cup of green tea. These food offerings are always placed near the deceased during the funeral and transported with the deceased from the house to the funeral hall, from the funeral hall to the crematorium, from the crematorium to the funeral hall and, finally, from the funeral hall to the grave. As I have already indicated, some close relatives, friends and neighbours often bring food and drink such as a box of beer, a bottle of *sake*, a bowl of fruit, a basket of canned food and bottled drink and a sack of rice which are placed at both the left and the right hand sides of the funeral altar and outside the funeral hall. These gifts of food and drink given by mourners can be seen as offerings to the dead. As mentioned in Chapter Four, these offerings also allow the spirits of the dead to supplement their own vitality (which may outweigh the

pollution of death) and thus they can be transformed into stable and purified household ancestors.

Apart from the foodstuffs, the elaborate funeral altar (*saidan*) decorated with fresh flowers (*sēka*) and other decorations such as baskets of fresh flowers, a plate of mortuary sweets (*morigashi*), candle sticks and paper-covered lamps (*bonbori*) placed at both the right and left hand sides of the funeral altar are also considered to be offerings to the deceased's spirit. After the funeral, various offerings continue to be placed on the post funeral altar (*atokazari*) until the forty-ninth day after the death when they will then be placed on the household Buddhist altar (*butsudan*). For example, offerings of incense, flowers, fruit, cooked rice, water or tea and a variety of everyday cooked food and drink are placed on the *butsudan*, and these offerings are kept fresh and replaced regularly. Gifts given by guests to a household are also placed at the *butsudan* before they are used and eaten.

Moreover, when the deceased is placed in a coffin at the encoffining ritual (*nokan siki*), some items for travelling such as straw sandals (*waraji*), imitation paper money (*rokumonsen*), a wooden stick (*tsue*) for the crossing of the thorny mountain (*tsurugi no yama*, literally meaning 'sword mountain') and the river (*sanzu no kawa*: the boundary between this world and the other world) on the way to the other world are placed in the coffin. At this point, items that the deceased liked to use when s/he was alive such as books, glasses, photos, clothes, shoes, an alarm clock, etc. are usually put into the coffin. Some of the deceased's other favourite things such as candies, sweets, green tea, cigarettes, etc. are also put into the coffin. After the private funeral ritual (*missō*) and just before the departure for the crematorium the deceased's family, some close relatives, intimate friends, and members of the neighbourhood funeral cooperative have a final look at the deceased. At this point, they stand in a line and put various kinds of flowers into the coffin. All of these items that are encoffined with the deceased's body can also be seen as gifts to the deceased or his/her spirit.

Additionally, as I have previously suggested, when people visit the deceased's house and participate in the funeral it is obligatory for each guest to bring a monetary gift which enables the deceased's family to defray the costs of the funeral and to reduce their financial burden. It also has the function of creating, maintaining

and strengthening social relationships and the cooperation between the donor and the recipient because the monetary gift must always be reciprocated to the givers on other occasions. However, more importantly, giving a monetary gift is not just to assist the deceased's family financially and to create or strengthen social relationships between the deceased's family and the guests, it is also to console the departed spirit and to create and strengthen the bond between the living and the dead. In this respect, the mourners' monetary gift is a type of ritual offering to the deceased or his/her spirit.

As mentioned in Chapter Two and Five, the first and most important task for each guest participating in the funeral ritual is to perform a *shōkō* (offering burning incense to the spirit of the dead) because the wafting incense smoke is a vehicle to aid the departed spirit as well as to drive malevolent spirits or wandering ghosts (*muenbotoke*) away from the deceased, and more importantly, to disperse or purify the pollution of death. In order to carry out this important task, in the past, each guest might have brought their own incense to the funeral. This speculation is based on the fact that the monetary offering given by each guest at the funeral is still called *kōden*, literally meaning 'an offering of incense'. This speculation is also supported by some of my local elderly informants who stated that mourners used to bring their own incense and rice or rice products in the past, but they indicated that this has been replaced by money in modern times.

In sum, in the past, people brought their own incense as an offering to the spirit of the dead, then this became rice or rice products and finally these were replaced by money in modern times. Although the item offered at the funeral has changed from incense to money and thus it seems to have a more practical function of assisting and consoling the surviving relatives, its original purpose or function is still to appease, console and purify the spirit of the dead. In other words, apart from the economic and social aspects of a monetary gift, it can also be offered for the purpose of appeasing, consoling and purifying the unstable, dangerous and polluted departed spirit and thus helps to usher the spirit safely to the other world for the attainment of household ancestorhood.

The various kinds of offerings to the dead or the spirits of the dead above may correctly be seen as gifts. Yet these offerings to the dead cannot be defined as

'pure gifts' because the surviving family receives gifts of movable or immovable property such as jewellery, a house and land through inheritance from the deceased (cf. Goody 1962). In this system of reciprocal exchange between the living and the dead, the living are able to provide comfort to the departed spirits through various mortuary offerings during and after the funeral and by doing so it is possible for them to supplement their own vitality and, thus, move into the other world without wandering about this world and without bothering or harming the living, and, finally, it allows them to achieve ancestorhood. In return for the various mortuary offerings, the living are also expected to receive immaterial gifts such as prosperity, wealth, good health, vitality, long life and the general well-being of their family from the spirit of the dead or an ancestor (see also Langford 2009). The exchange of gifts between the living and the dead gradually reorients the relationship between the living and the dead from an antagonistic relationship to a mutually dependent relationship. In this respect, I would argue that the relationship between the living and the dead can be considered to be not only a 'spiritual' but also an 'actual' and 'practical' bond.

### **5. The exchange of pollution and vitality**

Apart from social and economic aspects of gift exchange, the exchange of gifts between the bereaved and the non-bereaved seems to have another important and indispensable function in the context of Japanese mortuary rituals. It functions as a device to distribute vitality as well as pollution. In other words, the deceased's family may replenish or supplement their own vitality (which may negate death pollution) by receiving various mortuary gifts such as *omimai*, *kōden*, and food and drink from their guests. They may also have the opportunity to diminish their high density of death pollution by distributing return gifts (*okaeshi*) to their guests, and the guests may have the opportunity to supplement their own vitality, which has been weakened by the pollution of death during the funeral, by consuming *okaeshi*.

In a similar manner, as I have indicated in Chapter Three, in the case of *tenju*, the deceased's family scatters coins (*makisen*) to the non-bereaved after the funeral. On their way back home, using the coins they picked up, these people buy and

consume drinks. By doing so, they will be blessed with good health, rejuvenation and a long life because death due to old age is considered a good death and is full of vitality. However, they must spend all their coins and never take them into their homes because the coins are also contaminated by death pollution and may cause harm to other household members. In this sense, *makisen* also functions as a device to distribute pollution as well as vitality. The scattering of coins therefore makes it possible for both the deceased's family to diminish their pollution by distributing the coins and the non-bereaved to supplement their own vitality by collecting the coins and ingesting drinks.

Additionally, this practice of scattering coins during the mortuary ritual is intriguingly similar to a Cantonese one described by James Watson (1982).

[T]he household of the deceased distributes coins, often in white envelopes, to everyone who participates in the funeral. The coins are kept in a box under the coffin and are distributed toward the end of the public ceremony. The coin is treated very gingerly: it is held in the (left) hand or inserted in the (left) ear; it must never be put in one's pocket (to do so, I was told, would bring bad luck). As soon as the funeral is over the coin must be spent on a sweet or, better still, given to a beggar. (Watson 1982: 163)

In describing the distributing of coins, Watson attempted to show that the corpse and its surroundings are impure, dangerous and contaminated by death pollution. However, he did not sufficiently explain the reason for his interpretation of why the deceased's family distribute coins and why the coins must be spent or given to a beggar. It seems to me that in a similar way to *makisen*, this Cantonese practice of distributing coins also has the function of distributing the pollution of death to the non-bereaved and so the bereaved family members may have the opportunity to diminish death pollution. However, unlike *makisen*, the Cantonese practice seems to place emphasis on the distribution of pollution rather than the enhancement of vitality.

Furthermore, it is also worthwhile to look at the sharing of food and drink between the bereaved and the non-bereaved. During my fieldwork, I found that food and drink are not merely provided as a kind of offering for the deceased to placate, pacify or appease the departed spirit, but are also offered to ritual participants. As indicated in Chapter Two, the deceased's family usually holds commensal banquets



for the participants after the wake ritual (*otsuya-siki*) and after the funeral (or sometimes after returning from the crematorium or the grave), in which the deceased's family and guests share stories of the deceased over food and drink. After these feasts, some food, sweets and drinks are often distributed not to all the guests but close relatives and members of the *kumi-ai* (the neighbourhood funeral cooperative).

The main purpose for holding these feasts and emphasising commensality, as far as is known, is to commemorate the deceased as well as to offer thanks and remuneration to both the guests who have attended the wake or the funeral and to the priest and the members of *kumi-ai* who have assisted the deceased's family in holding the wake and the funeral. However, apart from these reasons, I would like to suggest that these commensal banquets may be held for the purpose of distributing death pollution as well as vitality. This commensality allows the deceased's family to diminish their death pollution by distributing food and drink, and it also allows the participants to replenish or supplement their own vitality by ingesting food and drink.

### **Concluding remarks**

Although the system and the process of gift exchange in the context of death and mortuary rituals are extremely complicated, variable and difficult to understand, gift-giving is an indispensable part of mortuary rituals and crucial in order to understand the characteristics of Japanese mortuary rituals. In this chapter, I have given various ethnographic examples of mortuary gift-giving, not only among the living but also between the living and the dead. The system of the reciprocal gift exchange is an important mechanism for creating, maintaining and strengthening social relationships or cooperation between the surviving relatives and their guests and for reinforcing the social and economic status of the surviving relatives.

Therefore, although the death of a household member threatens to obliterate the social and economic ties that the deceased has formed over a lifetime, this gift exchange system makes it possible for the surviving relatives to reinforce and even intensify the social and economic ties of the deceased, bringing the deceased's social and economic network together in the diminishing household (see Lepowsky 1989:

225). The system of the reciprocal gift exchange has another function, which is to create mutually dependent relationships and to maintain and strengthen the bonds between the living and the dead. In this mutually dependent relationship, the living provide comfort to the dead through various mortuary offerings and the dead offers them help and support. Therefore, I would argue that Japanese mortuary rituals can be understood as a process of 'balanced' reciprocal gift exchange among the living and the dead.

Moreover, although the exchange of gifts has various social and economic functions between the bereaved and the non-bereaved, one of the primary purposes is the distribution of vitality and pollution and so the living and the dead may supplement their own vitality and diminish pollution. By doing this, the defiled state of both the living and the dead can be transformed into a state of purity. The ritualised action of gift-giving emphasises the complexity of relationships not only between pollution and vitality but also between the living and the dead, and the bereaved and the non-bereaved. However, I would like to suggest that although the system and the process of distributing pollution and replenishing vitality and their relationship and interaction with the living and the dead are complicated and variable, it is crucial to deal with them explicitly in order to understand the characteristics of notions of death on the one hand, and to grasp the cosmological system of exchange, on the other.



Plate 28. A gift in return for *kōden* (*kōdengaeshi*)



Plate 29. *Uchimorikago* (baskets of canned food and bottled drink)



Plate 30. Boxes of beer and fruits at the funeral altar





Plate 31. Sacks of rice with the donors' names



Plate 32. Sotomorikago (funeral wreaths with bundles of offerings)



Plate 33. Bundles of offerings

## Conclusion

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One warm afternoon in the middle of April 2007, several weeks before I left Makabe, I was sitting with a local Buddhist priest on the floor of his temple and drinking *matcha* (powdered green tea) and enjoying the view of cherry trees in full bloom. He told me, 'Pure white cherry blossoms are dazzlingly beautiful while they are in full bloom on their trees but when they lose their vitality they begin to wither, and then they scatter on the ground and they are viewed as dirty'. He continued, 'We human beings are also the same as cherry blossoms because when we lose our vitality we become the dead and are polluted due to the decomposition of our bodies'. 'Pollution can't disappear in this world unless we're immortal' he added. He also noted, 'If there is no vitality there will be no life, if there is no life there will be no death, and if there is no death there will be no pollution'.

\* \* \*

After this conversation with the Buddhist priest, I realised that the association between life and vitality and between death and pollution has long been established as the most important feature of 'traditional' Japanese cosmology, which still has a vital influence on contemporary Japanese people in Makabe and in many parts of Japan. These paired associations explain why the 'traditional' idea of death pollution still remains unchanged and the ritual imperatives still place great emphasis on the purification or elimination of death pollution and the replenishment of vitality despite the fact that mortuary rituals have dramatically changed from community-based 'traditional' funerals to commercialised ones over the last two decades in Makabe.

In this thesis, I have shown how and why local perceptions of death and the articulation of actual mortuary rituals must be understood in terms of pollution and vitality. More concretely, I have explored the way in which pollution and vitality are significantly implicated in the process of death by focusing on ritual procedures, the



connection between different kinds of death and persons, different spirits of the dead, the sources of pollution and its purification, the expression of grief and the exchange of gifts. By doing so, I have suggested that grasping the relationship between pollution and vitality is crucial in order to understand not only the conjunction between mortuary rituals and people's perception of death but also a number of important features of 'traditional' Japanese cosmology that I encountered in Makabe.

Throughout the thesis, I have attempted to show, through various ethnographic examples, that pollution is still vividly manifested in various forms in mortuary rituals and that it is still considered dangerous, fearful and contagious. I have also illustrated how although pollution inevitably occurred on the occasion of death due to the decomposition of the corpse and it is powerful and dangerous, it is not considered permanent, but rather, it can be diminished or eliminated not only by performing various purification rituals with purifying elements but also by replenishing or increasing vitality. By doing so, the polluted state of both the living and the dead can be transformed into a state of purity.

As indicated in Chapter Two, when a person is alive, each person has vitality but when vitality is exhausted, the body (*karada*) stops operating and then the spirit (*tamashii*) leaves the *karada* and thus a person has died. However, the *tamashii* does not immediately leave the *karada* as soon as the *karada* stops operating because the *karada* is still lifelike. The *tamashii* remains in the *karada* for a certain period of time until the cremation or the burial takes place. During this period, the *karada* starts to decompose and pollution occurs and thus the *karada*, the *tamashii* and their surroundings are contaminated. From this point on, various purification rituals are performed along with the mortuary procedure to diminish or eliminate the pollution of death as well as to supplement vitality. However, these rituals vary considerably depending on how much the deceased embody vitality when death occurs, because vitality has power to negate death and pollution. In other words, each person embodies different amounts of vitality and thus s/he is dealt with in different ways when s/he dies.

I have also illuminated how each person embodies different amounts of vitality. I have suggested that when a person is a child, s/he gradually creates and supplements his/her own vitality from birth onwards not only by physical growth

gained through ingesting food and drink but also through social growth from learning shared ideas, customs, wisdom, experience and knowledge. When a child is grown up, s/he may supplement his/her own vitality by accumulating and achieving fame, honour, wealth, success and good health in his/her spaces of social, political and economic relationships. In this way, each person embodies different amounts of vitality.

As indicated in Chapter Three, for those who have sufficient vitality, their death is considered a good death and dealt with elaborately and magnificently. In this case they are not considered extremely contaminated by the pollution of death and thus they are not required to have complicated and long purification rituals. On the contrary, for those who lack vitality, their death is considered a bad death and dealt with simply and abruptly. If they die tragically or unnaturally, their own vitality is exhausted all of a sudden and they are extremely contaminated by the high density of death pollution. In this case, they are thought of as having overflowing pollution and thus they are required to have special, complicated or long purification rituals. All of these differences in dealing with the dead arise from differing amounts of vitality embodied by the dead.

After the *tamashii* is separated from its *karada*, it can be transformed into one of three different kinds of spirits: a god (*kami*), an ancestor (*hotoke*) or a wandering ghost (*muenbotoke*). Those who are thought of as having brimming vitality or as the source of vitality in their lives become *kami* immediately after death without having long purification rituals. There are two typical kinds of persons who can become *kami*: one is the Emperor and the other is the war dead. However, the only way to reach the stage of *kami* as an ordinary person is to be killed in wars or to die for one's country. Those who have surviving descendants or relatives become *hotoke*: it does not matter if they die well or not because it is more important for them that they can continue to supplement their own vitality by receiving various formal and informal veneration and offerings through their surviving family members. However, if they do not have surviving descendants or relatives they cannot supplement their own vitality and thus they become *muenbotoke*.

The most striking feature of the spirit of the dead is that although they are thought to be potentially dangerous and polluted, they remain an integral part of

everyday household life and are treated by their surviving family members as if they are still alive. For example, the surviving family members share food, drink and stories with their deceased members in their everyday lives. Indeed, as Straight (2006) notes, the living and the dead are mutually 'entangled' by sharing everyday life. By doing so, they can create and enhance an intimate relationship. This intimate relationship between the living and the dead makes it possible for both of them to supplement their own vitality which may negate death and pollution and thus they can be transformed into a state of purity. Thus, as I have noted in Chapter One, the 'familiarisation' of death is immensely important to understand not only for the connection between the dead and the living but also for the actual process of death.

I have explored the ways in which grief is expressed or suppressed and I attempted to interpret outward emotional actions or behaviour in and through a person's relation to pollution and vitality. As I have shown through various ethnographic examples, mortuary rituals in Makabe do not place emphasis on the morose and gloomy aspect of the funeral but rather on the funeral's social aspect. More precisely, wailing or sobbing is not a welcomed behaviour or a socially recognised practice during the funeral because it reminds guests of the fear of death and thus it is regarded as impure and polluted. Wailing and sobbing is a sign of death pollution that makes the guests feel not only abhorrence but also polluted. Therefore, it should be expressed privately within the household. Although the surviving family members do express their grief in private, there is a difference in the level of grief or its expression among them. For example, female members express much more grief than male members because they are considered more impure and polluted and thus it is expected that they will expose themselves to death pollution by expressing their grief. I have also shown that the surviving family members embody different amounts of pollution according to the degree of their intimacy with the deceased and the different amounts of pollution affects their degree of grief. For example, if a person was very close to the deceased, s/he is thought of as having more pollution, which may generate more grief.

I have also drawn attention to how pollution and vitality are exchanged not only between the living and the dead but also between the bereaved and the non-bereaved through the system and the process of gift exchange. I attempted to

understand the extremely complicated and variable system and process of the mortuary exchange in terms of the relationship between pollution and vitality. Although the exchange of gifts has various social and economic functions, one of the primary purposes is to distribute vitality and pollution so the living and the dead can supplement their own vitality, which may have power to eliminate or diminish the high density of pollution. Through the process of gift exchange among the living and between the living and the dead, the defiled state of both the living and the dead is ultimately transformed into a state of purity.

Thus, this thesis makes an important contribution to the anthropology of death in terms of both its ethnography and its theory. It contributes to the existing ethnographic literature on death and mortuary rituals in Japan by producing a new ethnographic investigation of death and mortuary rituals through emphasising their connection to pollution and vitality. More precisely, as I have indicated in Chapter Five, pollution and vitality have never been at the centre of anthropological studies on death and mortuary rituals in Japan despite the fact that in many parts of the country, not only rural but also urban and suburban districts, mortuary rituals still place emphasis on the purification or elimination of death pollution and the replenishment of vitality. Even some of the recent ethnographic works on death and mortuary rituals tend to reject the continued existence of death pollution and its social and cultural significance after industrialisation and urbanisation and thus they suggest that there is no need to purify death pollution and supplement vitality. However, this thesis has shown that the notion of death pollution still continues to exist in contemporary rural Japan and has suggested that grasping the relationship between pollution and vitality is immensely important to the understanding of mortuary rituals and people's perceptions of death.

The thesis also contributes to existing anthropological approaches to death and mortuary rituals by rejecting Seremetakis's 'defamiliarisation' and by using instead the idea of 'familiarisation'. I found out that rather than defamiliarisation, or destruction of relationships between the dead and the living, there is a continuation or a new set of relationship which can be characterised by 'intimacy', as Tsintjilonis (2007) points out, or 'entanglement', as Straight (2006) notes. In this sense, the relationship between the living and the dead are not different from any other

relationships. In this intimate or entangled relationship between the living and the dead, they both can supplement their own vitality which may have the power to negate the impurity of death and eliminate pollution. Therefore, I have suggested that the 'familiarisation' stemming from death and the appropriate mortuary rituals is a key to understanding not only people's perception of death but also the process of death itself and its relation to pollution and vitality.

Additionally, although I did not place an emphasis on Seremetakis's idea about the 'defamiliarisation' resulting from death, I did adopt her emphasis on 'the optic of death' for looking at the world of people in Makabe. In other words, I attempted to examine the connection between different kinds of death and persons, the spirits of the dead, the expression of grief and the exchange of gifts through death and the significance of mortuary rituals. By doing so, I was able to grasp the relationship not only between the living and the dead but also between pollution and vitality.

***Yoku ganbatta!***



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