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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Departure and Return: Abandonment, Memorial and Aging in Japan

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirement for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

in

Anthropology

by

Jason Allen Danely

Committee in charge:

Professor David K. Jordan. Chair
Professor Carl Becker
Professor Keith McNeal
Professor Richard Madsen
Professor Steven Parish
Professor Christena Turner

2008

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The Dissertation of Jason Allen Danely is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California, San Diego

2008

DEDICATION

To my wife Robin and our son Auden, who helped me understand how precious life is, and how our lives continue far beyond what we thought was possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature page.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Figures.....	ix
List of Tables.....	x
Vita.....	xi
Acknowledgements.....	xii
Abstract of the Dissertation.....	xiv
Introduction: Departures and Returns in the Lives of the Elderly.....	1
Shame and Abandonment in Japan.....	6
Obasuteyama—“over and return”.....	11
Zeami’s Obasuteyama.....	11
Other Depictions of the Obasuteyama Story.....	14
Obasuteyama in Contemporary Japan.....	15
Methodology and Research Design.....	18
Chapter Outline.....	24
Chapter 1: Aging and Ancestors in Context.....	26
Old Age and Anthropology.....	27
Old Age and Social Structure.....	28
Old Age and Human Development.....	30
Erik Erikson and the Japanese Life-Cycle.....	32
Critiques of Erikson.....	40
Anthropological Perspectives on Ancestor Worship.....	43
Ancestor Worship and Social Structure.....	44
Psychological Approaches to Ancestor Worship.....	49
Summary.....	51
Chapter 2: Connecting Aging, Ancestors, and Religious Plurality in Japan.....	53
<i>Boke</i> Fears and <i>Pokkuri</i> Hopes: Managing Loss and Abandonment.....	54
Ancestor Memorial and the Religious Traditions of Japan.....	63
Shinto.....	63
Buddhism.....	67
Christianity.....	72

New Religions.....	74
“About Our Ancestors” (Senzo no Hanashi)	77
“Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan”	80
“The Practice of Concern”	82
Summary	86
Chapter 3: Practicing Ancestor Memorial and Aging in Japan.....	89
Definitions: Religion, Ancestors, Worship and Memorial	90
Who Are the Ancetors?.....	91
Body and Soul.....	92
Becoming an Ancestor	96
Worship and Memorial	100
The Practice of Ancestor Memorial.....	105
Rituals for the Recently Deceased	107
The Wake	107
The Funeral	109
Annual Memorials for the Collective Ancestors	115
Obon.....	116
New Year’s	119
Ohigan.....	121
Summary	123
Chapter 4: Kyoto: Remembrance and Return.....	124
Dimensions of Kyoto Culture	128
A Brief History of Kyoto	134
Kyoto People.....	138
Navigating Neighborhood Kyoto.....	142
Neighborhood Organization.....	143
Daily Life of the Elderly in Kyoto.....	146
Elder Care in Kyoto	149
Religious Landscape of Kyoto.....	152
Summary	156
Chapter 5: Grief and Mourning in Japan	157
Death and Dying	157
Grief and Bereavement	162
Mourning, Memorial, and Death Ritual.....	164
Summary	167
Chapter 6: Sato-san	169
Meeting Sato-san	169
Sato-san’s Life History	176
A Visit to the Grave	182
Shame and Bereavement.....	185
Meaning and Memorial.....	187

Summary	189
Chapter 7: Religion and the Family	191
Nation, Household and the Family	191
Bearing the Burden: Obasuteyama in Contemporary Japan	197
Summary	203
Chapter 8: Ogawa-san	204
Love Objects and Spirit-Objects	204
Discovering a Dagger in a Haystack	209
Burying the Dagger	216
Divining Abandonment	220
Remembrance and the Family	224
Mother and Daughter Revisited	229
Summary	235
Chapter 9: Continuity, Tradition, and Change	239
Changes in Memorial	240
Diversity in Practice	250
Summary	253
Chapter 10: Nakamura-san	255
Tradition and Continuity	255
An Anniversary of the Dead	257
Two Festivals Sixteen Dieties, Ten Graves, and Countless Ancestors	263
Two Festivals: Public, Performance and Place	264
Gion Matsuri	265
Jidai Matsuri	267
Sixteen Dieties	269
Ten Graves and Countless Ancestors	271
Continuity and Tradition	280
Summary	282
Chapter 11: Growing Old in Japan	284
The Life-History Project	284
Living to Old Age in Japan's Aging Society	290
Age Groupings: the "young-old," and the "old-old"	293
The "young-old": the first post-war generation (b.1940-1945)	296
The "old-breed" (b. -1940)	297
Japanese Approaches to Old Age and the Life-Cycle	298
Summary	300
Chapter 12: Nishida-san	302
Meeting Nishida-san	302
Nishida-san's Life-History	305

School Years	305
Marriage and Childbirth.....	308
Later Years.....	312
Aging and the Role of the Ancestors	315
Nishida-san’s Religious Development.....	317
Dreams and Visions of the Ancestors	319
Dream #1.....	322
Dream #2.....	324
Dream #3.....	326
Transition to the “Other World”: Reminiscence and Anticipation	329
Summary	332
Conclusion: New Departures and Returns	336
Rememberance and Return	336
A Visit to Nishida-san.....	339
Jizō Ceremony	341
Reflections	344
Conclusions.....	348
Appendix I	356
Appendix II.....	358
Glossary	360
References.....	364

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig 1.1 Erikson’s Epigenetic Chart of the Eight Stages of Human development.....	33
Fig 2.1 Billboard of “Don’t Become <i>Boke</i> , Live a Long Life” in Kyoto	55
Fig 2.2 Shrine to <i>Ususama Myoō</i>	59
Fig 3.1 Abandoned gravestones piled together at memorial for <i>muenbotoke</i>	96
Fig 3.2 A household grave	99
Fig 3.3 <i>Miyagata</i> hearse.....	110
Fig 3.3 <i>Butsudan</i> of man in Kyoto.....	113
Fig 3.4 <i>Butsudan</i> of man in rural Japan	114
Fig 3.5 Woman cleaning her family grave at <i>Obon</i>	118
Fig 3.6 Vendors selling New Year’s decorations at a local market.....	121
Fig 3.7 Attendees search for their family’s <i>tōba</i> on Autumn <i>higan</i>	122
Fig 4.1 Kyoto city overlaid with a grid of the ancient capital	124
Fig 4.2 Protective talismans outside of a door of a <i>machiya</i>	132
Fig 4.3 Traffic safety billboard in the shape of an <i>ema</i>	147
Fig 4.4 Standard <i>ema</i> with a wish for mother’s long life.....	148
Fig 4.5 <i>Jizō</i> shrine between vending machines on a street-corner.....	154
Fig 7.1 Mother and Child poster	179
Fig 8.1 Shrine decorated for recently deceased man	207
Fig 8.2 Ogawa-san’s home during her move	211
Fig 8.3 Priest conducts divination ceremony.....	221
Fig 8.4 Ogawa-san bowing before her family grave.....	223
Fig 8.5 Ogawa-san’s <i>butsudan</i>	227
Fig 9.1 Abandoned Graves	242
Fig 9.2 Abandoned Graves	243
Fig 9.3 Memorial monument for a Senior Citizen’s Club	245
Fig 9.4 Advertisement for a “memorial hall”	248
Fig 10.1 A priest conducts a <i>shotsukimeinichi</i> service for Nakamura-san’s ancestors..	259
Fig 10.2 Portraits of ancestors in Nakamura-san’s house.....	260
Fig 10.3 Nagaoka-san and his family dressed for the <i>Jidai Matsuri</i>	268
Fig 11.1 diagram of fertility decline since World War II	292
Fig 12.1 Nishida-san outside of her <i>machiya</i>	303
Fig 12.2 Memorial Tablets in Nishida-san’s <i>butsudan</i>	313
Fig 12.3 NHK reporters filming Nishida-san on “Respect for the Aged Day”	335

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Japanese terms used to describe ancestor memorial	105
Table 10.1 relatives represented by the ten graves of Nakamura-san.....	272

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Departure and Return: Abandonment, Memorial and Aging in Japan

by

Jason Allen Danelly

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

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Professor David K. Jordan, Chair

This dissertation examines the ways that ancestor memorial shapes the experience of aging in Japan. Ancestor memorial is a popular form of mourning in Japan that helps individuals manage feelings of grief and loss through the use of cultural symbols. Ancestor memorial is also effective in managing other forms of loss that arise with the experience of old age. If this is the case, it would seem that ancestor memorial gives a unique indication of how older adults in Japan cope with the pain of loss and construct a new identity that can manage that pain. This dissertation addresses this point, and draws

on the work of Erikson's eight stages of development, as well as the theories of attachment, emotion and coping in order to learn how religious experience among older adults shapes their understandings of themselves and of the aging process. This research is based on 21 months of field-research in Kyoto, Japan, where I conducted ethnographic interviews and participant observation with the elderly. What I discovered in interviewing and observing older adults' religious practice is that mourning not only transforms the identities of lost loved ones, but it also provides an opportunity to reflect on one's own identity as an older adult. This reflection during mourning is a kind of remembering, or reminiscence that transforms the relationship between the living and the deceased. The four case studies of this dissertation illustrate different facets of this process of mourning and memorial: grief and bereavement, intergenerational relationships, tradition and change, and growing old. In the conclusion, I summarize the findings and suggest the possibility for pursuing the questions raised in this study further.

Introduction: Departures and Returns in the Lives of Elderly

I have written how my brother in law Akio once remarked that Mother's interests had gradually been reduced to marriage, birth and death. Well, stated in these terms it could also be said that her attention now was fixated on 'the pain or parting from loved ones.' In a person's life marriage, birth, and death do play a part, but over life's entire span what remains indelible of human relationships until the very end is "the pain of parting from loved ones." Had Mother, after living for over eight decades, reached a point where her mind and body registered only these things?

Inoue 1982: 91-92

In *Chronicle of my Mother* Yasushi Inoue describes the gradual process of his mother's declining health, including her dementia, and his family's efforts to understand the changes that it brought forth in the meaning of his mother's personhood. In Japan, where the dead may be memorialized for decades, it is interesting that what remained of Inoue's mother's personhood, what gave her a sense of purpose and stirred her memory was, "the pain of parting from loved ones." Upon rereading this passage, I was reminded of what my wife's widowed grandmother told me when I visited her at a nursing home before returning to San Diego to finish my degree: "Life is just a series of departures and returns." But is this stoic view of death and old age, and the hope that religious views give the elderly a universal phenomenon? And if so, how might it operate in different cultural contexts, or amongst people with different experiences of aging?

One common assumption regarding growing old is that there is a natural tendency to become more introspective and detached (Birren 1964). This tendency is then often associated with deeper spiritual insight or a newfound religious conviction, as if detachment from this world necessarily leads to a closer connection with the transcendental or spiritual world (Atchley 1995, 2000; Eisenhandler and Thomas 1999;

McFadden 1995, Vogel 1995; Tornstam 1999; Musik, Traphagen 2000, Koenig and Larson 2000; Kimble and McFadden 2003). Perhaps because of the tendency to associate aging and religion, many societies have specifically marked old age as a time to devote oneself to religious practice (Ahern 1973; Weibel-Orlando 1997; Peterson 1997; Lamb 2000: 124-137). In other societies, the notion that old age is a time for spiritual or existential contemplation is less explicit (Vogel 1995; Seifert 2002). Certainly it can be reasoned that the elderly simply have more time to participate in religious behavior, but time alone does not constitute an emotion or motivation directed towards religion.

Several studies, conducted mainly in the United States, suggest that religious belief is important for older adults because it is associated with positive health (Fry (ed.) 1991; Levin 1994; Benjamins and Brown 2003). Krause, Ingersoll-Dayton, Ellison and Wulff (1999) also find that “religious doubt” has detrimental effects on feelings of well-being for older adults. Studies such as these underlie a presumption among gerontologists that studying the religious lives of the elderly can be used to suggest measures for improving health outcomes in a group that has traditionally been identified as unhealthy. Can we conclude then that religious belief is a strategy of the elderly for achieving a long, healthy life consistent with the model of what has been called “successful aging” (Rowe and Kahn 1998)?

One problem with the studies on religion and aging mentioned above is that they usually fail to question the validity of the “successful aging” model itself, despite the lack of consensus among scholars regarding this term and the numerous critiques it has received in other gerontological studies (Depp and Jeste 2006, Oliver 2008:31-36; Cohen 1994). Another problem is that they fail to adequately account for longitudinal studies

suggesting that simply growing older does not necessarily mean becoming more deeply religious (Coleman, Ivani-Challan, and Robinson 2004). Coleman et al. (2004) in particular note that the decline in religious activity among older British men and women is often associated with dissatisfaction in religion's ability to provide comfort during bereavement (Coleman, et al. 2004:181-183). This seems contrary to the assumption that religiosity increases with age primarily because older people are coping with the loss of loved ones and with their own mortality. No doubt there are many individuals who discover in their old age that religion is not terribly important to them after all, or who have never been particularly religious and don't see why they would want to be in late life. Others grow disenchanted with religious institutions, but continue to regard some sort of spirituality as important in later life.

Differing cultural definitions of aging and religion, as well as methodological difficulties, such as accounting for historical or cohort effects, have made finding a conclusive relationship between aging and religious conviction difficult. Because of this, rather than argue about the universality of growing religious conviction as a characteristic of aging, or disregarding the possibility of an association of religion and aging altogether, this research begins with a different set of premises. The first premise is that older people may think about and participate in religion *differently*, than when they were younger, or than younger cohorts. Secondly, when older adults *do* feel a sense of religious conviction, it is because those religious beliefs and practices are perceived as somehow helping them adjust to old age. Both of these premises are based on the assumption that there is something that distinguishes the young from the old both psychologically and phenomenologically, and that this "something" also affects one's

beliefs or practice of religion. Simply put, older people are “doing religion” differently, and that difference is related to the experience of old age. If we accept these premises, then the question becomes *how* the experience of religion is different in old age, and how this reflects the experience of old age.

My research focuses on a group of older adults with varying degrees of participation in religious activities, and asks how their religious beliefs and practices influence the ways in which they experience old age. In particular, my research attempts to understand the role of the memorial of the recently deceased as it is practiced in Japan. I look at what motivates older adults to practice acts of memorial for deceased relatives as well as how the practice is used by older adults to think about and understand themselves, their family relationships, and their social world.

I found that the memorial of the dead is important to the elderly primarily because it provides a culturally meaningful way to defend against fears of abandonment. This fear is not only related to the psychic, somatic and social experience of old age, but also to experiences of the self in earlier life and the feeling of loss that accompanies their recollection. Although abandonment fear has been recognized as a key component of the memorial of the dead in on-Japanese societies, it has not been explicitly linked to aging (Leavitt 1995). On the other hand, Studies of societies with a close connection between elders and ancestors, rarely mention the importance of abandonment fear (Kopytoff 1997; Pendergrast 2005; Traphagen 2004). Rosenberg (1997) addresses scripts of abandonment among the elderly, but again, does not clearly articulate this with religious behavior. My research will therefore contribute to understanding religion and aging by showing how the fear of abandonment becomes closely articulated with memorial in old age in Japan.

Certainly the fear of being abandoned or of abandoning others, is not limited to older adults, but rather, is generated over the life course, through different experiences of loss and attempts to manage that loss. Fear of abandonment is, however, a focal concern to the elderly, since they must adapt to increased incidence of loss across multiple domains (psychic, somatic, social) with fewer resources available for coping with the experience of loss. In this sense, fear of abandonment can be compared to the re-experiencing of early trauma in older adults (Schnur, Spiro, Aldwin and Stukel 1998; Kaplan 1999; Grossman, Levin, Katzen, and Lechner 2004; Andrews, Brequin, Philpot, and Stewart 2007). While initial trauma may be adequately suppressed or defended against by, for example, overcompensation at work or in the family, many older adults find that when these resources have diminished, or when the ego is no longer strong enough to suppress the trauma, it reemerges in the form of such symptoms such as anxiety disorder and depression (Andrews et al. 2007:1320). Similarly, abandonment, beginning with the earliest feelings of being abandoned by a parent, can be defended against in youth and adulthood, but since the fear is never completely resolved, the anxiety that it produces may reemerge in late life.

While abandonment may provoke a number of emotional reactions, especially in the context of grief and mourning (Rosenblatt 1976, 1993). I have chosen to focus on shame. The link between abandonment and shame not only conforms most closely to the experience of the elderly people that I interviewed, but is also supported by the literature regarding psychodynamics of Japanese life and child socialization (Benedict 1946; Doi 1970; Creighton 1990; Miyake and Yamazaki 1995). Shame, which is exhibited through feelings and expressions of embarrassment, helplessness, painful exposure, shrinking or

becoming invisible (Block-Lewis 1971:196-210; Tomkins, Sedgwick and Frank 1995; Kiborne 2000), can be said to be hyper-cognized (Levy 1973) in Japanese culture.

Abandonment, or the withdrawal of attention and care, is seen in Japanese society, as the consequence of a shameful exposure of one's private self, an admission of something that ought to remain hidden, and the loss of control over how one is seen by others (Kilborne 2000: 2, 10). Abandonment and the reaction to it mirror each other—one tries to turn away from being turned away¹.

Shame and Abandonment in Japan

Japanese people tend to manage the shame of being abandoned by developing positive orientations towards both a public self (*tatemaie* 立前, 建前) and a private self (*honne* 本音) (Doi 1986; Bachnik 1994). Public selves are generally composed of reciprocal, interdependent relationships that fortify the sense that one is indeed connected to others (Kondo 1990, Rosenberger 1992). The private self then reserves a cultural and psychological domain for the expression of potentially shameful thoughts, feelings and behaviors, allowing the individual to gain a sense of control over the potential of abandonment.

Keifer (1980) recognized this tendency in the way that middle-class residents living in large Japanese apartment complexes (*danchi* 団地) found it “desirable because it provided circumstances where it is possible to withdraw from neighbors” (1980:439) to

¹ In the case of Oedipus, the turning away is represented by the gouging out of his eyes in order to keep others from seeing him as he truly was. This can be seen as the transformation of shame to guilt, as the rage towards the gaze of the observer is redirected onto the self.

whom one would might be subjected to scrutiny, and potential ostracism in a more “traditional” community².

In old age, however, the ability to manage or balance public and private selves is compromised by an increased dependence on others, which brings with it both a decrease in the ability to reciprocate, as well as a lack of privacy (Long and Harris 1997; Jenike 1997, 2004). This results in the association of old age as not only culturally inappropriate (or at best childlike), but also as psychologically stressful (Hockey and James 1993). As with the case of trauma, re-experiencing a sense of shame and loss in old age may lead to a greater fear of abandonment, and if alternate means of re-interpreting one’s identity and working through this fear is unavailable, this fear may lead to increased existential anguish or depression.

I used the term “work” in the previous sentence self-consciously, since, in order to understand how all of this relates to memorial of the dead, it is necessary to look at theories of both “grief work” (Bowlby 1980) and the “work of culture” (Obeyesekre 1990). Leavitt (1995) blends these two notions to develop a model that is particularly useful for this research. He writes:

“Grief work” and “the work of culture” both refer to an active psychological process engaged in by individuals to deal with conflict, in the former to adjust to loss of a loved one, in the latter to manage conflict by manipulating cultural symbols. Each implies a progression away from expressing conflict through symptoms, and in neither process is there a definitive resolution. Rather, the only resolution is a partially successful existential adjustment to conflict or pain based upon a configuration of meanings. In the mourning process such meanings coalesce over time as individuals work to put together narratives that capture the personal significance of a loss. Their grief work, especially when considered over

² The kind of loneliness Keifer (1980) describes is, I believe, different than the social avoidance of largely young middle-class male shut-ins known as *Hikikomori* (Hattori 2006), which is understood more as a psychodynamic tension between parents and children, rather than an individual and society at-large. Similarities may exist however, particularly in feelings of abandonment.

the long term, is accomplished through the work of culture. Their grief is managed culturally. (Leavitt 1995:457-458)

Leavitt employs the idea of using cultural symbols for working on inner processes of grief to explain the nature of ancestor memorial among the Bumbita Arapesh with whom he worked. Leavitt, following Bowlby's (1980) work on attachment theory and a stage model of grief, associates grief with the conflict of anger and guilt, a formulation that is particularly apt for Arapesh culture, where most deaths are interpreted as the violent result of sorcery (Leavitt 1995: 458). This stands in contrast to Japan, where death is seen as a natural transition to the "other world," and where the dominant emotional response to this abandonment is shame rather than rage and guilt. Crieghton (1990) writes that in Japan, "shame involves the awareness of inadequacy or failure to achieve a wished-for self-image which is accompanied by or originally arises from the fear of separation and abandonment," and "the anxiety associated with shame arises from the fear of separation or loss of the loving parent" (Creighton 1990: 285).

This is not always conceived of as negative, and may be thought of in terms of a sense of modesty, or *shūchi* 羞恥. The concept of *shūchi* is, however closely related to *hazukashisa* 恥ずかしさ, which has a more negative connotation, and which I heard much more frequently in the context of discussing old age with my informants. During one interview where I was discussing Japanese myths and superstitions, my informant began talking about shame in Japanese socialization:

- F: In Japan...um...the leaf of a fig tree or something was it? . . . what was it again? I've forgotten ... In the garden of Eden ... Eve picked the fruit and that was the first time she felt shame (*hazukashisa* 恥ずかしさ)? There was a fruit that you weren't supposed to eat, an apple or something? (J: Oh oh, I see) that was the first time she felt shame (J: I see, in the Bible right?)

- F: Right. In the same way, the Japanese have ways of making people act right.
- J: You have the same thing?
- F: In order to teach shame to children, we've developed our own methods (*sahō* 作法) in Japan.
- J: To teach shame?
- F: Like “if you do this it will be shameful (*hazukashii* 恥ずかしい)! If you do that it will be shameful!” things like that. Shame—well, modesty (*shūchishin* 羞恥心). (J: Oh I see). If you don't have modesty, wherever you go, you'll be worthless.

This is not to say that other emotions associated with grief and mourning, such as rage and guilt, are absent in the Japanese experience of bereavement, since, after all, shame may result in rage turned against the self in the form of guilt (Block-Lewis 1971: 198). After all, it could be reasonably argued that both shame and guilt involve the unconscious fear of the withdrawal of love, and therefore abandonment. Rather I choose to focus on shame, because it is hyper-cognized in Japanese culture, while rage and guilt are hypo-cognized (Levy 1973). Because of this, expressions of shame, both as embarrassment and modesty are more easily and openly expressed than rage or guilt, and there are more contexts in which shame can be acceptably expressed, including ancestor memorial.

Anxiety regarding fear of abandonment is evident in older adults' feelings of shame towards their caretakers. To the extent that recently deceased spouses, parents or grand-parents of the older adult were also, at one time, likely to have been caretakers, the older adult must also find ways to cope with shame felt towards the dead as well as the living. Memorial of the dead “works” to relieve the shame of abandonment by providing symbols and rituals for helping the individual both to care for and to identify with the

deceased. Memorial of deceased relatives, as it is practiced in Japan, reinforces a sense of attachment to the deceased relative, and because, as I shall show, the older person identifies with the dead relative, a renewed sense of maintaining attachment to the living can be imagined. In other words, remembering the ancestors allows older adults to indulge in the feeling that they have not been abandoned by the deceased and reinforces the feeling that they are not and will not be abandoned by other caretakers. In this way, ancestor memorial engages memories to create a sense of security in the present context by projecting a future trajectory of continued attachment and positive interdependence even after death. Returning to the ancestors means creating an imaginable space for one's own future.

So that, in brief, is the argument I shall make, the conclusion of my field observations and interviews. In order to illustrate the extent to which memorial of the deceased is a means of attaching meaning and significance to loss in old age. In this sense it may be a kind of “culturally constituted defense mechanism,” (Spiro 1994b) providing the resources for managing painful feelings associated with aging.

I will first examine a particularly apt cultural narrative, known as the “*Obasuteyama*” story. This story is revealing of the rich psychology of aging, intergenerational conflict, abandonment fear and shame. By framing the individual case studies that form the bulk of this research, in a master narrative, I hope to draw out the emotional depth of aging and loss, and through memorial, the hope of recovery.

***Obasuteyama*—“Over and Return”**

The classic Japanese folktale of *obasuteyama* (姥捨山 literally “the mountain where the old-woman is abandoned”) provides clues about the association between old age, abandonment, shame, death and memorial in Japanese culture. This story recalls a time when the elderly, having reached an age where they have become a burden on family resources, were taken to the mountains and left there to die. Although Japanese folklorists mostly agree that this kind of gerontocide was not practiced in early Japan, this legend has nonetheless remained a popular story, acted out in numerous stage dramas and films. The fact that it is not a mere depiction of a real occurrence, however, gives further support to the argument that the *obasute* story is a kind of allegory expressing the suppressed desires of the audience. Although the old woman being abandoned is the central character around which the story revolves, her fate is in the hands of her son and his wife. Therefore it is not merely a story about the fear of becoming old, but about the impact old age dependence has on the family. While I have described the shame of abandoning one’s parents above, the *obasute* story highlights the shame of *being* abandoned.

Zeami’s Obasuteyama

In the opening sequence of Zeami’s 15th century version of the story, written as a Noh drama, the old woman on the mountain addresses two travelers curious about the tales they have heard of *obasuteyama*. The chorus, speaking for the old woman, sings:

CHORUS: How shameful!
 Long ago I was abandoned here.
 Alone on this mountainside

I dwell, and every year
 In the bright full mid-autumn moon
 I try to clear away
 The dark confusion of my heart's attachment

(Keene 1970:121)

Immediately afterwards, the woman vanishes. The travelers later come upon a local villager who explains that a man, at the urging of his cunning wife, left his elderly “aunt” in the mountains to die³. After the old woman died, her attachment to the world turned her into a stone marker on the mountain (Keene 1970:122-123). When the travelers relate their story of meeting an old woman to the villager, he replies,

MAN: Oh! Amazing! It must be the old woman’s spirit,
 Still clinging to this world,
 Who appeared and spoke with you.
 If so, then stay awhile; recite the Holy Scriptures
 And kindly pray for her soul’s repose.
 I believe you will see this strange apparition again

(Keene 1970:123)

Already in the play, the viewer has realized that the abandoned woman is a ghostly spirit who refuses to accept her abandonment, and instead, remains attached to her memory of living in the world. When the travelers return to the mountain, the woman, who has now changed her mask to reveal that she is a ghost sings,

GHOST: Trying to forget that long ago
 I was cast aside, abandoned,
 I have come again to Mount *Obasute*.
 How it shames me now to show my face
 In Sarashina’s moonlight, where all can see!

(Keene 2002: 125)

³ The description or translation of the old woman as “aunt” is dubious, since most of the retellings of the story identify the old woman as the mother of the son who abandons her. Yamaori notes that in Zeami’s play, the man “took care of his aged aunt as though she were his own mother” (1997:34)

She begins to dance, singing of praise for the grace of Amida Buddha, the Buddha of infinite light, which is symbolized in the story by the light of the moon. The moon, like memories, however, is inconstant, and as the ghost continues to dance, her song alternates between herself and the chorus:

CHORUS: Over and return, over and. . .

GHOST: . . . Return, return
 Autumn of long ago.

CHORUS. My heart is bound by memories,
 Unshakable delusions.

 I shall vanish,
 The traveler will return.

 [the traveler leaves]
 Abandoned again as long ago
 And once again all that remains—
 Desolate forsaken crag,
 Mountain of the Deserted Crone.

(Keene 2002: 126-127)

At the end of Zeami's play, the ghost of the old woman raises her arms and freezes dramatically. Does she remain chained to this world by her nostalgia for her youth? Or does she find salvation through the acts of memorial of the travelers, and the grace of Amida Buddha, represented by the moon?

The image of old age depicted in Zeami's work is that of a shameful, lonely, and nostalgic woman. She is ashamed that she has been abandoned, and wishes for the days of her youth and the company of others. This is an expression of the heart of someone bereaved, who has lost the respect and appreciation of her family. It is also the heart someone who has lost a sense of connection with preceding generations, who is yet to accept her own abandonment of her parents and who cannot be comforted by the idea that

she too can follow their example. She cannot bear “pain of parting from loved ones,” and now departed herself, faces perpetual repetition of this abandonment, as the travelers who began the story depart. The “Deserted Crone” is both the abandoner and the abandoned, and cannot resolve the pain of either situation.

Other Depictions of the Obasuteyama Story

Perhaps one part the popularity of the *obasuteyama* tale is that there is so much flexibility to the story. In some versions, the old woman is not even abandoned (Traphagen 2000: 150; Yamaori 1997: 35); in others, she is completely demented and demon-like (Kurahashi 2003:27-40). Because of this plasticity, different authors are able to play around with the few essential elements: elderly woman, son, and the threat of abandonment. Many times there is also a daughter-in-law character or some other rival for the son’s attentions that encourages the son to abandon his mother. In other words, it is never simply a story of mother and son, but of the family, and the family’s continuity as well.

The *obasuteyama* tale has remained popular well into the present day. One of the film versions of this tale, entitled *Narayama Bushiko* (1958), or *Ballad of Narayama*, was met with tremendous praise. At the time, the film was even shown internationally, although a *New York Times* reviewer wrote that the movie was merely “an odd and colorful evocation of Japan’s past that is only occasionally striking” (Weiler 1961). The director of the 1958 version, sought to not only comment on ideas about the nature of death and dying, but also the condition of elder care in Japan and the need to value elders,

and the film's popularity was a boon to senior advocacy groups (Kawabata 2001:28).

Narayama Bushiko was remade in 1983, again with considerable praise and popularity.

In the 1983 film version of the *obasuteyama* story, it is the old woman herself who insists on going to the mountain to die, rather than the daughter-in-law. In fact, the old woman's son is a widower at the beginning of the film, and remarries only as a result of his mother's match-making. By securing her son's marriage, she is essentially tying up loose ends in the family, assuring generational succession and the continuity of the household. Since it is the descendants of the household that perpetuate the spirits of the household dead, the old woman's strategy can be seen as a process that assures her spirit to remain socially alive, even after, or in preparation for, her physical death.

At the end of the film, the son carries his mother on his back to a skeleton littered crag in the mountain where she sits, stoic and almost triumphant. The son returns to his family, and the viewer gets the sense that he is now truly the head of the household.

Obasuteyama and Old Age in Contemporary Japan

Today, *obasuteyama* has come to be associated with the shame of entering a nursing home, which can be seen as a modern way of abandoning filial duty and casting one's parents aside (Bethel 1992; Traphagen 2000). I argue that this over-simplified association, while interesting in the sense of showing the repetition of the *obasute* trope in modern Japan, does not begin to do justice to the psychological depth of the *obasute* story.

I have found the *obasuteyama* story especially helpful for understanding Japanese personality in old age as reflected in my work with the elderly, and from the four case

studies presented in this research. First, as suggested above, the *obasuteyama* story brings together the emotional complexity of abandonment, bereavement and mourning. Abandonment suggests the dependence of the old woman on her family (her death was not her choice), and therefore that other people are ultimately responsible for the outcome of old age. Even in the film version described above, the old woman must rely on both the approval of her community and the physical strength of her son to take her up to the mountain, even though it is her choice. Although still abandoned, the audience is left with the sense that she accepts this as part of the transition to her return as an honored spirit. In Zeami's Noh play, bereavement, or the experience of loss, and grief, or the emotional and somatic reaction to loss are exhibited, not by the son, but rather the old woman. The old woman, even as a ghost, re-experiences old age in terms of loss, and the shame of that loss, and tries to comfort herself at first by nostalgically recalling her youth before turning to the Buddha's light. In the end, she turns back to her own memories, and both the light of the Buddha, represented by the moon, and the travelers who were to dedicate an offering to ease the old woman's pain, have left.

Secondly, the different versions of the *obasuteyama* story suggest an unresolved ambivalence, both on the part of the old woman towards her own old age, and on the part of the son towards his aging mother. In Zeami's version, the dependent old woman is unable to act, though she attempt to retain control through her attachment to memories and things of the world. The son can and does take action, although reluctantly and not without lingering regret. The film on the other hand, depicts the old woman as actively shaping herself as an old woman, fulfilling her responsibilities to her family before retiring with the help of her reluctant son. The old woman's acceptance of death and the

son's final acceptance of the responsibilities of his succession as household head suggests that adaptive intergenerational relationships and a good death can be achieved. However, in order to achieve this ideal model, the older adult, satisfied with their accomplishments in life, must relinquish attachment to this world, while adult children must learn to relinquish their attachment to their parents, *even as* they fulfill their filial duty.

In some ways, the *obasuteyama* tale can be interpreted, not only as a story of generational change within the household, but also as one of larger social change. In this sense diminished community resources are apportioned to the younger generation, while the older generation must defer and, if necessary, be abandoned. The social capital of the elderly, such as wisdom and tradition, is not enough to offset the economic costs of the village in the tale. This problem is most clearly depicted in the version of the *obasuteyama* where the old woman is hidden away by her son, in direct violation of the community rules. As Yamaori (1997) describes, “[the son] is able to solve a number of difficult problems presented to him [by his ruler] with the wisdom and experience of his mother ... the custom of abandoning the aged is abolished” (Yamaori: 1997:35). If we were to interpret *obasuteyama* solely on the story as depicted by Zeami, we might easily miss the tension between wisdom and material resources and of tradition and change. This question of the value of the elderly, and how the elderly make themselves valuable remains debated in contemporary Japan, where fewer and fewer working age adults are available to support the numbers of retired adults.

Finally, I see the *obasuteyama* story as pertinent to the older people I spoke with because it clearly addresses both the pain and pleasure of remembrance in old age. If the ghost of the old woman is, in a sense, representative of an unfavorable old age, then this

is represented by an ambivalence between remembering (nostalgia or reminiscence of the “springtime” of one’s younger years), and longing for the “other world” (the grace of Amida Buddha to deliver the soul to paradise).

The basic components of the *Obasuteyama* story are old age and abandonment; bereavement and mourning, ambivalent intergenerational relationships, continuity and change, and memory and hope for the persistence of one’s spirit after death. These are also the underlying themes of the case studies that will be presented as the primary source of evidence for this research. By focusing on these themes, I will call attention to the similarities between the psychodynamics of aging and ancestor memorial in Japan.

Methodology and Research Design

Participant Observation

As I began my research I focused initially on exploratory participant observation (Bernard 1988: 148-180; Bogdewick 1992): seeking out informants, building rapport, surveying the city and refining research questions and methodology with respect to local “meta-communicative” norms (Briggs 1986). After making a few initial contacts I began to select key informants for future interviews. However, my focus on participant observation to both inform interviews and to compare with interview transcripts remained constant throughout the course of the research.

This research presented a methodological obstacle in that the subjects themselves did not constitute an easily bounded community such as a particular city ward, a congregation for a particular temple, participants in a certain trade or occupation or

residents in a retirement home. Rather, the intent of this research was to gather and record experiences and perceptions from elderly people from multiple backgrounds throughout the city. In order to begin participant observation then, I began with places where older people tended to gather, and attempted to extend my frame from these places to more personal arenas whenever possible.

Kyoto is divided into 11 wards, each with their own senior community welfare center and at least one “day-service” or adult day care center. Each ward is further divided into school districts which often provide additional social and educational groups directed by and for the elderly. Other neighborhood groups that I came into contact with, and that typically find a high participation amongst the elderly were local festival associations, women’s temple associations and fire safety associations.

I participated in activities and volunteered services to three main organizations: a school district-based social welfare cooperative association (*shakai fukushi kyōgikai* 社会福祉協議会), two ward-based senior community centers (*rōjin fukushi sentaa* 老人福祉センター) and ward-based senior day-service centers (*dei-saabisu sentaa* デーサービスセンター). Each of these groups is a semi-autonomous organization which is part of a broader system of institutions throughout the city.

Each of these very different institutions provided places for elderly people to socialize freely in non-familial settings, develop new knowledge and skills and receive support (Fujita and Sano 1988). They were therefore excellent venues for observing the ways in which older adults perform their identities within their cohort, as well as for observing how the performance of these identities were constructed in-part by cultural

norms and values of the institutions. For example, while the Senior Welfare Cooperative Association and Senior Welfare Centers were informed by larger cultural discourses regarding aging, their activities were largely decided, planned and carried out by elderly people themselves. On the other hand, Day-Service clients were often more mentally and physically dependent, and their daily activities were almost entirely carried out by younger, professionally trained caretakers and the occasional volunteer. As a result, their ability to shape their identity as an older person had more to do with accepting and performing a role of dependence, while maintaining a sense of integrity through reminiscence.

Because this research was focused primarily on healthy individuals, I chose to avoid conducting research in long-term care facilities, hospitals and the homes of those receiving in-home nursing care⁴. I also refrained from attempting to conduct extended interviews with persons I met at day-service centers. On the other hand, if I restricted my interaction with the elderly to the groups and centers, I would be running the risk of over-representing the elderly who were exceptionally active—a fault that seems common in gerontological research conducted for the purposes of social work and nursing. Therefore, whenever I could, I sought introductions to possible informants through other, less institutionally framed means.

In the end, the majority of those who agreed to participate in several life-history interview sessions were not those who I contacted through the senior centers or neighborhood associations, but rather through chance meetings and introductions. As we

⁴ See Long 2005 for an excellent description of such facilities in Japan

established rapport with one another, the arena of observation naturally expanded to include individuals' homes, neighborhoods and religious institutions.

Interviews

Whereas data gathered through participant observation allowed me to situate informants' lives into a larger context of family and social life, interview data was used to investigate informants' more private lives—their personal feelings and perceptions of their experiences, their desires and anxieties about old age, and their reflections on religious and spiritual matters. Because some informants were less forthcoming about such personal matters (especially in public arenas), it was necessary to conduct several interviews over a long period of acquaintance, in private or semi-private settings (usually the interviewee's home). This also allowed me the chance to become familiar with the recurrence of personally scripted self-narratives, as well as the use of more widely shared cultural scripts regarding old age and the ancestors. Once I could determine an individual's use of these sorts of scripts, I could focus on more idiosyncratic narratives.

Interviews were conducted according to an open-ended, person-centered method (Levy and Hollan 1998) and a check-list of basic topics was used to generate a basis for comparability and organization (see Appendix I). This check-list served as a guide for prompts during the interview as well as for new topics when interviewees seemed to have exhausted their interest in previously discussed topics.

Life-history interviews were used to simulate a longitudinal approach that could help to identify changes in sentiment and personality over the individual's life course. Of course the process of recollection is influenced by the informants' situation at the time of

the interview as well as the revisionary mechanism of memory and reminiscence which tends to emphasize certain episodes (usually more positive) over others. This problem was taken into account by comparing the narrative of the life histories to other interviews and observations, including the interviewee's tone, expression, gesture, and word choice. When possible, I interviewed friends and children of my primary informants in order to confirm or disconfirm my impressions.

I did not make an attempt at establishing a representative sample of elderly informants, but as it turned out, I was able to conduct open-ended life-history interviews with 10 individuals whose backgrounds, current situations and religious life were quite diverse. Of these 10 interview subjects, 5 were male and 5 female; 5 lived with adult children, and 5 lived only with a spouse. In addition, these 10 individuals represented 6 of Kyoto's 11 wards, 6 different sects of Buddhism and an array of occupations from ex-taxi-driver to ex-college professor. Four of the 10 individuals were interviewed on 10 or more occasions, typically between an hour and an hour and a half each time, over the course of one year. The other 6 were interviewed between two and five times, for an average of 2 hours each session.

In order to establish differences between the religious practices of the elderly and younger cohorts, interviews were also conducted with 5 young adults (30 years old or younger) and 7 middle-aged adults (ages 31-65). For the younger cohorts, interviews were arranged through the help of a public youth community center, and consisted of individuals between the ages of 22 and 27. In contrast to the interviews with the older adults, these interviews were semi-structured, using topics generated during the open-ended life-history interviews. In addition, there was no effort at building rapport prior to

the interviews, although introductions were made by the youth center and some initial contact was made via email to explain the purpose of the project and the format of the interview. Finally, the interviews with the younger cohort were conducted either in cafés or at the youth center itself, which supplied a private room.

I conducted similar semi-structured interviews with 7 middle-aged adults, defined roughly as persons born after World War II and currently involved in productive work and/or childrearing. The interviewees ranged in age from 40 to 62. These interviews took place in homes, places of work and in cafés. All of those in this group were employed, and 5 of the 7 were raising children at home.

The young and middle-aged cohorts differ significantly from the elderly in their experience and perception of historical changes in Japan, the family, and age related factors such as retirement, health, and concerns with death. They also differ in regards to relationships with the recently and long deceased members of the household, and therefore can illuminate several aspects of the problems of this research dealing with the ancestors.

All of the interviews were conducted in Japanese, and most were digitally recorded and later indexed and partially transcribed either by myself or by a Japanese research assistant hired for this purpose. Recording the interviews allowed me to focus on extra-linguistic indicators that could not be perceived through the audio recording alone. In cases where a transcription assistant was hired, I reviewed each transcription together with the assistant in order to get her opinion on ambiguous terms or terms specific to Kyoto that I wasn't familiar with. This exchange often provided further illumination to the conversation that I would not have been able to uncover myself.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation develops as follows. The first four chapters situate the analysis presented above by reviewing some of the important theoretical work on both aging and ancestor memorial. Chapter 1 concentrates on some of the major questions that anthropologists have dealt with by engaging the topics of aging and ancestor memorial, such as the nature of inter-generational relationships, the development of the person over the life-course and the experience of mourning and memorial. In this chapter, I attempt to draw parallels between the answers to these questions that have been proposed by various scholars, making the case that the theoretical contributions of studies of aging and ancestor memorial are complimentary, and should be studied together. Chapter 2 strengthens my case by focusing specifically on the relationship between aging and ancestor worship in the historical context of Japanese religiosity. Chapter 3 focuses on definitions and practices of contemporary Japanese ancestor memorial. Chapter 4 introduces the ethnographic location, drawing heavily on observations made during my fieldwork.

Chapters 5-12 are structured as four duets, each with a topical melody that introduces a theme, and a case-study harmony that brings rich ethnographic depth to the theme. Each of these duets explore a different facet of the experience of aging and its relationship to religion as introduced in the *obasuteyama* story above: 1) mourning and loss (Chapters 5 and 6); 2) inter-generational relationships (Chapters 7 and 8); 3) continuity and tradition (Chapters 9 and 10); and 4) memory and hope (Chapters 11 and 12). In each of four thematic pairs, I reveal how old age brings about fears of

abandonment, and how practicing ancestor memorial eases these fears and helps reshape older adult identity.

In summary, the underlying fear that motivates ancestor memorial among the elderly in Japan is not a fear of death, but the fear of abandonment. Elderly Japanese believe that becoming dependent will result in becoming burdensome or dependent, and that this will ultimately result in abandonment. Considering the importance of reciprocity and interdependence in Japanese culture, and the ways in which this is reinforced through child socialization, it is not surprising that this fear would have significant weight. Ancestor worship attends to this fear not only by providing a source of meaning to the elderly, but also by integrating them within a different position in the family—a different sense of time, space and belonging.

Ancestor memorial entails a set of practices and beliefs that allow older adults to revisit old memories, especially those involving their dead parents, grandparents or spouses, and to re-incorporate these memories into their understandings of themselves. Remembering people of one's own past helps older Japanese people create a meaningful narrative of their present self as well as where they will go in the future. As an older adult, imagining a dead relative in the other world entails a close association with one's own life. The deployment of methods of reminiscence, narrative constructions, gift exchange and other symbolic interactions that characterize Japanese ancestor worship practices draws the elderly person closer, in a relational sense, to the role of an ancestor. Introducing the emotional and existential experience of old age in Japan to the analysis of ancestor memorial practices opens up new ways in which to view the interaction between culture and psychology in Japanese religion.

Chapter 1: Aging and Ancestors in Context

The disciplinary studies of aging and ancestor memorial, even within anthropology, have developed along largely separate lines. This is despite the fact that they address many similar themes, such as the concern with death and dying, grief and bereavement, succession and inheritance, and psychological adjustment over the life course. It is not surprising that there has been little work to date looking particularly at the relationship between aging and ancestor memorial, since social gerontology research, even when dealing specifically with the topic of religion, has traditionally focused on North American and European societies that do not practice ancestor memorial; whereas many of the important anthropological studies of ancestor memorial have focused on societies where, until recently, old age had not been considered a problematic social issue, such as Africa, East Asia and Melanesia (Middleton 1960; Goody 1962; Rappaport 1967; MacDonald 2001).

In the case of Japan, I argue that older adults, responding to their own psychological needs, are often motivated to practice religion differently than younger people, and that when these needs concern the fear of abandonment, ancestor memorial becomes particularly important. Because ancestor memorial, as it is practiced in Japan, concerns the nature of mourning, memory, family relationships and old age identity, this research may even generate implications for understanding societies that do not practice a formal procedure of memorial for the deceased. In order to better contextualize my own research, I will first review some of the theoretical questions in the anthropology of aging and the anthropology of ancestor memorial. In each case, I make a distinction between

those questions that address issues of social structure and those that relate primarily to psychological issues. This distinction is at some points blurry, as the two approaches are clearly interrelated—this is precisely the point I wish to make: that the study of aging and religion is best approached from both socio-cultural and psychological perspectives, or, from a psychosocial perspective that can encompass both of these viewpoints.

Old Age and Anthropology

Margaret Clark (1968), a pioneer in the anthropological study of old age, notes that although anthropologists have long depended on elderly informants, there seemed to be a lack of theoretical focus on aging itself (Clark 1968: 433-434). Since Clark and others called attention to this omission, the field of “geroanthropology,” or the anthropology of aging, has accumulated a rich and diverse number of ethnographies and theoretical writings (Meyerhoff 1976; Kertzer and Keith (eds.) 1984; Rubenstein (ed.) 1990; Schwietzer (ed.) 1991; Cohen 1994; Sokolovsky 1997; Ikels and Beall 2001).

Nevertheless, the idea that the anthropology of aging should be seen as a sub-category composing its own theoretical innovations, has its critics as well. Cohen (1994), for example, cautions anthropologists to the question of the very possibility of a “geroanthropology,” noting that much of the geroanthropological literature has lacked sufficient self-critical analysis of the underlying motivations that frame the discourses on aging that it purports to address (Cohen 1994: 139). More recent work in the study of aging has attempted to address Cohen’s critiques, refining the kinds of questions scholars ask about old age as well as its possibilities for theoretical contributions (Biggs, Lowenstein and Hendricks 2003). Both Cohen’s critiques as well as the responses to it

bring a welcome reflection on the question, “why an anthropology of old age?” Or, phrased differently, “what anthropological questions does studying old age answer?”

While evolutionary biologists consider questions of why humans live as long as they do (Dolhinow 1984; Mayer 1987), social anthropologists have asked what purpose the elderly have for maintaining and perpetuating social structure and culture. All known societies have at least one linguistic equivalent to “old person” as distinct from “adult” (Sokolovsky 1997: 2). Furthermore, a survey of HRAF (Human Relations Area Files) has shown that most societies base the use of their term for “old age” on changes in social role, more than on chronological age or change in capabilities or physical characteristics (Sokolovsky 1997: 4). Social anthropology has sought to address the roles of the elderly, in order to understand how societies have devised ways to exclude or include, integrate or discard their elders to preserve social stability.

Old Age and Social Structure

Old age was systematically addressed by anthropologists in terms of social age-groups, age-grades or age-stratification (Radcliffe Brown 1929; Evans-Pritchard 1940; Kertzer and Keith (eds.) 1984; Maybury-Lewis 1984; Traphagen 2000; Tuzin; 2001). In these age-grade schemes, elders often have a different status, ritual, jural or productive. This means that they were recognized based on their degree of maturity as having a different status in their community and this change in social status was often marked by a rite of passage (Turner 1967).

The recognition of different systems of age-groups or age-grades gave greater attention to the role of older adults in the family, and in particular the relation of maturity

to inheritance and succession (Fortes 1984; Maybury-Lewis 1984; Pendergast 2005). What each of these has in common is the notion that older adults, while on the periphery of processes of economic production or biological reproduction, nonetheless hold important roles of influence and power, or a kind of social capital within the community. The worth that this social capital produces offsets the burden that elders produce on other members of society.

The importance of the elderly in systems of age-grading or stratification and their corresponding roles, duties and rites of passage that this entails is less explicit in many other societies. However, despite this, the fundamental question of how to integrate the elderly into a socially meaningful role remains important. Some studies, for example, have looked at aging in the family in terms of the role of grand-parenting (Kivette 1991; Vesperi 1997), or caring for the elderly (Hareven 1986; Rosenberg 1990; Sung 1994; Jenike 1997; Cattell 1997; Krause 2001). These studies emphasize the sometimes difficult process of integrating older adults into the family rather than age-grade system.

In societies where the extended family is not expected to take full care of its older members, the gap in care has often been mediated by state and local institutions and networks. A significant literature on the effects of participation in non-familial care institutions, such as retirement or nursing homes, highlights the ambivalence felt on the part of both the elderly as well as caretakers (Kinoshita and Keifer 1992; Tsuji 1997; Shield 1997; Woolfson 1997). Others have emphasized the increasing role of the elderly themselves in managing aging, and the difficulties or paradoxes that arise from this venture (Counts and Counts 1997; Tsuji 1997; Oliver 2007).

Finally, there are those societies where the elderly are systematically neglected or where “death-hastening behavior” (Glascock 1997) is practiced. While these societies are relatively few, it is important to emphasize that in almost all of these societies anthropologists have also documented supportive or at least non-threatening treatment (Glascock 1997: 64). This finding is useful for assessing older adults “complaint discourse” (Rosenberg 1990) or other expressions of fears of abandonment and neglect, such as the tale of *obasuteyama* described in the Introduction because it emphasizes the ambivalence on the part of caretakers towards old age.

The discourse on caretaking and social dynamics tends to focus on the perspectives of the caretakers themselves, rather than the older adults being cared for. It is important to note the ambivalence of the elderly towards their position in society and the relationship of this ambivalence to their attitudes and behaviors. While the elderly people I spoke with often described their wishes to be cared for in old age, such discussions often included expressions of shame and remorse as well. In order to understand this, it is important to understand the psychological dynamics of growing older.

Old Age and Human Development

Psychological theories of aging try to take into account the development of the person over the entire life-course, framing old-age personality in terms of continuities and discontinuities or stability and change (Lanum and Birrin 1995:522, Chiriboga 1990). In other words, aging calls into question what aspects of the person remain important for the subjective formation of identity despite age, and what aspects are more dependent

upon reaching a new stage in life, which introduces new perspectives or brings to the fore aspects that existed mainly as potentialities in prior stages of life. Studies by social psychologists have looked at this issue in terms of rigidity, cautiousness, depression, introversion and other aspects that seemed to either increase or emerge with age (Lanum and Birrin 1995: 521).

While some anthropologists study aging in regards to particular traits, others have found it useful to approach aging from a developmental perspective that focuses on the individual life-course (Hareven 1982; Featherstone and Hepworth 1991; Hockey and James 2003). These scholars not only look at how culture shapes the experience of aging, but how the subjective experience of old age, and the changes in personality that this entails, feeds back into cultural beliefs and practices. One of the most fundamentally important theorists of life course psychology is Erik Erikson, who sought to combine psychoanalytic concepts with the strong influence of the social environment, and by doing so, outline a psychosocial perspective of the entire life course. While some believe that Erikson forwarded controversial claims regarding old age and ethical or religious faith, his overall structure of life course development remains a fundamental contribution to our understanding of psychology in old age. Because Erikson and those who have developed his central ideas in regards to identity, reminiscence and personal narrative are important to the view of aging that I take in this research, I feel that it is important to briefly review his contributions here.

Erik Erikson's and the Japanese Life-Cycle

In contrast to Freud, who seemed to have a general aversion to the elderly and to his own aging (Schur 1972: 258, 259; Woodward 1991: 48), Erikson, together with his wife Joan, wrote prolifically about old age (Erikson 1980, Erikson and Erikson 1997 [1982], Erikson, Erikson and Kivnick 1986), and is perhaps the best known psychoanalytic thinker to address the last stage in life. In this section I will briefly outline Erik Erikson's model of identity and the life-course, or life-cycle, before concentrating on the last stage in his model: old age. I argue that Erikson is not only useful for the study of the lives of older Japanese adults, but also that applying Erikson's theories to Japanese adults emphasizes concepts that Erikson perhaps could not have developed in the context of the United States, where he primarily lived and worked. Also, Erikson's understanding of the life cycle gives insights into the role of culture, and religious faith in particular, in the lives of the elderly.

Erikson's model of the human psychosocial development is illustrated most succinctly in what he terms the "epigenetic chart" (Fig 1.1). This was inspired by the idea of the epigenesis of the embryo (Erikson 1982: 26-27). The basic premise of the chart is that every person passes through successive developmental stages as one matures, and each of these stages builds upon and interacts with the others (regressively with prior stages and potentially with future ones). At younger ages, the later stages of life exist mainly as latent potentialities, whereas for the older adult, those stages of life that one has

progressed through in youth may be recollected and readdressed, primarily by the unconscious ego, in light of a new experience, environment and/or psychosocial conditions.

Psychosocial Crises

Old Age	VIII									Integrity vs. Despair, disgust. WISDOM
Adulthood	VII									Generativity vs. Stagnation. CARE
Young Adulthood	VI									Intimacy vs. Isolation. LOVE
Adolescence	V									Identity vs. Identity Confusion. FIDELITY
School Age	IV									Industry vs. Inferiority. COMPETENCE
Play Age	III									Initiative vs. Guilt. PURPOSE
Early Childhood	II									Autonomy vs. Shame, Doubt. WILL
Infancy	I									Basic Trust vs. Basic Mistrust. HOPE
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	

Fig 1.1 Erik Erikson's model of the eight stage epigenetic life course. Each stage is characterized by crisis as well as a virtue (in caps) that comes from a healthy adjustment to the terms of each crisis. The 56 "empty" quadrants represent possibilities for interaction between different stages of development. (Table reproduced from Erikson 1980)

The dynamic principle of Erikson's epigenetic chart is the characterization of each stage in terms of "syntonic" and "dystonic" elements most relevant to each stage. These two elements form a crisis that the individual works through during each period of life, and tries to resolve to a reasonable degree in order to adapt to future stages of life. In the first stage, "Infancy-Oral-Sensory," for example, the infant begins to formulate a sense of "basic trust" and "basic mistrust" in his or her caretaker (Erikson 1993 [1950]):

247). Still, confronted with the painful reality of limited access to the caretaker, the infant develops both trust and mistrust in world, eventually adapting and finding a balance between the opposing and yet complementary aspects that will affect future orientations. This balance is important, because if the child accepts too much trust, he or she is likely to become gullible or overly dependent. On the other hand, if there is too much mistrust, and the child is likely to be reactionary, or detached and indifferent. In this way, a process of negotiation occurs at each of the eight stages. It is also important to note that striking a balance between syntonic and dystonic poles is not even primarily a conscious process. Unconscious motivations, including those initiated by the ego, such as psychological defenses, also strongly affect how the individual will resolve each crisis. In the eight stages in Erikson's model, the first three are consistent with Freud's developmental model of infant sexuality (oral sensory/infancy, muscular-anal /early childhood and locomotor-genital/play age phases). These lay the foundation for later psychological development. The next three (latency/school age, adolescence/puberty and young adulthood), focus on the interaction between the adolescent and the broadening social world and institutions they encounter. The last two stages (adulthood and old age/maturity) focus on generativity and integration. Erikson's eight stages, initially proposed in 1950, were gradually expanded upon and refined in subsequent publications (Erikson 1980, 1986, 1994; 1997) but the basic format of the resolution of stage-specific crisis remained essentially the same.

In conducting interviews with elderly Japanese men and women, I would often recall Erikson's epigenetic chart, as it gave me a general structure by which to intuitively assess the various stages and turning points that built each person's life-history narrative.

Naturally I could not elicit details of very early childhood (stages 1-3), nor very much about the early days of play and school apart from the very general recollections (stage 4-5). Talk of childhood play would often lead into other, sometimes surprising topics suggesting associations with other points in life. In fact, most interviews rarely, progressed along a chronological or linear narrative, and certainly not in the stage oriented way that Erikson drew out. With more interviews, the narratives became smoother, as my practiced interlocutors usually felt embarrassed when they would get “off-topic”⁵. Some Informants did have a sense of an organized, sequential narrative of their life, others were constantly shifting time, place and perspective during the interviews. Considering Erikson’s model from this perspective gave a new fullness and fluidity to the 56 “empty” quadrants in the epigenetic chart, as the act of reminiscence seemed to associate certain old age with other stages that were not completely resolved, and which continued to be important to other life events.

The most important stage of Erikson’s model for the purpose of this research is the eighth stage: “Old Age.” All of my primary informants had arrived at the eighth stage identified in Erikson’s chart, and the defining crisis of this stage is “Ego-Integrity vs. Despair” (1993 [1950]:268)⁶. Transitioning from adulthood, during which the crisis of generativity vs. stagnation motivated ego to work and produce and reproduce, Erikson argues that the elder now must learn to find generativity in other ways, letting a

⁵ Neugarten (1985) writes that personal narrative must be “followable” and “self-explanatory” and “judged in terms of its internal consistency and how well it accounts for the various events of the life course; it must make sense in ways that others can accept, which is to say it must be understandable in terms of socially shared meanings” (1985: 298). In my interviews, I can account for much of the deviation from linear narrative style to my interviewees’ lack of understanding about the “shared meanings” I was after.

⁶ Erikson describes “Despair” in old age as “disgust” and “distain” or “rejectivity” in subsequent works. “Ego-integrity” is also described in later works as “Integrality,” and had different implications for Erikson’s depiction of late life.

satisfaction with work well done allow for the emergence of a new perspective on one's goals and aspirations. The ability and perhaps the desire towards generativity that drove middle-adulthood would need to give way to late adulthood, and the realization that one would not go back.

Erikson describes "ego-integrity" as:

the post-narcissistic love of the human ego—not of the self... an experience which conveys some worldly order and spiritual sense, no matter how dearly paid for. It is the acceptance of one's one and only life cycle as something that had to be and that, by necessity, permitted of no substitutions: it thus means a new, a different love of one's parents. It is a comradeship with the ordering of ways of distant times and different pursuits, as expressed in the simple products and saying of such times and pursuits...in such final consolation, death loses its sting. (1993 [1950]:268)

Joan Erikson, at the age of 93, wrote that in her own experience of "integrity,"

Love, devotion and friendship bloom; sadness is tender and enriching; the beauty of relationships is deeply heart-warming. *Looking back is engagingly memorable*; the present is natural and full of little pleasures, immense joys and much laughter (1997: 8-9 emphasis mine)

While Joan Erikson's description highlights the intensity of the ideals of the eighth stage, the fact that each stage in Erikson's model depends upon tension, or crisis between opposing tendencies should not be overlooked. If it were not for this tension, if each person effortlessly progressed through their lives to each ideal of every stage, religion or other symbolic systems would not be as meaningful for resolving these crises.

The need for integrity in old age entails a return to those first stages of life, either through reminiscence or through those cultural institutions that attend those early needs⁷.

⁷ Taft and Nehrke (1995:188) found some correlation between reminiscence as a means of life review and ego integrity, but the strength of the findings is hampered by methodological problems.

In his words, it means a “different love of one’s parents,” and in hers “looking back is engagingly memorable.” Because this research deals not only with memorial rites, but also with the remembrances of the interviews, the linkage between reminiscence, ego-integrity and old age is important. But what is special about reminiscence in the religious context?

Erikson writes that “throughout life, this tension [between basic trust and mistrust] involves issues of commitment to established religion and, with increasing age, of quasi-religious, philosophical considerations” (Erikson, Erikson and Kivnick 1986:218). In this statement he seems to imply that religious faith deepens as one ages, or at least begins to focus on personal existential matters rather than on institutions. For example, Erikson writes that “what begins as hope [the virtue gained by developing a positive orientation of trust] in the individual infant is in its mature form faith” (Erikson 1964:153). According to Erikson, the link between the elderly and the child is the link between the experience of the “numinous” world of the first experience of “I” and “other,” and is, for Erikson, most purely expressed in the institutions of art and religion (Erikson 1997 [1982]:45)⁸. Here, in the linking of the child and the elder, the present and the past, Erikson shows how memory, age and religion are linked culturally and psychologically. Reminiscence brings integrity, while the reassessment of the first stage in the context of integrity brings the possibility of a more mature form of faith.

⁸ Erikson writes that, “ ‘ritualizations’ of each of the major stages of life correspond to one of the major institutions in the structure of societies—and to their rituals. I submit that this first and dimmest affirmation of the described polarity of “I” and “Other” is basic to a human being’s ritual and esthetic needs for a pervasive quality which we call the numinous: the aura of a hallowed presence...Religion and art are the institutions with the strongest traditional claim on the cultivation of numinosity” (Erikson 1997 [1982]:45)

Given the limitations of late life, and the anticipation of death that comes with it, Erikson writes that,

With their special perspective on the life cycle, [older adults] are in a position to serve as guides for the futures of those who follow, at the same time that they must struggle to find guides on whom they can rely in considering their own futures and that of our world as a whole (Erikson, Erikson and Kivnick 1986:56)

It is interesting that Erikson would note that even elders need guides for their futures, despite the fact that they anticipate that death is drawing close. These guides may be living figures but also deceased ones, such as parents, grandparents or other elder role-models. This may be what Erikson means when he describes ego-integrity as “a different love of one’s parents” (Erikson 1993 [1950]: 268).

In Japan, the ancestors are venerated precisely because they are remembered for their accomplishments, and can in this way be considered guides. The relationship between the ancestors and believers is strongly influenced not only by the needs of one’s psychosocial stage of life, but also by culture. The influence of culture on psychosocial development is key to Erikson’s thought, which, unlike Freud, begins by considering the healthy, or well-adapted individual. One useful model of how culture affects emotional and psychological states is offered by Robert Levy (1973).

Erikson’s notion of ascendant psychosocial crisis can be combined with Levy’s (1973) concepts of *hypercognition* and *hypogonition*, mentioned in the Introduction. Levy argues that in any society, “some sets of feelings are relatively ‘hypercognated,’ controlled, so to speak, by discrimination, whereas others are ‘hypocognated’ and controlled by cultural invisibility or at least by difficulty of access to communication”

(1973:324). Similar to Erikson, Levy's argument is useful for focusing on the resources and constraints that culture provides not only for emotional expression, but also for the very phenomenology of emotions.

As a person progresses from one developmental stage to the next, the way in which each psychosocial crisis is resolved will depend upon the availability of cultural resources and constraints. In Japan, where it could be argued that guilt (Stage 3) is a hypocognized emotion, one might expect feelings of guilt to be expressed in terms of shame (Stage 2), which is more hypercognized. Rather than the pain of shame being turned towards the self, the pain of guilt is turned outward and projected on others. This allows for a more complex reading on Erikson's developmental stages, since it implies that resolving crisis at one stage may involve partially "borrowing" resources from past stages. Furthermore, because the experience of the cultural environment is not uniform over the life course, different cultural resources may become available in later life that attend to hypocognized emotions of earlier stages.

By showing how Erikson's model can be combined with Levy's idea of hypocognition, I aim to point out the plasticity and adaptability of his model, as well as make the case that the stages as I understand Erikson explaining them, are not experienced as distinct units of time with a clear beginning and end, but that the cultural environment provides constraints resulting in slippage between stages over the entire life course. Furthermore, Erikson's model enables us to add another dimension to Levy's model by considering that cultural identity is experienced differently at different stages of psychosocial development. Although an individual's ego-identity, once adapted to the cultural environment may seem to remain fairly stable over a life course, Erikson also

shows how the experience of the self to its body, the relationship to cultural institutions, and the significance of memory and life-review all contribute to new possibilities for the emergence of new emotional experience. This adds a further dynamic quality to Levy's model and enriches Erikson's as well.

In my research I will attempt to show how the Erikson-Levy model supports the argument that ancestor memorial attends to the needs of the elderly as they begin to experience a new emotional landscape of their relationship to their bodies, to institutions and memories. It entails a form of reminiscence that can transform the past into a way of experiencing the present self and anticipating its future.

Critiques of Erikson

The most common critique of Erikson's model is that its generalizations about human development and identity are too ethnocentric to describe other cultures. Because Erikson's model is not only based in western psychoanalytic theory, but is also framed in a way that makes it appear to be organized in terms of an individual's linear and progressive movement from lower to higher stages of realization, some critics have dismissed it as inapplicable to non-western, non-Christian, non-individualistic societies.

As Hoare (2002) writes in her account of Erikson's life and work:

Some critics have claimed that he generalized to an extent that stretched believability. In particular, by attaching identity to adolescence and then to all of adult development, including spirituality, ethics, prejudice, and group and national belonging, identity's credibility sagged ... Appropriately, Erikson's projection of middle-class, Euro-American identity as the gold standard for all has caused him the most difficulties. (2002:209)

One example of this critique is found in the work of Yoko Yamada (2006, 2003), who claims that Erikson's model of the life cycle contrasts with the Japanese experience,

which she describes not only as cyclical and giving equal importance to each transition. Yamada criticizes Erikson and other life-cycle model theorists as individualistic, linear, progressive and consistent with western ideas of “successful aging” (Yamada 2003: 16-17). In Yamada’s view “Erikson neglected the natural loss of power or ability in old age and the appreciation of death in human life” (Yamada 2003: 103)⁹. This is a surprising claim, considering that Erikson himself writes:

At the end the life cycle turns back on the beginnings, there has remained something in the anatomy even of mature hope, and in a variety of faiths...which confirms hopefulness as the most childlike of all human qualities...Thus, a historical change like the lengthening of the average life span calls for viable re-ritualizations . . . as well as some finite sense of summary and, possibly, a more active anticipation of dying (1997 [1982]: 62-63)

I believe that Yamada is more in line with Eriksonian thought than she believes she is. In fact, her own model, which she calls the “Generative Life Cycle Model” (GLCM), uses Erikson’s idea of “generativity” (Stage 7), which she writes, “involves concern in establishing and guiding the next generation and is connected with intergenerational relations beyond the ego of the individual” (Yamada 2003: 21).

Unfortunately, rather than simply adapting Erikson’s model to the Japanese case, as I am attempting, Yamada introduces an entirely new model to describe the life course, and in effect, loses the psychoanalytic insights of Erikson’s model. This does not mean

⁹ Although this may arguably be the case, it does not necessarily diminish Erikson’s overall life course model. Hoare (2002) writes that “Comparing his writings at the ages of 48- to 64- years, when he was in his middle and early old age years, and those at the ages of 72-81, when he was in middle and late old age, it is clear that his writings became more negative as he aged.” (Hoare 2002: 220) She continues to say that in his early years, nineteen statements “portrayed a positive resolution, tone or content,” and four negative. In older years thirteen negative, six positive (Hoare 2002:220). The fact that Erikson struggled with the pain of old age is supported by comments made by his wife Joan Erikson in a reissue of *The Life-cycle Completed* (1997 [1982]).

that we should dismiss Yamada's findings altogether, since they have some genuinely important insights and are one of the few examples that I could find of a Japanese critique of Erikson. For example, Yamada proposes an idea of the life-cycle in which the vital energy of the self is distributed throughout a social system, and therefore "nested within a series of interconnected, concentric life cycles" (Yamada 2003:24). When we take into account the practice of ancestor memorial, Yamada claims that for the Japanese, "interaction with their ancestors allows them to feel that they occupy a certain position in a long succession of related lives. . . It is essential for the GCLM that people feel their lives are an animate part of a larger cycle of life from generation to generation—an ongoing process" (Yamada 2003: 109).

I argue that although Yamada's critiques of Erikson's view of the life course are important to take into account when considering old age and ancestor memorial in Japan, they cannot completely displace the epigenetic model as a psychological tool for assessing the human life course. This is because Erikson's model of the life course trajectory does not ascribe a deterministic view of earlier stages of development, but rather depicts adulthood and old age as both the culmination of earlier stages *as well as* an opportunity to revisit the crisis posed by those earlier stages in light of current realities. Therefore in his study of old age in the US, Erikson reviews the significance of all stages of development in the lives of the elderly, not only the eighth (Erikson, Erikson and Kivnick, 1986). The fact that the construction of identity in late life, although foregrounded by earlier psychological needs also provides a structure for these earlier needs to be revisited, revised and reinstilled with meaning is, I believe important to both Yamada's and Erikson's thought.

Erikson and other scholars who focus on the life course show how meaning in old age depends upon constructing a sense of a stable identity based on a personal narrative that integrates memories into resolving the crisis of one's current situation. For the person in Erikson's last stage, however, the question of where to go next insistently remains. If one's sense of identity in old age is a matter of both who one was as well as who one is going to be, and if one needs role-models or guides to become that person in the future, then it is important to understand elder perspectives on the continuance of the person after death. The continuity of the person after death is expressed in the memorial of the person after death, and while there is tremendous variation in how this is done—from posting an obituary to practicing in secondary burial rites—there is little debate about the effect of these practices in restoring a sense of solace in the place of loss.

Anthropological Perspectives on Ancestor Memorial

Burial rites have been held up together with language as one of the fundamental markers of the advent of culture in human societies (Mithin 1996:135-136). The elaboration of mortuary rituals and the continuance of rites performed for the dead, has been a principle focus of anthropology since the early days of the discipline (Tylor 1891; Frazer 1934). For the purpose of this research, I follow the definition of ancestor worship (memorial) suggested by Meyer Fortes, who distinguishes ancestor worship as “customary beliefs and practices that are directed towards dead predecessors” (Fortes 1976:2). In this section I will try to show how ancestor worship represents not only a way for elderly people to think about lost loved ones, but to think about their own identities as they prepare to make a similar transition.

Just as I have asked the question, “Why an anthropology of old age?” above, in this section I ask, “Why an anthropology of ancestor worship?” This question is perhaps less notable, since the study of the place of ancestor memorial in culture has a much longer tradition in anthropology than the study of old age. I will therefore focus specifically on those aspects of ancestor memorial that pertain most to the study of aging in Japan in order to contextualize my own research.

Ancestor Worship and Social Structure

Approaches to the study of ancestor worship, or memorial, have been very similar to those used to study aging. Of course, this is hardly surprising since both are closely associated with the distribution and transfer of power within a kinship structure.

Ancestor memorial and aging also converge on the problem with how societies cope with the problem of death; in the former death is a beginning, and in the latter, it is the end.

Ancestor worship, or the “ancestral cult” has been distinguished from the practice of “death rites,” in that the perpetuation of the ancestors is seen as necessary for the maintenance of a lineage, clan, household, or the like. Emile Durkheim (1995) elaborates this distinction, arguing that,

A cult is not a mere collection of ritual precautions that man is responsible for taking in certain circumstances. It is a system of rites, feasts, and various ceremonies *all having the characteristic that they recur periodically*. They meet the need that the faithful feel periodically to tighten and strengthen the bond between them and the sacred beings on which they depend. (1995: 59-60 original emphasis)

Durkheim argues that although primitive societies, such as the Australian Aborigines, may practice death rites, this does not result in perpetuation or memorialization of the

deceased *as a person*, but rather as “legendary heroes,” who are “not men who, after having experienced the life of men were transformed by death into something like gods,” but are “thought to have enjoyed superhuman powers throughout their lives” (Durkheim 1995:60). They do not, in other words, become ancestors in the sense of being identified with “the relatives that men really lose each day” (Durkheim 1995:61)¹⁰.

Durkheim’s distinction between death rites and the ancestral cult is important, because it situates religious practices within the larger arena of social structure, and challenges social scientists to study what may appear to be private acts as social phenomenon. Durkheim’s student, Robert Hertz, furthers this analysis in his study of Malayo-Polynesian mortuary rituals. Hertz (1960) argues that the rite of secondary-burial provides more than just an arena for the expression of grief, but also functions to reorganize society in the aftermath of a death through the ritual redistribution of emotional roles among the bereaved. This redistribution is necessary, Hertz felt, to heal the damage to social structure rent by the loss of a member. Although the emotional and somatic experience of grief is important to Hertz’s argument, and Durkheim’s as well, it is only important insofar as it initiates a series of rituals to keep that determine the form of grief and keep it from disrupting social structure¹¹.

Having established that ancestor worship has particular social value that encompasses more than private death rites, social scientists began to look at precisely what those social values were. First, ancestors, whether identified as individual souls or

¹⁰ The primitive, animistic and totemistic beliefs Durkheim distinguishes from the ancestral cult have obvious parallels with Japanese Shinto and Emperor worship traditions. While Durkheim argues that ancestral cults grew out of totemism, and represents a developmental advancement in society, Yanagita Kunio (1970) argues that in the case of Japan, the belief in deities grew out of the ancestral cult.

¹¹ For more on the significance of Hertz’s work, see Bloch and Parry (1982: 2-7) and Huntington and Metcalf (1991: 33-37) and Chidester (2002:31-34)

as the collectivity of family dead, influence the living by anchoring descent lines, or lineages. Generally speaking, what determines an “ancestor,” rather than, say, a “ghost,” is the fact that they have descendents, or at least some living kin that fulfills the responsibility of carrying out death rites. The organization of kin groups linked by shared ancestors forms a basis for the distribution of social roles, and often has a large impact on claims to the wealth or property of the ancestors (Goody 1962), alliances or rivalries to other clans, marriage arrangements, ritual authority and responsibility and the like.

The legitimacy of these claims depends upon upholding the power of the ancestors, which is analogous with placing the power of the social order above the desires of individual actors. The power of the ancestors is often expressed in their ability to both protect and punish their descendents for violations of social propriety. The gratitude and/or fear of the power of the ancestors is maintained through the act of making a sacrifice, or giving an offering. The recognition of the ancestors is not necessarily limited to formal public death rites. In the Zulu ancestor worship, for example, Chidester notes that “descendents ... honored [the ancestors] by setting aside a special cow in the cattle enclosure, by placing beer and food in the *umsamo* of the hut [a special place for making offerings], by leaving unwashed cooking pots on the hearth for them to lick, and by being conscious of their constant presence” (Chidester 2002: 58). Ancestors may also appear as spirits in visions and dreams inviting speculation about the members of the moral behaviors of the spirit’s descent group. What is in some instances veneration, is in other ways, everyday consideration.

When aging and ancestor worship are viewed from a structural perspective, it seems at first that there is little that distinguishes the elder from the ancestor. This argument is made by Janelli and Janelli (1982), who take what they call the “cognitive approach” (Janelli and Janelli 1982:173) in their study of Korean ancestral hostility. Their approach leads them to conclude that the character of the ancestors can be seen as an extension of relationships between living people, and most importantly between juniors and elders. As one of their informants told them, “An ancestor’s affliction of a descendant is just like a parent hitting a child” (Janelli and Janelli 1982:174). For Janelli and Janelli, parents or in-laws who have become ancestors continue to act in a hostile fashion in death because that is how they acted towards juniors before.

Janelli and Janelli’s interpretation bears resemblances to that of Kopytoff’s (1971) analysis of the relationship between elders and ancestors among the Suku of the West Africa. Kopytoff locates the ancestors not in a cult separate from the elders, but rather as part of an “eldership complex” (Kopytoff 1971: 413). Kopytoff offers compelling evidence for his particular case, citing the lack of a local distinct linguistic term for (deceased) ancestor, and several other direct associations between elders and ancestors. He also points out certain minor distinctions between the dead and living elders but concludes that,

In short, there is a difference in the manner in which the dead are approached in contrast to the living. But the difference is related to their different physical states, even while they remain in the same structural position vis-à-vis their juniors” (1971:416)

The idea that ancestor worship is basically an extension of the relationship dynamics between seniors and juniors has also been proposed in the case of Japan. In the

introduction to *Aging: Asian Concepts and Experiences Past and Present* (1997) for example, the editors write that in Japan, “since the aged are the ones who are nearest to the ancestors—they in fact would within short term be themselves ancestors—ancestor worship is seen to contribute to a high position of the elderly” (Formanek and Linhart 1997:12). This argument implies not only that the elderly and the ancestors are essentially same, but also that elderly are respected because they will *become* ancestors. The authors do not provide evidence or references for this specific claim, and this particular argument is not directly addressed elsewhere in the book.

In reviewing the social values attached to the ancestral cult, one question that has important ramifications for my research is, “What is the difference between the elders and the ancestors?” As noted earlier in this chapter, in societies where elders are venerated, they seem to be venerated for the very same reasons that the ancestors are. Furthermore, they usually require the work of the living for their livelihood, and therefore occupy an ambiguous role of both power and dependence similar to the ancestors. Is the only difference, insofar as social structure is concerned, simply that the ancestors are dead, while the elders are living? In order to approach this question, and to deepen the association of elders and ancestors, I will describe some of the psychological approaches to ancestor memorial.

Psychological Approaches to Ancestor Memorial

One of the goals of my research is to illustrate how the association of elders and ancestors is meaningful in a way that cannot be discovered by studying aging or religion as social phenomena on their own terms. Rather, the meaning of an individual’s

experience of religion is formed through the *interaction* between social structure and psyche, both of which change and develop over the life course of each individual, and adapts to or manipulates according to his or her environment.

Janelli and Janelli's view is in many ways consistent with Freudian interpretations of ancestor memorial, at least in the respect that as extensions of the superego, ancestors are perceived as violent towards the living. Freud theorizes that this is the result of the "omnipotence of thoughts," which leads Freud to hypothesize that the guilt felt at death "is founded on the intense and frequent death-wishes...which are unconsciously at work" (Freud 1950:108). Spiro further argues that ancestor worship in East Asia may be motivated by the need to defend against the guilt, which redirects the locus of punishment from the self to the dead parent (Spiro 1994: 274-275).

While Janelli and Janelli seem to support the claim that the violence of the ancestors is an extension of superego related parental figures, they do not make the association between this extension and the feeling of guilt or other painful emotions on the part of the bereaved. Their analysis flattens the psychological dimensions of ancestor worship. What would be the motivation of children to worship their ancestors if it meant that it was simply a perpetuation of persecution? Unfortunately Janelli and Janelli do not address this question in their book.

Fortes's (1959, 1976) work on ancestor worship borrows strongly from Freudian psychoanalysis, but he also frames his analysis on the issue of "authority," wherein guilt for having taken the father's place of authority is alleviated by continued deference to the ancestral spirit who maintains ultimate authority. As Fortes explains,

conditions of existence as well as the kinds and mechanism of power attributed to ancestors *are totally different from those that are perceived to hold for living elders*. . . where ancestors are worshiped, not merely commemorated or taken into account for institutionalized purposes, the medium of relationship with them takes the form of ritual (1976:2 emphasis mine)

Fortes' main argument about *who* the ancestors are or can be hinges upon another argument about *why* they are:

the actions attributed to ancestors must be understood as representation of human experience in the social relations of successive generations . . . For parents must die, though they cannot but resist and fear this fate, so that children may continue the life they owe to their parents and children must replace parents though they dare not consciously wish them out of the way. Ancestor worship achieves the goal at the same time of submitting to the reality of the death of the parents which removes them physically, and keeping them symbolically alive and at home among the displacing offspring. It is evident that beliefs in the survival of the soul and the rituals of feeding and caring for the ancestors almost as if they are infants, dependent on their children now as these were at one time on them, are essential for these ends to be achieved. (Fortes 1976:14)

Similar to Freud, the core element of Fortes' argument is that the beliefs and practices that constitute ancestor worship derive from the "nuclear filio-parental relationship" (Fortes 1976:5), but are not merely an extension of relationships between living children and parents, since what is essential for ancestorhood is *death* as well as *succession* of authority. This means that in ancestor worship there must be a transformation—the person who is lost must also be able to somehow grant the bereaved a kind of legacy, be it material (property, heirlooms etc.) or non-material (in the case of memories, traditions, sentiments). The idea of transformation as central to psychological adaptation to loss is a strong component of both Erikson's and Yamada's work on the life cycle.

In order for ancestor memorial to be effective as a defense against the pain of abandonment, the ancestors need to take on a new character that distinguishes them from their living elders (see Chapter 5). The ancestor is a repetition of the once living relative,

but not a replication. The difference is not merely that the ancestors are dead and the elders are alive, but that while elders may pose a very real, physical, emotional and economic impact on a family, or present other ways that affect the way that the family manages itself, the ancestors occupy a distant but watchful place structured by ritual observance.

Summary

This chapter situates my research in the broader discussions of aging and ancestor memorial that have developed along largely separate but parallel trajectories with anthropology. The anthropological study of aging has shown that the meaning and experience of old age is culturally constructed. The fact that people's understandings of their own old age are shaped by cultural values and conceptions does not discount or eliminate the individual variation in how old age is experienced. Life course perspectives, and in particular, the eight stage model of Erikson, provides a useful model for understanding how the individual life course develops as it progresses through old age. Combining the findings of Erikson with Levy's idea of hyper/hypocognition helps us see how the interaction between the self, cultural institutions and memories over the life course influences the experience of culture and emotion in old age, and has further implications for understanding the experience of religion.

Ancestor memorial in Japan reveals a pattern of development which is particularly relevant in old age. Ancestor memorial has been distinguished from other death rites in its relationship to the elderly, but it has been ambiguous in its conclusions. While some have emphasized the direct identification between the ancestors and the elderly, others

see clear differences between the two. In my analysis, and in light of Erikson's life course theory which broadens the definition of the older adult beyond their socially prescribed social role, I argue for the latter. That is, from the perspective of the elder, the ancestors are both objects of identification as well as difference. They are memories of the past, recalled into the present, and guides to what one will *become* in the future. From the perspective of younger people, the distinction may be less obvious, but for elderly people, positioning themselves in a social world between their adult children and dead relatives, it is much clearer.

In the next chapter I will look at how Japanese culture has shaped the experience of ancestor memorial over history, as well as some of the important theories regarding ancestor memorial in Japan.

Chapter 2: Connecting Aging, Ancestors and Religious Plurality in Japan

*A deity called God and one called Buddha
Differ but as water from waves.*

from *Yōrō*, quoted in Shimazaki 1972:21

In the previous chapter I looked at different anthropological and psychological perspectives on aging and ancestor worship in order to contextualize this research. In particular I focused on Erikson's model of life course crisis in old age and Fortes's model of ambivalence towards succession. In both of these models, the older adult is characterized as being positioned between life and death, productivity and detachment. Their perspective on this is ambivalent, or in the midst of a final crisis, and the adjustment to this final stage depends upon an acceptance of one's past and guides to one's future.

In this chapter, I attempt to develop these points further by examining them in context of the vicissitudes of Japanese culture. I will first describe some of the more explicitly elder oriented forms of religious practice, which tend to concentrate on concerns about memory loss, and maintaining autonomy in anticipation of dependence. From these two concerns, I will make the case that ancestor memorial in Japan can similarly be approached as a practice dealing with the needs of elderly. Next I will provide an explanation of the development of ancestor memorial in Japan that focuses more on the thematic influences on ancestor memorial practice than particular historical events. Lastly I review the contributions of scholars on ancestor worship in Japan whom

I consider particularly important to this research. Altogether, this chapter gives a general overview of ancestor worship in Japan which will make it easier to understand not only the discussion on definitions and practices in the following chapter, but also the worldview of the individuals whose case studies form the core of this research.

***Boke* Fears and *Pokkuri* Hopes: Managing Loss and Abandonment**

Each winter Iwama temple in Kyoto's neighboring prefecture of Shiga¹², hold a special event for the prevention of "*boke*," a kind of mild senility that John W. Traphagen defines as "being out of it" (Traphagen 2000a.:135, 2004:64, 2006:273)¹³. In addition to holding a special prayer service, the temple's visitors are served simmered daikon radishes and other vegetables by local volunteer lay-women. In 2006, the Kyoto Shinbun reported that these women prepared enough of the daikon soup that day for an expected 500 visitors (*KS* 17 December 2006). Since daikon radishes grow and thrive even during the harsh winter months, they are considered a symbol of the Japanese cultural values of perseverance and resilience, and believed to have the ability to strengthen one's constitution and prevent sickness. This symbolism was especially dramatized in 2005, when a daikon radish in Aioi city (Hyogo Prefecture) became an unlikely national

¹² Iwama-ji (岩間寺 Shingon Sect) is the 12th temple in the *saikoku* 西国 western pilgrimage route. There are also senility prevention ceremonies performed there on May 17th, October 17th and December 17th. The main Buddhist figure enshrined is Kannon.

¹³ Although *boke* is mostly associated with forgetfulness in old age, it is also used for the "dummy" in comic duos (as opposed to the straight-man) and for other disoriented states such as jet-lag (*jisa boke* 時差ボケ). Plath (1980:217) has called senility in old age the "Japanese cultural nightmare," for its ability to cut the older person off from vital social ties that largely define one's self in Japanese society.

celebrity after it was discovered growing from a small crack in the asphalt on a street corner¹⁴.

The use of the daikon soup as a kind of potion for staving off senility illustrates the association of healthy old age with individual discipline and moral agency. While aging is accepted as inevitable, *boke* is “viewed as a social category of illness over which people have some degree of control” (Traphagen 2006:273). The remarks of visitors to Iwama temple, show the importance of taking initiative regarding mental health in old age. One visitor told a reporter, “When you’re over 70, ‘boke’ is your number one concern, so I plan to make this temple visit every year,” (KS 2006 December 17).

Iwama temple is far from exceptional in its dedication to prayers for the prevention of *boke*. One temple close to where I lived in Kyoto, has named itself the “Temple of the Retirement Waterfall” (*inkyō no taki no otera* 隠居の滝のお寺) and displays on its wall a popular poem written about morality in old age, called “Don’t Become *Boke*, Live a Long Life” (Fig 2.1).

¹⁴ The story of the ‘little-radish-that-could’ (affectionately named “Dai-chan”), quickly became the symbol of Aioi city. One word for “having guts” (*dokonse* ど根性) utilizes the same character for “root” used in the word *daikon* (大根= lit. “big root”). The perseverance of Dai-chan seemed to inspire the city to do all it could to keep it from naturally passing away, subsequently investing heavily in producing grafts of the original plant, and when this failed, attempting to create clones through the use of genetic technology.

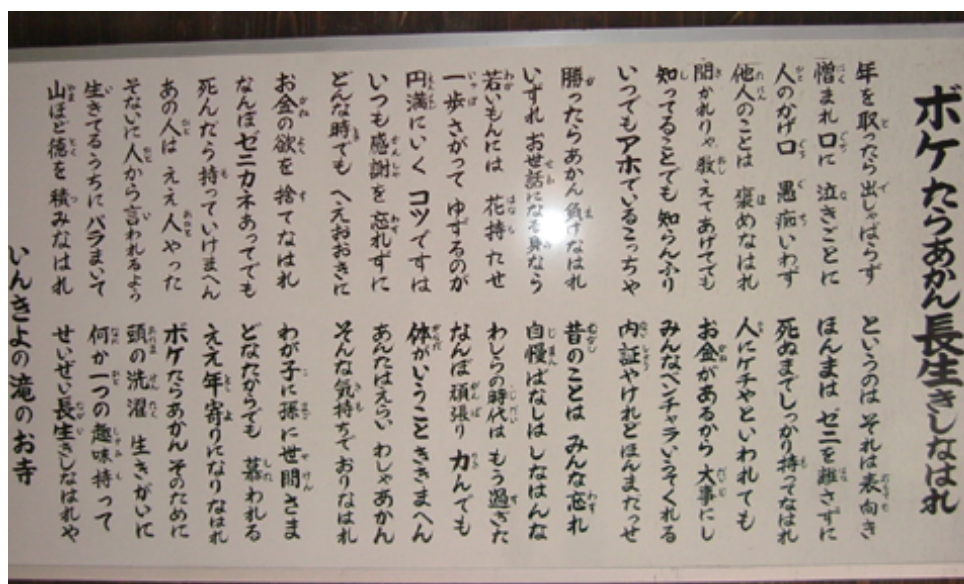


Fig 2.1 “Don’t Become *Boke*, Live a Long Life” on display at the “Temple of the Retirement Waterfall” located in northeastern Kyoto

The last lines of the poem read:

For our children, grandchildren, and those around us,
 Get along with everybody,
 Be a good old person,
 Don't become *boke*.
 Renew your thinking, have some kind of hobby
 That gives you meaning so this doesn't happen. At best, live a long life.

The author of the poem was not written on the billboard, but it is attributed to the former administrator of a Shingon sect temple in Ishikawa prefecture. It has been widely reproduced, and I have found it on sale at several Shingon temples written on hand towels next to others printed with Buddhist sutras. Interestingly, even though this poem was displayed on the temple wall, it makes no reference to religious activities. It does not advise the reader, for example, to devote themselves to the Buddha or the ancestors in order to stave off senility. Rather, it emphasizes taking moral responsibility for one’s own mental health for the sake of one’s descendants and others in general. Furthermore, the temple where I saw the poem displayed is associated with mountain austerities,

including those done under a waterfall. This further underscores the association of aging with individual moral discipline and spiritual transcendence.

Another example of taking moral responsibility for the course of one's old age, is purchasing protective amulets, or *omamori* お守り (Traphagen 2004: 112-124). Buddhist temples throughout Japan now offer protective amulets that are said to have the power to stave off the memory loss due to old age. One temple where I purchased an amulet to protect against *boke* even identified itself as part of a ten temple regional pilgrimage route for *boke* prevention¹⁵. The object of worship for pilgrims was not the one enshrined in the main hall, but rather a recently erected statue of the Bodhisattva Kannon 観音菩薩 (Skt. Avalokiteśvara), the Bodhisattva of mercy and compassion. *Boke* prevention amulets are commonly shaped like kabocha squash (since the word *boke* is a homonym for a squash), or eggplant (the word for eggplant, “*nasu*,” なす is a homonym for “accomplish,” 成す again echoing the notion of agency).

During my fieldwork I purchased a kabocha squash shaped *boke* prevention amulet at a temple dedicated to the Bodhisattva Kannon located in the popular hot springs resort town of Arima, Hyogo Prefecture¹⁶. The message attached to the charm offers another explanation for the relevance of kabocha to *boke*. The message reads, “Since ancient times, it has been said that if a person eats kabocha, they will not become paralyzed. Also, ‘kabocha head’ has become a phrase for the first signs of a weakening mind. Within this kabocha, Kannon has been placed, and is protecting you.” Certainly,

¹⁵ *boke fuji kinki jūroku kannon reijō* ぼけ封じ近畿十楽観音霊場. Other temples and pilgrimages for staving off senility are located throughout Japan.

¹⁶ 有馬市兵庫県 Hot springs are considered to have healing properties, and Arima in particular was said to have been promoted by a famous healer/monk Gyōgi 行基(710-784).

nobody wants to turn into a vegetable in old age. The small kabocha amulet, like other protective amulets is meant to be attached to a bag or purse, or something else that is usually close to the body, and it has a small bell attached that jingles pleasantly as you walk. Many of the men and women I had observed at day-service centers had attached similar *omamori* for health and protection to the handles of their canes, transforming it into a sort of lightly ringing wand.

Sato-san's (Chapter 5) comments summarize the popular conception of *boke*, dependency and the good death. For Sato-san and many older adults in Japan, *boke* makes one dependent on others, and this is worse than dying suddenly, without a long decline (Traphagen 2000, 2006). At the senior center one day, for example, Sato-san suddenly remarked:

Most people that come here [to the center], come here to avoid senility. There are a lot of motivations, but really, in the end, it's so that they won't become senile. *Boke* . . . Because when people become *boke*, they're a burden on other people, and particularly to strangers. *People that don't know them*. . .
 MY SON'S WIFE IS A STRANGER TO ME! (laughs) [Sato-san lives with his daughter-in-law]

But really, sometimes people die around here. These folks, some of them don't have a lot longer to live. Sometimes you have folks that don't come around for a while and then people ask "where's so-and-so?" and it turns out they're dead. But that's a good thing! If you die like that, without being a burden on someone, that's good! THAT'S WHAT I WANT! Some people wish that I was dead too, LIKE MY SON'S WIFE! (laughs)

Sato's comments reflect older adults feelings of abandonment by their family as well as the ambivalence towards building strong bonds with peers, since old age means that one or the other person will eventually be abandoning the other. The remedy is to stay active, which insures both deterring *boke* related dependence and a good death.

While the charms, amulets and radish stew services blend with the vast array of religious rituals connected to both the prevention and healing of physical and mental ailments that afflict the elderly, the rise in popularity of what have been called *pokkuri dera*, (ぽっくり寺 translated as “sudden death temples” or the more poetic, less literal, “chapels of impermanency”) offer a much stronger symbolic expression of the concern with the aging body, and the desire for a “good death” (Wöss 1993; Young and Ikeuchi 1997; Kawabata et al. 2001). Young and Ikeuchi estimated that there are somewhere between 175 and 250 such temples in Japan, most dedicated to Amida Buddha 阿弥陀如来, but others to similarly protective figures such as Jizō 地藏菩薩 (Skt. Ksitigarbha) or Kannon (1997:237). Another deity that can often be found at *pokkuri* temples is Ususama Myōō 烏枢沙摩明王, the deity of the toilet, whose representation often decorates the restrooms of temples (Fig 2.2)¹⁷.

¹⁷ Some temples, such as Eihei-ji, the head temple of the Sōtō sect of Buddhism in Japan have a statue of Ususama at the entrance to the toilet to whom one must bow before entering. I saw a similar statue at the toilet of a large religious center for the Buddhism based religion called Shinnyōen. While Ususama, who more closely resembles the powerful and aggressive Fudō-myōō than he does the peaceful and benevolent Amida, has his image printed on protective talismans available for purchase at several temples I visited.



Fig 2.2 Small Shrine dedicated to *Ususama*. The tablet on the right reads “Protective Deity of the Toilet.” On the incense tray is an offering of a cup of sake.

Ususama is said to keep the toilet area clean and pure. He is therefore an important deity for those who suffer from or fear incontinence or the inability to pass one’s bowels unaided in old age.

The value of the *pokkuri* temple is that “contemplation on the value of detachment from life’s entanglements is encouraged, [it is] not resignation to death” (Young and Ikuchi 1997:241). One anecdote they describe runs as follows:

An elderly widow, who is a multiple visitor to Kichiden-ji, arrived from a nearby prefecture to purchase a cloth amulet for her 94-year old mother-in-law. She had been the primary care-taker even before her own husband died 15 years earlier. Here, then, is an elderly woman doing double-duty, as a single-income earner (in her own shop) and as a geriatric nurse at home. A litany of woes spilled out, chiefly that her first son (*chōnan*) had died and that her second son (*jinan*) visited her less often than his mother-in-law...These are the new lifespan pioneers that *pokkuri* temples attract: not only the old-old, but the young-old, who see themselves mirrored in their declining and dependent elders (1997:242)

This example is interesting because the informant is buying an amulet for pokkuri death for her mother-in-law, not herself. Young and Ikuchi seem to be making the case that the caretaker was already considering her own old age and therefore the hopes of a quick death were generalized. In light of the *obasuteyama* tale, and the many other tales about conflict between the mother-in-law and the wife that married into the family, this seems to be only one side of the story. While *pokkuri* temples are frequented by the elderly, considering this account, it seems that they may also be places for caretakers to pray for a relief of their own burden.

Despite the popularity of *pokkuri* temples, there appears to be some ambivalence on the issue of the “good death”. In a newsletter published by the Tendai sect of Buddhism, the writer of the cover article entitled “The View of Aging” begins,

Contemporary Japan has become a long-lived society. Some time ago I was struck speechless when an old person quietly told me “There are times when I think I must be getting punished, living so long like this”. . . On the one hand, there are *pokkuri* temples now and they say there are more visitors than they can handle. “When I die, I want to die suddenly, without pain, without making others care for me.” Maybe this is the hidden desire of the elderly (*Kirameki* No. 2, July, 4 2005)

The essay continues to describe three cases of “healthy old people,” and advises others to approach each day with thankfulness. Although the essay stops short of criticizing *pokkuri* temples outright, the tone with which it describes them is not one of approval either. It seems to echo the fears of old age, memory loss, dependency and painful death which characterize the opposite of a good death.

As these examples illustrate, religious institutions, rituals and objects dedicated to health and well-being in old age abound. However, it is still unclear from these examples alone, whether there is a general tendency towards spiritual matters as one

approaches old age, or whether these institutions and rituals have merely adapted their general services of healing and protection to the specific needs of an aging clientele. After all, many businesses in Japan, such as convenience stores and travel companies have been increasingly marketing towards older people, so why wouldn't this be true for religious institutions? Again, were we to investigate the way Japanese religion addresses the needs of another group, such as businessmen, school children or young mothers, we would no doubt find just as many rituals specifically designed for them as well. In this view, the religious behaviors consumed by the elderly with the aim of deferring dependence are no different than any other market group.

While I do not entirely disagree with the idea that pragmatic, yet consumption-based religious practice adapted to fit the needs of the elderly, I find it requires a restrictive view not only of aging, but of Japanese religion as well. If we limit our analysis of religion and aging in Japan to the kinds of practices described above, not only are we forced to concentrate on only the minority of older Japanese people who participate in those practices, but we also leave out the broader religious discourse in which they are situated. Furthermore, we risk even further separating "old age" from the experience of the entire life course, as if no events earlier in life matter once one is old and frail, and only the things specifically designed for the elderly are able to define the experience of old age.

It is for these reasons that it is especially important to include ancestor memorial in the religious experience of old age. As mentioned in the previous chapter, ancestor memorial provides the conceptual basis for understanding death, familial relationships, and transitions in the life course. For the elderly in particular, ancestor

memorial is an act of remembrance, both of the deceased and of one's relationship with them. Survey data indicates an increase of grave visitation with age: nearly 100% of respondents age seventy and over making grave visits "regularly," compared to about 75% of respondents in their 40's (Swyngedouw 1993: 54). Through the process of reminiscence and life-review that is a central component of mourning and memorial rituals, elderly people can defer the feeling of abandonment-shame and reinforce a new identity as an older adult based on positive values of social continuity and interdependence. Like other practices that attend to coping with changes in the mind and body in old age, ancestor memorial is a means of staving off the threat dependence and degeneration, at least in the minds of those who identify with the ancestors. Just as the elderly might buy charms or undertake pilgrimages to marshal discipline and devotion against the malevolent spectre of forgetting, remembering the ancestors, even at the domestic altar in one's own home, reinforces the centrality of older adults' memories in constructing a psychologically acceptable narrative of personhood.

Ancestor Memorial and the Religious Traditions of Japan

Ancestor memorial in Japan has been studied extensively by both native and foreign scholars alike (Hozumi 1901; Hori 1968; Yanagita 1970; Plath 1964; Smith 1974; Ooms 1978; Newell (ed) 1978; Yamaori 1990; Inoue 2000; Traphagen 2004). Its history spans thousands of years and cannot be adequately summarized here. Instead, I will focus on the relationship of ancestor memorial to other religious traditions in Japan in order to show how it is both pervasive and malleable, and forms the basis for Japanese religious pluralism (Yamaori 1990).

Shinto

Shinto has been compared to animism since its cosmology exists of countless *kami* that are thought to embody natural objects and phenomena (Matsunaga 1966). The most prominent Shinto *kami* is the Sun Goddess *Amaterasu-omikami*, who is worshipped at the grand shrine at Ise, and is said to be the ancestor of Japan's line of emperors, which the ancient chronicles claim has remained unbroken since Emperor Jimmu's reign (c. 660BC). Smith summarizes an argument put forward by Ariga that the legitimation of the Yamato dynasty and their ideology of Shinto, arose out of the consolidation of ancestor cults of kinship groups called *uji* 氏 (Smith 1974:7-11).

Yanagita Kunio (1970) supports this argument by showing the relationship of the *uji* to the *dōzoku* 同族, or set of linked households, which formed the basic social structure of early cooperative Japanese agricultural society. According to Yanagita, ancestor rites served the purpose of unifying the members of a *dōzoku*, as well as providing a symbolic means of transferring inheritance (Yanagita 1970: 30-32).

Although the *dōzoku* system no longer persists in Japan today, a similar process can be seen in the *ie* 家, or household system, where the inheritance of both material goods as well as the duty to care for the ancestors falls on the eldest son (*chōnan* 長男) of a main household (*honke* 本家), while younger sons (*jinan* 次男) establish branch households (*bunke* 分家). As the members of a branch household die, their spirits are venerated by their descendants, separately from the main household. One can easily see how this would soon result in a mass proliferation of deified ancestors, eventually contributing more towards differentiation rather than unification. The transformation of

kinship based deities (*uji-kami* 氏神) into simply local deities partially resolves this problem, since they are not considered to be the ancestors of any particular household. Some have become associated with mythical deities of Shinto legend and others natural landmarks, such as the mountains, trees, and boulders.

As hinted to in the *obasuteyama* story summarized in the Introduction, the *kami* of the mountains are particularly relevant to the worship of ancestors (Hori 1968; Genyu 2005). About 75% of contemporary Japan is mountainous, and while rice cultivation was largely an activity of the lower fields, the mountains remained an important source of food, lumber and other resources. Furthermore, the spirits of the dead were believed to reside in the mountains, returning each year to visit their descendants and receive offerings (Hōri 1968 151-152). The mountain *kami* and the ancestors had an identical relationship with the living, both coming down from the mountains and bestowing life in the spring, and returning to the mountains once the harvest was over (Tanaka and Yamaori 2000: 40-41). In this way, beliefs about the mountain *kami* and the ancestors were almost indistinguishable. The relationship between the mountains and the spirits of the dead remains strong in contemporary belief. Because of their association with death and spirits, they are considered important locations for performing religious austerities¹⁸.

In Shinto belief, there is little differentiation between the spirits of the recently deceased and ghosts. Both are considered defiled, polluting and potentially dangerous to

¹⁸ In the mountain ascetic practice of *Shugendō* 修験道, for example, the mountain is central, symbolizing the practitioner's distance from the world below and entrance into one of the spirits. *Shugendō* in particular is known for its fusion of mountain worship, Shinto and Buddhist beliefs. In Kyoto, the most famous mountain practice is known as the 1000 day *Kaihōgyō* 回峰行. There is currently one person, Hoshino Endō, who is nearing completion of his 1000 days of walking in the mountains. In the last part of his training, Hoshino is referred to as Ajari 阿闍梨, or a kind of "Living buddha" (*ikibotoke* 生き仏), thus further connecting the mountains with conquering death through discipline.

the living. According to one of the foundational myths of Shinto lore, Izanagi, the male partner in the creation of Japan journeys to the land of the dead to find Izanami, his female partner who has recently died giving birth to the god of fire. When Izanagi finds Izanami, she begs him not to look at her, which is of course what he proceeds to do. After seeing her rotting flesh being devoured by maggots, Izanami is embarrassed and Izanagi repulsed (Buruma 1984:1-5). Izanagi flees from the place of death with Izanami in pursuit, but he finally escapes her at the “Pass of Yomi” in the mountains of Izumo (Nakanishi 1985: 106-107). This myth introduces the first death, and the idea of death as associated with birth, shame, pollution and the impossibility of recovery from this fate (Nakanishi 1985). The *obasuteyama* legend provides the link between these myths of the shame of death, the mountains and growing old. Because of the Shinto association of the dead with the mountains and with times of change, spirits are believed to be most active there during the sunset hours.

On one of my final weeks of field research in Kyoto, I accompanied a friend of mine, who is in his mid-twenties, on a climb up a small mountain that nonetheless affords a fantastic view of Kyoto. This mountain also happens to be the first of the five mountains of the “*gozan okuri-bi*” (五山送り火) or “five mountain sending-off fires” event held on the last day of the annual *obon* festival on August 16th (see Chapter 3). My friend and I also decided to climb in early July, the month of the annual Gion Festival 祇園祭 dedicated to the Shinto *kami* for Yasaka Shrine 八坂神社 that protects against disease and to the spirits of the dead that had fallen ill (see Chapter 10). It was therefore a particularly busy time for the spirits in Kyoto, and the mountains would be thick with

spirits. On the suggestion of his *senpai* 先輩 (a woman at his university a couple of years senior to him), my friend suggested that we make our hike in the morning in order to be as safe as possible.

After we made our climb and descended, we visited some college friends of his. Before we met them, however, he ran to a convenience store to purchase a small bag of sea salt. His *senpai* had apparently told him that we would need to be purified (*kiyomi* 清み) before entering her room. When we reached the room, he handed her the bag of salt, and standing outside the room on the veranda, she tossed salt on him and then silently moved her flexed hand a few inches away from him, as if smoothing out a piece of cloth. She did this for about a minute, and when she was finished, she brushed the salt off of his clothes, beginning at his shoulders and working downwards, just like a barber after a haircut. Finally, she bowed with her hands together, and the ritual was complete. I took my turn as well, and we were eventually allowed to enter.

This story, while admittedly idiosyncratic, illustrates some of the basic beliefs of Shinto, particularly the identification of mountains and spirits, the polluting influence of spirits on the living, and the need for religious rites of purification. There was no need for a religious specialist or institution to perform these rites. The *kami* are accessible to anyone who has the right implements.

One question that emerges from the relationship with Shinto and the dead is, “If there is such an aversion to spirits, how do you deal with the dead?” The account I have given above offers two alternatives: deification or purification. In the former case, a powerful ancestor becomes the object of offerings and other rites, and in return, protects

and answers prayers. As one can imagine, this would have the effect of raising the status of certain prominent families and keeping the status of *kami* away from common folk. The other option, purification, meant that in the case of most deaths, it was preferable to keep as distance, and memorials would therefore be done only for those who remained in memory. The introduction of Buddhism to Japan drastically changed this orientation towards the dead by not only introducing new rituals to comfort and memorialize the dead, but also a new division of labor that allowed Buddhism to coexist with indigenous Shinto traditions.

Buddhism

Buddhism was introduced to Japan from Korea in the sixth century and was promoted initially by Prince Shōtoku (聖徳太子 573-621 CE) in the sixth century. Prince Shōtoku suggested that Japan adopt Buddhism as a means of uniting the country by establishing a common religion with the Emperor as its head (Matsunaga 1974: 9). The proliferation of Buddhism in Japan is particularly evident during the Nara period (710-794 CE), when a large number of monumental Buddhist temples were built and the Buddhist clergy became a powerful and influential force, rivaling the imperial court (Matsunaga 1974: 25-137).

Buddhism grew to prominence in Japan due mainly to its ability to offer a philosophy and practice that effectively dealt with the problem of death and the afterlife. Japanese Shinto had to find a way to assimilate Buddhist teachings in a way that would also preserve their sense of identity. The introduction of Buddhism was eventually facilitated by the doctrine of *honji suiijaku* 本地垂迹 (Matsunaga 1969); or “Original

source, manifest traces” (Yamaori 1990: 65), which introduced the notion that the various Buddhas and Shinto deities are all part of a unified pantheon with an identical origin. Although this theory originally emphasized the superiority of Buddhas over *kami*, this has been largely downplayed in favor of a more equal relationship, or union of *kami* and buddhas (*shinbutsu shūgō* 神仏集合).

In terms of spirits of the dead, this plurality brings about a good deal of ambiguity. The ambiguity doesn't bother most people as long as they know what to do about the ancestors. In fact, it is perhaps because of this ambiguity that people can feel comfortable adapting ancestor memorial to their personal lifestyle. I may also contribute to the general unconcern with locating the ancestors in any one place, or ascribing particular rules for interacting with them.

Reader and Tanabe (1998) strongly argue that in the case of Japan, there is not only pluralism of religious practice, but also that this pluralism is largely due to Japanese religion's focus on “this-worldly benefits,” or *genze riyaku* (現世利益). Since the development of the *honji suijaku* theory, many deities, Shinto and Buddhist alike, have developed not only highly ambiguous affiliation, but have often done so to the point of losing their original identity. The quintessential example of this development are the “Seven Gods of Fortune” 七福神. The seven gods of fortune are enshrined in seven temples in Kyoto, making a popular pilgrimage site, and individual temples offer similar yearly events where people can make offerings to all of the Gods on the grounds of one site. Given the preponderance of deities such as these, Reader and Tanabe (1998) write that “while some of the associations may have been unconsciously influenced by the

theory of *honji suijaku*, these changes and interchanges took place without overt reference to it—and certainly without the polemical need to establish the superiority of the buddhas over the *kami*” (Reader and Tanabe 1998: 154-155).

In Kyoto, pluralism is a common feature of everyday religious life. Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples often share the same sacred grounds, so that a visit, say, to the famous *Kiyomizu* temple 清水寺 in Kyoto’s Higashiyama district could combine ritual veneration for *Yakushi-nyorai* (薬師如来 the medicine Buddha), *Daitoku* (大徳 an ambiguous deity whose origin is the Indian deity Skt. *Mahakala*) and a popular Shinto shrine famous for matchmaking at *Jishu Jinja* 地主神社 . One of Kyoto’s most sacred sites, Mt. Hiei, was originally the site of an important Shinto temple (*Hiyoshi Taisha* 日吉大社), before *Saichō* 最澄 founded the temple *Enryaku-ji* 延暦寺 on its peak, and effectively combined the Buddhas and deities of the mountain into one religious group that continues to be honored today (Yamaori and Tanaka: 2005: 57-58). This example is even more interesting when we consider the fact that the mountain, which is located in northeast Kyoto, is considered one of two “demon’s gates” (鬼門) of Kyoto, based on Taoist principles of geomancy.

From these examples, it is easier to understand the role of various religions in the minds of the people I spoke with for this research. All of the people who participated in the longer, life-history interviews had both a *kamidana* (神棚 a domestic shrine) for the Shinto deities and a *butsudan* (仏壇 a domestic altar) for the *hotoke* 仏 (literally buddhas,

but used for the recently deceased) as well. Most were married in a Shinto wedding at a shrine, and conducted funerals for departed family in a Buddhist fashion¹⁹.

There are exceptions to the richly interwoven traditions seen in Buddhism as mentioned above. One exception is the Pure Land Sect, which was promoted first by Hōnen (1133-1212) and afterwards in a more radical form by his disciple Shinran (1173-1262). Today, the Pure Land Sect established after Hōnen and True Pure Land sect (established after Shinran) together easily surpass all other sects of Buddhism in number of supporters. Put simply, Pure Land Buddhism preaches a soteriological version of Buddhism that claims that followers will be reborn in a heavenly Pure Land, by means of devotional recitation of a simple chant that is nothing more than “I take refuge in Amida Buddha” (*Namu amidabutsu* 南無阿弥陀仏). While Pure Land doctrine and priests that I have spoken with often condemn Shinto and other folk practices as superstitious and meaningless, many of the members of Pure Land Sects still participate in at least the minimal veneration of Shinto deities. Some, like my informant whose case study is detailed in Chapter 6, seem to disregard the notion of sole devotion to Amida altogether.

Buddhism’s evolution in Japan resulted not only in the accommodation of ancestor memorial and its manifestation in the Shinto tradition of *kami* worship, but elaborated and extended it to a central function of Buddhist practice. The later Buddhist

¹⁹ Although there are Shinto funerals and Buddhist weddings, these are uncommon, and usually associated with an special relationship to a particular religious institution. One wedding I attended, for example, was conducted in a Buddhist fashion because the groom was from a temple family, and attended a Buddhist college. In the last few decades, Christian style weddings, usually associated with a special wedding chapel have gained in popularity, but in Kyoto, where there is no lack of spacious and renowned shrines, Shinto weddings remain common. One friend of mine who was planning his ceremony at a Shinto shrine told me that his parents didn’t mind, as long as there was a ceremony. The form was more important than the religious affiliation.

sects, such as Pure Land and Nichiren, while seeking to consolidate religious devotion to a single object of veneration (Amida and the Lotus Sutra respectively), nonetheless found that incorporating ancestor memorial practices was essential in retaining the appeal among the masses. A look at the two other major religious forces in Japan, Christianity and New Religions further underscores the importance of ancestor memorial to the Japanese.

One interviewee told me that when she asked a Buddhist priest about her Shinto views, he consoled her by saying, “the paths are different, the end result is the same place.” By this comment, she was not referring to all religions having the same moral tone or immoral vices, but rather, she was indicating the path of the spirits of the deceased. Raised in a strongly Shinto household, this woman married a man from a Buddhist family, and, as is typical of women who marry into their husband’s family, was required to learn and practice the family’s Buddhist rites. On the occasion of a family ancestor’s memorial, she inquired to the Buddhist priest as to the trajectories of the *hotoke* and the *kami*, and as she explained it, holding her hands apart from each other and gradually merging them, she told me that whether they are *hotoke* or *kami*, they go to the same place. Although she herself and a friend present at the interview were both surprised by this simple statement, it affirms both current popular practice as well as the older theory of *honji suijaku*.

Christianity

Christianity was introduced to Japan in the 16th century by Jesuit missionaries led by St. Francis Xavier, and had a brief period of success before it was officially banned by

the feudal lords, and its followers severely persecuted (Mullins 1998). During the persecution, each household was required to register their names at a local Buddhist temple. This was largely a way to root out any remaining Christians, but it also served to strengthen the authority of Buddhism and its relationship with political power. Several Christians were able to hide their affiliation, and are known as the *kakurei kurisuchian* 隠れクリスティアン, or “Hidden Christians” for those centuries that they have spent in hiding. A recent New York Times article writes that in one village

Parishioners now say [Christian] prayers for the dead during the Buddhist festival for the ancestors in mid-August, one of Japan’s biggest holidays. Catholics also gather and, following Buddhist custom, pay tribute to a relative one year or three years after a death. (Onishi 2008, April, 6)

A very small percentage (about 1%) of Japanese are Christian, with the majority (about 50,000 followers) being Catholic. Christianity in Japan is mostly associated with wedding ceremonies and education, with some of the most prestigious (and expensive) private schools in Japan being Catholic. Although there were no Christians in my sample of informants, two had relatives or spouses who were Christian. Although this does not necessarily cause conflict in their relationship, it may be awkward for some public rituals. One middle-aged woman I spoke with could not keep from laughing uproariously when she told me about the funeral of her Catholic grandfather, where she and the other guests felt embarrassed and uneasy as a Catholic priest sang hymns and conducted other unfamiliar rituals:

It was in this totally Japanese townhouse and when this priest came in, everyone was shocked! They were like, “what the heck?” And then he started singing like Ah- Ah-! Everyone’s image [of a funeral] is chanting “*Namo myoho rengo kyo*” and the “knock-knock-knock” [of a wooden drum]. Everyone was wearing kimono, but the priest was wearing this, what do you call it? Church clothes...all

black with the little white thing? Then he sang hymns and everyone was like, “I don’t know any hymns!”

Although in this case, Christianity turned out to be slightly comical, this woman admitted that she enjoyed going to Sunday school as a child and looked forward to singing songs at Christmas. Despite her upbringing, this woman does not practice any Christian rituals, with the exception of memorial visits to her father’s and grandfather’s remains, which are interred in a Catholic mausoleum. Not only Catholicism, which has a tradition of encouraging remembrance of the dead, but other Christian churches in Japan have integrated memorial services for the dead into their practice. When I asked a minister in one Congregational Church if his church practices something similar to Buddhist memorial services, he responded:

In Christianity, because there is this Buddhist custom [of memorial], we have a *kinenkai* 記念会, a memorial worship service on the [anniversary of the] first year, third year, fifth year. Yeah, we have that. Also, the church itself has worship service every Sunday, so one of those Sundays we have a kind of a “memorial day service” kind of thing...When we do that, of course it is a service for the deceased. This is like, well in Christianity we have Easter, right? It’s a resurrection, right? It is said that [Jesus] was resurrected into the place of God, so Easter is, of course, a time that we can have a service to remember death. And then, Christmas is, well Easter is the day of death and resurrection so in the church’s yearly calendar, we have days to celebrate the birthday [of Jesus], and a day to remember the death and resurrection.

Again, in the case of Japanese Christianity, it is evident that the strong emphasis on perpetuating the spirits of the dead through memory is important, despite the actual doctrine concerning such matters.

New Religions

In the late 19th and early 20th century there was a massive increase in the presence and popularity of what are commonly referred to as “New Religions” (新宗教).

The oldest and most popular of these so-called “new religions” are Tenri-kyō 天理教 and Ōmoto-kyō 大本教, which date back to the early 19th century. The increased popularity of these religions can be seen, in part, as a reaction to the increased formalism of Shinto and Buddhism in the modern era (Earhart 1974: 237). These religions incorporate aspects of more traditional religions, but participation is generally more enthusiastic, involving greater emphasis on the role of lay-people centered around a charismatic founder or leader (Kōmoto 2001)²⁰.

Many of the new religions promote a strong devotion to the ancestors as a central tenant of their moral teachings. Sasaki (2002), reports for example that by far the most cited reason for joining the Japanese new religion *Risshōkōseikai* 立正佼成会 “They say that I’ll find happiness if I do ancestor memorial” (46.3% of respondents, 116 individuals) (Sasaki 2002:55,56). The second most popular response was “They say that my illness will be cured,” (13.89%, 35 individuals) (Sasaki 2002: 56). The emphasis on the ancestors is not surprising, given *Risshōkōseikai*’s history as a spin-off sect from the slightly older *Reiyūkai* 霊友会, whose central practice is ancestor memorial (Hardacre 1984). *Reiyūkai*’s practices differ from other Buddhist ancestor memorial in that they assert that it is the responsibility of everyone, not only the head of the household, to care for the spirits of the dead, and that a genuine understanding of the dharma comes from building a greater sense of identification with all of the ancestors.

²⁰ New religions have come under greater scrutiny by both the government and general populace since the new religious group Aum Shinri-kyō アウム真理教 released sarin gas in a busy Tokyo subway in 1995, which killed seven people and wounded 660 others. Although most of the more established new religions have been successful in distancing themselves from association with the Tokyo incident, skepticism of new religions remains.

Another Buddhist based new religion that I had experience with, *Shinnyōen* 真如苑, also emphasizes the role of the ancestors in guiding one on a spiritual path. A friend of mine, who has been a member of *Shinnyōen* for several years, described the practice (*sesshin* 接心) as a kind of meditation, followed by a consultation session with what my friend referred to as a “spiritual guide,” or *reinōsha* 靈能者. *Reinōsha* are members in the organization who have attained a high degree of accomplishment in spiritual exercises and acts as a vessel for the revelations given by the ancestors of the practitioner, offering him or her sometimes cryptic advice on behalf of the ancestors, and usually suggesting making an offering to certain ancestors. The association with shamanism here is quite clear, although it is important to note that one does not become a *reinōsha* as a full-time occupation, but practices consulting as a religious duty like any other. One woman, who practiced at *Shinnyōen* for fourteen years before being promoted to *reinōsha* stressed over and over that there was nothing innately special about her ability, and that “anyone could become a spiritual guide.”

As with *Reiyūkai*, *Shinnyōen* members believe that although memorializing one’s own ancestors is important, building one’s relationship to the dead should not be limited to a household or lineage. The group therefore practices large memorials for the general class of ancestral spirits regardless of a real or imagined kin relationship. My friend, for example told me that whenever he took a plane somewhere, he would try to do a memorial ceremony for people who died in plane crashes. Similarly, when he would visit the United States, he would do a memorial ceremony for the Native Americans who died there. “Buddhism makes you very busy!” he joked after listing these ceremonies.

The history of Japanese religion can be viewed in some ways the history of the ancestors, since ancestor worship figures prominently in the development and popularization of each of the major religious traditions and continues to be central today. Despite this, Earhart (1974), for example, devotes less than twenty pages of his 270 page review of Japanese religion to the ancestors, and Reader and Tanabe (1998) mention ancestors on only nine of 262 pages of their book. Anthropologists, because of their interest in cross-cultural comparative work, have been slightly better at noting the importance of the ancestors in Japanese tradition. However, the study of the significance of the ancestors in the daily lives of Japanese people has withered significantly over the last forty years of anthropology. Part of the reason for this is that native folklorists and anthropologists that proposed that ancestor veneration was at the core of Japanese religious understandings were vulnerable to criticism similar to that focused on *nihonjinron* 日本人論, which claim that Japan's post-war "economic miracle," among other advances in society, are the result of the strength of an indomitable ethnic/genetic essential Japanese culture (Yoshino 1999; Oguma 2002). To say that there was any family based psychological orientation that led to a particular Japanese personality is taboo, despite the evidence that ancestor memorial does affect people's worldviews.

While several Japanese scholars have succeeded in rebounding from this implicit moratorium on talking about Japanese attitudes towards the dead, publishing widely on specific topics related to the ancestors as well as giving them central importance in general survey texts, the same cannot be said about non-Japanese anthropologists²¹. For

²¹ When I asked Robert J. Smith about this discrepancy he responded by pointing me to a review by Antony Hooper on Sahlins's *Culture in Practice*: "Hooper likens anthropologists to 'swidden agriculturists, clearing

the purpose of situating this research and describing further the details of ancestor worship in Japan, I will describe three important works: one completed during WWII, one shortly afterwards, and the last in recent years.

“About Our Ancestors” (*Senzo no Hanashi* 先祖の話)

Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962) wrote *About Our Ancestors* in 1945, well after he had established himself as Japan’s foremost expert in native folklore²². *About Our Ancestors* traces the roots of Japanese religion to ancestral rites, and argues not only that ancestor worship predates all other formalized religion in Japan, but also that it was this practice later evolved into what came to be known as Shinto, as well as a distinctly ancestor focused interpretation of Buddhism. Yanagita’s argument continues to find strong support among current Japanese scholars (Kuwayama 2004), and as such, is necessary to address briefly here.

Yanagita Kunio’s *About Our Ancestors* (*Senzo Monogatari* 先祖物語) is composed of eighty-one short chapters based on an analysis of Japanese village folklore stories and anecdotes. One of Yanagita’s central arguments is that “the core of the religious experience proper to the Japanese people consists of the veneration of the

bits of forest and tending to their crops for a few years before moving on to new areas.’ He adds, ‘Occasionally they would return to the old fields to clear the undergrowth and start over again. But they left little lasting impact on the terrain. They built no great cities, no towering monuments.’ (Page 410)” (personal communication 10/28/02)

²² Yanagita Kunio remains a controversial figure in Japanese studies because of his association with the pre-WWII Japanese nationalist movement (see Ivy 1995: 67-97). Although it could be argued that Yanagita did contribute to the formation of early 20th century Japanese national identity by locating it in the traditions and folklore of the countryside, he also opposed many of the government’s imperialist plans, such as the colonization of Manchuria and further expansion into Asia. As a result Yanagita cannot be seen as aligned with either the imperial state or the Communists or Marxists, who rejected Yanagita’s romanticization of the “folk” and support of Emperor (see Kawada 1993, Morse 1990, Mitsuru 1998, Harootunian 1998)

ancestors, even to the point that many other gods are nothing but disguised or forgotten ancestral spirits” (Yanagita 1970: 7, see also Introduction). One of the more interesting arguments Yanagita makes, is that the individual identities of the deceased are in a sense meant to be forgotten. In fact, it is only because of this transition to anonymity that Shinto deities could arise as such. As Yanagita writes:

Any people were permitted to respect and worship the soul of the dead, to set up a symbol of wood and to offer purified drink and food, but in spite of the regular ritual held for it, it became far more difficult than today to worship it as a deity for the simple reason that it was the soul of a man...Eventually countless lesser deities of various kinds, which scholars can not explain, were left as they were, indoors or outdoors, and from that time, the big *Kami* became more and more respected, making a marked distance between them and the souls of men (1970: 122-123)

As we can see from this passage, Yanagita sees the rise of Shinto style deity worship as closely tied to the inability of households to deify their particular ancestors and the forgetting of the older ancestors over the course of generations. Ancestral shrines became Shinto shrines, and the ancestors of a household or clan became *kami* associated with a particular place or natural aspect of that place.

With the introduction of Buddhism however, this situation would again drastically change. A stronger division was made between the *kami* and the ancestors, and a single grave system (with a single site for both remains and ritual) was popularized. Furthermore, by introducing the custom of erecting tombstones and conducting periodic memorial services, Buddhism, according to Yanagita “took up services for the newly departed soul to remove our uneasiness, but in effect prolonged the same condition, even for one hundred years or more when possible” (1970: 131). He continues:

We used to have only vague ideas about the past. Gradually the images of the past drew near until they were no farther away than our parents and grandparent, which resulted in shortening the history of the family, and it was a loss to our

future as well as to our past. The reason for it is that the belief in far distant ancestors descending at annual festival had been the basis for anticipating that our own spirits after death might continuously visit this land forever (1970:132)

In addition to placing ancestor memorial at the center of Japanese religiosity, Yanagita also makes a close connection between old age and ancestor worship. Yanagita makes this association not only as a way to identify the elderly with the spirits of the dead, but also to emphasize the interdependence between generations as a central aspect of Japanese ancestor memorial. In chapters 59 and 60, Yanagita remarks that children's rhymes/folk songs beckon ancestors with words "Grandpa, Grandma" (Jii-san, Baa-san), and explains that,

The terms Jii San, Baa San did not always mean an old couple. Among the ancestors there were those who had regrettably left this world while still young, and those old ones who had been left alone in their old age passed lonely lives, and as a simple term applied to the general idea of ancestors, including all those spirits, they employed the words *Jii San, Baa San*, which sounded easy to children . . . The people of former times naturally spoke to ancestral spirits as they did to living persons, calling them *Jii Sama, Baa Sama*...people in their mature years recall that when they were children in the evening on the 13th Day to the grave, after making the fire and lighting the lanterns from the blaze, they put their hands behind as though ready to carry somebody who was there on their backs and said, "*Jii Sama, Baa Sama*, let's start now...There used to be stories of carrying the Kami on the back, but here it remains concerned with ancestors. (1970:138-139)

This last detail concerning carrying the ancestors/old person on one's back is interesting because it recalls both the image of a filial son or daughter caring for a feeble parent, as well as the *obasuteyama* story described in the Introduction. It condenses the meanings of both care and abandonment in a gesture that again is associated with "the back" suggesting an even further relationship of elders and shameful parts of the body (see Chapter 3).

Although he does not formally argue that elders are considered part of an “eldership complex” in the same way Kopytoff (1970) describes (see Chapter 1), Yanagita does seem to make the case that elders have traditionally been identified with ancestral spirits. Furthermore, this observation is central to his argument that the moral essence of the Japanese family is based on affectionate intergenerational bonds. Yanagita believed that the modernization of the Japanese family, as well as the massive casualties suffered during WWII threatened the continuity of what he referred to as the “unconscious tradition” of ancestor worship (Yanagita 1970: 178-179)²³.

“Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan”

The discourse concerning the devolution of the Japanese family, and with it the values and traditions that define what it means to be Japanese, has been going on at least since the establishment of the Japanese nation-state. Robert Smith wrote that when he set out to research ancestor worship in the early 1960’s, some colleagues believed that he wouldn’t be able to find people that practice ancestor worship, let alone an ancestral cult in the manner described by Yanagita (1974: 152). Although he found both, he himself postulated a similar decline in practice and a movement away from “veneration” and towards “memorialization.” In my own research, I found much less interest or frequency of ancestor worship practice among most middle-age or younger Japanese people than among the elderly. But because there is little proof that religious orientations stay

²³ Yanagita’s “unconscious tradition” *muishikidenshō* 無意識伝承 was influenced by European folklore scholars, such as E.B. Tylor, A. Lang and G. L. Gomme as well as the work of the Grimm brothers (Itō 2006: 135-139). Yanagita believed that the essences of “Japaneseness” (*nihonjinrashisa* 日本人らしさ) could be found in the “unconscious” or hidden subtext of songs, stories and customs that continued throughout Japan.

consistent over the life course, the fact that the elderly do more ancestor worship does not necessarily indicate that this is a dying tradition.

Robert Smith's *Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan* (1974) remains one of the most thorough works written on Japanese ancestor worship in any language. Smith's research is based largely on a survey of ancestral memorial tablets (*ihai* 位牌) conducted across several different regions and socio-economic groups in Japan. Rather than simply tallying the results of who had tablets for whom, Smith also conducted brief interviews with his informants about why certain tablets appeared or didn't, and what this meant about ancestor worship in the larger cultural context. He also collected information from literature, broadcast media, folklore, history and other disciplines.

Smith's findings generated two very important conclusions. First, his survey provides definitive proof that the placement of memorial tablets in the domestic altar does not conform to the patrilineal model of ancestor worship even though they are conceived of as tutelary deities of a household or lineage. Secondly, Smith finds that family members base their decision to memorialize certain ancestors based on a combination of filial duty and personal attachment. These findings are important because they draw into question the social model of ancestor worship (Chapter 1) and suggest that a psychological model based on emotion may generate better result.

Smith's work is particularly relevant to this study because it emphasizes the plasticity of contemporary ancestor worship as well as the notion that practices are generated out of feelings of attachment. While the plasticity that Smith points to is helpful in explaining how ancestor worship can be personally shaped to fulfill individual needs, or experimented with in different ways, the importance of attachment to the spirits

of the deceased suggests that themes of abandonment may also be at work. As suggested in Chapter 1, attachment can be seen as a way to guard against the fear of abandonment, and therefore expressions of attachment, such as gift exchange or care are indicators of abandonment fear.

Smith does not agree with Janelli and Janelli (1982) concerning the association of elders and ancestors. Although he does not develop a clear psychological model for describing Japanese ancestor worship practices, his view tends to be more in line with Fortes (1994), as in the conclusion of his book:

Ancestral spirits are thought to be generally protective and benign, and are rarely reported to be punitive. The only exception is that whereas they ordinarily do not cause misfortune, they may fail to act to prevent it. . . The weakening of their disciplinary power can only be attributed to the weakening of the authority of the senior members of of the social groups that once defined the range of their capacities. . . *But it would be a mistake to conclude that the power of the ancestors was ever merely a heightened version of the formidable authority of the household head.* (Smith 1974: 219 emphasis mine)

Although the power of the elder, or household head is clearly associated with the ancestors, Smith does not argue that this means that the two are the same.

“The Practice of Concern”

One of the few anthropologists who provides ethnographic data connecting aging and religion in Japan is John Traphagan (2004a). Traphagen argues that:

Ritual behavior associated with shrine visitations and ancestor veneration in Japan is organized around...*a total life care system* that is used to enact worldly benefits and well-being for oneself and one’s family, one’s community, and one’s nation and through which people enact concern. This life care system involves various sets of reciprocal relationships, such as those between *kami* and humans or living and dead (2004a: 79-81 emphasis mine)

Traphagen continues his argument by echoing Reader and Tanabe (1998) in asserting that the need for “worldly benefits and well-being,” which are parts of the “total life care system,” are particularly relevant to the elderly, whose social relationships tend to diminish with memory loss, physical disability, a shrinking cohort and existential anxiety.

Central to Traphagen’s notion of the “total life care system” is the concept of concern, which he draws from Tillich’s concept of “ultimate concern” (2004a: 19)²⁴. In his analysis, “concern” is not only the expression or act of “love and caring,” but also an existential process of developing a sense of meaning, or “*ikigai*” (Mathews 1996)

The concept that brings religion, health and aging together in Japan is concern. . . While anyone can do many of the rituals whenever needed, it is the elderly who carry the role of ongoing caretakers of the expression of the emotive ties that bring people together into families and communities. . . . elders are the caretakers of well-being and it is through ritual performance that much of their caretaking activities are carried out. The expression of concern is not a matter of voicing beliefs about concern for others; instead, it is a matter of *doing* concern about others. (2004a 179-180)

As it is explained here, “*doing* concern,” particularly in a religious manner, is somehow related to elderly Japanese people’s concept of health needs, physical, mental and social. Because the elderly are more occupied than younger people with their health, they try to show their concern for others. Building “emotive ties,” seems consistent to Erikson’s idea of ego-integrity, in that for Japanese, an integrated sense of self (a self that can withstand the pain of abandonment), depends upon maintaining inter-dependent ties with others. Although Traphagen does not go this far in his analysis, his notions of “concern,”

²⁴ Traphagen’s use of the term “concern” does come from a correlate in Japanese language such as “*omoiyari*” (concern for others), and should not be treated as a native concept, but more of an anthropological heuristic (2005 personal correspondence)

and “well-being” in old age are ambiguous enough that they do not contradict such an interpretation.

While I tend to agree with Traphagen’s general conclusions, I also have several criticisms of his work. First, Traphagen’s research was done in a small rural hamlet in northern Japan where everyone was of the same religious sect (Jōdo Shinshū), did rituals at the same local institutions and knew much about each others’ life (Traphagen 2004: 85-91). This differs greatly from my research, which was done not only in an urban setting, but among individuals who for the most part, did not know each other nor were associated with the same religious groups. Traphagen does not attempt to account for the differences that might occur in a context where there are numerous resources for the aged, where social networks may not be as highly integrated or monitored, and where religious perspectives are more varied. I argue that in such an environment, the tendency to express private meaning in terms of cultural symbols is more available and less a constrained by public scrutiny.

Second, although Traphagen’s work promises to focus primarily on ancestor memorial, his analysis is similar to Smith (1974) in that he gives almost no regard to understanding the relationships between the elderly and the dead as they are related to the or to the life course and its psychological implications. Instead, Traphagen tends to lump all religious practice together as contributing to the idea of expressing “concern,” and finding “well being,” so that visiting a grave alone, participating in a large public festival, or receiving a cleansing ritual at a Shinto shrine are all serving the exact same purpose.

In a chapter entitled “Old Women, Ancestors and Caregiving,” for example, Traphagen reviews dream experiences of old women, but stops short of applying any

psychological model to interpret their stories. In fact, Traphagan prefaces his analysis by writing, “I am interested in my informants’ interpretation of their ancestral dream experiences and their conceptualizations of the significance of such experiences” (2004a:129). Thus, Traphagan concludes:

...conveying ancestral dreams and carrying out the primary ritual duties associated with ancestor veneration may be one way in which elderly women maintain the caregiver role by being the primary individuals charged with enacting the practice of concern in relation to the ancestors. (2004a: 146)

While this argument is again intuitively plausible, it disregards the complex psychological relationship between the dreamer and the particular dead person in the dream, the context of the dream in the dreamer’s life, and the distinction between manifest and latent content of dreams. While I admit that it is difficult to attend to these points, I believe that doing so may offer alternative explanations that could describe the experience of aging and religious devotion with greater specificity.

Traphagen would have us believe that dreams of the ancestors are simply a way for older women to feel like they are still taking care of their family, and that this feeling of “concern” is also providing a sense of “well being.” Traphagen uses similar arguments throughout his work, as if he is eager to dismiss the idea that the particular emotional quality of grief and bereavement plays a role in elder identity, or that the relationship of people before death has any bearing on mourning practices.

Traphagen believes that “Japanese religious behavior can be understood as functioning like an HMO...in which people engage in both preventive and remedial activities that revolve around the expression of concern through ritual performance” (2004: 179). In statements such as these, Traphagen depicts the elderly as attempting to

cope with existential anxiety in the same rational, pragmatic way that one would approach any medical condition. In my research I attempt to focus on ritual in a way that extends beyond this view of the self and explores the possibility that religious beliefs and actions emerge from the unconscious work of the ego defending against the pain of loss within the context of Japanese culture.

Summary

In this chapter I have tried to reframe ancestor memorial as the ritual expression of a particular orientation towards an experience of selfhood that articulates with the needs of old age. While Chapter 1 deals with this same issue in the context of the broader anthropological and psychological literature, this chapter has focused specifically on Japanese culture.

First, I described different religious practices that explicitly address of aging, in terms of health, mental decline, maintaining autonomy and achieving a ‘good death.’ I then propose that although participation in ancestor memorial is not limited to the elderly, since it addresses each one of these concerns, it may be beneficial to our understanding of aging to look at its relationship to ancestor memorial.

Second, I describe how Japanese ancestor memorial is a pervasive and highly adaptable form of religious practice in Japan, by describing how it has been elaborated and given different symbolic meaning in Shinto, Buddhist, Christian and New Religious faiths. I argue that from the perspective of the Japanese, ancestor memorial, as it has evolved over history, has become one of the is the central components of each of these traditions. I also agree with Yamaori’s (1990) suggestion that “pluralism based on

ancestor worship” is a key theme in Japanese religious identity (1990:63), and this has been overlooked by many other scholars of Japanese religion.

Lastly, I review the contributions of three important works on Japanese ancestor memorial in order to show how it has been examined from the perspectives of folklore studies, anthropology and gerontology. Yanagita Kunio’s (1970) folklore perspective shows that ancestor memorial is not only a matter of maintaining patterns of inheritance and succession in the household, but has deep implications for the possibility of continuity in cultural identity that overflows formal religious institutions. Yanagita links this continuity not only with the ancestors, but with the elderly as well. Robert Smith (1974) in many ways echoes Yanagita’s conclusions, in his study of memorial tablets. Smith’s work shows not only the diversity of memorial practice, but also the way in which one’s practice is closely tied to personal attachment to the ancestor. John W. Traphagen (2004) gives us the most up to date account of Japanese ancestor memorial, and in contrast to the first two works, sets out to explicitly link ancestor memorial and aging. Traphagen sees ancestor memorial as “*doing* concern,” which benefits the well-being of older adults by keeping them engaged in social bonds with others.

In the next chapter I will give more detail concerning Japanese ancestor memorial by describing the ways in which people talk about their relationship to the ancestors, as well as how they practice ancestor memorial.

Chapter 3: Practicing Ancestor Memorial and Aging in Japan

As shown in Chapter 2, ancestor memorial remains an ambiguous category of religious experience in a society where clear lines of demarcation between religious traditions are often blurred. Because ancestor memorial in Japan predates the introduction of formalized Shinto as well as of Buddhism, it is often treated in the same manner as animistic “folk” beliefs, which are characteristically diverse and highly local in significance (Kawahashi 2005). The adoption of Shinto beliefs added additional understandings about ancestral origins, posthumous deification of spirits and ways to manage the pollution of death through ritual purification. Buddhism brought even more ways of thinking about the continuity of the spirit after death, and over time, developed unique ways of ritualizing ancestor memorial. In this way, ancestor memorial in contemporary Japan can be seen as the product of a long process of layering beliefs and practices onto a core experience of the continuity of personhood after death. Each layer of understanding is flexible and porous, so that the core experience of death, bereavement and memorial, like a chair draped with layers of diaphanous dust-covers, is masked and revealed, distorted and redefined.

It is not my intention to ‘peel back the layers’ to show some “essential” or “original” practice of ancestor memorial, but rather to investigate how the complex world of ancestor memorial and how it is experienced by older adults in contemporary Japan. I show, for instance that through its long history, ancestor memorial has accumulated paradoxes and contradictions; and that interest of the spirits of the dead has sometimes

come to be played down, selectively forgotten or otherwise managed through the use of cultural idioms. A general disinterest among laypeople in theological doctrine, and the prevalence of religious professionals willing to adapt, and therefore give some legitimacy to changing traditions, aids in this process of cultural revision. The best example of such a paradox in modern Japanese ancestor memorial is the contradiction between Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation, and belief in the continuity of the spirit in “the other world” after death. History and cultural influence have been so successful in diminishing this paradox that it has ceased to be seen as problematic to most practitioners today.

Everyone I spoke with during my research was familiar with the idea of reincarnation and its connection with Buddhist thought, as well as the popular idea of the judgment of the soul and rebirth in paradise or hell, which has been a widely circulated belief for centuries in Japan and other parts of East Asia. However, without exception, everyone preferred to imagine the spirits of the dead as eternally residing in an ambiguous “other world” rather than cite a scholarly or doctrinal explanation.

Although the pluralism in Japanese religion seems to blur the definitions of who the ancestors are, some insight into how older Japanese people think about the ancestors can be gained by understanding the words and categories people intuitively use to talk about them. Accordingly, in this chapter, I will give an overview of the terminology of ancestor memorial, followed by a description of some of the ways in which ancestor memorial is practiced today.

Definitions: Religion, Ancestors, Worship and Memorial

All of the persons that I interviewed in this research attested to participating in some religious practices throughout their entire lives. Most were brought up in a household that honored a particular sect of Buddhism and that had both a *kamidana* 神棚, for the Shinto deities and a *butsudan* 仏壇 for the ancestors. They also indicated that they attended Shinto festivals, visited shrines to pray to the *kami* enshrined there, and purchased protective talismans and amulets at both shrines and temples. This pattern of religious behavior is typical in Japan, where surveys of self-reported religious affiliation show that the population is 75-80% both Buddhist and Shinto. Furthermore, between 70 and 80% of respondents indicate that they do not profess to be in any particular religion *shūkyō* 宗教 (Reader and Tanabe 1998:7), which indicates that standard notions of religiosity do not necessarily work in Japan.

Religious participation in Japan is difficult to assess from survey data that uses problematic terms like “religion,” or assumes distinct categories between traditions (Matcha 2007: 328-335). For example, 45% of Japanese have both a domestic Shinto shrine and a Buddhist domestic altar, while only 15% have only a shrine and 16% only an altar (Sywngedeow 1993). This supports the notion of religious plurality, but does not include data about those who intend to purchase a shrine or altar at some point, such as when they establish a branch household, or when a family member passes away. If this data were included it would no doubt indicate a much greater participation in religious behavior.

The terms that anthropologists use help to situate the particular content of beliefs and practices within meaningful frames, at the same time construct (or obstruct) the object of study itself. So it is for the term like “ancestor worship,” which, while providing an important disciplinary language for cross-cultural comparison, and conveniently gathering up a wide variety of cultural artifacts into a single, bounded group, nonetheless does more to restrain than to encompass experience. I have used the term “ancestor memorial,” (*senzo kuyō* 先祖供養) in order to emphasize the spirits whose identities are still remembered as well as the actual process of remembrance that takes place in the act of memorial. Ancestor, however is not the ideal term for what I am describing. A more apt term might be “the recently deceased,” since most practices are not concentrated on the dead beyond two or three generations. Another possibility might be to simply use “*hotoke*,” 仏 which was the most common term used for the spirits of the dead, but which unfortunately glosses as “buddha”. So who are the ancestors?

Who are the “Ancestors”?

In Japan, when a person dies, the ephemeral aspect of the self, or “soul” (*tamashii* 魂) is thought to gradually disassociate itself from the physical body and the physical world (*kono yo* この世). It then embarks on a long journey to the realm of the spirits (*rei* 霊), which is spoken of ambiguously as “the other world” (*ano yo* あの世). The soul does not turn into a spirit, but rather the two are seen as comparable. In Japan, Buddhism has assimilated to this world view, depicting the soul as variously traveling to the Western Paradise of Amida Buddha, or other depiction of Buddhist salvation, either directly, by crossing a bridge, ferrying across a river, or traveling through the six realms

of existence. The “other world,” which is often associated with the mountains, the sea and the moon is also regarded as closely tied to “this world” (Hori 1968, 1959; Genyu 2005). The “other world” and paradise are similar in the sense that for most people, the soul only arrives with the help of the living, and the soul’s progress takes a good deal of time. In this liminal stage, the soul remains in close contact with the living, and while the spirit is thought to be powerful in the sense that it could potentially benefit or harm the living, it is also believed to be highly dependent on the living for its welfare on its journey. When the soul has finally completed its journey, it becomes merged with the anonymous ancestors; and the individual is forgotten.

While this notion of ancestor veneration finds parallels in the anthropological literature (see Chapter 1), the particular conceptions of what the body, soul and spirit consist of as well as how the living should relate to them have developed a unique character in Japan.

Body and Soul

In Japanese as well as in English, terms such as “soul” or “spirit” are frequently used to describe one’s vitality or “life-force”. Perhaps the most common term used to describe this quality is the term “*ki*” 気 (Kondo 1990; Lock 1993), which can be used to describe all manner of mental and emotional states in terms of a fluid and dynamic vital force that is inseparable from the body that animates it. Similar terms include *seishin* 精神 (spirit/mental state), *kokoro* (心 heart/mind) and *tamashii* 魂 (soul), the term we just

discussed²⁵. When someone is especially forceful, energetic or enduring something difficult, it may be said that their “spirit” (*tamashii*) is strong. In contrast to these terms, the spirits or souls of the living are never referred to as *rei* (霊 spirit), which is limited to the dead. At the Senior Community Center where I volunteered, I asked one of the frequent visitors to describe to me his idea of a “soul”. He told me that he thought of souls not as an entity that was separate and distinct from the body, but rather as “whole persons”. He then pointed out that he believed that in English, the abbreviation for distress-- “S.O.S.” stands for “Save Our Souls,” and therefore the “soul” encompasses the entire being, including both body as well as the heart/mind²⁶.

The ancestors and *hotoke* are conceived of as souls whose memory is perpetuated through death rites practiced by the living. Their perpetuation is not believed to fix them in a static condition, but propel them on a journey towards a transcendent state. Paradoxically, the very rituals that are meant to help the *hotoke* reach the “other shore” of salvation are also bringing them closer to the world of the living, with the spirit “returning home,” or being present at the altar or grave when someone is conducting a memorial. On the other hand, as I’ve described in the *obasuteyama* story (Introduction), it is the old woman’s attachment to the world and people in it that creates her misery, and only offerings from the living can help to free her.

This brings up another possible fate of the souls of deceased, one that does not result in transformation: abandonment. By abandonment, I mean the neglect of the living to conduct rites to perpetuate the memory of the dead. This category of spirit is generally

²⁵ A common depiction of the soul is a small ball of fire that can travel through the air. This was confirmed by some of my interviewees. The idea of the soul as a small ball of fire underscores its significance as a source of vital energy, but distinguishes it from the physical form of the body

²⁶ SOS actually stands for “Save Our Ship”

referred to as *muenbotoke* 無縁仏 which has been glossed as “wandering spirit of the dead” (Smith 1974: 41), or “unconnected dead” (Ivy 1995: 151)²⁷. Yanagaita Kunio (1970), for example, describes the souls of those lost in WWII as “wandering about to look in on other family altars, an undesirable condition for helping them go peacefully into the other world and to soothe minds disturbed by the war” (1970:179).

Abandonment is linked here with desire, and more specifically the desire to be cared for and remembered by others.

Muenbotke are characterized a pitiful sense of loneliness and craving, which resembles unfulfilled *amae*, or the desire to be cared for (Doi 1981). While the dependence of those souls who have dutiful descendents is indulged, the *muenbotoke*, who have been abandoned and forgotten by the living, are tortured by their dependence. They are depicted in art as gaunt and disheveled, whose weak hands are held limp at the wrist.

Abandoned souls are a popular theme in Noh plays, such as the Obasuteyama story, as well as in contemporary Japanese cinema, suggesting a stable recognition of this theme in the Japanese psyche over time. In the film *From the Depths of Dark Water*, (2002) directed by Hideo Nakata and based on a story by best-selling author Koji Suzuki, the ghost of an abandoned girl who died in a drowning accident haunts a young mother

²⁷ For more detailed description of the various categories of *muenbotoke* see Smith 1974, Iwasaka and Tolkein 1994. Ivy (1995) associates the pervasive reoccurrence of themes of “ghostliness, of death and memory” as ways of situating the “‘uncanny,’ referring to the strangeness of that which is most familiar: the uncanny as place out of place” (1995:23). Woodward (1999) uses the notion of the “uncanny” in a similar way in describing the “Mirror Stage of Old Age,” which she locates just before Erikson’s eighth stage, and characterizes as a time when one is confronting old age in the uncanny appearance of doubles that force one to reflect on oneself and either accept or reject the transition to old age (1999: 107-113).

and her daughter²⁸. The mother, who is struggling with a complicated divorce, finds herself under the gaze of lawyers, teachers and co-workers, and as the story progresses we see that the ghost represents the mother's own shame for not being able to care for her own daughter. At the climax of the film, when the story of the ghost is finally revealed, the mother mistakenly embraces the child thinking it is her own. When she realizes that the gruesome creature gripping her is not hers, she comforts the ghost, saying, "mama is here." The ghost and mother vanish as a result.

What is interesting about this film is that it shows how the themes of abandonment and shame, dependence and guilt depicted in ghost stories are only as dreadful as those same experiences that we face in simply trying to live our lives. Underlying the desire to remain connected to others is the fear of being abandoned, and nowhere is this more evident than in the experience of death. Today, memorial monuments for the abandoned are sometimes grouped together and worshipped collectively wherever they were found (Fig 3.1). While becoming an ancestor means that one can avoid the pain of abandonment, all spirits of the recently deceased are believed to pass through a temporary phase where they are almost indistinguishable from *muenbotoke*, before they are reintegrated into the social world of the living.

²⁸ This film was remade in the United States by director Walter Salles and the title shortened to *Dark Water* (2006). I have used the international title, which is a direct translation of the original title.



Fig 3.1 Abandoned gravestones for the *muenbotoke* are piled together at a roadside memorial

Becoming an Ancestor

As noted in Chapter 1, death alone does not make one an ancestor. In Japan, this is true as well, since ancestorhood in the formal sense is considered unattainable until at least the 33rd anniversary of the death, and sometimes, depending on the degree of devotion of the descendants, not until the 50th or 100th anniversary of the death. The spirits of the deceased that require the most attention typically have the most meaningful relationships in the memories of the living.

The recently deceased are referred to as *shirei* (死霊), or simply “spirits of the dead”. These spirits are given the most attention not only because they are the most vivid

in the minds of the bereaved, but because they are also considered to be potentially the most dangerous or unsettled of the spirits (Smith 1974:72). After forty-nine days, during which rituals are conducted every seven days, the spirit is no longer considered *shirei*, but *seirei* (精霊), and will continue to be regarded this way until becoming a *sorei* (祖霊) or “ancestral spirit” on the final anniversary of the death²⁹.

The recently deceased (both *shirei* and *seirei* but not *sorei*) are also referred to as *hotoke* (仏), or “buddha”³⁰. This reflects the idea that if given the proper post-mortem rites, the spirit of the dead will find its way safely to the land of the buddhas, in essence, becoming a buddha him or herself³¹. In many ways, Japanese attention to the deceased is most interesting at the stage of the *shirei*. While the rituals and taboos associated with mortuary rites for the newly deceased can be quite restrictive, those pertaining to the *hotoke* are, generally, much more flexible and open to personal interpretation³². The fact that the *hotoke* are likely to be still vivid in the memories of living family aids the feeling of emotional exchange, and personalized gifts, informal “conversations” and affectionate gestures are common.

²⁹ In one diagram I received from a Buddhist temple concerning this progression of the spirit, the final memorial service also represented the change of status to *kami*

³⁰ Yanagita (1970) has ventured a linguistic explanation for the use of the Japanese word *hotoke*, claiming that it does not derive from other Buddhist terms, but rather from a Japanese word for a ritual offering vessel. He uses this argument to support his overall claim that ancestor memorial preceded Buddhism and persists through Buddhism in a masked form: “The custom of calling every departed soul *hotoke* began from the food offering rite, because it was put into a vessel called *hotoki*, this having occurred in folk customs at *Bon* in medieval times” (1970:107).

³¹ By ‘land of the buddhas’ I am referring primarily to the popular belief in the “pure land,” or the “western paradise” ascribed to by several Buddhist sects. Temple altars as well as domestic ones are meant to be imitations of the pure land, with flower garlands and gilded platforms where the buddha of infinite light/life (Amitabha/Amitayus) welcomes the souls of the deceased (represented on the altar by memorial tablets).

³² In regards to taboos following death, many are associated with Shinto beliefs of purity and pollution. When a member of one’s family dies, New Year’s cards (associated with Shinto) are not accepted, as it is considered bad form to wish well to those in mourning. Those in mourning are also not to pass under a Shinto gateway (*torii* 鳥居) and should cover their domestic Shinto shrines in white cloth for one year.

The ancestral spirits (*sorei* 祖靈) are sometimes collectively referred to as *senzo* (先祖). *Senzo*, as the term is commonly used in Japan, has two basic meanings: that of recent forebears and that as the very distant, sometimes deified dead. Just as the *shirei* are referred to at *hotoke*, the *sorei* are often referred to as *senzo* in the context of everyday ritual practice. The Japanese term *senzo* (先祖) or *sosen* (祖先), is usually glossed in English as “ancestor”. A more literal translation of these terms would be something closer to “forefather,” or a (patrilineal) “grandparent” that has died, the former having a stronger emphasis on the founding ancestor of the household³³.

The importance of the ancestors is seen most easily at the family grave. Graves are commonly dedicated to the ancestors of a household, and “the grave of the ancestors of the X household,” (X 家先祖之墓) or “the grave of the generations of ancestors of X household” (X 家先祖代々之墓) is carved into the front of the gravestone (Fig 3.2), while the individual posthumous names of the persons whose remains are interred may be carved in a smaller script on the side or on a supplementary stone set next to the main one. Similarly, many people keep a memorial tablet for the collective household ancestors in their *butsudan*.

³³ Tanaka (1988:199-223) makes an excellent analysis of the use of the character “so”祖 as it has been used in ancient Japanese texts. Interestingly he has found cases where it seems that this character not only indicates the long-deceased ancestors (as it is most commonly used today), but also instances where *so* refers to one’s parents, and in some cases specifically to one’s mother. In fact, Tanaka concludes that the original meaning of *so* 祖 was mother, and only later, with the importation of Chinese thought were terms introduced that gave it a more masculine definition.



Fig. 3.2 A household grave. Large memorial stupas in back, and small ones in front indicate visits by family. In front of the incense are offerings of coffee and beer.

All of the remains of the members of a household (those who share the family name) can then be interred in the household grave (see Chapter 8). Members of branch households are generally not interred in the grave of the main household, unless there are no descendants to maintain the branch household's grave. A younger brother would therefore typically set up a separate grave for himself and his descendants, but were he to die without an heir; his remains could be interred with his older brother and the ancestors of the main household. Gravesites that are dedicated to the household ancestors uphold the value of the household over the individual members, but this practice is beginning to change (see Chapter 9).

Because the bodies of the deceased are conceived of as part of the entire “soul,” the fate of the soul after death continues to be tied to the care of the remains, even if the ephemeral aspect of the soul no longer animates them. Proper care of the remains of the deceased insures that the soul will find its way to a favorable place in the other world and be able to receive offerings and bestow favor on the living. Improper care or abandonment of the remains (particularly in a foreign place, such as those who died in war) is thought to confuse the soul, making it restless and even dangerous.

Worship and Memorial

“Worship” is usually glossed as *sūhai* 崇拜 or *reihai* 礼拝, the common character (*hai* 拜) meaning to bow in respect, but also more generally to “see” someone in a higher position. This sort of orientation evokes the feeling of shame and humility, as well as respect and gratitude (for being seen). While *sūhai* is sometimes used to describe ancestor veneration, more often, in academic literature at least, the term *saishi* (祭祀), which indicates rituals are being performed.

Another term frequently used by people in general conversation about rites for the dead is “making offering” (*kuyō* 供養), also glossed as “memorial”³⁴. Morioka (1988) writes that “memorializing the [individual] dead” (死者供養 *shirei kuyō*) and “veneration of the [collective] ancestors” (先祖祭祀 *senzo saishi*) together are called “ancestor rites” (祖先祭祀 *sosen saishi*)” (1988:11). Mokioka (1983:96-98) uses the term ancestor rites

³⁴ One of the largest professional funeral centers in Kyoto used the word *kuyō* as a mnemonic device for their phone number: 094110. In Japanese, this can be pronounced “O-KU-YO-110” (お供養 110 番), with “110” being the emergency number similar to 911 in the US. In other words, the number is “memorial service 911.” The “O” is an honorific addition.

(*senzo saishi* 先祖祭) with reference to the *Nihonshōki* 日本書紀, or *Chronicles of Ancient Japan*, to suggest that later Confucian ideas led to the renaming of this tradition as simply as ancestor rites or *sozen saishi* 祖先祭祀 (Inoue 2003:30).

Sosen sūhai or *senzo saishi*, imply a distinct and cohesive set of beliefs and rituals relating to the care of the dead. Most Japanese people I spoke with, however, do not understand their practices in these terms. On the contrary, ancestor memorial is always casually referred to as a “tradition” (*dentō* 伝統) or “custom,” (*fūshū* 風習, *shikitari* しきたり). It is important to note that no one who I spoke with called ancestor veneration “religious,” let alone “a religion” (*shūkyō* 宗教) in and of itself. Perhaps because of this, my Japanese friends often believed that they are not the only ones who honor their ancestors, as my informants usually assumed that Christians, including those in the United States, did something similar for their dead. Rather, ancestor memorial is such a common-sense and mundane practice that, for most people, it is indistinguishable from the non-religious world.

Satsuki Kawano (2005) argues that in Japan, “believing is culturally defined as a possible consequence of doing” and that ritual can “create moments of personal significance and engagement” (2005:120). When discussing ritual practices concerning the *hotoke* and the ancestors, I found it easiest to refer to specific concrete actions, such as making an offering, visiting a grave or going to the *butsudan*, rather than asking questions about “Buddhism” or “Ancestor Memorial.” The term used for visiting the grave or *butsudan* is a humble form of go/come (*mairu* 参る), which is the same word used for visiting a shrine or temple. To “go” to the altar or the grave therefore already

implies deference towards the ancestors. Another term that was easily understood by persons I spoke with was *matsuru* (祀る, 祭る, 奉る), meaning to pray to the spirits and comfort them with offerings. Again, this term can be used in reference to both ancestors as well as Shinto *kami*, and is the basis of word often translated as “festival” (*matsuri* 祭).

Several Japanese scholars discuss the implications of using different terms for the practice of religious rituals for the dead. Murakami (2005) for example, identifies the change in modern, urban Japan from ancestor worship (*senzo saishi*), to prayers for the dead (*shisha reihai*), or “memorialism” (*kuyōshugi* 供養主義). Murakami argues that this shift represents a post WWII movement towards a conception of the dead person’s relationship to individuals rather than the collective. Similarly, Ikegami (2005) identifies contemporary Japan as oriented towards an individualistic “memorial system” (*kuyō system* 供養システム), and away from a group centered “worship system” (*saishi system* 祭祀システム). There is, however, some ambiguity regarding the group/individual distinction when using terms such as *irei* (慰霊 consoling the spirits) or *tsuitō* (追悼 commemoration). These terms are often associated with collective memorials, such as those held for those who died fighting in wars, the victims of the two atomic bombs, earthquakes, train accidents and the like. However, Ikegami argues that they do not directly map onto the “worship system,” since they remain focused on the feelings of individual(ized) mourners.

It is interesting that both of these scholars use the term *kuyō* for memorial in the individualized sense. *Kuyō* is not strictly used for dead persons, but can be applied to any sort of offering service, such as those for pets, dolls or other objects (see Chapter 9). It

implies not only an offering, but also a sense of remembering and gratitude. *Kuyō*, when used by my informants to describe the act of making an offering, and seemed to have a neutral connotation that did not imply a hierarchical divide between the living and the dead in the same way that terms such as “worship” or “veneration.” In concordance with the arguments of Murakami and Ikegami, I never heard the term *kuyō* used in conjunction with the term ancestors (*senzo*). Rather, offerings were made to specific individuals or *hotoke*.

I have attempted to briefly list the basic terminology used to express relationships between the living and the dead in Table 3.1. None of these terms are strictly limited to ancestor memorial, although many of them have either a particular religious connotation or a feeling of respectfulness that might pertain to one’s living superiors. Most come directly from the terms used in interviews, while others were found at various temples and religious centers advertising care of the dead. I found it more useful for this research to collect a working vocabulary in this way rather than by simply consulting reference volumes on religious terminology, since it gives a better sense of the kind of vocabulary that might be easily recognized by anyone as concerning the ancestors.

Table 3.1 Japanese terms used to describe ancestor memorial

Romanized Japanese	Japanese	English translation
Terms of Respect		
<i>uyamau</i>	敬う	to respect, to venerate
<i>mairu</i>	参る	to (humbly) go/come; to visit a sacred place
<i>ogamu</i>	拝む	to bow respectfully with palms together
<i>sūhai</i>	崇拜	to worship, to adore
Terms of consolation		
<i>tsuitō suru</i>	追悼する	to commemorate (the dead)
<i>ireisai wo suru</i>	慰霊祭をする	to console the spirits of the dead; to remember (the spirits of the dead)
<i>shinobu</i>	偲ぶ	to memorialize (the dead)
Terms of giving		
<i>matsuru</i>	祀る・祭る・奉る	consoling the spirits through offering and prayer
<i>kuyo suru</i>	供養する	making and offering, memorializing
<i>saishi</i>	祭祀	ritual (offering)
Terms of petition		
<i>onagai suru</i>	お願いする	to ask for something, to petition
<i>inoru</i>	祈る	to pray for

While this list is by no means exhaustive, I have tried to give a sense that of four basic orientations towards the spirits of the dead that are implied in the vocabulary: respect,

consolation, giving and petition. These orientations can be divided into couplets, with the first two groups and last two complimenting each other. In the first couplet, holding the spirit in respect doesn't mean that they are beyond dependence³⁵. In the second, a more straightforward of reciprocal exchange is emphasized, with the ancestors being both givers and takers. In terms of Erikson's model of human development, the first couplet seems to evoke the second stage of development, where the child is both eager to exert its autonomy, but it shamed by its helplessness and independence. The last couplet evokes the first stage of development, in which the child must develop enough trust in the caretaker to give and receive. These associations suggest that ancestor memorial is dealing with very basic emotional territory, and that for the elderly, it provides a way to revisit, recollect and revise their basic orientations towards their own identities.

The Practice of Ancestor Memorial

The rituals associated with the care of the deceased circumscribe different social groups, ritual spaces and temporalities, all of which serve to situate the personhood of the deceased in relationship to the world of the living. Ancestor memorial rituals vary according to local custom, family tradition and individual taste. They also vary slightly between religious sects, although every Buddhist priest I spoke to played down these differences, telling me that they would conduct mortuary and memorial rites for anyone regardless of the family's sect affiliation. What ties these rituals together, however, is the way in which they emphasize the interdependence of the living and the dead, as well as

³⁵ This is similar to Smith's (1974) observation that the dead are both prayed *for* and prayed *to* (1974: 218)

the inclusion of remembrance of the deceased that provides the basis of this interdependence.

By “recollection” I mean both the action of recalling the spirit of the deceased into contact with the living and the recollection of oneself in relation to the deceased. Recollection in ancestor memorial is both return and reminiscence. Who are recollecting and the nature of the relationship created in rituals for the dead is contingent on the spatial and temporal framing of relationships. Generally, the longer a person has been dead, or in the “other world,” the further they are along on their journey. The spatio-temporal distance reflects a social and memorial distance. With time, fewer people retain interdependent relationships with the dead individual, and fewer memories are associated with that individual.

During the first year or so after a person has died, when the spirit of the deceased, known as *shirei* or colloquially as simply *hotoke*, is still close to a broad group of people, and the rituals associated with this first year, including the wake (*otsuya* 御通夜), funeral (*osōshiki* お葬式), the first of the periodic memorials (*kaiki* 回忌), and the first *Obon* holiday, may involve friends, neighbors, co-workers and extended family.

After this period, but before the spirit has been given its final memorial service, the spirit is in a long liminal phase in which it is considered gone but constantly returning. During this period, large scale periodic memorials become gradually less frequent, and less widely attended (only immediate or extended family). In addition, rituals for the dead are centered on the family *butsudan* and the grave, and frequency and manner of the rituals allow for much more personal variation. The four major memorial holidays (*Obon*, Spring Equinox 春彼岸, Autumn Equinox 秋彼岸 and New Years お晦日) are important

days for remembering all of the ancestors, as are the death anniversaries (*meinichi* 命日), which are usually observed only once a year, but in some traditions are observed each month on the particular day the person died (*tsukimeichichi* 祥月命日).

When the deceased have had their final memorial service they are formally recognized as an ancestor or *kami*. At this time, their individual memorial tablet in the *butsudan* is removed and although one may keep records of the deceased person's individual identity in the form of genealogical records, these identity markers are less frequently recalled, except, perhaps by the elders of the household on special occasions. Although the ancestors serve as an anchor for the practice of memorial and symbols of the continuity of a household, rituals for the ancestors during this last period are almost completely absent. Recalling the ancestors no longer involves working through reminiscence, so much as the resolution of reminiscence.

The following descriptions are normative models of ancestor memorial ritual in Japan and are meant to provide a reference for understanding the case studies in the following chapters. They are grouped according to the three spatio-temporal frames outlined above, and make note as to the significance of these events to for the elderly in particular.

Rituals for the Recently Deceased

The Wake (*otsuya* 御通夜)

When a person is finally declared “departed” (*gorinju* 御臨終) preparations are made for the soul's journey to “the other world.” In Pure Land Buddhist belief, the dead person is met by a Bodhisattva on a purple cloud and led to Amida Buddha's paradise, a

striking contrast to the image of abandonment³⁶. While Amida takes the soul away in a lotus blossom, the body is taken home³⁷. The family calls relatives to inform them of the death, and it is traditionally the family that performs the pre-funeral preparation of the body.

The process of preparing the soul for its journey to the next world begins with cleaning and dressing the body. The body is laid on a futon and ritually washed with a soft cloth or gauze wrapped around a brush or wooden chopstick. The ritual washing symbolizes the cleansing of the spirit as well as the body (Murayama 1994: 271). The body is then dressed in the clothes of a Buddhist pilgrim: an all white tunic, gloves, socks, straw sandals, a dagger, and a Buddhist rosary³⁸. Across the forehead is tied a small band with a white triangle shaped cloth that is the most obvious mark of a dead person and appears frequently in depictions of ghosts. Six coins (now typically made of paper) are placed on the body to pay the fee for crossing the *Sanzu* River 三途の川, the Buddhist version of the river Styx. A cloth is usually placed on the face of the deceased, and the body is covered in a blanket.

The body is placed with the head facing north and an altar is arranged parallel to the body at the head. The altar contains all of the elements typically found on a *butsudan*: candle, incense, an offering of cooked rice with chopsticks sticking upright, water, green

³⁶ *Raigo* (来迎) or “coming to meet someone” is the phrase associated with Amida’s power to save the dead as well as the genre of artwork depicting this, in which Amida descends with a chorus of heavenly spirits, one of which takes the soul of the deceased into a lotus blossom and carries it away to paradise.

³⁷ The predatory nature of funeral companies to make connections with hospitals, while convenient, has been nonetheless criticized by others

³⁸ Buddhist pilgrims or monks undergoing austerities bear a close identification with the deceased. In a sense they are thought to be “dead to this world”. Another explanation is that if they were to die during the course of their austerities, they would already be prepared for the funeral. For instance, the canes typically carried by pilgrims on the 88 temple Shikoku route are fashioned to resemble grave markers, so they could be used to mark the place where the pilgrim died on their route.

evergreen branches, and a bell. The candle and incense are lit and the attendees are expected to constantly replace these throughout the night as they burn down. This is the beginning of the wake, or *tsūya*, which literally means “through the night”. The meaning of this is quite literal. Attendees join the dead body in the house until morning, usually eating, drinking and telling stories about the deceased to pass the time.

Funeral (osōshiki お葬式)

Having completed the *tsūya*, the body is either kept in the house or moved to a temple or funeral home for the funeral (Lay 1974; Suzuki 2000; Rowe 2000). Although most funerals in the past had been conducted within the home of the deceased, in the last few decades professional funeral homes have become increasingly popular alternatives as fewer and fewer people have space in their home to host visitors (modern western-style homes lack the removable sliding doors which can reorganize space even in a small Japanese home) or the expertise in handling the numerous aspects of funeral etiquette³⁹.

The Japanese funeral has many stages and the etiquette is highly formalized. Mourners bring a gift of consolation money (*kōden* 香典 or “incense money”), and the amount of the gift is recorded along with giver’s name. A return gift (based on a percentage of the amount of the gift received) is customarily given after the funeral is completed (Tsuji 2006). When the mourners have assembled, a Buddhist priest recites verses while the audience sits in formal seated posture. When the chanting is finished,

³⁹ Japanese funeral rites are extensive and well documented (cf. Tsuji 2006, Takahashi 2004, Rowe 2000, Suzuki 2000, Hamabata 1990). The details of the numerous varieties of funeral rites could fill several dissertations and there is no need to reiterate them all here. However, because the funeral is central to Japanese ancestor memorial and the pattern of memorial that follows, it is useful to describe the basic elements.

the attendees approach the altar one by one to offer incense. This is done by taking a pinch of incense from a small coffer, raising it to one's forehead, and dropping it onto the smoldering mound of incense in the censer.

After this ritual is finished, the principal mourner (*moshu* 喪主) may say a few words about the deceased, and about their gratitude towards the other mourners. This is particularly important in funerals of high status individuals, where choosing the principle mourner can have great consequences in terms of family prestige and inheritance. Before the coffin is taken away, it is common to have mourners place flowers in the coffin and other objects important to the deceased. The body in its coffin is then transported to the crematorium in a Japanese style hearse, sometimes outfitted with what appears to be a large wooden shrine on the back, called *miyagata* 宮型 (Fig 3.2)⁴⁰. At the crematorium the family nails the coffin shut with a stone, each member taking their turn.



Fig 3.2 Japanese-style hearse, or *miyagata*. These are meant to mimic the older palanquins that were carried by the mourners. The family name is written on the side. Shinto-based ideas of purity are evident in the unstained wood of the shrine on the back of the car.

⁴⁰ The *miyagata* 宮型 are meant to resemble *omikoshi* 御神輿, or portable shrines that are carried throughout a neighborhood during a Shinto festival, or Matsuri. This style of hearse originated around 1910, and gradually came to replace the palanquins that would be carried by family members during a funeral procession. Asahi Shinbun (5/27/08) reported that many crematoriums are banning the hearses because residents in the area find them “depressing”

After the body is cremated, the family is ushered back into the crematorium to sift the remains for pieces of partially cremated bone. These bones are ceremoniously placed in a special box, carefully lifted from the ashes with chopsticks by two family members at once. Typically the bones are moved to the box by male and female relatives, using non-matching chopsticks. The axis bone (*hotoke bone* 仏骨) of the vertebrae is said to have special significance during this rite, since it is supposed to resemble two hands pressed together in prayer. The rest of the ashes are discarded.

Family members returning home purify themselves with salt as a precaution to prevent the spirit of the dead from following them into the house. They then host a party for funeral attendees known as the *kokubetsushiki* 告別式 or “farewell ceremony”. While funerals are attended mainly by family and descendents, the *kokubetsushiki* is open to the general public. While this was a separate ceremony in the past, today it is usually held as a continuation of the funeral ceremony.

After the funeral, a small, unfinished wooden box of remains is taken home and placed on a special ceremonial altar for the recently deceased for a period of forty-nine days after the death. The memorial tablet for the deceased remains only an untreated piece of wood with the death name *kaimyō* 戒名 written on it in ink⁴¹. The deceased are represented by memorial tablets that are placed in the domestic Buddhist altar. The names of the deceased and their death date are marked on each memorial tablet and in a

⁴¹ Members of the Jōdo Shinshū sect call the *kaimyō* a *hōmyō* 法名 (dharma name) and these are commonly given out at ceremonies for lay persons called *kamisori* 剃刀 or symbolic “shaving” of the head

small booklet kept at the domestic altar, which is used by clergy during memorial days and by the family to remember memorial dates and the death names of the deceased.

Every seven days, for seven weeks, a Buddhist priest comes to the home to recite verses meant to calm the spirit of the dead and prepare them for their journey to the other world. This is usually referred to as “the 49 days,” and marks the successful transition of the spirit to buddhahood. On the seventh week, the untreated wooden tablet is replaced with an engraved lacquered tablet and the special altar for the dead is removed. The remains are taken from the domestic altar and interred in the grave.

After the 49 days, periodic memorial services (*kaiki* 回忌 lit. the “return of taboo”) are held on the first, third, seventh, thirteenth, seventeenth, twenty-fifth and thirty-third anniversaries. In some rare cases, memorial services are held on the 50th or 100th anniversary of the death. As one can imagine, depending on the number of spirits memorialized in the household, this can create a busy annual schedule of memorials. The yearly schedule of memorial ceremonies (*nenkai kuri shuppyō*, 年回繰り出表) is usually posted in the near the entranceway of a temple or in the main hall. These charts are sometimes simply strips of paper indicating the family name, the date of the service and the number of the anniversary.

After the grave, the most important site of ancestor memorial practice is the *butsudan*. The *butsudan*, in many respects resembles a miniature temple, and some designs are in fact modeled after the head temple of the family’s sect. The main figure of veneration, such as a statue of Amida Buddha for the Pure Land sect, is placed in the center of the topmost shelf. Because of this placement, the statue is not only set far to the rear of the altar, but being so high up, is out of one’s line of sight when sitting in front of

the altar to pray. In contrast, the memorial tablets for the family dead are kept on lower shelves, closer to the doors which remain open (Figs 3.3 and 3.4).



Fig 3.3 the *butsudan* of a man living in the city. The two lacquer trays are used for serving food to the spirits on the holiday of *Obon*. The memorial tablets are on a lower shelf, off to the side. The Book of the Dead is between the two trays. Offerings of grapefruits and flowers are closer to the buddha image.

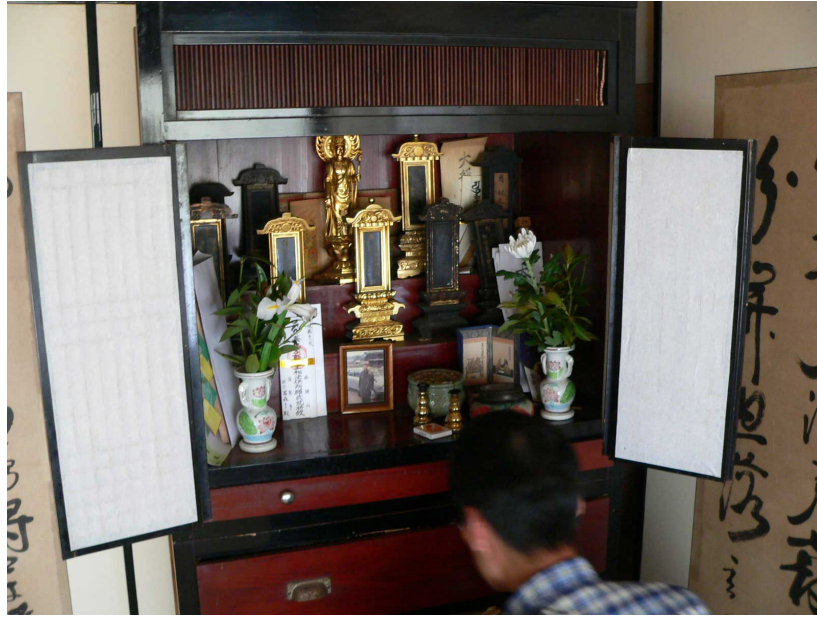


Fig 3.4 the *butsudan* of a man in rural Japan. The *butsudan* is a simple cabinet with so many memorial tablets that they easily overwhelm the small buddha image in the center.

Traphagen (2004) notes that, “regular experience of this identity or unity [with the ancestors] come in the form of a direct link between the living and dead and is maintained through the enactment of ancestor related rituals, particularly those performed on a daily basis at the family altar” (Traphagen 2004: 108). This sentiment is similar to Klass’s (2001) comparison of the *butsudan* to a “transitional” or “linking object” that can aid in managing emotions of grief (Klass 2001: 749).

Some informants of mine, however, had a greater sense of the ancestors at the grave:

H: When I go to the grave I feel kind of like I’ve come close to [my husband]. So I feel at ease.

J: More than at the *butsudan*?

H: That’s how it feels. I feel that way at the *butsudan* too but, uh, the *butsudan* is everyday (makes shape of box with hands about the size of a television) So it’s a given. There’s that too...

- J: Oh is that so? [do you go to visit] the *butsudan* in the morning? Morning and evening?
- H: Not so much in the evening, only the morning.
- J: And the offerings are, uh—
- H: Tea and cooked rice. (holds out hand as if striking a bell to greet the *hotoke*) But everyone buys presents and comes over, right? When that happens, before we all eat, we offer to father [her husband], and uh, inform [him] that something has been bought [for us]. Then we all eat (laughs) (J: I see) So that's why, that's why we go to the *hotoke-san* when they come home (laughs). Um, flowers are always there, but, uh, what shall I say? For offerings, I guess fruit and things. Things that you have sometimes but not as much other times. Because they're not so everyday.

Other informants of mine had similar feelings of devotion to the ancestors at both the grave and the *butsudan*, with no one clearly preferring one or the other. Practices done at the *butsudan* will be discussed in further detail in the following chapters.

Annual Memorials for All Ancestors

While the ceremonies for the recently deceased are highly scripted and characterized by avoiding the pollution caused by the death, memorials between the end of the first 49 days and the last memorial representing the merger with the anonymous ancestors are very flexible and can be observed to different degrees based on personal preference more than social or religion obligation. While most regular observances take place at the *butsudan* or the grave on a daily or semi-regular schedule, there are four occasions during the year when most families, no matter how devout, will spend some time memorializing the dead. These are placed more or less evenly throughout the year, and roughly coincide with winter and summer solstice (New Years and *Obon*) and Spring and Autumn equinox (*Ohigan*).

Obon お盆

Obon is an important annual holiday for making offerings to the spirits of the deceased and is celebrated throughout Japan either during mid-July or mid-August, depending on the region. The first time *Obon* was observed in Japan was in 733, but it probably wasn't popularized until the end of the Heian period in the late twelfth century (Ashikaga 1950: 221). In Kyoto, *Obon* is celebrated from August 9th through August 16th. The date of *Obon* is meant to be consistent with the early Buddhist observance called *Urabon* 盂蘭盆 (Skt. *Ullambana*), which fell on the fifteenth day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar, and marked the end of the monsoon season during which monks could not travel (Murayama 1994: 139-140). Part of this observance was the presentation of offerings to the living monks, and was eventually merged to making offerings to suffering spirits (*gaki*, or a kind of *muenbotoke*)⁴². Although some families continue to set up a special altar outside of their house out of pity for these spirits, and temples offer services for them, most families limit their offerings to the spirits of their own household.

In preparation for *Obon*, families decorate the home altar with special offerings, flowers and traditional plants. A small window may be left open to invite the spirit in and an offering of water placed there to comfort the spirit after their long journey. Two small effigies are placed near the altar, one, a cucumber with toothpick legs represents the horse that the ancestor rides in on, and the other, an eggplant similarly outfitted with

⁴² The origin of *Urabon* as a time to offer to hungry spirits is traced back to the *Ullambana Sutra*, which recounts the story of Mokuren 目連 (Skt. *Mahamaudgalyayana*), a disciple of Gautama Buddha, who traveled to the realm of hungry ghosts to offer food to his mother. Mokuren's mother was reborn in this realm because during her life she had disobeyed her son's command to dispose of her riches, and instead hoarded treasures (Murayama 1994: 138-140). Interestingly, Mokuren's own brutal death was explained as a result of the crime of killing his parents in a past life.

toothpick legs, represents the cow that the ancestor slowly goes home on. Lanterns are placed by the altar and food and other things that the recently deceased enjoyed during life are set out. A priest is typically called to the home to hold a memorial service for the ancestors enshrined at the domestic altar. In Kyoto, it is easy to recognize *Obon* season because the streets seem to suddenly be filled with monks in formal robes zipping from house to house on motor scooters. I could also tell when *Obon* was approaching because television programs about ghosts and commercials advertising burial plots become more frequent.

On one of the earlier days of *Obon* the family gathers together and makes a special visit to the household graves. *Obon* is one of the busiest travel times of the year, since it is one of the few times that the extended family assemble at the home of the main household. At the cemeteries I observed, a steady stream of visitors came all day long, each group bringing flowers, incense and occasionally food offerings. In some instances these were bought at vending booths set up at the entrance of the cemetery. At smaller cemeteries, visitors would greet other families they recognized. At one cemetery, some visitors got into a lively discussion about the inconvenient placement of newly erected graves, others wandered around reading inscriptions on other stones after they had finished visiting their own household grave.



Fig 3.5 A woman cleaning her family grave on *Obon*

In Kyoto, the end of *Obon* is signaled by the five sending-off bonfires (see Chapter 2), which are lit on the sides of the mountains surrounding Kyoto. Some of these are lit in the shapes of Chinese characters with Buddhist meanings (dai 大, hō 法, myō 妙), while others are in the shape of religious symbols (a boat, a *tōri* gate). In other regions, lanterns are placed on small boats and sent down a river, although concerns with pollution have curtailed this practice in recent years.

Because of *Obon*, August was one of the busiest times for my informants, second only, perhaps to New Years. One informant of mind brought out her offering trays to show me, and spoke with excitement about *Obon*.

Y: Yes, yes, on the day of the sending off fires. On *Obon* there was a tray laid out with food. And, like this everyone, we cooked that season's food, like kabocha squash or eggplant, we cooked that sort of thing. The meal, what they call, the soup, what they call (motions to the trays) (J: uhn) This is how we give all the different food . . .

J: Oh it seems like a lot of work!

Y: It is like playing house! (motioning to the small bowls) This is for rice, this is for soup. Well at that time-- you do what is best for that time. We give special things to them.

Although *Obon*, like the other holidays tends to be more scripted than other rites performed in the home, Y's description shows how it can also be a time for expressing strong, intimate emotion towards the ancestors.

New Year's お正月

Like *Obon*, New Year's celebrations begin well before actual New Year's Day, and continue afterwards. Typically New Year's is celebrated by making a visit to the family gravesite (*omisoka* お晦日) at the end of December, and visiting a Shinto shrine on New Year's day, although this may depend on when the family is available to gather together. Many people make their first shrine visit of the year just after midnight on New Year's Eve, purchasing protective talismans for the New Year, often shaped like arrows (a common Shinto symbol for purification and morality, or for a straight direction in the New Year).

As with *Obon*, New Years day is celebrated with family. Children receive pocket money (*otoshidama* お年玉) from their parents and grandparents⁴³. One explanation for *otoshidama* is that it is the expression of passing on the “soul” (*tama* 魂) from the senior members to junior members of the household, since the “*tama*” 玉 meaning jewel, or treasure is a homonym for “soul” (Murayama 1994:136). All family members share a meal of Japanese delicacies symbolizing wishes for good luck, which may be prepared at home, sometimes in all-night marathon cooking sessions, but often ordered from department stores or food boutiques and delivered on New Years day. In contrast to Christmas cards, which trickle in gradually through the month of December, all New Years cards are delivered on New Years day, and families often sit around reading these on New Year’s Day.

While New Years is a holiday that emphasizes rebirth and renewal for the coming year, some consider *Obon* to be the genuine New Year celebration. Still others I spoke to consider the annual *Gion* festival (see Chapter 9), observed throughout the month of July to be the genuine beginning of the New Year. In each of these cases, the sentiment of change, rebirth and renewal occurs with the blessings of the ancestors. The ancestors form the link between the cycle of the years, and between the self of the past and the future.

⁴³ The requirement for receiving New Years money seems to be based more on social position than chronological age or even familial relation. I was surprised that I received money from a friends’ grandparents when I visited during the New Years holiday, despite the fact that I was a 22 year old college student. When I asked my friend about this, he explained that you typically get money as long as you are still in school (or have not yet become “*shakaijin*” -社会人, literally, “a person in society”)



Fig 3.6 Vendors selling New Year's decorations/ talismans (*shimekazari* 注連飾り) at a local market.

Ohigan 御彼岸

The spring and autumn equinoxes (spring and autumn *higan*) are occasions to visit the family graves to clean them and present offerings. While the holiday lasts a full week, the actual day of the equinox is considered the peak of this celebration. *Higan* literally means “the distant shore,” in reference to the soul’s journey from this world to the next. Since, as the saying goes “coldness and heat until *higan*,” and since equinox is the time of year when that night and day are of equal length, *higan* represents the restoration of balance and moderation that will ease the soul’s journey.

Ancestor memorial on *higan* follows the same pattern of *Obon* and New Years. Grave visits are made with other family members, and the gravestones are cleaned and

decorated with new flowers. Temples may conduct special ceremonies this time, and many people buy special small *tōba* to mark their offering. Apart from *Obon* and New Year's, *higan* is one of the few times of the year that I saw several three-generation families gathered together to care for the grave. Children would often be put in charge of hauling the bucket of water to wash the grave, and older members would inform them of who was buried there, arrange the flowers, light incense, give offerings and then bow in prayer.



Fig 3.7 attendees search for their family's *tōba* on the temple floor after a *higan* ceremony

At one *higan* ceremony that I attended at the temple of one of my informants, a group of perhaps 50 people gathered in the temple's main hall, while the priest recited verses. At one point in the ceremony, each individual was called up as the priest read the names of

the deceased and their household name on the small wooden *tōba*. As each individual approached the middle of the hall, they bowed, and then proceeded to offer incense in the same manner of a funeral. The *tōba* were written out for each family and then left in a pile in the main hall at the end of the ceremony. When the priest had left, attendees quickly descended upon the pile, sifting through it trying to find their one for themselves.

Summary

In this chapter, I described both the terminology used in regards to the ancestors as well as the rituals of ancestor memorial as practiced in Japan today. First, I explain the significance of the terminology associated with Japanese “ancestor worship” in order to clarify the relationships between the living and the dead. I have distinguished between two different trajectories for the soul after death: memorial or abandonment. In the case of memorial, the relationship is both respectful and caring, and involves both giving and receiving.

The terms used to describe the ancestor memorial in Japan are elaborated upon in the rituals that perpetuate their memory. After death, souls of the dead embark on a journey away from the dead, and yet are recalled in those same rituals of consolation. This not only evidences the ambivalence felt towards the ancestor, but suggests the ambivalence of those practicing the rituals towards their own desire to be forgotten, or to hide from shame, and to be remembered, or be seen as they see themselves. Regular practices of ancestor memorial fix this affect in a ritual cycle that orders and gives meaning to recovering from the pain of loss by assuring a natural and perpetual world of departures and returns.

Chapter 4: Kyoto: Remembrance and Return

On a visit to the Kyoto National Museum, my wife and I stopped to admire a large map of the modern day Kyoto overlaid with a grid mapping out the original city plan⁴⁴. Kyoto is often depicted as a city that has continuously retained the structure and sensibility of its past and yet has been renewed as a modern city. The image of the map with the grid of the old city overlaid is frequently displayed in museums, tourist guides and even city planning manuals (Fig 4.1).

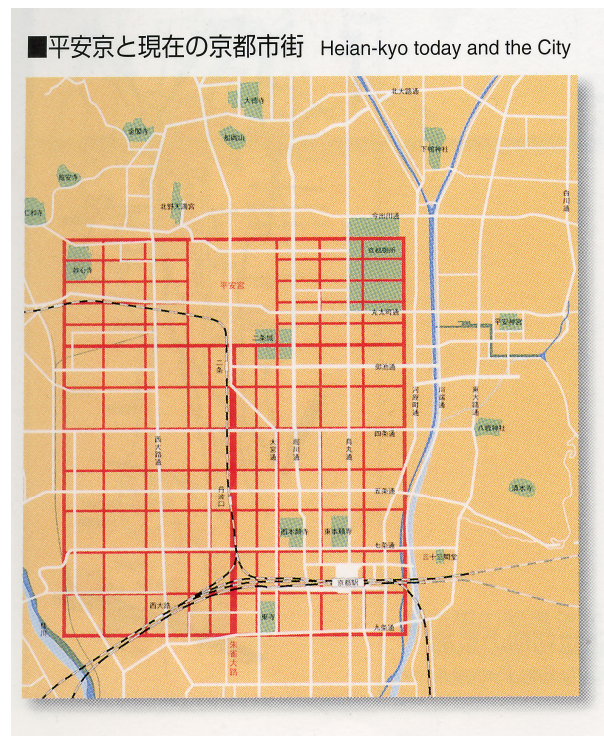


Fig 4.1 a simple example of the modern Kyoto with grid of the old Kyoto map, reprinted from the City Planning Bureau booklet “City Planning for Kyoto City” (2005: 4)

⁴⁴ Kyoto is the name of both the larger prefecture as well as the city. Unless otherwise noted, all references to Kyoto will be to the city rather than the prefecture.

Looking at a map like this, I find myself trying to line up recognizable landmarks, such as streets or important shrines, with those of the original city plan, a process that makes the viewer an active participant in creating the imagined space of a very imagined community⁴⁵.

While my wife and I were looking at the map with the grid, an older man approached and offered, in English, to explain the map to us. Since the museum's explanation was only written in Japanese, he did his best to describe the basic orientations of roads and the division of districts. He explained that Kyoto was designed by a renowned geomancer named Abe no Seimei (安倍 晴明 c.921-1005), whose shrine in central Kyoto is still one of the most popular places to buy protective amulets for traffic safety. The north/south axis of the original plan was based on a small hill between the two major rivers that run down the basin. The east/west axis was drawn between two prominent shrines: Yasaka Shrine 八坂神社 to the East, and Matsuo Shrine 松尾大社 to the West. The placement of the palace, its guardian temples and shrines and the districts of the city were all laid out in harmony with this plan.

I had read about most of the details the man described, but at one point he broke off from his explanation and asked my wife and I if we had seen the Hollyhock Festival parade (*Aoi Matsuri* 葵祭), which is held each May 15th and features a recreation of a procession by the imperial family from the imperial palace to a Shinto shrine located at the fork in the Kamo River (Shimogamo Shrine 下鴨神社) in the days of the Heian period. The parade continues up the river to another, related Shinto shrine (Kamigamo 上

⁴⁵ Ritsumeikan University, located in Kyoto, has even developed a "virtual Kyoto," where one can, from any place in the world, jump back and forth between today and the 12th century viewing different parts of the city. http://www.geo.lt.ritsume.ac.jp/uv4w/frame_e.jsp

賀茂神社 Shrine). Unsure of what the man might be leading to, we answered that we had seen the parade. “This is the story of my life,” he replied, smiling wide.

He explained that the fork in the river, and the placement of the shrine at that spot had a special meaning to him. He turned our attention to the map once again, motioning to its shape: the two rivers, flowing down from Kyoto’s northern mountains, approaching each other at roughly equal angles and then joining and widening, running down the eastern side of the city. He was showing us that it resembled where the legs meet at the crotch⁴⁶. Satisfied that we understood what he meant, the man continued, saying that the parade to this shrine on the occasion of the festival is a ‘return to the womb’ and was symbolic of a kind of ‘rebirth’. The city itself—its geography, its history and its traditions, were, according to this man, what defined his sense of self.

The man who spoke to us told us that he sometime acts as a volunteer tour guide for Kyoto and handed us his business card, where he is identified only as a former infantry man in the self-defense forces. He then quickly moved on, leaving us pondering the map once again. How does geography and a sense of place become imbedded in notions of identity? What does it mean to live and grow old in Kyoto? How does cultural change, whether that experienced in one’s lifetime, or that imagined over the history of a city shape the ways in which people think about themselves? All of these questions were brought up in this chance encounter, and all of them helped me think about the importance of Kyoto in a very different sense than I had previously.

Kyoto, like other large Japanese cities, has undergone tremendous change during the lifetimes of my informants. And yet, despite this change, markers of continuity keep

⁴⁶ The word *mata* (股) in Japanese is used to refer to both the crotch of a person as well as the fork in a river.

old memories and remembered or imagined pasts rooted in a sense of a distinct local culture. Kyoto exists in the memories of the elderly differently than it does for the tourists, who enjoy indulging in a nostalgic fantasy of the old capital. The Kyoto that exists in the memories and daily lives of the elderly is perceived in a different sense than the map with the overlaid grid. For the people I spoke with, as with the man as the museum, Kyoto is the ‘story of their lives.’ The city is embodied by the people who live in it, and the metaphor of the city is a way to for them to understand changes in their own aging bodies.

In this chapter I will give a very brief introduction to the history, geography and character of Kyoto, in order to situate the case studies that follow. I also hope to give a sense of how living in Kyoto shapes the experience of aging. I shall argue that aging in Kyoto presents both opportunities for achieving ideal ways of growing old and difficulties for those who feel that they are not aging correctly. Kyoto shapes the experience of aging by engaging time as a repetition of transitions from one state to another, rather than something that once lost cannot be recovered. Older people who have lived in Kyoto all of their lives view the city not only its current developments, but also past experiences; the ability to integrate these two perspectives in practical means reflects back on the ability to integrate past, present and future representations of the self. In other words, Kyoto, as an old and yet revitalized city, nostalgic about its past, encourages a way of aging that does not fixate on the past, or future, but seeks to find a harmony between the two.

Dimensions of Kyoto Culture

Kyoto city is located just west of the center of the island of Honshu, the largest and most populous island in the Japanese archipelago. For all of Kyoto's historical and cultural significance, only a handful of ethnographies have been written on its particular local culture. The few that have been written have tended to focus on marginal groups or special individuals involved in traditional arts and crafts (Dalby 1983; Hareven 2002; Pitelka 2005). Most ethnographers of Japan have chosen to focus on either the megacities of Tokyo and Osaka (Dore 1958; Bestor 1989; Kondo 1990; Allison 1994, Bestor 2004), new suburban communities (Robertson 1991, Kawano 2005) or on small scale village life (Embree 1939; Norbeck 1954; Beardsley 1959; Dore 1978).

Kyoto does not fit comfortably into any of these three general categories of Japanese community life, and yet in some ways it resembles each of them, or even all of them, sometimes on a single city block. Compared with Japan's two largest cities, Tokyo and Osaka, Kyoto has had a much longer history as an urban center and yet retains a smaller population and geographic size. The development of Kyoto as a modern urban city has been limited not simply because of the geographic constraints of its mountainous borders, but also because of carefully controlled city planning. In 1971, for example, Kyoto established its first "urban promotion zones" (roughly 15,000 hectares currently), together with "urbanization control areas" (roughly 33,000 hectares). Twelve degrees of architectural restriction based on zoning types were also established, which considerably limit not only the use of the land, but also the building-to-land ratio, lot size, and height of structures, even in commercial districts. 92.6% of all urbanization promotion areas are also designated height control districts, which, depending on location could mean that

structures can be a maximum of 10 meters in height to 45 meters. On September 1, 2007 Kyoto enacted the “New Landscape Policy” (*shinkeikan seisaku* 新景観政策), which renewed its commitment to controlled urbanization and set even stricter limits on building. This contrasts significantly with the larger cities of Tokyo and Osaka, which boast about the size and height of some of their urban structures⁴⁷.

The tension between urban development and urban restraint is palpable in the often incongruous mixing of “traditional” and “modern” structures. The central shopping district, for example, exists in much the same place as it has for centuries, and although many roads have been expanded and repaved, and markets covered and lit up with sparkling neon karaoke and amusement parlors, every now and again some marker of the past catches one off-guard, such as an old stone pillar from a now invisible path, or a medieval temple sandwiched between trendy clothing stores.

The main thoroughfares of Kyoto wear the mask of the modern city, lined with glass and steel office buildings and stores selling international brand-named goods. Behind these buildings lie narrow lanes that fill in the space between the main streets. These narrow streets and alleys are host to mostly small, locally owned shops, services, workshops and homes. Although the open facades of shops and the lack of sidewalks give the impression of closeness, there is also a sense of opacity and division. Windows facing the street are usually covered with bamboo drapes, grating or heavy metal shutters. At the very least, the windows are translucent. These aspects of city zoning and architectural style reinforce Japanese values of distinction, such as *omote* (in-front) and

⁴⁷ In 2003, for instance, the massive mixed use facility in downtown Tokyo, “Roppongi Hills,” (238m in height) was opened to the public. An even larger mixed use development, “Tokyo Midtown” (248m), is scheduled to open in March 2007.

ura (in-back), *tatema*e (outward appearance) and *honne* (internal feelings), *soto* (outer) and *uchi* (inner). As mentioned in the introduction, this sense of guardedness and division is seen as directly related to protecting against possible abandonment and the shame that this entails.

The quintessential example of the structured division between inner and outer space is the traditional wooden Kyoto town house, or *machiya* (町屋). Of the ten key informants interviewed for this research, two lived in traditional *machiya*, four in refurbished *machiya*, and two in houses built in the space of a demolished *machiya*. Writer Kitagawa Morisada, writing in 1810, compared the *machiya* of Edo (Tokyo), Kyoto and Osaka, characterizing Kyoto's *machiya* as having a narrow façade and a long interior space punctuated in roughly the center by an open garden (*tōri niwa* 通り庭), which not only separates the more public front quarters from the private rear, but also allows a cooling breeze into pass through the house in the stifling summer months (Kitagawa 1929: 21-31). The open gardens in the houses of my informants were usually well kept, featuring stone lanterns, large urns with goldfish, and in one case, a small shrine to the protector deity of the garden. According to a 2005 news broadcast, there are roughly 28,000 *machiya* in Kyoto, although this number is decreasing by about 2% each year.

Even the smallest apartments in Japan will have a *genkan* (玄関), which separates inner and outer domains not only spatially, but by practice (removing the shoes and stepping up into the inner chambers). Some visitors, such as delivery people or monks on alms rounds are often only allowed into the *genkan* area, and it is customary for first time

visitors to wait for an invitation to “step up” before entering the house. Stepping up from the *genkan*, the visitor is expected to apologize for interrupting (*ojama shimasu* お邪魔します). The construction of the *machiya* can be seen as an elaboration on the idea of the *genkan* in that how far back in the house visitors are allowed depends upon the relationship of the visitor to the owner of the house. These relationships are also embodied in actions such as sitting posture, bowing, gift-giving and the like, so that the house becomes a clear extension of the body. Like the body, the front is considered more exposed to the world, and therefore more vulnerable to pollution, the private quarters are associated with purity and safety, but also with shame⁴⁸. Not surprisingly then, the toilets are usually located near the rear of the house.

The placement of protective talismans outside the doorway, or just inside the house; the placement of a barrier featuring a fearsome creature, such as a dragon; and the use of indigo colored door curtains are all symbolic representations of the notion that “demons” (*oni* 鬼), or bad luck, typically enter the house through the front door (Fig 4.2)⁴⁹.

⁴⁸ Erikson (1985 [1950]) writes that “shame...has much to do with a consciousness of having a front and a back—and especially a ‘behind’ ... the ‘behind’ is the small being’s dark continent, an area of the body which can be magically dominated and effectively invaded” (1985 [1950]: 253)

⁴⁹ According to David Jordan (personal communication) The notion that demons only travel in straight lines and can therefore be deterred by making it difficult to enter a house directly can also be seen in Chinese architecture, and have roots in Taoist geomancy. Although a Ming dynasty diary reports a notation in a Western Hàn dynasty travel diary describing the use of stone sculptures or tablets erected facing outward at house entryways with the words *shí gǎn dāng* 石敢當 “the stone dares oppose” on them. Today they have tended to be displaced by little mirrors and *bāguà* 八卦 and the like



Fig 4.2 Protective talismans above the outer door of a *machiya* in Kyoto

Machiya are rarely built today, and upkeep of existing *machiya* is expensive, requiring carpenters specializing in traditional Japanese building techniques. As a result, many *machiya* are refurbished with modern materials, either by simply adding a new façade (the “mask *machiya*”) or refinishing the building completely (the “salaried workers *machiya*”) (Tsukamoto et al. 2007)⁵⁰. Other aging *machiya* are demolished entirely, creating the “dent” or “bump” streetscape effect, where traces of the demolished structure remain in the vacant lot (Tsukamoto et. al 2007). These spaces are often filled with houses that are taller, but use less land, such as apartment buildings. Because the vacated lot retains the long and narrow shape of the *machiya*, however, these new buildings typically take a shortened form of their predecessors, although normally with less distinction between inner and outer spaces and levels of relationship. This change mirrors what some of my informants identify as the shift to nuclear families and shallow, detached social relationships. According to these informants, many small nuclear

⁵⁰ Many cafes, bars, bookshops and art galleries in Kyoto capitalize on the warm, nostalgic quality of *machiya*, in contrast to the sterile, fabricated quality of modern architecture. While these shops usually remove the barriers between the front and rear portions, they retain traces of the distinctive *machiya* aura by using rush mats, exposed wooden beams and plaster walls. Thus while the social aspect of the *machiya* is diminished, the nostalgic or traditional aesthetic remains.

families move into the newly build ‘mansion,’ and have little interest in joining neighborhood associations, participating in local festivals or otherwise relating to their neighbors.

I did not live in a *machiya* during my fieldwork, but rather an abbreviated version of one, connected to two others in what is known as a “long three-house building” (*sangen nagaya* 三軒長屋) that one might imagine as three short *machiyas* pushed together, sharing dividing walls. Similar to a *machiya*, each unit had a narrow façade and a long interior. My neighbors on either side shared a thin wall with us, and sound passed easily between. Despite the close proximity, I was impressed by the degree of privacy that was retained throughout my time there, a feeling that was not unlike that of boarding a crowded subway car, where each person feigns ignorance of the other bodies stacked against him or her.

When I visited my neighbors for the first time, only one of my neighbors came down to the *genkan* to meet me. One stood inside the house and reached towards the door to take the present. Yet another neighbor merely cracked a window and received my moving-in gift that way. In no case was I invited inside, even as far as the *genkan*. Perhaps because it was still February, my reception seemed unusually cold. While importance of the inner/outer distinction is not be specific to life in Kyoto, it underlies the concept of bodily practices of distinction that are constructed in response to space and that reflexively construct cultural values.

As a result of controlled urban development, Kyoto has evolved a unique atmosphere that marks it as part of both global and local contexts⁵¹. Having lived in Tokyo for two and a half years prior to moving to Kyoto, I was immediately struck by this difference in landscape. Even in Kyoto's busy downtown commercial district, there was an abundance of tree-lined streets and views of the mountains, and while the main roadways were still choked with the familiar noise of other cities, I could easily follow a narrow side street and immediately find myself in the midst of squat wooden houses, quiet shopping arcades and peaceful neighborhood shrines. Because Kyoto city was spared the WWII bombing raids that destroyed many cities, especially along the coast, and because it rarely is affected by earthquakes, typhoons and other natural disasters, Kyotoites can claim a special pride in its preservation.

A Brief History of Kyoto

The Kyoto basin has been inhabited since at least the seventh century, mostly by groups of Korean or Chinese descent. These early inhabitants did not erect the grand tombs and monuments to the dead that their Japanese counterparts were making nearby in what is now Nara prefecture, but archaeological evidence suggests that they did hold animistic beliefs similar to those of early Shinto.

Before establishing the capital in Kyoto, the capital had been moved from Nara 奈良 to the city of Nagaoka 長岡 in present-day Kyoto's southwest region. Nagaoka was

⁵¹ Unique as Kyoto is as an urban center, it is not the only "Kyoto" of Japan. In 1985, 50 other cities and towns across Japan were recognized as "Little Kyotos," distinguished by their historical importance, their preservation of traditional culture and art and their "nostalgic" quality. These "Little Kyotos" have no particular relationship to Kyoto outside of this. Another way that Kyoto relates itself to the global is through its sister city relationships. Kyoto currently has sister city status with Boston, Paris, Cologne, Guadalajara, Kiev, Xian, Florence, Chiju, Prague, and Zagreb. These relationships promote academic and artistic exchange between cities and add to the overall cosmopolitan feel of Kyoto.

the capital for a mere ten years (784-794 BCE). The reason for the sudden move is historically somewhat unclear. Moving the capital into the region of present day Kyoto did have strategic and economic advantages, being surrounded on three sides by mountains, and having easy access to rivers that fed to the sea and were convenient for trade. In addition, the Emperor at the time (737-806) was believed to have relatives of Korean descent, which easily secured access to the region. Popular legend, however, points to other reasons for moving the capital—particularly the vengeful curse of the spirit of the exiled Prince Sawara.

According to Plutschow (1990), Crown Prince Sawara, who was accused of plotting against the influential Fujiwara clan, died soon after his exile to the island of Awaji. Soon afterwards, the empress and the new Crown Prince also died, and this “prompted Emperor Kammu to dispatch the Supervisor of Imperial Graves to Awaji, charged with the mission to bury Prince Sawara’s remains properly and then to placate the spirit” (Plutschow 1990: 208). This action was not sufficient for Emperor Kammu, and plans were undertaken to move the capital to Kyoto’s present location

This popular legend of Kyoto’s origin has ancestor belief at its core. Heian Kyō was established on the belief that the spirits of the dead have the ability to benefit or ruin the lives of the living, and establishing a place for these spirits to be honored and placated was vital for achieving balance and harmony not only for families, but for the nation itself. Crown Prince Sawara was not murdered or executed, but rather banished or abandoned. As a spirit out of place, to paraphrase Mary Douglas (1966), his ghost manifested as pollution to others, whose only recourse was to distance themselves from the place of origin and reestablish the spirit in a sanctified ground.

Kyoto became the capital of Japan in 794 BCE, and its construction was meant to emulate the great Chinese capital of Xian (Moritani (ed.) 2005:22). The main avenue (*Sujakudōri*) led from the southern gate to the palace, and beyond that to the *funaoka* (船岡 boat shaped hill) where a shrine was placed to protect the city. This avenue formed the north-south axis of the city. The east-west axis was formed by *Shijo* Street (四条通), which linked Matsuoka shrine in the west with Yasaka shrine in the east. Two temples were established on either side of the southern gate, called, naturally, the Eastern Temple (*Tōji* 東寺) and the Western Temple (*Saiji* 西寺, currently not standing). Along the diagonal axis of the city, the northeast was seen as the gateway of demons, and was secured by establishing an extensive Buddhist temple complex (*Enryakuji* 延暦寺) on the peak of Mt. Hiei, and a smaller protective temple (*Sekizenji* 赤禪寺) at the base of the mountain.

Kyoto was originally divided into two large sectors on each side of the imperial palace, the western (right-Kyoto) and the eastern (left-Kyoto) sectors. As their names suggest, the city was oriented from the perspective of the imperial palace, which faced the south. Therefore, the area to the right of the palace was called the right-Kyoto sector, and that of the left of the palace was named the left-Kyoto sector. Approaching the palace was referred to as ascending and leaving the palace as descending. To this day, locals will refer to moving south as “descending” and north as “ascending.” Below, or south of the palace, was the merchant’s district. The residential and agricultural districts were largely zoned to the periphery and northern regions, a plan that has largely survived to this day.

By the end of the Heian Period (794-1192) the population of Kyoto was in the hundreds of thousands, and supported not only the family of the emperor, but also a wealthy aristocratic class and a number of powerful Buddhist temple complexes. By the mid-sixteenth century, however, Kyoto became a focal point of a civil war that destroyed much of the city (Berry 1994). At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the country was unified once again, and Kyoto became the seat of the Shogun, or the military ruler of Japan. Feudal lords of all regions of Japan were required to pay obeisance to the Shogun in Kyoto as well as the emperor, whose residence was in Edo (Tokyo). The unification of Japan was followed by a second golden age of peace, prosperity, cultural and intellectual achievement (Pyle 1978: 11-34; Bellah 1985).

The Shogunate secured its power, in part, by isolating the country from foreign influence. It was not until the United States sent Commodore Mathew Perry to Japan in 1853, that foreign trade would resume. Following the Meiji Restoration (1868), in which the Shogunate conceded its power to the Emperor, and Japan began to form itself as a modern nation, Kyoto ceased to be a center of Japanese national politics.

Kyoto was established as a municipality in 1889. Gradually Kyoto's wards multiplied, and currently, the city is comprised of eleven wards, some of which extend far beyond the city center to include small mountain villages. Kyoto's boundaries stretch 29km from east to west and 49km from north to south, enclosing an area of 827.9sq km (City Planning for Kyoto 2005:2). The population of Kyoto when I did my research in 2006 was over 1.47 million people representing roughly 650,000 households. The percentage of the population over the age of sixty-five was 20.1%, consistent with national averages.

When I arrived in Kyoto in January, 2005, Kyoto's tourism board's advertisements presented themselves throughout the city in understated slogans such as "It's nice that Kyoto is in Japan" (*Nihon ni Kyoto ga atte, yokatta* 京都があつて、よかつた) and "Back to another time" (*ano goro he* あのころへ). Also at the time, NHK, the Japan's state television station, was airing its historical drama mini-series "*Yoshitsune*," (義経, one of the most popular TV dramas NHK ever produced) based on the historical drama "Tales of the Heike" (*Heike Monogatari* 平家物語). This television series, featuring a number of well respected as well as young, attractive actors brought renewed attention to Kyoto as an important historical city, generating tourism campaigns for those who wanted to visit the locations featured in the drama. Later in my fieldwork, Hollywood released the film production of Arthur Golden's novel *Memoirs of a Geisha* (1997), (Japanese title "*Sayuri*"), which added further international mystification of Kyoto, and travel agencies eager to promote offers for foreign tourists eager to catch a glimpse of a kimono clad courtesan.

Just as with the map with the grid over it, the drama of Kyoto, its connection to history and its cultural mystique invited people to go back into an imaginary nostalgic time. But how do the people who live in Kyoto actually experience it? How does the "branding" of Kyoto affect peoples' own perceptions of identity? What does it mean to be a person from Kyoto?

Kyoto People

Japanese people commonly refer to the general geographic areas around Tokyo and Osaka as *Kanto* and *Kansai* respectively, indicating a cultural as well as linguistic

difference between these areas more than an area with easily definable geographic borders. Kyoto is sometimes included in the *Kansai* region because of its location (less than one hour by train from Osaka) and the relationship with neighboring areas, but more often it is seen as occupying its own cultural sphere. *Kansai* people are typically associated with the boisterous and aggressive shopkeepers, the quick-witted comedians, and rabid sports fans. Kyoto, on the other hand, is associated with the aristocratic and refined culture that comes with being the capital for over one thousand years⁵².

Osaka people, known nationwide for their penchant for quick witted comedic banter, seem to take particular pleasure in talking about their neighbors who live only an hours train ride away. One Osaka man I spoke with explained Kyotoites in terms of a dish called *yuba*, one of Kyoto's well-known delicacies. *Yuba* is made from the skin that forms on the soy milk as it is simmered to make tofu. Often times this is simply discarded, but at other times it is eaten for its supposed nutritional value. "In Kyoto however," continued the man, "THEY make it into a DELICACY! And then they say that KYOTO'S *yuba* is the best *yuba* in all of Japan!" In other words, Kyoto people are so elitist that they consider even their scraps to be treasures compared to the rest of Japan.

There are several other stereotypes of Kyoto people that are widely understood by Japanese people throughout the country. The most common perception of the typical Kyotoites is that they have a greater tendency to make in-group/out-group (*uchi/soto* 内・外) distinctions than most Japanese. As noted earlier, this is hinted at in their architecture and the zoning of the city. The Japanese language itself is another obvious way in which distinctions are made between groups, such as in the many levels of polite

⁵² I asked several people about Kyoto's gender, and without exception the answer was female.

and humble speech, the mastery of which is highly valued. Few people still speak the “true” Kyoto dialect today, the exceptions being matrons of traditional Kyoto inns and eateries, geisha, and the very old. The word for “foreigner” in Kyoto dialect is “*yoso-san*,” combining the word for “alien” (*yoso*) with “san,” an honorific for proper names. The effect is subtly distancing. It assumes that outsiders will always be “alien,” but at the same time, there is the ironic addition of the honorific, which serves to both raise the outsider in status, as well as distance him from locals.

This recalls something that I was warned about by several non-Kyoto Japanese friends when I was beginning my fieldwork: the so-called “*bubutsuke*”. *Bubutsuke* is Kyoto dialect for “*ochatsuke*” (a dish made with rice and some flavoring over which green tea is poured). As rice is typically the last course of a meal, its meaning, when offered to guests is an invitation for them to leave. In other words, Kyoto people won’t directly tell you that they’d like you to leave, and might even give you a directly opposite invitation to stay, by offering you food. The idea is not that Kyoto people are mischievous or even overly polite, but that they rarely express their “true feeling” (*honno* 本音), and since politeness often masks discomfort in dealing with others, one must be sensitive to this when interacting with them.

Another Japanese friend and a native Kyotoite told me before I left for Japan that a common saying goes, ‘In Kyoto you meet three types of people: monks, students and old people.’ Given my research topic, this comment intrigued me. Kyoto boasts some of the most important Buddhist temples in Japan, including the head temples of several important sects. It also has several of the most famous universities in Japan, including Kyoto University, Dōshisha University and Ritsumeikan University. But of course the

last category of Kyoto resident is the most interesting, since it does not refer to a particular institution, but rather to a more general class of individuals that one may not typically associate with large urban cities. Despite the fact that the ratio of people over the age of sixty-five to those below is basically consistent with national figures (about one in five), the perception of Kyoto as a city “full of old people” is strong. Old people, or, more exactly, the cultural values that they represent, seem to index several aspects of Kyoto city itself, such as being emotionally removed, traditional, conservative, and weary of outsiders. Many people told me, in particular, that Kyoto “*obaachan*” (old ladies) are “scary,” since they’ll speak nicely to your face, while harboring some grudge, or seem to be making judgments about you that they might pass along in gossip. Many had the impression that the smiling woman who brings around the neighborhood bulletin was most likely muttering nasty things as she walked back to her house.

In my experience with Kyoto people, both young and old, most of these stereotypes are, while not completely unfounded, still gross exaggerations. The reason I see it this way may be in part because as a student from the United States, I was so *completely* “*yoso*” as to confound people’s sense of guardedness. The woman that I hired to help me transcribing interviews for example, remarked on how open people were with me regarding subjects that would normally be considered taboo. Kondo (1990:11-17) and Hamabata (1990) both comment on the difficulty of conducting research as Japanese Americans, mainly because of the assumption that they should already be aware of the cultural implications of what informants said. My position, not only as a young student, but also as a western foreigner, no doubt broke some of the usual categories of

insider/outsider, and helped me gain access to material that might otherwise have gone unsaid.

Navigating Neighborhood Kyoto

In many ways, Kyoto has the feel of a medium-size town, and many residents find it sufficient to walk or ride a bicycle or scooter to attend to their daily needs⁵³. Many neighborhoods are still tightly knit organizations, and each district maintains its own unique persona often based on its history, traditions and industry. In order to get around Kyoto well, you have to possess not only geographical knowledge, but more importantly, knowledge of Kyoto's history, legends and landmarks.

The apartment that I rented was in the northeast of Kyoto. When I told the matron of the temple I was rooming at that I had found an apartment, she asked me where it was. When I answered, she immediately recalled that it was the site of a famous sword fight between the members of a prestigious fencing school and the legendary Japanese swordsman "Miyamoto Musashi" (宮本武蔵)⁵⁴. This historical fact was repeated to me on many other occasions when I mentioned where I was living, and also served as a useful tool in explaining where I lived to people who were not as knowledgeable about the area in terms of names of bus stops or intersections.

This mode of navigation is not limited to Kyoto. Japanese people in other parts of the country also seems to navigate more in relation to landmarks than by compass

⁵³ Kyoto has only two subway lines, compared to the thirteen major subway lines in Tokyo and eight in Osaka. The bus system is fairly extensive and is especially useful for tourists. A large highway runs to the south of Kyoto, but does not pass through the center of the city. Many elderly residents use the subways, but bus use is much more common.

⁵⁴ Miyamoto Musashi (1584-1685) is a legendary swordsman of Japan and author of *the Book of Five Rings* on the art of swordsmanship and fighting strategy. The duel at Ichijōji (一乗寺) is one of his most famous in the Kyoto area.

directions or street names. This point was observed most accurately by Roland Barthes in regard to Tokyo:

This city can be known only by an activity of an ethnographic kind: you must orient yourself in it not by book, or address, but by walking, by sight, by habit, by experience; here every discovery is intense and fragile, *it can be repeated or recovered only by memory of the trace it has left in you*: to visit a place for the first time is thereby to begin to write it: the address not being written, it must establish its own writing (1982:36 emphasis mine)

Navigating Kyoto requires a knowledge of the place, a visual understanding of its landscape, and a sensual experience of its landscape. But Barthes also points out that the experience of place does not end with the acquisition of this knowledge, but rather its memory is “repeated.”

Neighborhood Organization

Neighborhood social activity in Kyoto is largely focused around the *chōnaikai* (町内会), or self-governing association of a city block unit (*chō*) (Nakagawa 1980). In original the zoning plan for Heian-Kyō, one *chō* was comprised of 32 households, each measuring about 15meters across and 30 meters deep (City Planning for Kyoto City 2005:4). Today, with an increase in household population density as well as variation in housing, the number of households comprising a *chō* has, in some cases, become much higher.

With the establishment of wards (*ku* 区) and school districts (*gaku* 学区) in the Meiji period, much of the official duties that once belonged to the *chō* association, were transferred to municipal ward offices. However, the *chō* remains a basic unit of neighborhood organization which all members of a neighborhood are free to join for a

small yearly fee. I paid 3000¥ (about \$30 USD) for a one year membership in my *chō* association, which at the time of my entrance consisted of seventy-four households divided into four groups, which could be subdivided again into ten *kumi*, each consisting of six to thirteen households. Leadership of the *chō* association is rotated yearly according to group as well as within each sub-group, or *kumi*. So, in 2005, leadership was the responsibility of the “A group,” which consisted of *kumis* one and two. The association head was the head of *kumi* two for that year.

Chō association leadership is divided into five principal positions: one association chief, two vice chiefs, a secretary and a treasurer. In addition, members of the *chō* association are chosen to represent the *chō* association within different committees, such as the Red Cross Association, the Traffic Safety Association, the Youth Leadership Association or the Senior Welfare Association, which are affiliated with committees in other groups nationwide. Although the staff who have leadership positions are often called on to resolve local disputes or give advice concerning small neighborhood matters, the major activities of the *chō* association are park maintenance, litter removal and organizing holiday events and local festivals. The real essence of the *chō* association’s function is in the way it produces an formal space for both mutual assistance and social monitoring.

Members of the *chō* association are also expected to circulate bulletins concerning upcoming events, summarized area crime reports, park cleaning schedules, changes in garbage disposal and the like. If there was a large event held, a full account of the itemized costs and donations of the participating *chō* are also circulated. Bulletins are clipped into a binder covered with advertisements for local businesses and passed by

hand from household to household once or twice a week according to a regular pattern. When a member of the *chō* has read the bulletin, it is initialed and passed on to the next recipient in the chain. Besides being an efficient means of circulating neighborhood news, the process of passing the bulletins to other neighbors provides structured opportunities to chat, gossip or simply check up on people. Women's gossip circles, or "well-side meetings" (*itobatakaigi* 井戸端会議) are not uncommon even today, and heighten the feeling that one is constantly being monitored even if direct interaction is minimal.

School districts are comprised of several *chō*, and have yet another governing body with an appointed leadership whose main duties include child and senior welfare along with the organization of large-scale community events such as school festivals. Leaders are given small gifts of money for their voluntary services, but these are used to pay for the various responsibilities which they may be called upon to assume as community leaders. For example, one former school district leader I interviewed was sometimes called upon to handle funeral preparation for those without family, in which case the gift money would be used to hold the ceremony. She was also called upon to settle local disputes, handle neighborhood drunks and gather money for emergency hospitalization. School districts are nested within wards, and are second to the *chō* in terms of local significance. While matters regarding school functions are managed at this level by the PTA (Parent Teacher Association), larger events, such as the annual sports festival (a national holiday in Japan), or other events centered around school-age children are the domain of school districts. Election districts are also grouped according to school

district. Wards are further grouped into voting districts with representatives in the Japanese national parliament.

Daily Life of the Elderly in Kyoto

Kyoto is a dense city, not only in numbers of residents but also in its use of space⁵⁵. Although sidewalks can be found along some of the major multi-lane streets, the majority of streets are narrow, with houses and storefronts pushed up to the street. This means that on most streets in Kyoto, pedestrians and bicycles compete for space with cars.

In recent years there has been a rise in traffic accidents involving elderly people, sometimes as drivers, but more often as pedestrians. The city's reaction to this has been a massive campaign to warn and educate senior citizens on proper traffic safety. In other words, rather than trying to prevent accidents by focusing on the responsibility of younger drivers to drive more carefully, responsibility for traffic safety was portrayed as the responsibility of senior citizens. I first noticed this pattern on public posters tacked to local bulletin boards. These posters showed an elderly woman crossing the street as a younger person driving a car moved toward her with a look of panic on his face.

Not only did I see several other versions of this poster over the course of my fieldwork, but I also received neighbor bulletins issued by the local police outpost detailing the number of traffic accidents involving seniors, or advertising hands-on traffic

⁵⁵ In 2005, the population density was 1,780 residents per square kilometer according to the national census. While the population has gradually increased over the last 50 years, the population density is currently lower than it has been since the census of 1920 because of gradual increase in land considered a part of the city. In 1920 for example, Kyoto was only 60.43 km², whereas it is currently about 827.9 km².

safety workshops⁵⁶. One particularly interesting poster was hung on the front of the police station (Fig 4.2). This poster, designed by students at a local arts college, shows an elderly man approaching a pedestrian crosswalk with a young child and a dog while a woman in a car and a motorcyclist look at them and smile. The man and child look both ways, under a slogan reading “One more please- check both ways” (ワン・モア・プリーズ 左右確認). The “One” is spoken by the dog as “Wan,” the Japanese equivalent of “Bark”. The most interesting feature of this sign in contrast to others, is that it is made to resemble a five sided Japanese votive placard (*ema* 絵馬) that one typically sees at Shinto shrines (Ashikaga 1954). Across the top of the poster, in a stylized Japanese script contrasting the style of the rest of the image is written “prayer for traffic safety” (Fig. 4).



Fig 4.3 A large traffic safety poster outside a police station in Kyoto shaped like a votive tablet. In the center, a dog, an elderly man and a child look before crossing the street.

⁵⁶ In 1995 there were just over 40,000 traffic accidents “caused” by seniors. In 2005 the number had risen to 98,550 (MHWL white paper on aging society 2007). Although who caused the accidents is unclear, the rapid increase is alarming.

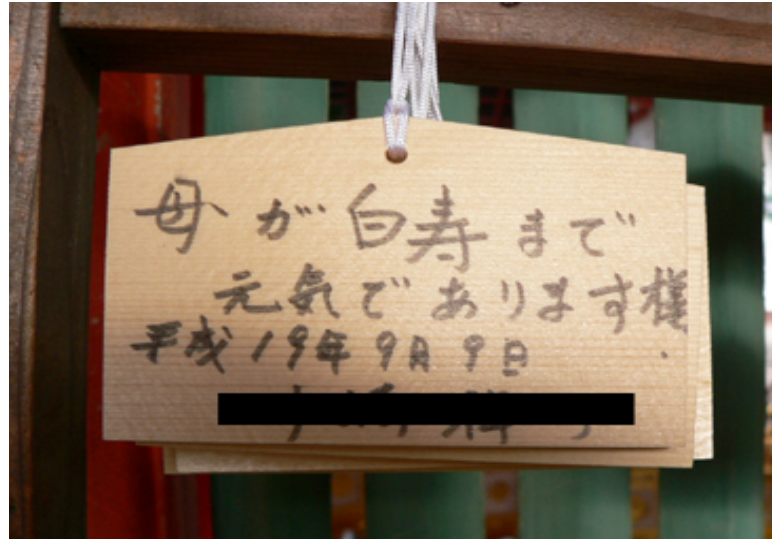


Fig 4.4 Standard *ema* plaque at a shrine. This one reads “May mother be lively until she is ninety-nine years old” and is dated September 9, 2006. I have blocked out the name of the person who wrote it.

The meaning of using a votive tablet to promote traffic safety among the elderly can be seen as the expression of a deep wish, equal in sincerity to making a prayer, on the part of the police department. This does not necessarily mean that the police are depending on the deities to keep people safe, but rather it communicates that the police department has set its heart on traffic safety and will do its best to improve it. At the same time, rather than depicting the activities of the police to improve traffic safety, it calls on ordinary senior citizens to do their part by looking both ways before crossing a busy street. The poster therefore not only expresses the wishes of the police, but attempts to shape the wishes of ordinary citizens.

Kyoto also includes a number of “silver zones,” or areas in which there is a large number of elderly residents. Signs are posted on the street to alert drivers and bicyclists to be careful when entering these areas. Contrary to Palmore and Maeda’s (1985) interpretation, special designation of places for the elderly, such as ‘silver zones,’ or ‘silver seats’ on trains and buses are not evidence of an ethic of respect for the elderly, as

much as they are means of distinguishing the elderly from the rest of society. This distinction is morally ambiguous, and in the opinions of some of the elderly people I've spoken with, such discrimination creates awkwardness and even guilt. When I first arrived in Kyoto, for example, there was discussion about starting to charge senior citizens for bus and train passes that had, until then, been free. Some Kyotoites were incensed at this change, and members of elder advocacy groups and the communist part of Japan held protest rallies outside of city hall. However, one editorial that I read at the time expressed a sense of shame for being able to take public transportation for free, noting how this made them feel shameful (literally “narrow shoulders”). The ambivalence towards the transportation passes is evident in senior welfare centers, which, although providing a service to the elderly, nevertheless tend to generate a sense of shame regarding old age.

Elder Care in Kyoto

Each city district of Kyoto has a “Senior Welfare Center” (*rōjin fukushi senta* 老人福祉センター) that hosts several opportunities for active seniors, including dance lessons, table tennis, chorus and English conversation (with the help of the foreign anthropologist). One woman I met at a welfare center explained that Japanese have the saying “Learning [something new] at sixty” (60歳の手習い), and indeed, most of the other regular center visitors I spoke with only took up their hobbies after the age of sixty. Since until recently, sixty was the standard age of retirement, it was seen as a time to take up interests one didn't have time for in the past, or to take up new pastimes to reinvent a sense of self. One eighty-five year old man who attends the center nearly everyday, told

me that when he retired at sixty, several friends commented on his poor penmanship. He thought to himself, “I can’t be an old man and have poor penmanship! How embarrassing (*haji* 恥!)” Since then, he has been regularly practicing his calligraphic skills, and is the only person who made regular entries in the “diary” notebook that was laid near the entrance of the Center.

It is probably significant that this man described his new preoccupation as founded in a sense of shame. He is not alone in this. Indeed, the welfare center is a social meeting place where shame is an important regulating emotion. According to people I spoke with, those who come to the Senior Welfare Center typically do not disclose personal information that might indicate a hierarchical relationship to others, such as where they worked before retirement, their education or the prestigious positions their children might have. Oliver (2007) notes a similar pattern of behavior in the leisure groups of English retirees in Spain, which she sees as an effort on the part of the elderly to uphold an ethos of “egalitarian *communitas*” necessary for constructing a shared identity (Oliver 2007:113).

Senior Welfare Centers often share a building with “Day Service Centers”, which serve as respite institutions for elderly people whose health or mental decline has compromised their ability to participate in many activities. Day Service Centers provide the elderly with basic health check-ups (blood pressure and temperature), assisted bathing, lunch, games, tea and occasional outings. Most elderly people who go to these centers attend only once or twice a week and are transported by the staff to and from their homes. At the day service centers where I volunteered, the clients ranged in age and health needs, and were typically much older (mid 80s- 90+) than those at the senior welfare center as

well as more dependent on caregiver attention. At each center, at least one or two of the clients needed constant caregiver attention and were unable to speak, eat or move on their own. An additional five or six clients used wheelchairs, and nearly everyone else held a cane but needed assistance walking. As a volunteer, my main duty was to converse with clients, most of whom showed interest and attentiveness. Most clients showed some symptoms of mild senility, and apart from the rare instance of a severely demented client, all seemed to get along well with each other, those who were more aware gently clarifying things for those whose memory served them less well.

In addition to the ward Centers, each school district has a Social Welfare Association (*shakai fukushi kyōkai* 社会福祉協会) that hosts regular events for the elderly, including community service, leisure activities, fieldtrips and educational events. In the school district where I lived, the Social Welfare Association held monthly meetings in a room in the local elementary school specifically dedicated to the group. Meetings generally consisted of an address by the association president, followed by light stretching exercises, singing songs and lunch, usually sushi donated by a local restaurant and miso soup cooked by the women of the group. After lunch, participants would either hear a short lecture on elder welfare topics, such as traffic safety or preventative health practices, or have a small craft project to do. Because the group emphasizes community solidarity, there is a greater feeling among participants of obligation, and therefore it is able to attract a wider group of elderly people, including those who are less inclined to take initiative to join other social groups. While the Senior Welfare Centers seem to have a roughly equal participation by men and women, in the day-service and neighborhood social welfare association women outnumbered men as much as four to one.

Religious Landscape of Kyoto

As mentioned above, Kyoto is home to a dizzying array of religious sites.

UNESCO has formally recognized seventeen of Kyoto's landmarks as "World Heritage Sites," and the city goes to great lengths to protect and promote these sites as symbolic national treasures. Many of the smaller or less prestigious shrines and temples have long histories as well, and are greatly valued by local residents.

Most residents consider themselves part of a parish of both a local shrine (in which a parishioner is called an *uji-ko* 氏子, literally a clan member) and temple group (in which a parishioner is called a *danka* 檀家). These associations have their origins in centuries old system of household registration, which was monitored by Buddhist temples following the expulsion of Christianity in the late 16c., and Shinto Shrines following the Meiji restoration of 1868 (Fridell 1973; Hardacre 1989). As members of a parish, residents participate in collective religious festival events, and often build relationships with the clergy that extend beyond formal ritual occasions. In the past, residents often formed religious associations (*kō* 講), which served in a wider sense as mutual assistance organizations. In religiously oriented *kō*, members of one of these groups might undertake a pilgrimage, for example, and with funds from the group, purchase protective plaques (*fuda* 札). Although such groups are still common in rural areas, I was surprised to see a neighborhood bulletin circulated during the New Year's where residents could sign up to order these protective plaques from Ise Shrine, dedicated to the sun goddess *Amaterasu*, the most highly venerated shrine in Japan. In this way, the neighborhood association had taken the place of the religious mutual aid group, and while not quite a

mail order system (someone still had to go and purchase the plaques for the neighborhood), it seemed to lack much of the sense of community, since there was little face to face interaction.

In addition to Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples, there are several smaller altars placed around the city dedicated to the Bodhisattva Jizō. The Bodhisattva Jizō (or Jizō-san as he is affectionately called in Kyoto) is said to protect children, and is a central religious figure in the practice of “*Mizuko-kuyo*,” or rites performed on behalf of deceased children (LeFleur 1992, Hardacre 1997). Because successful ascension to ancestorhood depends upon having descendants to observe ancestral rites, children are thought to be sent to a special sort of hell for their premature and hence unfilial deaths. In this hell, evil demons force them to pile stones at the banks of the *sanzu no kawa*,sa (三途の川) or river of death. Jizō-san is said to protect these children from the wrath of the demons, and Jizō shrines are often characterized by stacks of stones at the altar.

Kannon-san (Skt. Avalokiteśvara, literally “the one who hears the outcries of the world”), known in Japan as the Bodhisattva of compassion, and Jizō-san are perhaps the most popularly revered Buddhist figures in Japan today. Unlike Kannon-san, however, Jizō-san plays a particularly important part in the daily life of Kyotoites. In Kyoto, a Jizō altar is erected in each *chō* unit. This altar is the center of a festival called *Jizō-bon* (地藏盆), which takes place around the summer *Obon* festival⁵⁷, in late August and is believed to have originated in Kyoto and spread to other parts of Japan. As Jizō is

⁵⁷ Jizō-bon is said to have originated in Kyoto as a festival for children. In addition to praying at local Jizō altars, children were treated to games and sweets as part of the festival.

particularly important to children, this festival is a kind of children's festival, complete with games and candy.

Because each block has its own Jizō statue, one is constantly running into Jizō-san. Sometimes the altar is tucked beside a school gate, and other times it is nestled between a row of vending machines (Fig 4.5). As Jizō-san is associated with protecting spirits of the deceased, Jizō statues are also often found at the entrances to cemeteries. Most frequently six statues of Jizō, representing his protection in the six realms of rebirth are stood at the entrance of cemeteries and receive separate rites than the standard graves or Buddhist statues. As he is associated with travelers, one is likely to come across some Jizō statues at intersections or along roads.



Fig 4.5 shrine dedicated to Jizō, the Buddha of children and travelers, in downtown Kyoto sandwiched between vending machines above a large sign advertising alcohol- sacred and profane in a small space

In winter of 2006, the Social Welfare Association of my school district developed a plan to utilize the Jizō shrines in order to increase the security of school children walking to and from school. Around the time of the formulation of this plan, several

incidences involving traffic accidents and abductions of children returning from school had been broadcast in the national news. The Social Welfare Association responded to this by formulating a child protection program that used the neighborhood Jizō statues as a method of insuring the safe return of schoolchildren. Residents (mostly elderly) were encouraged to make pilgrimages of the Jizō shrines of the twenty-five *chō* that made up the school district, especially during times that children were making their way to and from school. For a small donation, residents were given a map of the Jizō altars and a small booklet that included a copy of a Buddhist sutra and blank spaces on which to affix stamps stored at each altar. The map and booklet both indicated that the best times to do this pilgrimage were between 7:30 and 9am, and 12 and 5pm. This program was very successful, and the neighborhood social welfare group expressed surprise that many residents had made over four tours of the Jizō altars in the first couple weeks of the program, and were asking for new booklets to affix more stamps.

The Jizō pilgrimage blends the two views of Kyoto that were mentioned at the beginning of this chapter: the map with the grid, and the embodied city. In terms of the city with the grid, elderly pilgrims traced the outline of the district which existed prior to the erection of most of the buildings around them. They were tracing an ancient path laid onto the present map, a nostalgic trace of an older city. The pilgrimage itself consisted of a ritual practice, and particularly one that implies the care of children. In this way, the pilgrimage was not merely for the religious benefit of the participant himself, but for future generations. It was a way for older adults to maintain interdependence and generate a sense of connectedness and continuity through religious ritual.

Summary

To live in Kyoto is to be constantly in dialogue with the past and the present representations of the past. This orientation mirrors the perspective of the city's elderly, whose memories and sense of transition from one identity to another are closely identified with a sense of place and local culture. Strolling through the streets of Kyoto with an elderly companion inevitably entails recalling past events, scenes from childhood years, comments on the changes that have occurred, and a return, sometimes accompanied by a gentle sigh, to an acceptance of these changes.

While the preservation of traditional *machiya*, temples and shrines index the past experiences of the elderly, a gap remains between memory and perception that can only be filled by the creative process of reminiscence. Ancestor memorial is analogous to this process, since it consists of the recollection of the memory of the dead, with the understanding that continuity exists between this world and the next, past and future, the old body and the spirit. Living in Kyoto therefore, may provide a greater sense of time as a continuous process of transition for elderly people who live there and for whom a sense of place is important to establishing a secure sense of identity.

The following eight chapters are comprised of four duets that are the focus of this research. Each duet describes a particular person's experience of living in Kyoto, interacting with family and memorializing the ancestors. In the first of these duets, I will focus on the theme of grief and mourning.

Chapter 5: Grief and Mourning in Japan

Ancestor memorial begins with death. As described in Chapters 2 and 3, the ritual cycle of ancestor memorial begins with the day of a person's death, and this day remains an important marker of transition to the other world. Therefore, it makes sense to begin by discussing the topics of death and dying, grief and bereavement, mourning and memorial in the cultural context of Japan.

Anthropological studies of practices surrounding death, dying and bereavement are numerous, and have contributed greatly to our understanding of the diverse ways in which this universal phenomenon is understood (Rosenblatt 1976; Huntington and Metcalf 1987 [1979]; Hockey and James 2001). In addition, several ethnographies that have focused on older adult identity have also included an examination of cultural concepts of death and dying and bereavement (Myerhoff 1976; Lamb 2000: 213-238; Traphagen 2004; Oliver 2007:131-157). In this chapter, I will approach each of these topics in order to contextualize the case study of an older widower in the following chapter.

Death and Dying

The Japanese view of death is influenced by the tradition of memorial that continues for many years after death. After death, there is a period of separation between the soul and the bereaved, and gradually the soul becomes reintegrated into the household until it is identified as an ancestor. Memorial rituals assure that the memory of the

deceased is maintained, and as long as there is a memory, the spirit maintains social influence in the family.

The belief in the continuity of the soul, its intimacy with the living and view of death as a natural part in the life-cycle does not mean, however, that all Japanese fearlessly accept death. The association of death with pollution, for example, suggests that there is a good degree of anxiety concerning death. In fact, some studies have suggested that Japanese people have a significantly higher rate of “death anxiety” than Americans, or Australians (Becker 1999: ***). Many people that I met remarked that death is considered a taboo subject in Japan, and held superstitions about how mentioning death might invite it to approach sooner.

The anxiety regarding death is closely related to fears of not being able to achieve a “good death” (Long 2005; Hattori, McCubbin, and Ishida 2006). Long gives a lengthy discussion of the “metaphors and scripts for the good death” in Japan (2005:52-72) and in her experience, a “good death” must have an explanation (2005: 54). The ideal explanation is a death from “old age,” or *rōsui* 老衰 (2005:54). A *rōsui* death implies not only a natural, quick and relatively painless decline, but also a sense of the fulfillment of one’s life and a trust in a continued relationship with the living. This relationship is best symbolized by the desire presence of others at the instant of death, and of a “natural” environment. Becker (1999), for example, writes that,

Japanese place a premium on dying in a natural environment...[they] are far more concerned with dying at home or surrounded by relatives seeing the sky, trees, or horizon from their deathbeds, and dying in a “natural” setting, preferably on tatami mats (1999: 67)

Long (2005) notes that in order to accommodate this ideal death, many hospitals “include a “tatami room” where dying patients may spend their last days or hours surrounded by family” (2005:59).

The desire for a “good death,” in which one retains a measure of dignity, autonomy and social connectedness until the final cessation of life are the same criteria implied in the cultural model of a “good old-age.” A “good old-age,” in fact, implies a “good death,” and vice versa. To the extent that older Japanese adults can form a coherent and meaningful model of a “good death,” they can also understand themselves as older adults. Medical and scientific advances in healthcare have given many older adults living to a healthy old age, but ironically they have also helped increase the population in advanced old age, whose prolonged dependence steals away the hope of the “good death.”

According to the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, in 1947, 90% of Japanese people died at home. In 1990, hospital deaths increased to 75% and 93% for cancer patients. Long writes that in 2002, “78.6% of deaths occur in hospitals and 13.4% at home” (Long 2005:34) Hattori et al. (2006) found similar numbers in 2004 (2006: 169). The leading cause of death among the elderly is malignancies, followed by heart disease and cerebrovascular disease. Pneumonia (often contracted through prolonged hospital stays), accidents and suicide are the next most common causes, but account for far fewer deaths (Long 2005: 32).

Long (2005) argues that although the modern medical model of death has become predominant, “revivalist scripts” (2005:65) have begun to introduce alternative ways of dying, such as palliative or hospice care. These can be considered “revivalist” rather than

innovative, because they attempt to combine medical technology and cultural ways of understanding the body, consciousness, and well-being. For instance Becker (2007) writes that in the early days of Buddhism in Japan, “monks followed detailed instructions on the palliative and spiritual care of the dying, recorded their deathbed visions, guiding their transition from the dying body to the next, disembodied state” (Becker 2007:15). Despite this history, Japan lags behind other developed countries in providing care at death, and debates concerning the ethics of practices such as organ transplant from brain-dead patients and ‘death with dignity’ remain unresolved (Becker 1993: 126-147).

For many of my elderly informants, planning for a “good death” was a chief concern, and involved remaining independent, avoiding pain and “living out one’s natural life” (*tenju wo matto suru* 天寿をまっとする). This position towards death was repeated to me by several older adults I spoke with, suggesting a connection between attitudes towards late life and death. One man for instance told me that he saw death as “a part of the natural cycle of life.” This man continued, saying, “People who fear death don’t really understand life. So if you can live your life the way you want, that is the best there is. That is why I look at my life and feel it is was good.”

This same sentiment was evident in a conversation I had with another informant of mine, who holds the opinion that people who are happy in life do not resist death:

J: Happy people want to die early?

F: Yes, right. And if, say, someone gets sick, and they’re saying, “Oh I’m dying! I’m dying with this pain!” Then you say, “Do you want to die?” They’ll say, “I don’t want to die!”

J: Because they’re scared?

- F: Yes, they're scared. They want to live a little longer; people who get sick and are suffering say things like that...
Happy people would want to die. Because [the spirits] will come to meet them, they'll go to the afterlife [*yomi*⁵⁸]... that's because they're satisfied now.

F-san's intuitive notion of the "good death" includes a feeling of satisfaction in life that comes with a passive detachment from the world and a sense of trust in the afterlife. Just as the woman in the *obasuteyama* story is tortured by her own attachments, Japanese adults feel that approaching death means gaining a sense of satisfaction in one's life, and trust, or hope for the future after death. In this sense, the Japanese view of death has close parallels to both ego-integrity in the eighth stage of Erikson's epigenetic model, as well as the virtue of the first stage of development: hope.

For elderly Japanese people, abandonment is more frightening than death. As discussed in relation to ghosts (Chapter 3), abandonment affects both the living and the dead. For ghosts, the withdrawal of love causes loneliness and confusion, and sometimes violence. The most important aspect of having a "good death" therefore is to remain linked to bereaved friends and family. As Traphagen writes, "the central theme in the practice of ancestor memorialization [is that] death is not a time of separation from the household or family. Rather death is a time of transition where the individuals take on a new role within the household upon death" (Traphagen 2004:104). By contrast, the abandoned have no role—death for the abandoned is not only immoral, but unnatural, and therefore a pain that far exceeds death itself.

⁵⁸ The term *yomi* (黄泉) is defined as an alternate of *yami* (闇) meaning darkness or the land of the dead. *Yomi* appears for the first time in Japanese literature in the *Nihon Shoki* (*Chronicles of Japan to A.D. 697*) as the place where the deity Izanagi's deceased wife Izanami resides (See Chapter 2)

Grief and Bereavement

While the term *bereavement* describes the situation of losing a loved one, *grief* refers to both the emotional and somatic reaction to the death of a loved one (Hockey and James 2001:5). The term *grief work* (see Introduction) implies a behavioral or psychological component to this reaction, wherein the bereaved tries to change his or her situation to appropriately cope with the pain involved in loss. *Mourning* (discussed later in this chapter) describes the expression of grief work, and is usually associated with cultural traditions surrounding funerals, mortuary rites, burial and the like. Borrowing from Raphael (1983) we can define *loss* as the state of being deprived of, or being without, something one has had: “Grief is the pain and suffering experienced after loss; mourning is a period of time during which signs of grief are made visible; and bereavement is the process of losing a close relationship” (Raphael 1983:20).

All of the older adults that I interviewed for this research are survivors. Each of them has stories of lost parents, siblings, spouses, neighbors and friends. Annual class reunions, though typically happy occasions, rarely gather as many friends together as the previous year. This loss of loved ones brings grief, and for older adults in particular, each loss is a time for reflection about one’s own identity.

There is a sense of grief not only the loss of a loved one, but also in the feeling of a loss of oneself, or of one’s youth as one becomes older. Diminishing physical and mental health, authority and autonomy all contribute to the grief of aging. Although Erikson’s crisis of “ego-integrity vs. despair” defines the terms of adapting to grief in old age, because of the complex emotional landscape of grief (involving shame, guilt, rage and other emotions), the experience of loss can potentially necessitate psychosocial

readjustment at other levels of development. Furthermore, the ways in which these readjustments of identity occur have both psychological as well as cultural components, so that we cannot see grief as a completely universal or trans-cultural phenomenon (Currer 2001).

Grief describes not only the reaction to loss, but also the somatic and emotional response to this reaction. Depending on the availability of psychological and cultural resources for cognizing grief, the reaction to grief may follow different courses, only one of which is Bowlby's (1980) model based on western attachment theory (see Introduction). Recent work on grief and adjustment to loss suggests that the actual variability in reactions is much larger than had been previously assumed (Wortman and Silver 1989), and that in order to understand this variation, it is necessary to understand other ways in which people conceptualize the world, such as in terms of models of health and illness, death and dying, social position and sense of power (Currer 2001: 55-56).

In the Introduction, I make the case that Japanese experience of grief may involve several emotional states, or emotional co-assemblies, but that for Japanese people, loss primarily finds expression in terms of shame. In other words, the psychological and cultural resources for experiencing and adjusting to loss are situated in the context of Japanese society, which tends to place a premium on sensitivity to shameful behaviors. The experience of loss makes one feel ashamed because of the association of loss with the pain of abandonment. The continual mourning of deceased loved ones manages this abandonment-shame by relieving the sense of helplessness incurred at the time of the loss, since in the mind of the bereaved, their actions done on behalf of the dead actually comfort the dead in the other world.

Again, I do not mean to suggest that Japanese culture shapes the experience of emotional life of older adults so profoundly that they do not experience other emotions in conjunction with bereavement. Rather, the hypercognition of shame in other realms of Japanese relationship dynamics, and the ways in which mourning rituals are elaborated suggests that when other emotions, such as sadness, guilt or rage are expressed, they are constrained in such a way that they appear as co-assemblies: sadness-shame, guilt-shame, rage-shame, and the like.

Grief over losing a loved one and grief over losing a cherished identity are analogous to the degree that resolution in one can affect the resolution of the other. Mourning is a form of grief work that allows the bereaved to recover a positive identity by transforming the relationship between the self and the object of loss.

Mourning, Memorial and Death Rituals

In “Mourning and Melancholia,” (1917) Freud contrasts *mourning*, which he corresponds with an adaptive adjustment to the loss of a loved object, with *melancholia*, which we would refer to as “depression” today, and which is a similarly painful but non-adaptive state where Freud observes in the sufferer “an extraordinary fall in his self-esteem, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale” (Freud 1917:155). Freud points out that in both mourning and melancholia, there is the possibility that the sufferer is slowly and painfully withdrawing the libido from its attachment to the lost object, gradually freeing it from the ego inhibition caused by the loss (1917:167).

In mourning, as the libido is withdrawn, it becomes refocused on another object (Freud 1917:153). In melancholia, however, the lost object becomes part of the ego in

such a way that it becomes impossible to escape the pain of loss. Freud found a sense of hope in mourning, in that,

Mourning, as we know, however painful it may be, comes to a spontaneous end. When it has renounced everything that has been lost, then . . . our libido is once more free (in so far as we are still young and active) to replace the lost objects by fresh ones equally or still more precious. (quoted in Schur 1972: 303)

It is interesting that Freud specifies being “young and active” as important factors in adjusting to death and loss through mourning. Although many insights into grief and loss can be gained by Freud’s work, this comment brings doubt as to whether it is fully applicable to the case of older adults on the one hand, and the Japanese case in particular, where the notion of disengaging from the deceased has a wholly different character, influenced by cultural and religious factors.

Freud explains that the melancholic is striking because “shame . . . is lacking in him, or at least there is little sign of it. One could almost say that the opposite trait of insistent talking about himself and pleasure in the consequent exposure of himself predominates in the melancholic” (Freud 1917:157). In Eriksonian terms, what Freud describes as the lack of shame is a heightened expression of personal autonomy. Therefore there is the sense that shame of loss may be managed by constructing an identity of oneself as independent and in control. This tendency to cope with underlying feelings of shame in some domains by projecting an autonomous image in others was evident among several older people I spoke with, and particularly in the case study to follow, but this tendency seemed to diminish with increased age and infirmity.

Japanese psychoanalyst and theorist Doi Takeo (1973) wrote about his personal experience of the death of his parents in a way that gives additional insight into Japanese perceptions of grief and mourning. Doi writes:

I became aware of them for the first time as independent persons. Where hitherto their existence was real to me only insofar as they were my own parents. This made me wonder whether to become a god or a Buddha for the Japanese might not mean that human personality of the individual concerned was accorded a new attention and respect. (Doi 1973: 62-63 quoted in Smith 1974: 219)

This is a fascinating passage because it so clearly describes the feeling of the deceased loved one becoming both more intimate and distanced all at once, a notion that will have greater significance as I consider aging in the family. Doi also suggests that mourning changes the status of the deceased in the minds of the bereaved, and leads to revelations about the nature of the self in ways that resist sentimental or nostalgic recollection, and emphasize transformation, or a new kind of memorial.

While mourning in the Freudian sense represents one kind of grief work, another model that has been suggested is “continuing bonds” (Klass 1996; Klass, Silverman and Nickman 1996; Klass 2001). Continuing Bonds is described as simply maintaining a relationship with the deceased, keeping their memory alive, rather than disengaging from them. While comparative studies of the efficacy of grief work versus continuing bonds for relieving the pain of grief is inconclusive (Russac, Steighner and Canto 2002), it appears that both approaches have beneficial aspects.

While Klass has argued in several papers that Japanese ancestor memorial is the quintessential model of continuing bonds (Klass 1996; 2001), others, such as Ivy (1995) have a model of Japanese memorial that seems more in line with Freudian thought:

Memorial practices thus allow the living to work through grief, to idealize the dead, and to substitute images of the person as really “dead” for the memory of the person as he or she was in life . . . Memorializing the dead is a way of replacing the memory of the dead person by substituting a marker (or memorial) for the image of the dead (Ivy 1995: 150-151)

Ivy’s description of Japanese mourning practices combines the idea of memorial and grief work, maintaining Freud’s idea of substitution of the love object together with a recognition of the work of culture in helping to maintain this substitution. While it is understandable that we approach Freud’s thought with a critical eye, Klass and others that argue that continuing bonds is a revolutionary way of conceptualizing mourning and completely rejects Freud are perhaps taking too narrow a view of his work⁵⁹.

I believe that Ivy’s account of mourning and memorial is correct but incomplete, at least for describing these experiences for older Japanese adults. Like several ethnographers whose work does not specifically focus on aging, Ivy, who mentions the special roles that elders take in mourning at several points in her book, chooses to not pursue her observations further. In doing so, we lose a sense of the special relationship that the elderly have with memory and how this affects the meaning of mourning in their lives (Viney, Benjamin and Preston 2000).

Summary

In this chapter I introduce the theme of death and loss, and the reactions of those who have been left behind. Death is, of course, a universal phenomenon, and every society has adapted to its occurrence by developing values, beliefs and rituals to cope

⁵⁹ Klass himself emphasized this point in a paper he presented in Japan by presenting a slide of a photograph of Freud and a short quote from regarding mourning, and in the following slide turning the photograph upside down and pronouncing “he’s wrong,” before continuing to the next slide.

with both the social rupture that death produces as well as the emotional pain of the bereaved. In Japanese culture, the idea of the “good death” has become both a

The primary components of the reaction to death are bereavement, grief, mourning and death rituals/memorial. Bereavement was defined as the situation of a person who has lost a loved one. Grief is the emotional and somatic experience of bereavement. Mourning is the expression of grief, and implies a kind of “grief work,” or management of painful feelings that grief generates. Memorial, or a kind of continuing bonds, that transforms the mental representation of the dead is a type of mourning that involves the perpetuation of the memory of the deceased. Memorial may also be a way in which older adults recover feelings of interdependence with lost loved ones. This act of memory, when symbolized in ancestor memorial, has the ability to reshape personal identity a way that attends to the reaction of grief in other domains of life, such as growing old.

This chapter is the melody of the first duet, and will be accompanied in the following chapter by the case study of an informant I am calling Sato-san. In order to understand the role of ancestor memorial in Sato-san’s life, it is important to understand the meanings of death, grief and mourning in Japanese culture.

Chapter 6: Sato-san (71)

*My parents have gone to heaven. My wife has gone to heaven.
My wife's parents have gone to heaven. I am lonely.*

- Sato-san

Meeting Sato-san:

Sato-san, age 71, is small in stature but energetic and fit compared with many other men his age. He can be extremely talkative at some times and coldly reticent at others. On most occasions Sato-san is dressed in slacks, polo shirts and light sweaters, which he prefers to more casual wear like jeans and T-shirts. In all, he seems to be quite conscious of his looks, not trying to portray himself as either too relaxed or too stiff, but rather lively and active, and ready to take charge.

I first met Sato-san in February of 2005 at a senior community welfare center in central Kyoto, and we continued to meet and talk throughout the fieldwork. Sato-san is a sort of leader at the center, and is well known by most of the regular visitors. He participates frequently in a number of the center activities, including table tennis, Japanese poetry recitation and ballroom dancing. He has even been given the role of master of ceremonies for the center's group show several years in a row. Sato-san's participation in activities at the center requires that he is there for a few hours two or three days a week. In addition to his activities at the center, Sato-san occasionally volunteers at a day-service center for the elderly, where he and other volunteers read

stories to the more infirm elderly there. Outside the center he takes singing classes for karaoke and studies English through classes broadcast on public radio.

It is easy to be impressed with the breadth of Sato-san's interests, his active personality and his sometimes blustery way of taking charge. He seems, in many ways, to fit the definition of "successful aging": independent, healthy, active and social. Sato-san himself states that his *ikigai* (Mathews 1996), or "what makes life meaningful for him," is to be constantly finding new things to learn and taking advantage of new opportunities. Sato-san seems very much to be on a sort of quest, not to return to youth, or even to delay old age, but to resist falling into a state of placid indifference or removed detachment.

Despite his prominence at the senior center, and the light-hearted and flirtatious manner he takes with the other regulars there, some people who attend the center with him frequently refer to him (behind his back) as a "cantankerous old man" (*gankō oyaji* 頑固親父). For example, once, while waiting for Sato-san to meet me at the center, I ran into a woman whom I often see playing table tennis. When I told her I was waiting for Sato-san, she smiled and pointed to her head, saying, "Oh, that old *bald* guy? He's not the kind to keep his appointments!" This was only one of several instances where others at the center showed that they didn't take his opinions very seriously, or mocked his self-importance there.

Sato-san has three sons. The eldest son and youngest son attended college and eventually moved away from home. The middle son married and purchased a newer house where he, his family, and Sato-san now live. Sato's living quarters are entirely separate, located on the second floor of the house and accessible from an outdoor

staircase⁶⁰. Sato-san's grand-daughter used to come upstairs to visit him when she was younger, but he sees her less often now. Sato-san tells me that he rarely sees his family downstairs, and when he does, it is likely that something will spark an argument between him and them. Sato-san often complains that his opinions are ignored by the family downstairs, and that his daughter-in-law in particular frequently tries to tell him what to do. Speaking of his son as we sat having coffee one afternoon Sato-san suddenly exploded, "You'll only understand what I say after I die!"

Sato-san's room on the second floor of the house is decorated with souvenirs from his numerous solo travels overseas: masks from Bali, a snow dome from San Francisco, a totem pole trinket from Canada, a decorative plate from Paris. Sato-san is proud that unlike most Japanese tourists, he does not join tourist groups, but prefers to explore foreign countries on his own. Many of our first conversations regarded his interest in traveling—how he judges the cost of living by the price of coffee, how he was impressed by the technological advancement of the ancient Romans and how he walked across the Golden Gate Bridge.

Other than his souvenir collection, Sato-san's living space has the look of a typical Japanese bachelor pad. There are three rooms: a bedroom, a bathroom and a room with both kitchen facilities and living space. In the bedroom, clothes are strewn about in disarray, and the bed is unmade. The kitchen has few matching sets of glasses and a set of small barbells rest on the floor next to the couch. Sato-san takes pride in having his own space, just as he is proud of his travels. When I visited Sato-san's place for the first time, he reached behind the couch and showed off a toy rifle that he bought to

⁶⁰ See Naomi Brown (2003) regarding these types of separate living arrangements.

emulate John Wayne. Sato-san told me that he remembers seeing John Wayne in person once, shopping for a traditional Japanese parasol in Kyoto. “He was so *tall!*” Sato-san recalled, opening his eyes wide as if in disbelief. Taking out the toy rifle, he explained again that because John Wayne was so tall, he was able to cock the rifle by flipping it around in one hand. Sato-san’s biggest idols are the classic icons of masculine independence. Even the corn-cob pipe puffing iconoclast General Douglas MacArthur, the director of the Allied occupation of Japan following WWII, earned praise from Sato-san. One of Sato-san’s favorite songs to sing at karaoke is Frank Sinatra’s “My Way”.

Consistent with his heroes’ independent personas, Sato-san tends to be suspicious of authorities and institutions. Instead, he tells me that he favors “*yoko*” 横 or horizontal relationships rather than “*tate*” 縦 or vertical ones (Nakane 1970). For example, Sato-san complained that when he visited the prefectural international center to inquire about language programs it was too “*tate*,” meaning that the teacher/student relationship was too formal or stiff for his taste. In another instance, when discussing war, he strongly asserted that Japanese soldiers weren’t at all interested in dying for their Emperor or commanders, but rather for their fellow soldiers who share horizontal (*yoko*) relationships. This feeling of horizontal relationships is echoed by the Japanese notion of “*ninjō*” 人情, or “human feeling,” which contrasts with *giri* 義理, or “duty.” Sato-san mentioned this contrast on many occasions.

Sato-san’s emphasis on these distinctions suggests a concern with controlling self-image, setting himself in terms of Japanese values and constructing an identity of morality. One incident in particular reveals his need for control over how others see him

and his regrets over his life. The desire to control how he is seen reveals his shame in his transition to old age and this is reflected in his mourning behavior.

About one month after we had met each other, Sato-san invited me to join his neighborhood festival. Although Sato-san was not closely related to this shrine, he told me that he thought I might learn something about Japanese culture from it. My participation in the festival however, did not proceed exactly as I had expected. When we arrived at the shrine to register and receive the proper clothing, Sato-san pushed in front of me, telling me that he would do all of the talking. When I was addressed directly by the man taking down the names of participants, I began to answer in Japanese, only to be cut off once again by Sato-san. Afterwards, Sato-san roughly pulled me aside, telling me in a firm but hushed tone not to speak in Japanese—*only English*. When I asked why I was to speak only English, Sato-san said “that’s not important. Just be like a *gaijin* (外人=foreigner).” What I had assumed was a gesture of reciprocal exchange between Sato-san and I (offering me the experience of a Japanese festival in return for offering myself as an English conversation partner), now seemed more like a way for Sato-san to gain some prestige by showing off his foreign friend and English tutor to his neighbors.

The festival is fairly standard in form: men dressed in white cotton shorts, jackets, headbands and cleft toed boots heft a tremendous portable shrine and parade it through the streets of the neighborhood accompanied by traditional percussion and flute music, stopping every so often to eat snacks and drink beer or tea provided by local women. As I joined the other men around the portable shrine, Sato-san followed behind watching and chatting with people during the breaks. I struggled to give the impression that I didn’t speak Japanese, especially given the fact that it would have been a perfect opportunity to

get more information about the festival. I decided to let others speak to me in Japanese, and I would respond in English to their questions.

About two weeks later, Sato-san and I were talking on the stairs of a large Buddhist temple when he turned to me and said, “The other day I said don’t speak English. But there was a reason.” He directed my attention to a group of young boys playing on the steps in their school uniforms before finishing his thought, that all Japanese want to speak English. They study it in school. These boys aren’t any different from other people. They want to speak English but they don’t get any chances. When there is an English speaker it is a great chance for them. If you just go there and start speaking Japanese, then it’ll spoil it. They’ll have absolutely no interest in you.

In rather roundabout fashion, Sato-san saw my ability to converse in Japanese as a hindrance to forming bonds with the others in the festival, as if it took away the only asset that I could exchange and therefore make the encounter awkward. Paradoxically, Sato-san decided that in order to be accepted “in,” I had to be completely “out”.

I accepted Sato-san’s explanation as an apology. After reflecting on the day of the festival, I had to admit that I was approached by other men who found it amusing to use the little English that they knew to talk with me. I also recalled that Sato-san kept a polite distance, rarely speaking to the other men, so it could have been the case that he really wasn’t showing off at all. It is more likely that Sato-san, who projects his dedication to practicing English onto other boys and men, was indicating how he would like me to relate to him. Perhaps he was also indicating that he himself would have no interest in me if I didn’t help him with his English?

More than two years after the festival, Sato-san confessed to me that he had two major regrets in life: not living abroad, and not getting a better education. Throughout our conversation he switched between speaking in English and Japanese, emphasizing his effort to relate to me in my native tongue, but also, perhaps, his lack of comfort in speaking about some matters in Japanese (especially since we conducted this interview in a convenience store with several other people around).

- I: Well you see I'm 72. So, I'm always—well not always ... there are times where it is always, but, (switching to English) DEATH-- I think about DEATH. (Japanese) I think about it (English) I have no fear. (J: un). (Japanese) None whatsoever. However ... (English) *Regret*. Many regrets ... (Japanese) well I have these anyway. And what are these (English) regrets? (Japanese) It's ... (in a low tone, quietly) I wished I studied more. This is a big regret... Study. That's the first. And there is one more. The second one is ... Beyond Kyoto, beyond Osaka, of course, I'd like to have lived somewhere [else]. I wouldn't mind going overseas. Domestic is fine too. Like Hokkaido... (referring to me) you are, you are—well, this is your second time, right? When you're young, at least four or five years...I don't know. This is, of course one of my regrets.

It would seem that from these statements, Sato-san sees himself as isolated, not having control over his self-image. Although he would like to have been educated and well-traveled, he had dedicated himself to his work, and in his older years. This is the same image that he projected on the men at the festival and the boys at the temple, who he assumed could not work up the self confidence to speak English. He could see himself in the men at the festival, and attempted to somehow ease his own regrets by providing them the opportunity to relate to me. It may have also been the case that in asserting his will over me, as someone who is both living abroad and pursuing a higher education

degree associated with a well-known university, he could somehow develop a sense of mastery over his own regrets.

After gathering together all of this information, it seems as if Sato-san's insistence that I only speak English at the festival revealed a well of regret, loss, and even mourning. These feelings brought the pain of shame, in the sense that despite his efforts to make others see him as he would like to see himself, (such as well-educated and worldly) he cannot be successful. Old age has brought a sense of ending to this effort. In his post-retirement years, Sato-san tried to gain what he had deferred by traveling and educating himself, only to find that despite all of this, he would not gain the kind of respect that he sought from his children or even his companions at the center. His attempts at finding autonomy were compromised by his

Although this incident seems limited to the ways in which Sato-san attempts to manage his regrets in old age, the same sentiments can be seen repeated in his religious outlook. In order to clarify this point, I will first describe some of the important events in Sato-san's life history.

Sato-san's Life History

Sato-san was born outside of Kyoto, but his family moved to Kyoto when he was about three years old. He is a middle child with one older brother and one younger sister, neither of whom he speaks of often. He is also hesitant to talk of his parents and much of his early life. In going over his family tree, he told me that he was closest to his wife's aunt, saying, "when she dies, I won't have any more relatives." This is despite the fact that Sato-san still has living siblings, cousins and other close relatives. It is difficult to

say what created this distance between Sato-san and his siblings and parents. While second sons are expected to set up their own branch household apart from the main household, the break between Sato-san and his birth family seems especially severe, at least in his description.

On one of our first interview occasions Sato-san and I met in Gion and walked around together. At every sighting of a slightly traditionally constructed establishment, Sato-san would light up, pointing out to me the more subtle elements of “entertainment district” architecture. Sato-san refers to the period in his life when he frequented Gion as the “carefree times,” one of youthful innocence and adventure. He explained that he and a male friend would go together to an *ageya* (揚屋), and the proprietor would then call for girls to come join them. When the girls arrived, he and his friend would choose which girl they liked (deciding by “rock-paper-scissors” if they liked the same girl) and they would all go upstairs to separate rooms to have sex. Sato-san told me that he didn’t go to the *ageya* alone, because after all, “Talking about how it went afterwards was half the fun!”

When Sato-san was a young man, he was eager to set out on his own, getting a part-time job and saving enough money to buy his own car. Although he does not drive anymore, due to the cost and the danger of driving, Sato-san is proud of his past driving record. The desire for autonomy, and to attain the freedom to travel not only long distances (which could be easily accomplished by rail travel in Japan), but also to have the ability to set one’s own schedule, seemed a particular point of pride for Sato-san. Sato-san graduated from college and took a job as a salaried businessman. He then set out to get married.

After meeting several prospective candidates, and not being very satisfied with any of them, Sato-san finally met the woman that would be his wife. He was impressed with her because of her simple, conservative, and yet feminine style:

S: OK, first, my ideal woman was, I don't know why this is so but, my mother never wore make-up. My mother never wore makeup when I was young. So she didn't wear make-up. for me, I hate make-up...makeup-is too dense (laughs) No No No., She is very simple first.

J: Simple? (*sunao* 素直)⁶¹

S: Simple? No, she didn't wear makeup...

J: A genuine, true face?

S: (in English) Supine. She didn't wear makeup so she was more "supine" maybe? (In Japanese) When I first met her, she wore Kimono. She fit it perfectly. I don't know why. Besides that I thought she looked clever. Looks like clever! And really she was quite smart. That's what I thought. That's what really was. Three points! So she herself hesitated! But I deferred and asked for her.

As for his bride, Sato-san claims that she was slightly reluctant to marry him at first, one of her reasons being his height. As Sato-san told me, she said that since they stood at roughly the same height, if she wanted to wear high heels, she would be taller than he was. Sato-san's wife, who was a skilled seamstress (she held a teaching license in Japanese textile work), occasionally taught sewing, but could not teach as much as she wanted to because she was occupied with caring for their three sons. After marriage, Sato-san took his work even more seriously, and prided himself on separating work and family, not taking personal phone calls from his wife when he was at the office.

⁶¹ I use the word *sunao* which has a meaning in Japanese that is both moral ("guileless") as well as aesthetic ("simple," "pure"), in order to get a better idea if he is referring to mostly physical or moral/aesthetic qualities of his ideal.

Almost a year after meeting Sato-san, my wife and I sat in Sato-san's room and he took out a black and white photograph of himself and his wife on their honeymoon. In the photograph, Sato-san wears a suit, and stands confidently with his legs apart and hands behind his back. His wife wears a western style dress and a shy smile. As we admired the photo, he then told us, "When I die, I will have this photo in my casket. I told my son this."

Sato-san's wife died of cancer when she was 35 years old. Sato-san was 38. She died not long after the birth of their third son, leaving Sato-san to raise his three sons himself. He did not ask for any help from his other relatives, but aided by his live-in mother-in-law⁶². Sato-san mentioned that his wife had died early in their relationship and didn't seem bothered by any questions relating to it. In fact, he was eager to express his devotion to her, in a passionate manner that I was unused to in talking with other Japanese people.

In regards to her death, Sato-san explained, "If it was me that died, it would have been better." He explained,

S: Boys need their mother...They need discipline. I was too soft on them. But, really, It would have been better if I died than my wife, really. I've always thought that.

J: You really think that?

S: I really think that. For male children it really is more about the mother than the father. . .

⁶² It is rare that a man's wife's mother would co-reside with him, except, perhaps in the case of an adopted son who would become the heir of his wife's family (*mukoyoshi* 婿養子). In Sato-san's case, he was not an eldest son, and was therefore responsible for setting up his own branch household. He made no reference to a father-in-law, which leads me to believe that his wife's mother came to live with them not long after they were married.

S: I don't know why. for me, in my case, In my situation, my parents lived till they were in their 80's or 70's, and when your parents die in their 80's, well that's another thing, but, I've always thought that way ...[that is if one were to die, it should be the father]

In this exchange, as with the previous excerpt, Sato-san makes a direct association between his wife and his own parents. In talking about his wife, Sato-san mentions how she compares with his mother, at least in her style or comportment. In the last exchange, the connection between his parenting and that of his parents is less clear, as though he is beginning to make the connection between the disciplining mother and his own parents, but stops short of fully describing the situation. This kind of interaction occurred frequently during our interviews, and yet when I asked Sato-san to tell me more about his mother, he was brief and hesitant. His few descriptions of his mother included that she would sometimes "discipline," towards he and his brothers, but was not always so strict. Beyond this, little was offered about her character.

While there is too little data concerning Sato-san's early life to make a firm interpretation, I believe, that Sato-san's reaction to the death of his wife involves a self-reflection on his own identity, and that this identity is closely connected to early childhood experience. David Gutman (1997) made the interesting observation in his work with aging men that in some cases, such as that of Ernest Hemingway, old age leads to an increased resistance to passivity, resulting in painful psychological symptoms. Gutman argues that in old age, when women tend to take on more assertive, or "masculine" qualities, and men tend to have more passive ones, men who fit the personality described above are liable to react violently towards old age and towards their wives and towards themselves (Gutman 1997: 225). Gutman found that these men,

... tend to be intelligent; and despite some problems with success; they are driven to achieve and to feel *shame* when they fail ...all these men also report much the same kind of mother—destructively dominant...but despite their distrust in her, these men inherit strong ego ideals from their mothers; and *they are driven as much by shame as by guilt*...Furthermore, as these men gain sexual maturity, they finally achieve a tolerable degree of psychological distance from the mother, usually through their attachments to women who are completely unlike her: demure, soft-spoken, dependent, even adoring (1997: 226-229 emphasis mine)

Gutman's observation that these driven and successful men are particularly prone to shame, and that this shame is directly related to not only their relationship with their mother, but also in a different sense, to their wives, is helpful in understanding Sato-san's case. Sato-san's wife was, from his description, demure and feminine. As a *mother*, however, she was a strict disciplinarian. While given the data I have, it is difficult to establish a firm connection between Sato-san's perception of his mother and that of his wife, Gutman's observation does seem relevant when we look at other details of Sato-san's life, including his religious behavior.

Sato-san's life history centers around one key event: the death of his wife. He rarely spoke of his children (or his own childhood) and he shows little in most of the other events in his life⁶³. As the key event in Sato-san's life, his wife's death and the grieving process became a catalyst for what would emerge in his post-retirement years as a reconsideration of his basic identity, and the sense of autonomy that he aspires to. The experience of grief, and the sense of shame and helplessness that it gave him resonate with his other regrets in life, all of which have to do with not achieving a strong sense of

⁶³ The one exception to this is the death of his mother-in-law, whom he cared for and visited in the hospital until she died at the age of 93. Of course the fact that his mother-in-law acted essentially like a surrogate wife/mother (although sexually unavailable) for the last twenty years of her life means that she is not wholly unconnected to Sato-san's understanding of his experience of bereavement. The fact that Sato-san's mother-in-law required Sato-san's care and attention later in her life may have contributed to a deferral of emotional investment in the memorial care of his deceased wife.

individual mastery and independence. Instead, Sato-san describes his life in terms of feelings of isolation and lack of achievement, which is supported by his isolation from his son's and the rest of his family.

In the next section I describe Sato-san's attitude towards mourning, and argue that by performing his shame in ritual symbolism, he is able to gain a greater, even transcendent sense of connectedness unavailable in other parts of his life.

A Visit to the Grave

Sato-san's case shows that mourning and identity, and its expression in ancestor memorial, are intimately linked in what Obeyesekre (1985) calls "the process whereby painful motives and affects...are transformed into publicly accepted sets of meanings and symbols" (1985:147). In order to understand how Sato-san's sense of self has changed in old age, we should therefore consider this transformation of emotion into ritual practice.

Sato-san calls himself "*mushūkyō*" 無宗教 or "un-religious"⁶⁴. On other occasions when we visited temples, Sato-san usually seemed disinterested in religious activity, and criticized at length the more wealthy and influential sects of Buddhism. When we entered the main hall of a temple, where several people sat in prayer or silent reverence, Sato-san showed little sign of reverence, and walked around and seeming distracted. Only on one such occasion did I see him kneel and recite a short prayer in the

⁶⁴ There are several words in Japanese for not having a particular religious affiliation, or appreciation. The most commonly used is *mushūkyō* 無宗教. Another is *mushinron* 無神論 which tends to be a more particular version of the former, closer to the English word "atheism".

main hall, after which he quickly got up and moved away. Why would someone so averse to religion bother with things like graves and memorial services?

One day when I was interviewing Sato-san, he took me to see his wife's grave. We went into the small temple cemetery and walked to the back, where his wife's plot was located. This was not a family plot, but rather a stone dedicated solely to his wife. A couple of old wooden *tōba* stood erect behind the obelisk shaped gravestone. Each of these slats represented a memorial occasion and bore Sato-san's name on them. No other name appeared on any of the slats. He asked me for a lighter, and then held out a half stick of incense that had been lying on the gravestone. I lit the incense, and a candle which soon blew out, and Sato-san and I stood in the narrow pathway between plots, facing the grave.

“Hi! Jason is here! Jason's here!” he said, in a soft, affectionate voice. Sato-san always takes on a softer tone when he speaks of his wife, and it is softer still when we visited her grave. This tone is drastically different when we discussed the period following her death, where he became extremely animated and spoke in a loud often shouting voice. At the time of his wife's death, Sato-san claimed that he held no interest in Buddhas or Shinto deities and resented the funeral process, which he found meaningless and costly. Despite his initial revulsion towards religion, he continues to dutifully maintain his wife's grave and practice memorial rites for her, even going so far as to inter a portion of her remains at the head temple of his family's sect⁶⁵.

For Sato-san, there was little social pressure to keep up graves for his relatives. After all, he was not the eldest son or heir to his household. Like other second or third

⁶⁵ The practice of dividing remains is called *bunkotsu* 分骨

sons, Sato-san was to set up a branch household, separate from the main household. The fact that all of the *tōba* set by the grave, a couple of them weathered with time, bore Sato-san's name on their inscription shows that Sato-san was now solely responsible for his wife's remains. When I asked how often he visited his wife's grave, Sato-san turned to me casually and said “*Obon*, New Years, *Ohigan* and her Birthday.” He then added, “If I go to the supermarket, I'll look at the flowers and if there are some inexpensive ones, I'll get them and come here to give them to her.”

Our visit was brief, and after bowing his head in a praying motion, Sato-san seemed anxious to move on. Perhaps he was ashamed at not bringing her flowers or cleaning the grave, or perhaps my presence in the context of this intimate encounter made him uneasy. As we left, we had the following exchange:

- J: How is the Sato-san before your wife died and the Sato-san afterwards different?
- S: My personality was bad. (J: bad?) It became worse! (J: became worse?) Looking at myself, how can I say it? This is also a little difficult ...*before, I was BIG. I got smaller. People became smaller...*
- J: Did you feel anger at the time?
- S: More than anger, more than anger, I'd say *depression* [said in English]. The feeling of depression was stronger...WHY? WHY? WHY MY WIFE? That feeling...I didn't do anything wrong, right?!

I find this exchange is extremely telling. In particular, Sato-san's remark that “*people got smaller*” and that he himself “*became smaller*” shows his association of grief and the loss of control over his size after his wife's death. The instability of one's size can be directly related to feelings of shame. Kilborne (2002), for example, writes that “pathological

narcissism (and pathological shame) may be related to an instability in psychic size” (2002: 21), and notes that feelings of smallness (both literal and psychic) or the sense of frustration and helplessness in relationship to a larger, powerful figure can have profound effects.

Furthermore, the statement “I didn’t do anything wrong, right?” clearly indicates that Sato-san’s sense of shame is related to his sense of helplessness and confusion. As I’ve showed in the case of Japanese ghosts (Chapter 3), this sense of helplessness is closely related to feelings of being abandoned. Sato-san feels responsible for being abandoned by his wife, for whom he could not control or remain attached to.

If, as Erikson says, “doubt is the brother of shame”(Erikson 1993:253) it is not surprising then that at the time of his wife’s death, Sato-san recalls his complete lack of any religious faith. The sense of helplessness that Sato-san felt during his wife’s death and the following mortuary procedures must have greatly damaged his sense of being in charge and his need to keep things in control. Not only did Sato-san feel guilt at his inability to prevent his wife’s death (“Why my wife?”) but afterwards, he was shamed by the mortuary process, changing his indifference to spirituality into doubt and disgust.

Shame and Bereavement

Returning to Erikson’s model of the life-cycle allows us to start unpacking Sato-san’s narrative. Sato-san expresses sentiments that refer not only to his memories, but also to core aspects of his personality that these memories seem to touch on. Despite his active attempts to secure a satisfying old age, aging has also brought to Sato-san a sense of regret along with the need to adapt his sense of self to this new reality. Developing a

new understanding of his relationship with his deceased wife and resolving the conflicts that her death came to symbolize, has become an important means of affecting this shift in identity.

Perhaps the need to cope with feelings of shame motivates Sato-san to identify with such icons of autonomy such as John Wayne, Frank Sinatra and even sailing ships, which he has admired since childhood and still decorates his room with. To be dependent on another person is, for Sato-san, the most shameful thing there is. It for this reason that he claims that he has never borrowed or lent money to anyone else, and told me, quite seriously, that he'd "kill himself" if he was ever in financial debt. He was thrilled when I would teach him English phrases such as "Waste not, want not," or "Neither a borrower nor a lender be," and repeated them often.

Shame dominates Sato-san's description of grief following his wife's death and is ritualized and given symbolic meaning in ancestor memorial. After several experiences with Sato-san's sensitivity to relatively small threats to his self-esteem, I came to believe that Sato-san's almost over-performed self-reliance is an indication that feelings of shame were particularly painful for him. Because of this sensitivity to shame, I also suspected that Sato-san's wife's premature death was experienced by Sato-san as both survivor guilt and shame; a feeling that seems supported by the passage that I quoted above.

Sato-san's remark that "*people got smaller*" and that he himself "*became smaller*" is a metaphoric description of his feelings of helplessness and shame after his wife's death. Feelings that made him want to feel *smaller*, as if hiding away or becoming invisible. Themes of shame are not uncommon in relating to the deceased, and yet the

shame one is supposed to feel before the ancestors differs from the debilitating survivor shame.

Meaning and Memorial

Sato-san's narrative also shows that with age, there are ways to explore new meanings and recover a new sense of self worth through personal experiences of ancestor memorial. At the close of the *Obon* holiday, when spirits of the dead are said to return to their families for a few days before being send back to the sphere of the dead, Sato-san told me that he felt as if he was sending off the spirit of his wife, and then pointing to his chest he thoughtfully added "But she is always in my heart."

When I ask Sato-san if he thinks that people need religion he replied:

I: It's not that you don't need [religion]. [You] can't be like [you] don't need it at all. Of course, in ordinarily, ordinary, normal, everyday life you don't need it at all. However, my wife, when my wife died... I didn't have any belief in *kami* or *hotoke*... That was my frame of mind, you know? What's a buddha? What's a god? Why did my wife have to die? That's all that I would think about, you know? For years ...

Now my thinking has changed a little. Changed ... how did it change? Well, basically, until now that feeling has been there a little but, of course, today, up to now, *my wife is dead, and I am still alive is of course-- there must be some sort of power (chikara= 力) in me that I can't rationally understand, you know?* ...I don't think that the deities are going to help me . . . There's something that has given me the strength to live. I've gotten this from everyone.

I've come this far, It's like that. Where will I go from here? Well, you have the *hotoke*, and you go to the temple, or the shrine, right? Everyone. Once when I was with someone they asked me, why I go. I said, "Well for me, wherever I go I say whatever! I go on. I'm always thankful. Wherever I go, I'm always trying to be grateful."

It is difficult to say if this “power” that Sato-san feels now would have developed in the process of reflection without his particular dedication to her memorial care because for him, it is tied to the fact that she is dead, and he has continued to live. In the interview transcript above, Sato-san seems to shift back and forth between asserting autonomy and dependence on others. Sato-san does not want to admit his dependence, since this conflicts with his independent persona. At the same time, the sense of dependence that he feels in ancestor memorial gives him a kind of strength to go on. Remembering his wife represents one of the few relationships where Sato-san can legitimately have shame, because there is also a feeling of “power” that he obtains from what this emotionally meaningful source.

As noted in the Introduction, there are two distinct words for “shame” in Japanese, *haji* (恥心), meaning embarrassment or humiliation, and *shūchi* (羞恥), which is closer to a sense of modesty, as in the phrase “have you no shame?” (Creighton 1990). In Sato-san’s case, I argue that his relationship with his deceased wife allows him to shift from *haji* (at being unable to prevent the death) to *shūchi* (accepting his finitude and deferring to the sense of the ‘next world’). If, as I argue, Sato-san feels shameful (especially to his children) that he couldn’t prevent his wife’s death, a shift to a more mature understanding of shame, one that entails a positive sense of inter-subjectivity, would bring him a feeling of relief. Furthermore, the means through which he performs this inter-subjectivity is through socially encouraged ritual, so there is little feeling of exposure or special meaning. Ancestor memorial is simply what everyone does.

Sato-san’s case shows that ancestor memorial is more than a tool useful for grieving immediately after death, but can also be a way of maintaining an emotional link

to intimates that may be lacking particularly in old age. It is likely that Sato-san's realization of this "power" could only come to the forefront after his retirement, which marks an important transition from an Eriksonian orientation towards generativity to one of integration. Generativity remains an important element in Sato-san's life, as is evidenced by his participation at the senior center, but the character of this generativity has shifted from preservation in this world to preservation in the next.

The experience of caring for his dying mother-in-law, which exemplifies the "virtue" of the seventh stage (care), is concurrent with the shift from generativity to integrity and perhaps aided in Sato-san's reconfiguration of identity. Sato-san had, despite the pain of the loss of his wife, managed to provide for his family, raise his children and care for his mother-in-law. In short, he learned to care. The value of care is now concentrated on his deceased wife, who provides the ideal source for revitalizing the sense of emotional "power" that helps him find continuity and meaningfulness.

Summary

Sato-san's case shows how a bereaved husband with intense feelings of survivor shame came to a new relationship with his deceased wife and consequently with himself over several years of personal memorial. Whereas Sato-san's concern to be seen as strong and independent is not supported by others at the senior center, nor by his son or daughter-in-law, he can still imagine himself as being seen in a positive way, perhaps momentarily freed of shame, when he visits his wife's grave in the context of ancestor memorial. For Sato-san, ancestor memorial was a way to keep his deceased wife in his heart, to feel an intimate attachment to her that he did not feel among his living relatives.

By identifying with his deceased wife as he grew older, he was able to enact feelings of interdependency, even while asserting autonomy and initiative in other domains.

As Sato-san's case shows, ancestor veneration practices cannot be wholly attributed to early indoctrination, historical differences between cohorts or simply concern about mortality and the afterlife. There are changes in religious feelings over the life course and these correlate with other changes in the life cycle. That changes in religious behavior are principally directed towards the dead is not surprising, since they offer the most immediate and intimate references for identification and attachment and give a sense of continuity and integrity in the life cycle.

Mourning and identity formation are intimately linked. Through the process of mourning for his late wife, Sato-san reviewed his own identity as a parent, a son-in-law, and a father, and constructed a personal narrative that centered on his fidelity to his wife. These sentiments were not shared with his children, nor were they instilled in him from his parents. Rather, Sato-san developed his own style of ancestor memorial according to his emotional needs.

By using shared cultural meanings and symbols (the continuity of the spirit after death, the importance of the gravesite, offering and remembrance), Sato-san shows ways in which he is beginning to transform painful emotions, and creates a new positive identity.

Chapter 7: Religion and the Family

In the previous chapter, I examined the case of one individual's experience of bereavement, grief and mourning. However, it is important to note that the experience of mourning in old age, especially when expressed through ancestor memorial, is situated within family relationships. In the *obasuteyama* tale, for example, the cause of the old woman's abandonment is inter-generational conflict instigated by her dependence. In this chapter I describe family dynamics in Japan. First, I examine the model of the family as a corporate household, or *ie* 家. Next, I describe how this model creates situations that create inter-generational conflict. Finally I look at narratives of elder abuse and abandonment that suggest a crisis in family relationships and suggest that ancestor memorial is a means of relieving the pain of anticipating abandonment.

Nation, Household and Family

Anthropologist David Plath (1964) called ancestor worship in Japan a system where “the family of God is the family,” referring to the notion that ancestor worship is not only central to Japanese religious orientation, but that it exists on a level of intimacy that is virtually indistinguishable from other kinds of everyday family interaction. The family receives considerable attention in almost all anthropological accounts of Japan, and is seen as the primary locus of socialization to cultural norms and roles, and forming an identity based on interdependent bonds (Benedict 1946; DeVos 1973; Hendry 1986; Hamabata 1990; Peak 1991; Allison 1996; Ozawa de-Silva 2006). When the elderly are considered in the context of the family, they are usually treated in terms of care-giving

responsibilities, and much less often in terms of contributing positive resources to the family themselves (Hashimoto 1996; Long 1997; Jenike 1997). The focus on the caregiver/elder relationship is consistent with the ways in which social gerontologists tend to consider the family (Silverstein, Bengtson and Litwak 2003).

Collier, Rosaldo and Yanagisako (1997) criticize the notion of “the family” as a unit of affective and instrumental support, arguing that the romanticization of the family has been a means of complying with political and economic changes in industrial capitalist society (Collier et al. 1997: 76). Although these authors focus mainly on the family in western society, a similar, if not more radical process, has occurred in Japanese history, most recently with the legal formalization of the *ie* system in the late nineteenth century. The promotion of the idea of the family as a natural, cooperative group, bound by affection, obligation and loyalty benefits the Japanese state, which can shift some of the responsibility for the welfare of its citizens away from itself. Although the *ie* system has faded, the promotion of a close family continues into the present day, where some argue it is exploited by the state as a means of providing supplementary eldercare (Hideaki 2008). The *ie* also remains important for structuring ancestor memorial, which Smith (1974) points out has been greatly shaped by state institutions.

The *ie*, (Chapter 2) is the Japanese corporate household system, based on rules of inheritance and succession that distribute power and responsibility between main families (*honke* 本家) and branch families (*bunke* 分家) (Isaacs-White 2002: 6-7)⁶⁶. This group cannot quite be referred to as a family, but rather something closer to a “house,” as in the “House of Windsor” (Hendry 1995:24). The *ie* can therefore be seen as a system of

⁶⁶ A household is usually referred to as an *ie* 家, while a family is called a *kazoku* 家族 or *katei* 家庭

hierarchically arranged roles—a suggestive principle for family decision making that is parallel with, but is not entirely synonymous with Confucian relationships of filial piety.

The structure of the *ie*, including the rules of inheritance as well as legal obligations towards care of the elderly and perpetuation of the ancestors, was codified in the Meiji Constitution of 1898 (Isaacs White 2002, Tsuji 2002). Based on ideal rules of patrilineal primogeniture adhered to by members of samurai households, the constitutional regulations outlined a family system wherein the eldest son of a household was given chief responsibility for the welfare of the household upon the retirement of his father. All of other members of the *ie* were considered subordinate to the household head, who was also responsible for care of his aging parents and the maintenance of ancestral grave and memorial rites.

Since the abolishment of the *ie* system with the enactment of the post-war Civil Code (1947), the organization and restrictions that consolidated the authority and responsibility of the family patriarch have been gradually relaxed. However this does not mean that the *ie* model has disappeared. Because of the close link between ancestor memorial and the *ie* system, and the connection between ethnic identity and the ideals of culture as promoted by the Japanese state, the *ie* remains an important unit of analysis. This fact is evident in more recent work on the *ie* in relation to family dynamics.

The *ie* has been described as both an “economic unit” (Traphagen 2000: 51) as well as a “spiritual community” (Ooms 1976:71). In Yanagita Kunio’s terms the *ie* is the means of transmission of both resources as well as tradition. In regard to the latter, ancestor veneration is the most important element, since it is so directly associated with the prosperity and continuity of living family members and their descendents. Ooms

supports Yanagita's position, writing that, "the *ie* is a spiritual community and ancestor worship is its religion" (Ooms 1976:71). Like Yanagita, Ooms proceeds to argue the importance of interdependence in the *ie* as the driving force behind ancestor worship.

Lebra (1976) goes a step further than Ooms in regards to the idea of interdependence and the elderly:

The aged person is expected to and does depend up on the younger. In the traditional social structure, dependency of the aged is tied to the institutional requirement to perpetuate the *ie*. The aged retired parents depend up on their son and successor and his family for security, comfort, and emotional support. They are also concerned over who will take care of the funeral, ashes and tablets, the grace, and memorial services for them and their ancestors. Attainment of peace of mind in one's late years and salvation after death is thus closely connected with this sense of dependency upon the succeeding generation. The successor is expected to be dependable, willing to prove his filial piety by gratifying their dependency wish. (Lebra 1976: 65)

In one anecdote that supports Lebra's claim, Jeremy (1989) writes that the aging head of an *ie* he knew of had the ancestral grave moved closer to home in order to "encourage his son's interest in this part of the *ie*." Jeremy writes that the completion of the expensive and complicated business of moving the stone in time for the summer festival of *obon* caused a "rare smile of satisfaction to cross his face" (Jeremy 1989 36). The elderly may take interest in the ancestors, not only because it mediates conflicts or regrets between themselves and the deceased, but also because it encourages younger generations to continue the traditions, insuring the continuity of the memory of the elders (Chapter 9).

In the last half of the twentieth century, Japan has seen extraordinary shifts in family demographics (see Traphagen and Knight (Eds.) 2003). These shifts are characterized by an increase of nuclear households, encouraged by urbanization and a more mobile workforce; declining fertility, the result of greater education and job

opportunities for women as well as the high cost of raising and educating children; and a rapid increase in number of the elderly, partly the result of excellent an inexpensive and accessible healthcare system following WWII (Campbell 2008). Although the many families, especially those who pride themselves as having sustained over several generations wish to continue the traditional *ie* ideal, these demographic shifts have posed a sometimes insurmountable obstacle. Hamabata (1990) observes that today, “In terms of traditional ideals, the *ie* is patriarchal, patrilineal, primogenitural, and patrilocal...In actual practice, much of this ideal is routinely ignored” (1990: 33-34).

These demographic shifts, along with the deregulation of household responsibilities have led to a major depopulation of the rural villages, as young men and women move to the urban centers for work. For the elderly living in a city like Kyoto, however, the influx of single men and women as well as young couples to the city has given rise to what one informant (Chapter 10) refers to as “*mansion-ization*” in the cities and suburbs. “*Mansion*” are large single-resident or dual resident apartment buildings often built in the lots where extended family *machiya* once stood. For the elderly, the demographic change occurring in the last half of the 20th century has left many without readily accessible social support networks or family to care for them. As fewer elderly people reside with adult children, an increasingly urgent question regarding the future of the Japanese family is “Who will care for the elderly?” This is colloquially referred to as the “low-fertility aging-society problem” (*shoshi kōreika shakai mondai* 少子高齢化社会問題).

This question of who will take care of the elderly, though certainly not new or unique to this generation, has had different answers, but basically comes down to finding

the best way to share the burden between the state, the local community, relatives and the elderly persons themselves. Since the 1970's, the Japanese government's position on elder care, referred to as "Japanese-style welfare" has frequently evoked the notion of the "Japanese family," (the three generational co-residing household *sansedai katei* 三世代家庭) as solution to the aging problem (Garon 1997: 225). However, while the number of three-generation co-resident households, is still relatively high in comparison with other developed countries, it continues to shrink each year. While the three-generation co-residing household, used by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare to track changes in the life-style of the elderly, is not identical to the *ie*, it implies a model of a tightly linked, ordered household that conforms to the *ie*.

In Kyoto, many elderly people I spoke with lived with or very near to adult children or other close relatives. While many elderly people spoke of this arrangement as ideal, this was contingent on the nature of relationships in the family, which were never taken for granted. At the day service center where I volunteered, family relations were a common subject of conversation. In one instance a blind woman at the center mentioned that she lives with one of her four sons and that they ate meals together. At this, another woman at the table, who is 99 years old, said that she lives alone, since her husband and daughter have passed away. She tells me that living alone isn't very hard, and adds that maybe it would be for a man, but not for a woman. Mainly she counts on her relationships with neighbors to help her out. The others at the table were supportive of both models of dependence. However, the woman who lives alone then told a story that everyone agreed was the worst case.

She said that she knows a woman who lives with her only son, but they live completely separate. She takes her meals in her own room and the children even lock her out of their rooms. They even go on vacations without telling her, and once when they went on a vacation to Okinawa, she passed away. They talk about this case for some time, repeating the details for some of the more forgetful people, and it seems evident that what these women feared most was not necessarily physical separation from their children, but emotional separation. They feared an old age where relationships were structured by obligation rather than by affection.

In 1956, Fumio Niwa wrote in his story, “The Hateful Age,” about a family struggling to care for a senile and infirm mother. At one point, the son of the old woman contemplates the emotional burden to conform to the principles of the *ie*:

There was hardly a family in Japan that did not suffer from the system in which old people had to be either cared for by their children or committed to primitive and sinister institutions. People had been complaining for years, but the traditional family system still lingered on, with all its inefficiency, hypocrisy, sentimentality, and injustice. It was high time for something to be done—not by sociologists, but by people all over Japan who were themselves suffering from these anachronistic traditions. (Niwa: 1956: 340)

This story is, in a sense, still being played out. But where Niwa was writing at a time where less than 5% of the population was over the age of 65, today that number is over 20%. Although fewer young-old reside with their children, as parents grow older and more dependent, it remains the responsibility of the family to bear the burden.

Bearing the Burden: Obasuteyama in Contemporary Japan

Modern tales of elder abuse, neglect and even murder are frequently seen in Japanese newspapers. In a 2004 study of elder abuse conducted by Japan’s Ministry of

Health and Welfare, half of the respondents between the ages of 75 and 85 reported incidences of abuse resulting in detrimental mental or health effects (AS 20 April 2004). Equally unsettling is that according to the same study, 88% of “care-managers” assigned to monitor the health and safety of older adults in the home, reported that even though they knew that someone was being abused, they felt that they did not have the means to rectify the situation. Given the difficulty of collecting data on such matters because of the shame of being abused, it is safe to assume that the actual number of abused and neglected elderly is much higher. The most frequently cited cause of elder abuse, neglect or murder is determined as “caregiver stress” (*kaigo tsukare* 介護疲れ), a combination of physical, emotional and financial stress incurred from the devotion to elder care, and the most common perpetrators are the children of the victims.

In one incident, a 66 year old, unemployed man in Aichi Prefecture had beat his 88 year-old mother-in-law to death in his house (AS 16 January 2006). The victim suffered from senile dementia and had moved in with her daughter and son-in-law (the murderer) only one month earlier. “I was sick of taking care of my mother-in-law so I hit her. I hit her, then I got drunk and went to sleep,” the man confessed. Only 3 days later, the Asahi News reported of another incident, in which a woman (44) strangled her mother (71) to death. When she turned herself in, she told police, “I was tired from taking care of her. I don’t have any job. I was worried about my future.” The two lived alone together, the daughter responsible for her bed-ridden mother’s constant care (AS 19 January 2006).

In these accounts, the pattern of the murderers turning themselves in shortly after the crime is not uncommon. In one case reported on at length by NHK television news,

an Osaka man killed his seventy year old mother by strangling her in 2003 after four years of caring for her. The man confessed to the police a few hours after. In this case, the son, who had inherited a sizable debt when his father passed away, eventually had to forfeit his own job, in order to care for his mother. Eventually, according to his care manager, he had only enough money to buy one lunchbox a day, feeding his mother first, and eating the leftovers himself. Although he tried to take her to a day service type nursing care facility, his mother would have wild outbreaks and tantrums exacerbated by her dementia. She displayed a similar excited state when attended to a home helper. While this extreme filial devotion seems completely contradictory to the gruesome nature of crime, it begins to make sense when we consider the themes of the *obasute* story. It is as if in the son's mind, his mother's attachment to the world caused an immoral disruption of the way things are supposed to be. Abandonment, although morally ambiguous, became the last viable option, the last gift that he could grant her.

These are obviously extreme cases of what is happening to elder care in Japan. They not only point to the fact that in-home care places an enormous burden on families, but also that abandonment or similar retribution for the involuntary process of old age decline, remains a potent idea in Japan today. Resources supplemental healthcare are too often unaffordable, inaccessible, or otherwise seen as out of reach.

One point worth some discussion is the fact that the abandoned person is usually depicted as an old woman, rather than an old man. This is true for both the *obasuteyama* story as well as most of the media accounts that I found of neglect, abuse and homicide. Certainly one reason is that there are simply more elderly women in Japan, the life-

expectancy for women being much higher than men. However, looking at the *obasuteyama* story again suggests other reasons for this recurrent narrative of the family.

Yamaori (1997) recognizes three principle roles for old women, or *rōjo* 老女: the “*yamamba*” 山姥, a demon-like mountain woman; the “*ouna*” 女, a pleasant farmer woman who plays the counterpart to an old man; and the woman from *obasuteyama*, who is depicted as neither good nor bad, but rather confused and pitiful. *Obasuteyama* is elaborating on one of the classic depictions of old women, one that emphasizes her dependence, her conflict with her daughter-in-law, and her attachment to worldly things. The *obasuteyama* tale also points out the ambivalence regarding women, and mothers in particular.

The ambivalence towards mothers and its resolution in strong attachment, is reflected in the theory of the “Ajase Complex,” developed by Kosawa Heisaku, a Japanese psychoanalyst and contemporary of Freud (Ozawa-de Silva 2007:421-424). In the story, Ajase’s mother attempts to kill her child in her anger over losing her husband in accordance with a prophecy about the child’s birth. Ajase does not die, and when he has grown, and realizes his mother’s betrayal, he tries to kill her. He fails as well, and the mother and son resolve their guilt by forgiving each other.

The gist of the Ajase complex is that mother and son (in the absence of a male guardian) are bonded together through mutual guilt. Ozawa de-Silva explains,

In Kosawa’s interpretation, the reason Ajase becomes angry at his mother is not merely the fact that she tried to kill him, but more importantly, the fact that this shatters his illusion of her as an idealized asexual mother. Instead, it becomes clear to him that she is a sexual woman who was more concerned about losing the affection of her husband than about the welfare of her own child...Kosawa was firm in his belief that both psychological and physical separation from one’s mother and the resulting hatred and

resent meant toward one's mother is the source of depression, anxiety, and other psychiatric disorders among Japanese (Ozawa-de Silva 423)

Maternal attachment, whether comparable to the psychodynamics of the Ajase complex or some other model of close child-mother socialization (Allison 1996), finds obstacles in later life, either because the old mother has become burdensome, or, as the *obasute* tale suggests, because the son's attentions have turned to his wife. The result of this conflict is emotional ambivalence towards mothers—the son wants to be dependent on her, but also discard her and become independent.



Fig 7.1 Mother and Child in a poster tacked onto a private home. The last part of the inscription reads: “Before you scold your child, hug him or her tightly, until their smile returns.”

The attachment between mothers and sons is one explanation of why the *obasute* tale is so salient for Japanese audiences, but several other associations between women and the other world suggest that the relationship is over-determined⁶⁷. Women marrying into another household, for example, are socialized to their new household's traditions by their mothers-in-law, which makes veneration of the ancestors an important way of integrating oneself in the family and a possible site of breeding resentment towards the older women of the house (Masuda 1975: 10; Ooms 1978; Plath 1980: 148-149). Recall that in Zeami's version of the story, and in others, it is the son's wife who convinces the son to abandon the old woman.

The fact that daughters-in-law are socialized to respect the family may be one reason why several of my informants agreed that the realm of the *butsudan* 仏壇, which is the realm of the family dead, is associated with women, while the *kamidana* 神棚 is associated with men. Smith (1974) points out, because women are usually the ones preparing the offerings of tea and rice for the altar, they are also the most likely to make those offerings, since food preparation is usually a woman's job. This is not to say that older Japanese men do not also associate their old age with the threat of abandonment, but rather that because of the reasons stated above, they do not have as deep of an association with the themes of dependence, abandonment and the family. Lebra (1979) found that older women tended to defer dependence by withdrawing from responsibility:

⁶⁷ In the Freudian sense, rather than the Althusserian sense.

How are they going to manage [old age], I asked. My question was usually brushed off, evaded, or responded to with reluctance or irritation. . . 'I don't think I'll be left alone dying in the wilderness. Somebody will take care of me'; My children are saying, 'Don't worry'. The predominant attitude is twofold: avoidance of facing a denigrating, senile self-image, and transference of the decision-making responsibility from self to children. (Lebra 1979 :341)

Summary

In this chapter I have briefly described how the concept of the family was formalized in pre-war Japan as the *ie*, and how this ideal has unraveled in the post-war years. Close interdependent relationships that were taken for granted in the past, due to co-residence, are not usually maintained in modern household arrangements. When households do attempt to care for elderly parents, conflicts occur, and relationships are strained.

The following case study focuses on relationships in the family, shame and fear of abandonment in old age. While it is not a case of actual abandonment, it is the anticipation of abandonment, even in the lives of the healthy elderly that I claim motivates attachment to ancestors. In this case, attachment to ancestors, and the ritual expression of this, begins with an attachment to a symbolic object that, while somewhat removed from the person's current life, provides a bridge to other forms of ancestor memorial that in the end return to the issue of families, both past and present.

Chapter 8: Ogawa-san (79)

Love-Objects and Spirit-Objects

The identities of the spirits of the deceased exist not only in the memories of the living, but also in objects that were important to the deceased. Although the origins of this belief are unclear, it seems to be consistent with animistic beliefs of Gods and ancestors inhabiting natural objects, as well as aesthetic values that emphasize the expression of the artist's "spirit" in their work⁶⁸. As a result, these spirit-infused objects are to be accorded respect and gratitude in the same manner as living persons and ancestors.

The most common object said to contain the spirit of the living is a Japanese doll. Japanese dolls are considered to easily absorb human emotions and the human spirit of those who care for them. In doll-making, particularly making dolls for the annual "girl's festival or *hina Matsuri* ひな祭り, each doll has its head ceremoniously fitted on, imbuing it with its spirit. People find it difficult to dispose of these dolls in the same way as common garbage, preferring, if possible, to take them to a temple or shrine that performs a "doll offering" ceremony⁶⁹. The Japan Times noted that in 2005, an estimated 38,000 dolls were ritually disposed of at Meiji Shrine in central Tokyo, alone (*JT* 15 October 2006). Although some Japanese believe that without proper rites, the spirit in

⁶⁸ Matsunaga (1966), describing the religious sentiment of pre-Buddhist Japan notes that "the unity of the nature cult and ancestor cult form the basis underlying Japanese society and in the dynamic development of both, the highest power of nature, forming an organism beyond the simply human domain" (205)

⁶⁹ Dolls can also be fearsome as a result of their uncanny, or otherworldly spiritedness. Tales abound of dolls whose hair grows or who come alive at night.

the doll would take revenge on the living, most simply state that they'd feel sorry for the doll if there were no burial rite.

One of my informants who owned a traditional Japanese doll that she kept in a glass case told me that she intends to take it to Hōkyō Temple 宝鏡寺, which has earned the name “Temple of Dolls” for the prominence of their doll rituals. When I asked her as to why she would take it to a temple, rather than giving it to her grand-daughter or another relative, she told me that her grand-daughter isn't really interested in dolls and might not take care of it. She considered it comforting to attend to the last rites of her precious doll, to whom she had offered small glasses of water (serving the practical purpose of humidifying the enclosed display case), rather than be uncertain about its fate in the ownership of someone else, even another family member.

Dolls are not the only objects that may receive rites as a way of comforting the spirits. Shinto shrines throughout Japan, for example, have developed rites to express gratitude to a host of everyday objects, from sewing needles to credit cards⁷⁰. It is reasoned that since these objects gave benefit to their owners, and have thus contributed in some way to their prosperity, they should be accorded respect, and recognition. This may seem odd at first, since it is hard to imagine these objects as vehicles for deities (in the way that natural objects or even dolls might be), nor are their previous owners (whose use of them somehow transferred vital energy) deceased, in most cases. So where does their “life” come from?

⁷⁰ Needle *kuyō* is popular all over Japan, and occurs once a year on February 8th or December 8th depending on region. The credit card *kuyō* is a more limited service, and I know at least one shrine in Kyoto, Ichihime Shrine 市比売神社 performs this ceremony once a year in February.

When we consider that one of the fundamental characteristics of ancestor veneration in Japan is that it reproduces and reaffirms the interdependence between the living, the phenomenon of ceremonial object dedication can be analogously understood. That is, if we consider that each object has a kind of genealogy, then the object is also an important symbol of all those living people who contributed to its creation. Expressions of gratitude honoring an object recognize the interdependence between the user, object, and those who made that object available.

Purification is not entirely absent in rites for objects, especially those whose owners are deceased. Shinto Shrines and Buddhist Temples that receive objects for ritual disposal most often symbolically purify/destroy them in a bonfire ceremony. In this sense, the ceremonies follow a pattern identical to mortuary rites, or the disposal of memorial tablets or domestic altars. Unlike mortuary rites, however, subsequent memorials are not required, nor is there the concept that the object is dangerous or polluting⁷¹.

Objects that are considered an important part of the identity of a deceased family member may also receive special rites. The purpose of these rites is similar to other ancestor memorial rites in that living descendants are caring for the dead. In addition, they bear a resemblance to other object dedication rites, in that they express gratitude and interdependence with an imagined genealogy of the object itself.

Naturally, not all the objects that belonged to the deceased are accorded ritual disposal. Some objects are put inside the casket with the deceased during cremation

⁷¹ An exception to this is when the object to be dedicated somehow contributed to a violent or 'unnatural' death, such as the dagger used in ritual suicide.

(things that the deceased will take along to the other world)⁷², while others may be kept by the bereaved and set at a special shrine. At one household shrine I observed, the recently deceased's photograph was surrounded by several personal items, including the deceased's eyeglasses, fan, hat and a bowl of playing pieces for the game *go* (Fig 8.1).



Fig 8.1 a shrine set in the alcove next to the domestic altar dedicated to a recently deceased man.

As time passes and other family members die, it is likely that the shrine will be removed, and some of these sentimental objects will be stored (perhaps in the cabinet underneath the *butsudan*), or disposed of. Objects that bear the name of the deceased, and which

⁷² The informant in this case study told me that it was once a common practice for women in Japan to save the umbilical cord of their child, and have it placed in their casket before cremation (although she admits that at the time of her mother's death the whereabouts of the cord were forgotten). The umbilical cord would serve as proof of childbirth, and earn the mother a favorable rebirth in the other world. Women who did not bear children would be reborn in one of the less favorable realms of the other world, such as that of ghosts, hell-beings or animals. This story was corroborated one other elderly woman I spoke with, but the source of the practice is unclear.

indicate special accomplishments or honors earned by the deceased seem to be the most likely candidates for ritual disposal at temples and shrines. Other objects, after the passage of time, may be put back into use.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss the ritual disposal of a spiritually potent object (a short sword, or dagger) that was in the possession of one of my close informants, whom I will call Ogawa-san. This ritual is interesting not only because it reveals Ogawa-san's beliefs concerning the spirits, but also because it provided an occasion to consult with a Buddhist priest and to visit the family grave. I argue that the juxtaposition of these other practices with the ceremony for the object is significant, and indicates an internal association of what may seem like entirely separate events. For Ogawa-san, the primary basis of association between these events is the need to manage old age as she experiences it in terms of loss, abandonment and shame in her family.

First, I will describe the period before the ceremony, which brought important aspects of Ogawa-san's personality to light. Second, I will briefly describe the ceremony for disposing of the dagger, the consultation with the priest, and the grave visit that followed. Next, I will relate the sentiments and concerns expressed during the ceremony to the personality of Ogawa-san by reviewing some themes from her life-history. Lastly, I will explain the relationship between Ogawa-san's life and her personality, her experience of growing old, her relationships to her family members and ultimately the role of religious practice in her life.

Discovering a Dagger in a Haystack

All during the fall and winter of 2005, Ogawa-san was busy with the process of moving. As this was the first time in about sixty years that she has moved, the task was tremendous. At the time, Ogawa-san lived with her daughter in a two-story house not far from Kyoto's city center. The house was arranged in a layout typical of many traditional *machiya*, with rooms for receiving guests in the front of the house, a garden near the rear, and more private quarters on the second floor. On one side of the house there was a long narrow kitchen and a hallway that led to the bathroom at the rear of the house. Stepping up from the entrance way, one entered a receiving room, with an alcove for important items and the family *butsudan*. Because of the clutter, this room was no longer functional for guests, I was usually ushered back to the dining room, one wall of which was lined with a large china cabinet brimming over with plates and glasses. A square table, covered with a weathered, slightly yellowing plastic cover was set in the center, and the recessed floor underneath allowed one's legs to rest comfortably. In the winter, a heater was placed underneath, providing warmth in the drafty wooden house. The table was usually littered with scraps of paper, teacups and cutlery, which Ogawa-san would often fuss over, but rarely tidy up, perhaps for fear of losing something important. Behind the dining area was one more room filled with books, boxes and an old piano. Each of the rooms was divided by removable sliding paper doors.

The dining room where we usually conducted our interviews, had no less than six calendars hung around it, some of them outdated but displayed nonetheless. The telephone rested on a portable shelf unit that was overflowing with various bills, letters

and scrap papers. Whenever Ogawa-san wanted to illustrate something for me, or clarify Chinese characters, she would lean over and ruffle through this shelf, finding a blank scrap to write on before placing it back in the shelf.

Ogawa-san lives with her second of three daughters, who at the time was forty years old and working at an information technology company. When this daughter became engaged in early 2005, plans were quickly made to purchase a larger house, where Ogawa-san, her daughter, and the new son-in-law could live together. The actual moving process began in the fall of 2005. Ogawa-san's daughter was married in late November of 2005, but the move continued for another three months, until the end of February 2006.

Ogawa-san, who at the time of the move was seventy-nine years old, staunchly refused to hire a moving company. Her reason for this was that she believed that they would throw away things that were important to her, thinking that it was garbage. Her daughters objected strongly to this decision, but Ogawa-san was persistent, and eventually the daughters were forced to acquiesce. Ogawa-san did receive considerable help from friends and relatives during the move, including a young woman whom she taught to tie the complicated kimono sash, a man who owned a local antique shop, and several neighbors. Despite all of her help, since Ogawa-san insisted on examining each object herself before it was boxed, in order to sort out the trash from the treasures, the move was a long and tedious process.

Ogawa-san's house was exceedingly cluttered (Fig 8.2), due largely to her tendency to acquire items on a whim and keep them well past their usefulness. For example, although only Ogawa-san and her daughter were the only people living in the

house, there were at least fifteen umbrellas speared into a bucket by the door and many more throughout the house. The entryway to the kitchen, long fallen into disuse was bricked up by shoeboxes full of shoes, many never even worn. In her front garden were easily more than fifty potted plants, most of which were only weeds. Nonetheless, Ogawa-san was sure not to empty any of the pots, even though many seemed to contain only dirt, and had the pots carefully moved to her neighbor's yard, in case they could use them. This job alone, given to the anthropologist, took an entire afternoon.



Fig 8.2 Ogawa-san's house during the move. The house was perpetually in this state for at least three months. Paper and plastic bags shown in this photo are one of the most hoarded items for Ogawa-san

Even the six large camellia trees in her yard were pulled up and offered to neighbors. Two of these trees were donated to the temple where Ogawa-san has her family grave. This job required hiring a specialist to wrap the root ball, and then several other people to lift and move the trees.

Ogawa-san's "pack-rat" pattern of accumulating objects fits the psychological description of "hoarding" (Frost and Gross 1993; Frost et al. 1996). Hoarders accumulate things of little or no use, or, as in the case with the umbrellas and shoes, useful items in vastly exaggerated quantities. They also have a more difficult time than most people in disposing of objects, and when this is done, it is often accompanied by a degree of ceremony. Although hoarders save, they are not necessarily stingy; one of the rationales for hoarding is that the objects might be useful to someone else. As noted above, Ogawa-san was very generous and often sent me home with objects that she had come across during the course of the move. This generosity, however does not contradict a need to control, since objects were never simply handed over to strangers, but carefully chosen acquaintances.

Although I am hesitant to label or diagnose Ogawa-san conclusively, research regarding hoarders and other obsessive compulsive disorders does give important insight into the world that she inhabits. Hoarders are generally described as indecisive perfectionists, and according to the study conducted by Frost and Gross (1993),

Self-identified hoarders reported higher level of emotional attachment to their possessions. For instance, they indicated feelings of loss when throwing things away. They reported that they loved some belongings the way they love some people to a greater extent than nonhoarders . . . Saving possessions may allow the hoarder to avoid the negative emotional consequences of parting with a cherished object. (1993:380-381)

Hoarders are also more likely than other obsessive persons to be unaware of the severity of their symptoms, usually rationalizing their behavior as practical or useful (Frost and Gross 1993: 380). Ogawa-san's common response to questions about saving, for example, was to recall the deprivation during the later stages of WWII and the irresponsibility of younger people's consumption and waste. While her rationale might

seem reasonable at first, the tremendous piles of objects and papers literally filling whole rooms of Ogawa-san's small apartment clearly indicate to me that her strategy had become maladaptive long ago. I will return to Ogawa-san's hoarding tendency later in this chapter, but for the time being, it is enough to recognize that, at least during the move, it was affecting her health as well as her family relationships.

From November 2005 to February 2006, the moving process dominated Ogawa-san's days. The stress of the move reduced her appetite and caused insomnia, as well as other mild effects on her health. Ogawa-san complained of losing weight and being in constant pain throughout her body. The floors of the house became covered with bags and boxes overflowing with various remnants, and a pile of dirty dishes filled the sink. Ogawa-san was clearly suffering psychologically as well as physically. Not only was she moving from a house that she had lived in most of her life, but she was also moving in with a new son-in-law that she was not particularly fond of, and anticipating friction once the move was complete. Ogawa-san would often stay awake, packing well past midnight, and resume packing again at dawn.

The main sources of Ogawa-san's stress during the days of the move were the arguments and fights with her daughters who had come to help. Ogawa-san's daughters see their mother's hoarding as an effect of her stubborn and senile character, and Ogawa-san is constantly forced to defend her affections for the objects that she refuses to part with. Not only was Ogawa-san in a constant state of reminiscence and mourning over these objects, but adding salt to the wound was the fact that this sentiment found no sympathy from her children.

One day, when I was helping out with the move, Ogawa-san's eldest daughter was visiting. Even in her mother's presence, the daughter loudly chastised what she saw as her mother's irrational behavior, shouting, "I don't know why you have to keep all this garbage! You can't take it with you when you die! A person should have fewer things so that they can appreciate them more! The only suitcase you take with you when you die is your body! Oh I don't want to become an old lady like you!" Ogawa-san, who was preparing some tea for me, meekly replied, "Young people think that everything they say is right. But it isn't all the time." At this, the daughter simply rolled her eyes. I don't doubt that the daughter has heard similar things many times before. Looking at the small *kamidana* resting on a nearby shelf, the daughter, exasperated, resumed shouting:

"There's no way that the *kami* are going to come to this house because it is so dirty!"

Among Ogawa-san's most precious possessions were the many objects from her youth, such as old school papers, and objects that belonged to her parents or grandparents. Her father, for example, was a collector of various stationary and office tools, such as rulers and compasses. Her mother left behind a box of old kimono collars, many of them now stained and tattered. Months before the move, Ogawa-san complained that her daughter wanted these objects thrown out, since they held no use and were not even nice to look at. To Ogawa-san, however, these things held strong sentimental attachments. These objects, once gathered, filled several boxes, and were later transported to the new house. Several others, however, were offered to shrines and temples. The objects that were given to the shrines and temples were not only important objects that once belonged to her parents, but they were also, importantly, inscribed with the names of their owners. Ogawa's mother, for example, had several wooden plaques that were awarded to her as

degrees in flower arrangement. Rather than take these to the new home, pass them on to her children, or simply discard them, Ogawa-san took them to a local shrine to be ritually disposed of. Ogawa-san believed that these objects contained an essence of the person whose name was inscribed on them, and therefore, as a kind of secondary mortuary ritual, they required special care. Similar rituals were not to be performed for the various nostalgic remnants left by her father. One reason for this may be that her father was baptized as a Catholic, and his remains are interred in a Catholic mortuary. As Catholic churches do not perform such rituals for the objects of the deceased, Ogawa-san had no other recourse but to retain them, and transport them to her new home.

As I was finishing a day's work of moving potted plants, Ogawa-san drew me close to show me something that she had come across in the process of the move. It was a short dagger, the handle missing and the blade now rusted, that belonged to her mother's father's brother. As she showed me the dagger, which was wrapped in white cloth, she explained that it was a marker of status in the Edo period, and that he was a very important man, trusted with the care of a powerful lord. According to Ogawa-san, when her great-uncle failed to help cure his master's illness, he committed ritual suicide (using a different blade). Ogawa-san had never known this person, but the stories about his life and his official prominence in her family's household made her careful about disposing of his belongings. At first, she tried to give the dagger to one of her relatives, she explained, but none of them knew what to do with it and refused to take care of it. Ogawa-san then decided to take it to her parish shrine, a rather renowned one, but found out that it no longer accepts objects for ritual disposal. Finally, she asked the priest at the Buddhist temple where her ancestors' graves are located. The temple agreed to take the

knife and conduct a ceremony for its interment. Ogawa-san invited me to come along and observe the ceremony.

Burying the Dagger

Although Ogawa-san's sentimentality for objects has, in part, resulted in a pattern of obsessive hoarding, it also resonated with the sentiment towards objects described , at the earlier, where a special object and its genealogy have come to represent the dead themselves. The ceremony could be seen as a way in which Ogawa-san both relieves some of her anxiety regarding disposal, and at the same time engages in valuable cultural behaviors. What I did not realize or expect at the time, was the degree to which the ritual would be associated with broader concerns about aging and family.

The day of the ceremony was a cool but sunny January day. I called out a few times to the temple staff, but did not expect an answer. After a few moments however, I was greeted and ushered into a small consultation room lined with bookshelves with various scholarly and popular works on Buddhism. On top of the shelves are a few fake flowers and a ceramic tray with a couple of cups on it.

Ogawa-san arrived soon afterwards, bringing with her a relative, whom she introduced as her younger cousin. The cousin had come from several hours away by train to visit Ogawa-san and to be present during this ceremony. The two women stood about the same height, but the resemblance ended there. Ogawa-san seemed smaller, frail and anxious, while her cousin was both elegant and healthy. Both affected a deferential tone, towards the temple staff, and Ogawa-san turned the dagger, still wrapped in white cloth

over to a woman working at the temple, explaining that she is here for the dedication ceremony.

When we were seated in the consultation room, Ogawa-san takes out some photos of her mother and father which she had found while moving, and had brought to share with her cousin who she had not seen in a great while. One photo shows Ogawa-san as an infant with her mother, dressed in kimono. Another picture shows her parents and some family members at Ogawa-san's household grave, a huge stone, standing as tall as the people posed around it. Ogawa-san explains that the grave is in the mountains and a little hard to get to, so it was eventually moved into the city, to a more accessible site. Another reason the grave was moved is that Ogawa-san worries about burglars who target people who visit these remote mountain graves. Ogawa-san explains to the staff that the second son of the family originally took the dagger, but that it was then given to her when he died, and although there may be a main family (*honke*) descendent, she doesn't know them, and so she has asked if they can inter it at this temple.

We are given a signal by the staff, and Ogawa-san, her cousin and I shuffle to the temple's main sanctuary where the abbot, a man easily in his eighties, with a smooth bald head and long white eyebrows, is sitting on a red cushioned chair in the center of the hall. He is dressed in ceremonial garb consisting of a gold top coat and ornately embroidered vestments. A large statue of the Kannon, alongside other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas looms over us. The priest sits between the statues and us, next to a book support for his ritual text and a variety of bells and drums.

After Ogawa-san says a few words to the priest, she begins the ritual, stepping forward to a small table where incense is smoldering in a censer. She raises a pinch of

incense to her forehead, adding it to the incense already smoldering in a censer, and then bows with her hands together. Her cousin follows suit, and then I am motioned to go forward and do the same. The act of offering incense is an integral part of rituals for the dead, especially during memorial services and funerals (see Chapter 3). After offering incense, we sit again at the back of the hall, while the priest recites verses for about twenty minutes.

Although it is difficult to clearly hear or decipher the meaning of the chanting, there does not seem to be any specific reference to the dagger or to the ancestor that once held the dagger. Rather, this seemed to be a generic ceremony for the comforting of the ancestors (*hōyō* 法要). In fact, the dagger is not even present during the ceremony, or viewed at anytime afterwards. The dagger's disposal was, in a sense, accomplished as soon as Ogawa-san entered the temple and handed it over to the temple staff. The ceremony, on the other hand, served the purpose of acknowledging the remembrance of the ancestors. During the ceremony, Ogawa-san, her cousin and I sit in the back of the room, silent and observant. The clanging of bells and gongs that accompany the chanting during the ceremony is jarring at times, and I am thankful when it ends and the priest swivels around to face us.

The priest bows to us before giving a short, ten minute sermon, markedly similar to the one he gave several months earlier at the *higan* memorial services I attended with Ogawa-san in October. Despite his age, the priest's voice is extremely animated and he warbles about his experiences seeing demons and ghosts around the temple. Ogawa-san told me on an earlier occasion that one of the reasons she respects this priest and chose to have her ancestors' graves relocated there, is that she believes the priest to have a strong

sense of the supernatural world (*reikan* 霊感) as well as a skill for divination. Ogawa-san herself likes to dabble in Chinese astrology. Several times during the course of our conversations, and once during an interview, Ogawa-san would suddenly take out a tattered book of astrological charts and diagrams and turned her analysis on me.

As the priest finishes and stands up, Ogawa-san and her cousin approach him to express their gratitude and briefly discuss the circumstance of the dagger with him. Ogawa-san speaks with great relief as she explains the situation to the priest, thanking him repeatedly for taking care of the dagger when no one else could. She also mentions that the remains of the dagger's owner are not in the grave at the temple grounds, but that he is nonetheless a relative, and hopes that all of this is not too much trouble to the temple. Ogawa-san then mentions that the owner of the dagger committed suicide, but is sure to quickly add that this dagger was not the one used to do it.

Walking back to the reception room, Ogawa-san and her cousin both say that they feel "relieved" (*anshin* 安心) and that they can now "relax" (*ochitsukemasu* 落ち着けます). Ogawa-san laughs in relief and turns to me saying "It is a mysterious thing, isn't it? *It's just not a good thing to keep leftover things in your heart (kokoro). It's different than when you're young! Life gets shorter...*" The cousin agrees and adds that when you get old, you don't know how much longer you'll be here, so you want to resolve these kinds of things quickly. The two laugh some more, and Ogawa-san tells me "this is the feeling (*kokoro*) when you get old."

Divining Abandonment

The ceremony complete, we are led again to the small consultation room and are joined soon afterwards by the priest who has removed his ceremonial garb and is dressed in a simple grey kimono and a black vest-like jacket. The priest asks after Ogawa-san's family, and Ogawa-san is especially happy that he remembers many details about her family. Ogawa-san mentions that moving home is tiring her out, and taking a toll on her health. She mentions the help that everyone has given her, turning to me and recalling the proverb "better to have strangers nearby than relatives far away." She explains her daughter's marriage situation and the son-in-law's association with Buddhism (he was born into a temple family). After several minutes of chatting around the subject, Ogawa-san's cousin finally mentions that they want to ask something of the priest. Ogawa-san then says that what she is worried about most these days is what will happen when she moves to the new house.

O: I'm going to be taken care of by my daughter...

Priest: She's getting married, and you're going with her, right? She's going to live with you, right?

O: Yes, but,

Cousin: They're going to be living together...

P: So will things go well there or not...?

O: No, no, I'm an old lady, so that's not an issue! (laughs)

C: (laughing) Oh! you shouldn't call yourself that!

P: Oh, you're not an old lady...(laughs)

- O: Oh, but I don't want to live a long life and be a upsetting everyone!
(laughs) If I live to long!
- C: [to priest] Really, if you could help...
- P: I see... (gets up and leaves the room)

The exchange is filled with nervous laughter, and all three frequently speak over each other. In other words, it was anything but the formal and reverential ceremony conducted for the dagger. The majority of the laughter concerned jokes about old age and dependence, things that are often strongly associated in Japan with feelings of shame.

The priest comes back soon afterward with his divining tools: a black ceramic tortoise with a holder on its back from which several long, thin wooden sticks protrude. In addition, he has a wooden box holding six black wooden sticks with indentations in the middle of each. This kit of divination tools is a version of the Chinese Yijing oracle, referred to as the “yarrow stalk method” (*I Ching* 1967 [1950]: 721-724) (Fig 8.3).



Fig 8.3 Priest conducts a divination consultation for Ogawa-san

He takes out the black sticks and lines them up to his left. These would keep track of the rune formed by successive readings of the stalks. He then asks Ogawa-san once more about her family situation and other aspects of the move. When he realizes that Ogawa-san is moving in with her daughter, and that the son-in-law's parents live separately, he tells her at first that there shouldn't be a problem. Ogawa-san, however, persists, telling him that there are "other matters," and that "young people have different ways of thinking these days." The priest resumes, taking up the long sticks in his hands, mixing and shuffling them around, then holding them still while he closes his eyes in concentration, his jaws visibly clench now and then. He then takes one of the sticks and holds it in front of the others, then threads it between the others, separating the bulk of the sticks, setting them on the tortoise's head. He takes up another one and then counts out the sticks, three times, two sticks at a time, opens his eyes and moves the black blocks right or left depending on the reading. We are all silent while he repeats this procedure until the reading is complete, which takes about five minutes.

Finally, the priest turns to us and says with a pensive voice, "Well, I can't say that there won't be any problems, but...anyway, you can't acquiesce to everything that your daughter tells you. If you don't voice your own opinions there may be problems." He studies the results again and adds "how is the father [of the son-in-law]?" Ogawa-san replies that he is 63, but has been having blood transfusions for nearly 31 years. The son-in-law is the third son, and that is why he hasn't taken over his family's temple. The priest takes in this information and resumes the divination procedure.

“Oh this doesn’t look good [for the father-in-law]...” the priest finally says. Ogawa-san adds that the father is born in the year of the lamb, and that this year is not particularly auspicious. The priest tells her that he doesn’t put much faith in years.

Suddenly, Ogawa-san says, “If I live too long, if I live too long I feel I’ll be trouble for the family [my daughter married into]...Next year I’ll be 80, so maybe after six or seven years is fine for me! Living too long is difficult!” The priest offers some last words of consolation, but no specific advice, and Ogawa-san thanks him for his help.



Fig 8.4 Ogawa-san bowing in front of her family grave

Finally Ogawa-san, her cousin and I make a visit to the family grave (Fig 8.4), located in the cemetery behind temple. Ogawa-san has forgotten to bring flowers, and purchases a few branches of evergreen leaves and some incense sticks from a table sitting just inside the temple’s entrance. As we enter the cemetery, I offer to fetch her bucket at the gate of the cemetery, labeled with her name (rather than the name of the family whose

grave we visit), and fill it up with water to wash the grave stones. At the grave, Ogawa-san washes each stone by spilling water on it with a plastic ladle. The last stone she washes is her mother's, which is set apart from the others and still very new. Ogawa-san's cousin then helps her place the evergreens in carved vessels set on either side of each stone. Ogawa-san lights some incense and squats before her mother's grave and whispers gently.

From the comments made by both Ogawa-san and her cousin, it would seem that the significance of the ceremony, divination and grave visit had something to do with the experience of growing old and possibly with the sense of one's proximity to death. As Ogawa-san's cousin noted, it may also have been a matter of trying to take care of things quickly before they get too old. On the surface, it may seem that these three distinct rituals had entirely separate meanings, and that they were simply done together for the sake of efficiency, or because the cousin was visiting.

Knowing something about Ogawa-san's life history, however, I argue that these three rituals are at least thematically similar, and that they attend to fears associated with growing old, such as fear of dependence, survivor shame and most of all, fear of being abandoned in one's last years. In order to understand the meaning of this ceremony, we need to examine some aspects of Ogawa-san's life history in greater detail.

Remembrance and the Family

Ogawa-san was born to a moderately wealthy family in Kyoto, the eldest of two girls. Her family was cultured and well-educated, and, as the discovery of the dagger suggests, had a prestigious pedigree. Ogawa-san's father was Catholic, and she and her

sister attended Catholic schools. Still, consistent with accounts by Smith (1974: 139-140), and others, they still made grave visitations on *Obon* and other Buddhist holidays, and although they did not have a Buddhist altar in their home when Ogawa-san was young. A memorial tablet was made for her mother when she died⁷³.

From the time of the war and afterwards, Ogawa-san suffered a serious health condition that made her chest depressed, and her lungs extremely weak. Her parents did their best to keep her happy and satisfied, not knowing when she might die. For nearly ten years, Ogawa-san was frequently in the hospital, eventually being treated by new medicine introduced from abroad. Ogawa-san's mother, however, died soon after Ogawa-san recovered her health. After years of receiving constant care from her mother, Ogawa-san now mourned her mother's death. Ogawa-san's illness, and its proximity to her own mother's illness, strongly affected Ogawa-san's personality from that moment onwards, instilling a deep feeling of painful guilt, shame and helplessness.

Ogawa-san's mother was the most prominent figure in the development of Ogawa-san's personality. Consequently, she is highly romanticized in Ogawa-san's recollections and the main spirit of Ogawa-san's ancestor memorial activities (Fig. 8.5). Ogawa-san's mother died of liver cancer when Ogawa-san was in her early twenties. Although Ogawa-san admits that the cause of the death was cancer, she blames the early demise of her mother on "mental strain," which she says affects the liver most of all.

⁷³ One Catholic couple Smith writes about explained that the reason that they had a memorial tablet made for the deceased grandfather of the wife was "we wanted to care for him in death as we simply could not do in life. We had a tablet made, of course. He is a Buddhist, after all." (1974: 139). Another second-hand account describes a Catholic woman who observes Buddhist rites for her mother. She explains that "had she predeceased her mother, that devout Buddhist lady would have had Catholic rites performed for her daughter." (1974: 140). What is interesting to note about these examples is that the rationale for the rites is the consideration for the will of the deceased, and the value of respecting that will in spite of one's own religious affiliation.

Ogawa-san describes her mother as “a considerably serious (*majime*) person” and “unusually lonely”. The latter description seems to refer to the fact that Ogawa-san’s grandmother (her mother’s mother) died only a year after giving birth to Ogawa-san’s mother, who was thereafter raised by her own grandmother. There is therefore a pattern in Ogawa-san’s maternal line of women dying with young children, which, considering the difficulties of child-birth at the time, is not entirely remarkable, but which no doubt leads Ogawa-san to reflect on her own fate and its connection to having children of her own. Ogawa-san told me that after she recovered and married, all of her family were surprised that she was healthy enough to have four children of her own.



Fig 8.5 Ogawa-san’s *butsudan*. The single tablet for her mother is surrounded by offerings of fruit and camellia blossoms. Other important objects are placed to the side.

As Ogawa-san’s mother was a Buddhist, the standard Buddhist memorial rites are held for her and her ancestors. The small cupboard size *butsudan* that Ogawa-san keeps is solely devoted to her mother, with no other memorial tablets or objects of any sort enshrined. In a separate, even smaller wooden cabinet is a small statue of Kannon, who is generally believed to look after the spirits of children. This statue belonged to Ogawa-

san's mother, (a gift from a family friend) and was slightly damaged from Ogawa-san playing with it as a child. During the move, Ogawa-san decorated her *butsudan* with camellia blossoms, an unusual flower for the dead, since the blossoms drop off whole, and therefore have associations with dying suddenly. The Camellias, however, were from the trees that Ogawa-san had dug up from her front yard and given away. Therefore the flowers can be seen as another possible association between loss, moving and memorial of her mother.

In describing her feelings towards ancestor memorial, Ogawa-san makes specific references to her mother:

O: Because I don't have my mother, that's why I go to the temple, I go to the graves... that's human feeling (*ninjō* 人情), isn't it? You feel sentimental for those who have gone away...

And in another interview:

O: Anyway, you miss (*natsukashii* 懐かしい) the deceased. A lot of things have happened. We ask for things, we depend on them for everything, we tell them everything...

J: They are “nostalgic” (*natsukashii*)?

O: Well first of all, *your mother is still living, so you wouldn't think this way. Of course, when she dies, well, your mother takes care of you so and so forth—‘Oh, she did this for me, she did that for me...’ you remember a lot of things, right? ...*

This last transcript posed some difficulty in the translation, since the word *natsukashii* can have different meanings depending on the context. It means both to “miss something” or to be “nostalgic” or “sentimental” (Ivy 1995:55-59). Either way, although Ogawa-san is not talking about her mother in particular, the way in which Ogawa-san

explains her motivation to care for the ancestors does frequently involve reference to feelings anyone might have for their own mother: gratitude, shame and affection.

Ogawa-san often comments on the difficult life her mother led, and the effects this had on her health. She also shows a more romantic identification with her mother, who like Ogawa-san, was well educated in traditional Japanese arts. In fact, Ogawa-san's mother held several degrees in flower arrangement and left behind a large collection of kimono, a sign of refinement. Ogawa-san herself was quite fond of kimono, which she taught classes on, and learned other arts, such as calligraphy and the *koto* instrument in addition to classical piano and western-style oil painting. The attachment to and identification with her mother, (along with the fact that her father was Catholic), helps us understand why Ogawa-san places so much ritual attention solely on her mother, and her mother's family. The pity with which Ogawa-san speaks of her mother is no doubt a reflection of Ogawa-san's own self-pity in light of her relationship with her daughters. The characterization of her mother as sickly while still relatively young, is another important part of Ogawa-san's pattern of identification.

After Ogawa-san recovered from her illness, she married a woodworker and sculptor, who was a friend of her father, and with him had a son and three daughters. Before the last child was born, however, things in the marriage had already started to turn sour. The husband had initially been very successful in work, but as business began to slow down and he became an abusive alcoholic.

O: He was an alcoholic so, he got violent, you know? He would be violent in the house, when I would make food, I'd make dinner and he would take his cup and say 'what is this dinner?' and take the fry pan and hit me on the head . He was crazy... but of course

from his childhood, he was spoiled, and so he was used to getting his way...those people are all around nowadays.

After her divorce, Ogawa-san returned to live with her father, taking her three daughters with her, the youngest still less than a year old. The husband and the son stayed in a neighboring city and there was almost no contact between Ogawa-san and this son until relatively recently (after the ex-husband passed away). Ogawa-san raised the three girls by herself, and never remarried. Ogawa-san worked at part-time jobs (textile dying, kimono classes, a children's instructor, and working at day-care for a Catholic church) to help support the family and send the girls to school. Ogawa-san's father lived a long life, dying at the age of eighty-six. His funeral was held in the house in a Catholic ceremony.

Mother and Daughter Revisited

Despite being well-educated and worldly, Ogawa-san was apparently not particularly skilled at being a mother. As mentioned earlier, Ogawa-san and her daughters frequently argue with each other, a situation that is no doubt amplified by Ogawa-san's indecision and perfectionist tendencies together with an increasing forgetfulness as she ages. The eldest daughter was, and remains, the most aggressive towards her mother. The middle daughter, whom Ogawa-san lives with, has also often fought with her mother, but she is slightly more reserved. The youngest daughter's approach has been to ignore her mother, and while fights are uncommon, there is almost no communication occurs between them. The youngest would even prepare meals for herself, observing a "no-touch" policy. To the middle daughter, this is even worse than the violent arguments she and her older sister would have with their mother.

Returning to the ceremony, we recall that Ogawa-san's divination and consultation centered on the question of her relationship with her middle daughter, whom I will refer to as Masako-san. While the eldest and youngest daughters have long since moved away, Masako-san has taken it upon herself to care for her mother in her old age. Until now this care has largely been in the form of financial support, since Ogawa-san, who has never held full-time work for very long, receives only the minimum amount of pension benefits (about 20,000yen or \$220 USD each month). It is also clear that despite their differences, Masako-san feels a genuine obligation to look after her mother in other, more intimate ways. Masako-san's sense of obligation has developed throughout her lifetime, and it is evident from her highly polished narrative regarding her relationship with her mother, that she has integrated her role into her sense of identity as a moral daughter. Looking at Masako-san's narrative, together with Ogawa-san's own life-history is essential in understanding the dedication ceremony for the dagger.

Masako-san first describes her mother as a "princess":

M: She thinks a little like she's a princess. Because she was really a spoiled child. Her body was weak and her lungs were bad, she was really carefully brought up. Now she's in outer space! (laughs). It's like she's is from outer space! She's not realistic at all. So I think that as a friend she'd be really interesting.

J: How do you mean?

M: She knows all kinds of things. A lot of light things, art...authors, art, and she even plays piano. And then she knows about food. She knows a little French. So as a friend, talking with her would be really interesting, fun. If she were a friend. But as a parent, or family, well, there's a lot of problems...

Ogawa-san is not without faults, but she is well educated, and gains a certain kind of capital from this. Nevertheless, in the eyes for her daughter she falls far from the mark of

an ideal mother. Masako-san describes her mother as irresponsible, and ignorant of her own irresponsibility. During one interview, she described Ogawa-san this way:

M: For example, if when you make a cake, if I were making one, I'd mix and mix the water and egg and flour, and it's hard, really hard. Then after I'd carefully made the dough, I'd bake it, cool it, cut it, ice it, put on the decorations, all on my own. Then Mom would just come and plop a single strawberry, a single washed strawberry on top. That's it. She thinks that's her whole job- do you get it?

Almost comically, during one of my conversations with Masako-san, we were interrupted by Ogawa-san just as Mika was explaining her mother's lack of common sense:

M: Well, she's not the usual mother...

O: [from the other room suddenly enters] It's raining again isn't it!

M: Raining?

O: Oh, I thought that it was letting up, I looked over there and it seemed quiet so... It's cold in Kyoto isn't it?

M: [in a raised voice] NOBODY ASKED YOU, DID THEY?!

O: Oh, I'm sorry... you don't have to make fun....

M: You could at least KNOCK before you come in! Can't you do anything more than just say "I'm sorry?" WE HAVE A VISITOR HERE!

O: [leaving] well, well... I was just wondering where you went...

M: [turning again to me, frustrated] She still doesn't have it. She has no common sense!

Masako-san continues to tell me that she never learned basic things from her mother. It wasn't until she herself was older, and went out into the world that she started to realize that her mother was different than others'. It was her older classmates and work colleagues that taught her the proper way to cook, clean and so forth. When she realized

that her mother had never taught her these things she became terribly ashamed. This then became the source of the constant clashes that followed from her high school years through her early adulthood.

As Masako-san became an adult, however, her thinking about her mother has begun to change:

M: What I've come to see lately is that if I was her, I wouldn't know what to do. Well, her time in the hospital was long. Her time learning about the world, from the time she graduated college till her marriage was really short. She never went out into the world, even once. She didn't have any time to learn or even to notice. By that time, I've been out in the world for twelve years! Twelve years I've been aware of these things. But she hasn't had these twelve years, so I've realized that she just doesn't understand what she should do... There's no books on that sort of thing, right?... No wonder she doesn't know, right?

It is unclear as to whether Ogawa-san herself either recognizes or appreciates this change in her daughter's perspective. While Masako-san has to some degree accepted her role in a kind of Pygmalion manner, acting as her mother's tutor in basic things (washing dishes after using them, not eating while standing up, even brushing teeth), Ogawa-san herself seems to complain more frequently since she has moved to the new home. Ogawa-san speaks frankly that her daughter is "scary" and often refers to her as a "demon" (*oni* 鬼), a term sometimes used by husbands referring to their wives, but also, it seems, by some mothers as well. Although Ogawa-san's son-in-law is frequently away from the house for business, he has apparently mentioned the fact that Ogawa-san brought so many things with her during the move. Even a year after the move was completed, cardboard boxes full of various odds and ends still cluttered some of the hallways, clearly disrupting the newly-wed couple's sense of starting their new life.

Returning to the divination and consultation, it would seem that the explicit purpose of the ritual was to alleviate some of the anxiety felt by Ogawa-san regarding trouble between her, Masako-san and Masako-san's husband in the new house. It was also likely related to Ogawa-san's unease about growing older and more dependent. In our interviews, Ogawa-san mentioned her concern about the growing prevalence of nuclear families and the fact that this leads many older people to choose "institutions". In one interview, Ogawa-san says that she understands why people would choose to grow old in institutions, considering how families often have their own trouble getting along:

O: Well, that way...hmmm...Older people more and more are, get lone—aren't able to live by themselves, so that's why they have these institutions now, right? They have these institutions, so well...they can get medical care too...

J: At old age homes?

O: In the end, well, they also become selfish. When you get older, for some reason you start acting strangely—I think in some part, it's nerves but (unintelligible) ... it's not everyone, but still. When someone gets lon- a lot of people get suspicious feelings (*utagau kokoro* 疑う心). It's a kind of illness. The doctor—even children and parents- ...(trails off)

One interesting point about this passage is that Ogawa-san interrupts herself twice before saying the word "lonely" (*sabishii* 寂しい), in regards to older people seeking extra-familial help. Not only does Ogawa-san's hesitance to use this word reflect her own unease about being alone, but it is also the word that she used to describe her mother's personality, as mentioned above.

Ogawa-san then continues with a story not about her mother, but about her father. She says that when he got older he became increasingly selfish and hostile, thinking that it was his right to demand whatever he wanted. The example she gives is her father

wanting to watch television when the news came on, yelling at the children who were watching cartoons:

- O: Families have all sorts of problems because they're taking care of [their old parents]. My father, my own father, he has grandchildren, right? Well at first he spoiled them, but after they got a little older they always argued. For example, they'd want to watch cartoons of television and would let them watch at six o'clock, and at seven the news would come on and my father would come in and turn the channel to watch the news. Oh, and the kids would have a tantrum and they'd be crying for their cartoons, and well, the news comes on again at nine and so I'd say, why don't you watch the news at nine? But he wouldn't want to wait... older people just act like it's natural, they act like it's matter of fact [to get their way]

Here we see an important difference in Ogawa-san's description of her father in contrast to her mother. While her mother is described in extremely flattering terms, her death being tragic and a result of her sensitivity to the strains of the life, her father is described as an "old person," and not a very pleasant sounding one at that. When I asked Ogawa-san how long her father lived, she replied curtly "He lived a *long* time, until he was 86, but that person was hopeless."⁷⁴

Ogawa-san's life shows a pattern of abandonment by people who cared for her: her mother, her husband and eventually her daughters. Ogawa-san's reaction to this feeling of abandonment, real or unconscious, is retention, which has resulted in her compulsive hoarding, and memorial, through which she retains the sense of others watching her with approval. In other words, both Ogawa-san's hoarding as well as her religious practice, can be seen as coping mechanisms for fear of abandonment.

⁷⁴ *ano hito ha shikata ga nai* あの人は仕方がない。

Summary

In the beginning of this chapter, I describe the ways in which certain objects are believed to take on some of the vital force of the living beings in its genealogy, including its original creator as well as the user. Following this, I assert that the disposal of these objects motivate ritual acknowledgement, since, as with the process of mourning, each represents a potential loss of identity and sense of self. These rituals of disposal express feelings of attachment, gratitude and interdependence, and the objects fulfill the same work of ancestor memorial, and usually relate directly to the perpetuity of family bonds.

Next, I describe a dedication ceremony in which a spiritually potent object, the dagger of a prominent ancestor, was transferred to a Buddhist temple for disposal. The fact that the dagger was only uncovered as a result of Ogawa-san's process of moving, and was considered significant enough to warrant a formal ceremony, gives reason to suppose that the dedication ceremony and the divination request regarding the move are somehow related in Ogawa-san's mind. When considering the divination consultation and the grave visitation, the ceremony seems to have been not only for the dagger, but also for Ogawa-san's mother and even for Ohata-san herself. Although the occasion was composed of three distinct ritual events, each one dealt in its own way, with the primary issues of aging and family relationships.

By looking at Ogawa-san's family relationships and the ways in which they developed over her life course, I give additional evidence suggesting that the ceremony for the dagger, the divination about the move and the grave visit are linked. First, the move significantly alters Ogawa-san's status, since she would be moving from her own home to that of her daughter and son-in-law. She would thus become increasingly

dependent on her daughter and son-in-law in old age. The move highlighted this struggle with dependence, because Ogawa-san strained to keep control over each part of the process. Although Ogawa-san is not being abandoned in the sense of being left behind by her family, she perceives the loss of objects around her, objects that she invests her identity in, as a kind of abandonment. Furthermore, this abandonment is seen by Ogawa-san as a direct result of growing old, since the old, in her mind, save possessions and dispose of them ritually only when they must.

It is not surprising then that Ogawa-san mentions during the dedication ceremony for the dagger, that she doesn't want to "burden the family" of her son-in-law by "living too long." This is, of course, completely at odds with the reality of the situation, in which Ogawa-san is constantly burdening her family by making the move long and difficult. Even a year after the move, many of Ogawa-san's things still remained boxed, sitting in the hallways of the new home, in object purgatory. Ogawa-san's assertion that she doesn't want to be a burden is not necessarily an intentional lie, but may be seen as a reaction formation, motivated by a need to uphold social norms and a moral script of family relationships in old age. Although she does everything that she can to be a burden on her daughter, Ogawa-san still firmly believes that she shouldn't be a burden on her daughter or live very long. For Ogawa-san, admitting that she is a burden and will keep on living could potentially generate a fear of retaliation in the form of abandonment.

Ogawa-san's fear of abandonment is rooted in her prolonged early adulthood sickness and dependence, which her daughters blame for Ogawa-san's difficult personality and lack of common sense in household affairs. This fear threatens to be repeated through Ogawa-san's transition to a more dependent status in old age. While

the period of sickness and dependence in Ogawa-san's earlier years was also one of great indulgence and attention by her mother, it was also a clearly a source of shame, culminating in the traumatic loss of her mother. In this event, Ogawa-san both abandoned and was abandoned by her mother. One of the motivational forces for performing the ceremony for the dagger as well as seek divination is that Ogawa-san anticipates retribution (abandonment by a loved one) once she moves in with her son-in-law

. By being a burden on her daughter, Ogawa-san is, in a sense, laying the grounds for abandonment, and therefore a bad old age.

Ogawa-san's case is an example of how culturally constituted rituals concerning the ancestors provide symbolic resources for those trying to manage the transition of old age. Ancestor memorial is not simply a matter of approaching mortality or mourning an individual's death. It is used creatively, to manage several issues that are important to the elderly, such as the need for a sense of continuity and reciprocity, and the need to defend against the threats of shame and abandonment.

I do not believe that Ogawa-san herself was entirely conscious of why the dagger created such unease for her. For Ohata-san, the ceremony was a matter of putting things in order (something which in her own home she demanded, but was completely unable to do), as well as fulfilling her obligation as a senior member of the household, to care for the ancestors. In her opinion, the younger members had no appreciation of this sentiment, and were entirely ignorant about her needs.

One of the reasons this ceremony was successful, at least in terms of giving a sense of satisfaction and peace, was that it gave Ogawa-san a sense of initiative in her

immediate situation. At the same time, it strengthened the feeling of upholding an interdependent link between herself and her mother, and to a lesser degree, the 'ancestors' of the dagger itself. Furthermore, this connection was affirmed by the participation of both her cousin and the priest (not to mention the anthropologist). What makes this ceremony intriguing is that it clearly shows the complex interweaving of personality, family relationships and the experience of aging in ways that may be more subtle in more standard rituals.

Chapter 9: Continuity, Tradition and Change

In the previous case study, I examined the way in which family dynamics impact adjustment to old age and the process of achieving integrity. Another example of the ways in which loosening ties of interdependence affect ancestor memorial in Japan concerns tradition. The loss of tradition in the family is analogous to the loss of memory for the elderly. As mentioned in Chapter 1, older adults use reminiscence to construct a narrative of a past self, and the legitimacy of this identity is contingent upon the sense of continuity and integration of one's current life and future trajectory. When one's memories no longer bear relevance to successive generations, and cherished memories become only pale reminders of loss—memories become things that will not be, and therefore never really were. Of course the construction of identity in old age depends upon more than just memories, but when those memories include ancestor memorial, which implies that one's future welfare depends upon the continuity of tradition in future generations, the pain of loss is experienced more acutely.

In this chapter, I argue that for some older Japanese adults, the loss of family traditions, especially those concerning ancestor memorial, represents a kind of elder abandonment. While this abandonment may not seem to be linked to actual physical or financial neglect of aging parents, when placed in the context of ancestor memorial, where parents become even more dependent upon the family traditions for their well being after death, maintaining tradition can be vital to one's sense of integrity in one's last years. Therefore the abandonment of tradition potentially heightens the feeling of

shameful dependence in old age, particularly towards the ancestors, who embody the most intimate form of family tradition.

In Chapter 7, I describe the impact of social change in the family. In this chapter, I extend this same analysis to include family traditions and customs. I first describe pre-WWII formalization of ancestor memorial, before proceeding to the post-war changes. The changes in ancestor memorial that have come largely after the war have generated different thoughts about how one will be remembered after death.

Changes in Memorial

Yohko Tsuji (2002) shows how death related policies in Japan have changed over the last 130 years. Tsuji describes how in an effort to standardize all forms of social activity, the Meiji government began banning certain forms of death rites and instituting regulations tightly controlling others. The Meiji government's policy changed several times, mostly as a result of public protest to its attempt at "restoring" Shinto as the national religion. In particular, the ban on cremation (1873), which nativist scholars of the time argued "violated the indigenous Japanese way" (2002:178), generated strong opposition movements from Buddhist priests and crematorium operators across Japan (2002:179). The Meiji government lifted the ban, but placed more restrictions on crematorium facilities, regulating the height of chimneys and the distance from residential areas (2002:179). Tsuji sees this "pragmatic compromise" of the Meiji government, whose aim of re-building Tokyo into a "modern city" required improving sanitation and public health, moving burial grounds and minimizing land use by

cemeteries. Each of these is more easier to accomplish if the dead are cremated rather than buried as a corpse (2002:179-180).

In making this compromise, the Meiji government shifted its policy regarding the separation of religion and administrative domains. It did this in two ways. First, it separated religious Shinto from “State Shinto” (*Kokka Shinto* 国家神道) (Tsuji 2002:181; Hardacre 1989: 33). Second, it “removed death from the religious domain and made it part of the administrative domain,” which was formalized in the “Regulations Concerning Burials and Graves in 1884” (Tsuji 2002: 181). These new regulations transformed the practice of death rites in ways that would support the *ie* based household system as well as the veneration of the Emperor, who, as head of the nation mirrored the position of the head of the household, was to be shown the same loyalty and filial piety that children were to show their parents. Thus, the Meiji government’s policy towards death and disposal of remains combined Shinto, Buddhist and Confucian ideology with modern administrative bureaucracy into a new Japanese “tradition” that was aimed at producing “loyal subjects and filial children rather than developing each individual as a unique person” (Tsuji 2002: 182).

Although the New Civil Code (1948) written after Japan’s defeat in WWII established more individual rights and freedoms regarding the practice of death rites, it also clarifies rights of succession and inheritance of burial grounds. These and other regulations established directly after WWII were similar to the *ie*-based system of the old civil code, making it difficult for families living in contemporary Japan to continue death rites. One reason is that not only has Japan’s fertility rate dropped considerably over the last four decades, but fewer children are choosing to live with or even close to their

parents whose graves they will inherit. The lack of a successor or one that can be counted on for maintaining the family grave means that many graves are simply abandoned (see Figs 9.1 and 9.2). Even if one is not particularly devout, the thought of being abandoned by family is discouraging to the elderly. As I describe in the following case study, the pain of being abandoned is much more difficult. As one billboard advertisement read, “A life *without a grave* is an *empty* life” (*Ohaka no nai jinsei ha hakanai jinsei* お墓の無い人生は墓ない人生)⁷⁵.



Fig 9.1 Abandoned graves. The tags mark notices of pending removal.

⁷⁵ This is a play on words: *haka nai* means both “no grave” and “empty” or “meaningless.”



Fig 9.2 Abandoned graves. The tags mark notices of pending removal

One result of the difficulty in maintaining death rites, has been a new wave of alternative death rites, which have been gaining popularity since the 1990's. These alternative death rites have taken two principle forms, one collective, and the other more individualized. The collective form can be distinguished from *ie*-based memorial because it is based on criteria other than household affiliation. The most popular form of collective memorial is the "Permanent Memorial Grave" (*eidai-kuyōbaka* 永代供養). These graves are usually purchased in advance of an individual's death and guarantee that the individual will be memorialized not by one's family, but by the temple. This is a particularly appealing option for those without children or families to look after the grave after their death. There are now estimated to be more than 3000 *eitai kuyō baka* in Japan, and their number is growing quickly.

The graves for *eitai kuyō* are distinguishable from those of the *muenbotoke* (Chapter 2), because remains are usually consolidated under a single monument, or deposited into a collective mausoleum. In the case of *muenbotoke*, not only are remains disposed of, but the individual stones are piled up into a collection, and thus maintain a degree of autonomy from other households' graves⁷⁶. Sometimes the memorial tablets are preserved in the temple's mausoleum or other building, preserving the identity of the individual despite the lack of a grave. The association of these tablets with those for other general groups of abandoned dead was obvious when I visited Kyoto's Tōji temple, and noticed that the tablets for individual *eitai kuyō* were set in the same area as another for the victims of the Great Hanshin Earthquake of 1995.

Similar to the notion of *eitai kuyō*, some groups have established their own memorial monuments based on some other affiliation. In 2002, for example, the New York Times reported on the one woman who, being divorced herself, sought an alternative form of burial. With much effort, she “built an association of nearly 600 women—some divorced, some unhappily married, and some determinedly single—who plan to share a common plot carved out of an ordinary cemetery in the western suburb of Chofu” (*NYT* 9 May 2002). In recent years there are several similar examples of people seeking collective burial with like-minded individuals rather than strangers who simply happen to be affiliated with the same temple (*JT* 26 January 2004). This movement has a precedent in other kinds of collective memorial, such as the memorial for those who

⁷⁶ Some people are averse to *eitai kuyō* because of the fact that it mixes one's remains with those of “strangers.” Some funeral companies in Japan have tried to offer alternatives such as *eikyū kuyō* (永久供養) which individualizes plots, but promises perpetual memorial services.

died in war, or as the result of a large accident or natural disaster⁷⁷. On a visit to one prestigious cemetery south of Kyoto, I even came across a memorial monument for the members of an Osaka Senior Citizen’s Club (Fig 9.3). While I can’t be sure that this was erected for those without descendents, it clearly shows the strong association between the desire for older adults to be remembered, and the need to adapt to changes in society.



Fig. 9.3 Memorial monument for the “Association of Fukuoka Prefecture’s Senior Citizen Clubs”

Another group of alternative grave practices that have gained popularity since the 1990’s are more individualized. The more mainstream form of this individualization of practice seems to be similar establishing “Western-style” graves. In fact, one survey conducted in Tokyo in 2005 found that 63.9% of gravestones in the poll were Western

⁷⁷ Although the men and women memorialized as war dead at Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo can be considered a collective memorial, there are many aspects of their memorial and their connection with the government that set them apart from other forms of collective memorial.

style, and several were inscribed with words such as “‘love,’ ‘bonds’ and ‘dream’” rather than the household name (YS 10 September 2005). The idea that Japanese graves are somehow gloomy, and that western ones give a more positive feeling is a common complaint concerning traditional burial arrangements, and has given rise to non-traditional “Memorial Park” (メモリアル公園). Although the aesthetic of such gardens mimics the West, it is used in ways that are particularly Japanese. Kawano (2003), for instance, notes that,

A female architect in her late thirties told me that she designed a grave for her deceased father-in-law. She said “I designed a bench by the gravestone for visitors to sit and spend time with the dead.” Similarly, spreading a plastic picnic sheet and a lunch box, a salesman tells the actress: “a good thing about a Western-style lawn cemetery is, we can have a picnic with *hotoke-sama* (ancestors).”(Kawano 2003:132)

These “memorial parks” are not affiliated with particular Buddhist temples, and offer a wide range of personalized services (including perpetual memorial). In the very naming of the cemetery as a “memorial park,” one gets the feeling that a distinction is being made between older, traditional forms of “ancestor worship” (*senzo saishi* 先祖祭祀) and “memorialism” (*shisha kuyō* 死者供養) (see Chapter 3). Some businesses that conduct funeral ceremonies have also begun using the term memorial to give themselves a less gloomy image (Fig 9.4).



Fig 9.4: An advertisement for a “memorial hall” for funerals posted at a railway platform. The tagline reads “Even in memorial, quality counts.” The term for “memorial” is written in katakana, suggesting both an association with western forms of memorial and a innovative practice.

The practice of *shizensō* (自然葬), or “natural burial,” such as scattering of ashes (*Sankotsu* 散骨) in the sea or other natural place, represents a different concept of the individual self and its relationship with nature (Rowe 2003; *JT* 12 January 2004). While *eitai kuyo* deemphasizes the *ie*, it usually maintains the position of religious clergy or other aspects of perpetual memorial. In contrast, natural burials do away with burial as well as the connection of memorial to remains (Rowe 2003).

In a survey of people who wanted natural burials, 76.5% of respondents said that they chose this form of burial because it allows them to return to nature (Inoue 2003: 13). The idea of a return to nature is reflected in traditional ancestor memorial as well, since the “other world” is associated with the mountains, sea and moon (see Chapter 2).

Returning also implies the desire to continue existing, although in a transformed way. Natural burials are therefore consistent with many of the ideals of more traditional models of death and dying.

One middle-aged woman I met at a local café told me that she is an only daughter, and that although she visits her mother's grave, there will be no one to care for the grave, after she herself dies. Since she has only a daughter, and is divorced, there are no descendents to perpetuate her mother's memory. If she or someone else doesn't pay the temple to care for the grave. It will become discarded with the *muenbotoke*. She told me that her personal belief is that there is no soul and that after death there is nothing, or "mu" (無). However, she memorializes her mother, and she also respected her father's wishes to have a portion of his ashes thrown into the sea, since he lived near the sea and was a fisherman. Although this can be described as *sankotsu*, it is not exactly the same as *shizensō*, in that the father still had a grave where his bones were buried.

This woman spoke freely about her personal wish, to have her ashes spread in the forest or somewhere, but didn't seem confident that her wishes would be adhered to. She also argued that there should be state run cemeteries where anyone's remains could be buried. "That way at least one could be assured that *someone* would come give offerings," she said, "even if it isn't your relatives." She didn't have an answer when I asked why you'd want to be memorialized if there is nothing after death. Instead she smiled and laughed as if to imply that I was asking a silly question.

What I found interesting in talking with this woman is that her form of practice did not emerge from some underlying belief or conviction about the afterlife. She cared for her mother and father in the manner that they chose, and did not question it. Her

model of how to memorialize the ancestors is highly individualized, and therefore does not conflict with a practice like *sankotsu*.

Another young woman I interviewed took the process of individualizing her style of memorial very seriously, even going as far as taking a part-time job at a funeral parlor in order to educate herself as to how different ceremonies are conducted:

Y: I hate the way funerals are done nowadays, so something—I wanted to do something about the ways that funerals are done now! (laughing). So that’s why I did it.

But in the end, the place that hired me... I figured it’s fine if I just learn the “form,” like, do it like this or that. At that funeral parlor-- It’s not like I thought that I was going to work forever at that funeral parlor. But the way that I thought at the time, the “income” was being able to see the funeral where it is done, and then I could take that outside, and I am interested in making a “pre-death contract” (*seizen keiyaku* 生前契約). Do you know what a pre-death contract is?

J: A “pre-death contract?”

Y: Usually, when people die, people conduct a funeral and things like that right? But, say if your grandfather dies, for example, what kind of funeral would your grandfather have liked?

J: Yes, I see.

Y: And afterwards, how they would have liked their memorials done. We don’t really know how they would have liked it. Because that person is dead. For example, because it’s your grandfather, you think that you have to get a big, expensive gravestone, and you waste your money. Things like that happen. So for me, before I die, it’s important for a person to think about what kind of funeral they would want, what kind of way would they want to be laid to rest (*maisō* 埋葬). I wanted to make a kind of company that would help people to make up a plan about how they wanted to be seen off (*miokuru* 見送る). And there was this NPO in Osaka that made up these plans, and I thought that it would be nice if they taught me how to contact older people and help them make up a pre-death contract, but the head of the company died. And the people that worked at the company, they couldn’t fulfill the contracts for people. But at the same time, they’d already spent all the money that they’d taken in. So they were treated like criminals in all over the papers the papers, as pre-death contract frauds.

This woman's sister died young, and the impersonal, expensive and ostentatious manner of the funeral disappointed her. She then set out to be memorialized the way in which she wished to be memorialized. In a way, her approach to ancestor memorial seeks autonomy over shame, individualization over interdependence.

Each of these examples shows that although ancestor memorial is becoming more individual centered and personalized, this does not mean that people don't have any wish to be remembered. While traditional memorial structured the symbols and timing of religious rituals, the shift from tradition entails a new kind of remembrance. For older adults, this unfamiliar memorialization is sometimes unsettling, since it brings doubt to their legacy.

Diversity in Practice

In contrast with the rituals described in Chapter 3, visiting the family graves or the domestic altar where the memorial tablets of the *hotoke* are enshrined, are not restricted to certain days or times of the year. While some people may make a small offering of water or cooked rice at the family altar each morning and evening, others may only do this simply when the feeling compels them. The same is true for bringing flowers and incense to offer at graves. In Smith's (1974) study of memorials made at the domestic altar, for example, he describes no less than fourteen common patterns, which nonetheless accounted for less than half of the households in his sample (1974:106)

The idiosyncratic nature of these memorials generates flexibility and room for personalization, spontaneity and change over time. This aspect is important because

while grave or altar visits may include the household ancestors, they are often directed towards particular *hotoke*, who as time goes on change in the memories of the living.

For example, one woman in her sixties, who still makes daily offerings to her husband who died thirty years prior to our interview explained:

- A: You see, at the time when my husband died, I did all kinds of prayers...it's like...There's the Heart Sutra (般若心經). (quietly) I prayed with that but, it got to where I couldn't say it everyday, at some point I just stopped it. (putting her palms together) I gave/recited to him the Heart Sutra but, hmm...(quiet again) there was a time when I thought about it, I and saw that I was just praying to him with "I'm off to work!" and that was it! (laughs)

This woman's shift over several years from a very formalized Buddhist memorial practice to seeing the dead as just another individual in the household shows how the presence of the *hotoke* at the home altar *butsudan*, integrated into everyday life. Because the grave is located apart from the *butsudan*, traditions regarding it tend to remain more formalized. This formality does not necessarily impair the feelings of attachment that occur during memorial. This woman quoted above described going to the grave of her husband saying, "When I go to the grave I feel kind of like I've come close to [my husband]. So I'm put at ease."

In a different interview, an older man described how he took down his wife's photograph from above the altar

- I: So, if you're by yourself- picture—my wife's picture, right? You place it above the place with the buddha (motions up by the ceiling), and if it's just by itself—well there are places where people line up [the memorial photographs] grand-pa, grand-ma, etc., right? (J: uh-huh) Well that's fine for them. I don't think there's a thing wrong with it. . . [very quietly] I took hers down. (motions taking it down) *I just did it based on how I felt.*

Again, this is a minor detail in the larger scheme of ancestor memorial rites, but the fact that I felt that these and other rites were a matter of his decision underscores the personalization and flexibility of ancestor memorial.

On days when the senior centers were closed, and I couldn't schedule interviews, I sometimes spent an afternoon sitting in a cemetery observing the visitors. One day, I saw a small frail looking elderly woman making her way back from *ohaka mairi*. I say hello to her as she passes and she responds,

A: Oh my stomach is hurting... I came right after eating. (laughs, but looks a little upset too)

J: So what are you doing today?

A: I thought I just come over and put a little water on [the grave]. Of course I'm getting up in years, y'know. If I was younger I wouldn't be doing this, right? I'm 90 years old. I don't need anything anymore. (motioning towards the grave) One more person is going there [soon].

J: Who's grave did you visit today?

A: My husband's. And the ancestors from all the way back.

J: Do you live with your family?

A: Yes, I live with two sons.

J: Do you come to the grave often?

A: I come everyday. Usually in the morning. Today I was at lunch and then thought I should go and look at the grave. Once you get old, you don't need anything anymore!

Afterwards, smiling politely, she passed by, slowly making her way down the stone path past the rice paddies in front of the cemetery. I met several men and women visiting cemeteries, and most of them were not celebrating any particular memorial occasion, but

simply coming to be with their lost loved one. These men and women were easy to spot, since they did not carry elaborate bouquets, memorial *tōba* or other paraphernalia. They would simply fill a small bucket with water at the cemetery pump and pour it over the stone. If a stick of incense or candle was left from before, it would be lit. These are traditions but they are not part of a doctrinal set of rules. They extend from personal feelings and are enacted through cultural symbols available to anyone.

Summary

In this chapter I have given a description of some of the changes that are taking place in the way that Japanese people relate to the ancestors through memorial rites. The general pattern seems to be one of increased individualization and memorialism as well as institutionalization. Early twentieth century ancestor memorial was conducted in accordance to both the Emperor system and the *ie* ideology. Once these strict guidelines were loosened, the “tradition” of ancestor memorial began to evolve into an increasingly individualized form, even going so far as personalizing funerary rites, gravestones and disposal procedures.

Given the constraints placed on family organization by the Meiji state, this individualism can be seen as a return to prior practices that had little to do with a formally structured corporate household. Instead, most households performed ancestral rites in accordance to family tradition. This tradition was passed down through the generations rather than through state centered moral codes.

I do not mean to imply that the breakdown of pre-war traditions is detrimental to Japanese society. Rather, from the perspectives of the elderly people that I spoke with,

the loss of tradition is more than a sign of new generations adapting to their social climate. The rejection of tradition is a sign that the older adult's memories and identity has become disconnected from both past and future. In terms of ancestor memorial, tradition represents an experience of seeing and doing that grounds memories in relationships with others. In contrast, new versions of ancestor memorial lack a retrospective quality, and separate reminiscence and identity formation from mourning.

Personalizing one's own death and memorial can be seen as an expression of underlying fears of abandonment. Personalization involves the crafting of an identity, and the performance of this identity allows others to participate in it. In normative ancestral practice, the identity of the deceased is viewed in terms of its relationships with other family members. In individualized rites, this bond is weakened. The motivation for choosing such an unanchored future reflects the lack of trust in the family as a viable source of emotional satisfaction. Because one cannot trust in the family, one is left to trust in institutions (*eitai kuyo*), one's peers (non-household collective graves) oneself (individual graves) or to nature (natural burials).

Chapter 10: Nakamura-san (67)

Tradition and Continuity

While my research focuses primarily on the psychological motivations and effects of ancestor memorial for the elderly, I do not mean to discount the importance of social structure, roles and expectations in influencing religious activity. As indicated above, ancestor memorial is the religion of the family, and as a result is intimately related to processes of succession and inheritance that involve the entire *ie* 家. Just as succession and inheritance insure continuity of the household name, resources and traditions, the dissolution of these processes as successor generations become more independent, disrupts the continuity. To the extent that a sense of continuity of the self is dependent upon generational continuity of the household, the loss of tradition is experienced as rupture in the self-narrative, calling into question the significance of past decisions and the meaning of keeping up old customs. Tradition gives a feeling of affinity with past times and places, and its disruption is felt as being out of time and place. The following case study will therefore highlight how disruptions of time and space are experienced for one older man whose position as the eldest son and heir to his household strongly identify his sense of meaning with perpetuating traditions, which include maintaining local festivals, deities and most of important of all, the memorial of the ancestors.

At 67 years old, Nakamura-san is relatively young, compared to most of the other people that I've interviewed in the course of my research. He appears healthy, and continues to work, despite being past the standard retirement age for his generation.

Nakamura-san confessed to me that he takes medication for high blood pressure and is concerned that his health will diminish quickly before he becomes much older, a fact that he tends to mask with his energetic and amiable demeanor. His wide grin seems to grow even wider when he talks about unpleasant things, and his laughter is loudest when he finds himself talking about awkward or embarrassing situations.

Nakamura-san lives with his wife in a traditional wooden merchant's house, or *machiya* in central Kyoto⁷⁸. Nakamura-san is the eldest son and heir to an *ie* 家 that he reckons back three generations. His wife and he have two sons, the eldest living in a neighboring town about a half an hour away by train. The younger son lives several hours away in another city and is rarely spoken of. Nakamura-san's house was purchased by his father, and Nakamura-san and his four siblings were all raised there from a young age. The house has been well maintained (no doubt at a heavy cost), and still serves as Nakamura-san's principle place of business as a small wholesale distributor of stationary supplies. Like most *machiya*, Nakamura-san's house is long and narrow ("an eel's bed" as he called it), with several rooms behind one another representing varying degrees of intimacy or "in-group-ness". Facing the street is Nakamura-san's office and behind that is a small room for greeting visitors. Behind this room and adjacent to the kitchen, is a modest dining room just large enough for four people to fit around a low, square table. To the rear of the dining room is a room containing the *butsudan* and alcove for important objects. Large sliding glass doors separate this room from a small middle garden, and the bathroom and the toilet at the far end of the house.

⁷⁸ In the following transcripts I refer to Nakamura-san's wife as NW

Nakamura-san, like many Kyotoites resembles the *machiya*: his persona, relationships and activities are arranged along clearly graded levels of *uchi* and *soto* (内, 外), *tatemae* and *honne* (たてまえ、本音), public and private. To illustrate this and to further illustrate the ritual form of ancestor worship, I will first describe an anniversary service that I attended at Nakamura-san's house. Second I will describe the full ritual regimen of Nakamura-san's household and his feelings concerning these traditions, giving importance to orientations of time and space. Finally I will look at how aging has highlighted particular concerns for Nakamura about the continuity of these customs and attempt to place his case in a more general cultural context.

An Anniversary of the Deceased

On the 21st of each month, a Buddhist priest from Nakamura-san's parish temple visits Nakamura-san's house to perform a *shōtsukimeinichi* (祥月命日) service⁷⁹.

Shōtsukimeinichi is the term given to the monthly memorial services for the recently deceased, and can be thought of as "The *hotoke*'s birthday," a kind of anniversary combining the ideas associated with Confucianism such as filial piety (*oyakōkō* 親孝行) and debt/gratitude (*on* 恩), as well as ideas associated with Buddhism, such as aiding the dead to an auspicious rebirth in paradise (Murayama 1994:188-189).

Nakamura-san invited me to attend one of these memorial occasions, and I arrived early enough to have a chat with him and his wife before the priest was due to arrive,

⁷⁹ Smith (1974) distinguished between *shōtsukimeinichi* (usually the yearly anniversary of the day of death), and *maitsukimeinichi* (a monthly memorial occasion observed on the day of death). In practice, this service conforms to the latter, but it was always referred to with the former term. No one I spoke to about these services used the word *maitsukimeinichi*, and therefore I will not be using this term.

sometime between before noon. I entered through the open front entrance, which had been converted to a parking space, and announced my arrival at the sliding paper doors, which are too delicate to knock on. I was soon greeted by Nakamura-san and invited me in, this time past the small room for receiving guests where we had met on previous occasions and into their inner dining area. I left my shoes on the stone steps leading up into the house and followed Nakamura-san to the low table where his wife was already setting out a plate of snacks and two cups of black coffee.

Near the ceiling of the dining room, set close to the entryway to the kitchen was a small shelf holding a vase of *sakaki* and pine branches, a white vessel for offering water, two protective tablets and three worn wooden statues of the deity *Hotei* (布袋), whose comically large belly and bag of goodies make him resemble a hairless Santa Claus. Across from this shrine was another, again a simple shelf mounted close to the ceiling with offerings, tablets and statues of the fox deity known as *Inari* 稲荷, who, like *Hotei*, is commonly associated with wealth and prosperity in business.

When the priest finally arrived, he was formally greeted and then slipped a cash donation in a formal envelope. After a scripted protest by the priest and counter-protest by Nakamura about the amount of the donation, the priest was ushered to the inner room of the house towards the *butsudan*. The priest seemed young, perhaps in his mid-forties, and wore a formal black robe with a gold embroidered sash. Nakamura-san's wife had prepared three cushions for us at the back of the room, and another in front of the *butsudan* for the priest.



Fig 10.1 Buddhist priest performing a *shotsukimeinichi* service at Nakamura-san's *butsudan*

As the ceremony began, Nakamura-san's wife and I sat behind the priest, heads bowed and palms together as he began to chant. When Nakamura-san returned from the other room, his wife moved to the dining room and watched from there. I sat beside Nakamura-san during the ceremony, in formal seated posture as the priest continued his chanting, drumming on a small wooden gong set on the floor.

During the ceremony Nakamura-san sat with his palms pressed together, eyes closed and head bowed. When the priest chanted the familiar mantra “*namu Amida butsu*” (南無阿弥陀仏 “[I take refuge in] the name of Amida Buddha”), both Nakamura-san and his wife joined in with low whispers. Apart from this phrase they did not seem familiar with the words being recited, nor could they chant the names of the deceased, which the priest read from a small record book at the end of the ceremony. The portraits of the ancestors, set high on the wall of the room looked over us (Fig 10.2).



Fig 10.2 four black and white portraits of Nakamura-san's ancestors set above the doorway of the room containing the *butsudan*. Placing such portraits on the wall is traditional, but the duration of display is variable.

The entire ceremony took only about twelve minutes. The priest brought with him no religious implements, offerings or scriptures. After the ceremony, Nakamura-san and his wife bowed deeply and the priest swiveled around on his cushion to face us. Nakamura-san's wife brought tea for the three of us and Nakamura-san and the priest chatted lightly about family matters for a while. Nakamura-san introduced me to the priest as a volunteer for the *Gion Matsuri* and a student at Kyoto University. Nakamura-

san then told the priest that I am interested in “Japanese religion and tradition,” and the priest crossed his arms and leaned back groaning “Oh, that’s a tough one!” To which we all let out a slightly embarrassed laugh. “It’s hard even for Japanese people!” added Nakamura-san’s wife from the other room. Nakamura-san then sheepishly explained that I had an interest in *shōtsukimeinichi* but that he himself didn’t feel confident in explaining it to me, and that’s why I’ve come along. Again we all laughed a little, doing our best to dissipate the awkwardness.

Instead of directly addressing the anniversary service, the priest proceeded to explain the range of Buddhist sects and their relative popularity in Japan along with some other historical notes. Nakamura-san then asked if the priest could explain to us the difference between *kami* and *hotoke*, (a question I had posed to Nakamura-san in an earlier interview). The main difference the priest mentioned was the fact that in Buddhism, after death one *becomes* a *hotoke*, and is therefore is no difference than Shaka or Amida or the other Buddhas of the standard pantheon. In contrast, one does not become a *kami*, but rather after death, goes to the place of the *kami*. Although it seemed at the time that the priest motioned towards the *kamidana* when he explained this, he may have been speaking of the difference between the Christian God (also referred to in Japan as “*kami-san*”), and all of this seems to come as a sort of surprise to Nakamura-san himself.

Bringing the discussion more clearly into the realm of Shinto, Nakamura-san’s wife commented that while one sometimes asks things of the *hotoke*, it is more often that favors are asked of the *kami-san*. The priest explained this in terms of the reverence for the emperor, and asking for his favor. He then added that while Malaysians are Muslim

and Filipinos are Christian, Japanese are in the same respect all Shinto—at least originally. He then brought everyone to giggles once again as he explained the pluralistic tendency of Japanese people, pointing out how funny it is that Japanese celebrate Christmas alongside other end of year rituals.

As this episode shows, Nakamura-san is both exceptionally devout and surprisingly naïve regarding religious matters. Later, in private, the priest who conducted the ceremony told me that people like Nakamura-san are rare, because although conducting *shotsukimeinichi* ceremonies is common just after someone in the family died, Nakamura-san has continued this practice for his father every month for nearly ten years. The priest could think of only a couple of other households in his parish who were so devout in their ritual practice.

Nakamura-san's devotion to ritual was also evident in his description of the funeral procedures taken after his father's death. For example, while it is fairly standard to erect an elaborate funerary altar for the recently deceased and keep it in the home until the 49th day anniversary of the death, Nakamura-san elected to leave the altar in his home for one hundred days. Because such altars are typically rented out for as much as the equivalent of several hundred dollars a day, keeping the altar for so long represented a significant financial burden on Nakamura-san. Nakamura-san, perhaps more than any other person I interviewed for this research, was not only diligent in his ceremonial reverence to the ancestors and the deities, but he also had far more objects of worship within his house than anyone else. Nakamura-san's reverence extended beyond his house to include attending and participating in large community *Matsuri*, or festivals. Yet while there is an element of profound reverence for traditions and customs that

approaches the religious, Nakamura-san does not refer to these ceremonies as “religious” or “spiritual,” they are simply what one does for others, living or dead, spirit or god—they are custom (*shikitari* しきたり) tradition (*dentō* 伝統).

Two Festivals, Sixteen Deities, Ten Graves, and Countless Ancestors

Nakamura-san is a good illustration not only of the full regimen of Japanese ancestor worship as described earlier in this chapter, but also of some of the tendencies such as pluralism and syncretism that are hallmarks of Japanese religiosity in general. Although Nakamura-san may seem to be an extreme example because of the degree of his devotion, he is not exceptional in his desire to have the family traditions continued in future generations. Nakamura-san struck me as exceptional on four accounts: his participation and leadership in two large local festivals (*matsuri* 祭), his upkeep of ten family graves, his dedication to daily ritual offerings to the sixteen deities enshrined in his house and his overall meticulous observance of ancestor memorial practices.

The fact that Nakamura devotes so much of his time and resources to religious ritual can only be explained by looking at the interaction between his position in his family and community and his feelings toward growing older and what this means in terms of his relationship with his ancestors and his children.

Two Festivals: Public, Performance and Place

I first met Nakamura-san when I volunteered to participate in the annual *Gion Matsuri* 祇園祭, one of the largest and grandest festivals in Kyoto if not all of Japan⁸⁰. From his important position in the *matsuri* activities I assumed that he had a relatively important status in his community but I had no idea how deeply imbedded this was in Nakamura-san's own family traditions. Nakamura-san is not only involved in the *Gion Matsuri*, but during the second year of my stay was also selected to participate in another of Kyoto's "big three *matsuris*"-- the *Jidai Matsuri* 時代祭り, or "Festival of the Ages"⁸¹. *Matsuri* represent the most public and community centered form of ancestral reverence. Although participation in *matsuri* might seem separate from the standard ancestor memorial rituals described above, it is, as I will show, very closely related in the sense that they are meant to link the long dead ancestors of a time and place in the past, to those in the present through offerings and other forms of reverence.

⁸⁰ The *Gion Matsuri* 祇園祭 (begun in 869 AD) is named after the *Gion* district, which much later would become famous as a high class district of traditional tea-houses and Geisha arts. The patron shrine of this district is Yasaka Shrine, which was established in the Heian Period (794-1185) and enshrines three deities, most chiefly *Sunosanomikoto*, brother of *Amaterasu* the Sun Goddess. The *Gion Matsuri* is said to have begun as a ritual to dispel an epidemic by placating the deities of immunity. A more appropriate description would be that the *matsuri* originated as a way to sooth the souls of those who died as a result of the epidemic, rather than to the deities themselves, thus it is ancestor memorial in the sense that it is meant to placate the spirits of the dead (Yamaori and Tanka 2005: 61). The *matsuri* evolved in the medieval period as a way for wealthy merchant families to display their status by erecting elaborate floats decorated with exotic treasures such as European or Indian tapestries, and other symbols of foreign influence.

⁸¹ The *Jidai Matsuri* is a relatively recent creation, beginning in 1895, and meant to showcase the grandeur of former times. The *matsuri* consists mainly of a procession of Kyoto citizens dressed in period costumes from the Heian period through the Meiji period. It is a sort of living timeline that departs from Kyoto Imperial Palace and ends at Heian Shrine, which enshrines the deified sprits of two past Emperors (Kammu and Kōmei) and is considered to be the patron shrine of all of Kyoto rather than that of a particular district.

Gion Matsuri (祇園祭)

Nakamura-san taken on many responsibilities as a member of one of the *Gion matsuri* float preservation societies, and is busy much of the year securing donations and supervising the training of the musicians, dancers, carpenters and other workers needed for the float. Although the *Gion Matsuri* technically lasts the entire month of July, the peak is the parade of festival floats, which occurs every year on July 17th. While the religious focus of the *matsuri* is the parading of three portable shrines by local men from Yasaka Shrine to various locations around the central shopping district of Kyoto, the majority of tourists (usually hundreds of thousands of people) come to Kyoto to watch a separate ritual, consisting of a parade of elaborately decorated “floats,” whose upkeep and management is in the hands of local districts in the area overseen by the *Gion Matsuri* United Float Association. The reason for this is that the floats (32 in all) are quite a spectacle, some weighing up to six tons and standing 25 meters tall.

On the actual day of the *matsuri*, Nakamura-san blends into the other officials leading the parade. He is dressed in the uniform of a committee member, a white cotton kimono printed with the design of the float in indigo. Those of us pulling the float are much more conspicuous with straw sandals and flattened cone shaped hats lacquered in black and red. As we pulled the float, Nakamura-san walked along with us, keeping an eye on the musicians and dancers that he has taken months to train for this day. The *Gion Matsuri* was a way for Nakamura-san to remember the old days of renewal after WWII:

- N: As for *Gion Matsuri*, well it wouldn't have continued if we had been bombed. All of the floats would have been destroyed. That was just after the war, about 50 years ago [that it was restarted]. I don't quite know off-hand...
- J: But they didn't have [the matsuri] during the war, right?
- N: After the war ended. I think it started around [Showa] the 22nd year? (1948)
- J: After the war ended.
- N: About two years after. From the strength of the people.
- J: At that time you must have still been quite young?
- N: I was born in [Showa] 14 (1939), so, I was just, well, I was in my primary school years so I can remember it somewhat....

Nakamura-san also remembered times when the path of the floats was much more narrow, and when his family would reach out to the floats from the windows of their second story buildings to offer food. In an analogous sense, the neighborhoods encompassed by the *Gion Matsuri* were wealthy traditional crafts districts that could support the floats each year. These days, Nakamura-san and others like him annually face the challenge of fundraising from the community in order to appear in the event at all.

Participation in the *Gion matsuri* is a way that Nakamura-san connects with both his community as well as with his own past. Throughout the year, he is constantly busy with preparations for the festival, and these preparations put him in the role of both leader (teaching others the proper protocol of the festival) and petitioner (soliciting donations and participants). While the ancestors of Nakamura-san's household are not explicitly invoked in the course of the festival, the festival itself is based in reverence for and consolation of deceased spirits, and as a tradition that has been passed down through the generations, is doubly symbolic as a way to honor those spirits.

Jidai Matsuri

On our fourth interview occasion, in March of 2006, Nakamura-san informed me that he was selected to participate in another one of Kyoto's "three great festivals": the *Jidai Matsuri*. The *Jidai matsuri* is similar to the *Gion matsuri* in that it takes the form of a long procession of individuals who display costumes and props meant to evoke earlier periods in Kyoto's long history. In contrast to *Gion matsuri*, the *Jidai matsuri* was established relatively recently (1895), and embodies the zeitgeist of that era: a reverence for a mythical past, the idea of both evolution and continuity of tradition, the display of hierarchy and deference, and the romanticism of an ever receding past.

Nakamura-san proudly pointed out that another important aspect of this festival is that festival participants are chosen from only from the centrally located school districts, where he lives. Within these school districts only people who can represent three successive generations are able to participate in the festival. In other words, grandparent, child and grandchild all must be able to walk in the procession. As a result, only families that have resided in the same area for three generations or more (about 100 years) can participate in the *Jidai Matsuri*:

- N: Once every two years [our school district] participates. So if you think about that, well, our school district has about 2200 households... from the school district one *kumi*, just one *kumi* can fill this role. It must be a family of three generations. (whispering). A son. A grandchild. This role filled by three successive generations. Two generations is no good ... (showing me photographs of past festivals) The general (*taisho* 大将) and this, what they call the attendant (*yumimochi* 弓持ち)...That's usually the son. And this secondary attendant. That's the grandchild. All wearing these costumes—parent, child, grandchild—all *three gathered and attending together*. You don't have to live together. You don't have to all live together in one house. But you must have a parent, child and grandchild, all in good health. That's the only kind of household that can participate.

The *Jidai Matsuri* is not only a festival celebrating a nostalgic display of Japan's history, but a reaffirmation of the family ideal in the present: three generations, living together in health (ideally) as one household for a significant period of time. In this respect, it resembles a reverence for the ancestors in two regards: honoring the historically ancestral generations, and portraying the continuance of the generational legacy in the current day. Nakamura-san was so proud of his participation in this festival, that a photograph of his family at the festival was on his New Year's cards (Fig 10.2).



Fig 10.3 Nakamura-san (on the horse) and his family dressed for the *Jidai Matsuri*

Similar to the *Gion Matsuri*, the *Jidai Matsuri* conjures the spirits of the ancestors of the community without focusing on any household's particular ancestors. Nevertheless, for participants, especially those like Nakamura-san for whom festivals evoke strong emotional resonance with childhood and adolescence, carrying on the festival is a means

of reaffirming and transmitting one's identity as a moral member of the family, the community and the country.

Sixteen Deities

Ancestor veneration is not merely a matter of social duty or public displays of prestige. In fact, most of Nakamura's ancestor related practices including the *shotsukimeinichi* services described above, monthly grave visits and daily offering rounds are done without an immediate audience and exceed expectations of even the most devout. For example, Nakamura-san has no less than sixteen shrines to different gods in his house. Each morning he goes to each one, presenting them an offering of fresh water or tea, putting his hands together and bowing his head in veneration. This ritual cycle takes about an hour each morning, and always begins with the offerings to the ancestors on the Buddhist altar, which Nakamura says are the most important of all.

After the ancestors are asked for another day of protection, Nakamura-san then goes to each of the other small shrines around his long "eel bed of a house" praying for safety to the other numerous *kami*:

N: So any way, to have so many places to worship in one household is unheard of. Well, usually there are the *hotoke*-san, right? And then another one or two, maybe even about six other places of worship but, sixteen is really at the limit! (laughs) You have to make a place for all of them. (whispering) There is the *kami* of the toilet, the *kami* of the well, and then the *kami* of the bath. I've made a place for all those. And then if you have a shop, you have the shop's—what they call the *kami* of business. If you add all of them up there are about sixteen.

J: [the *kami* of business] is Daikoku-san? [Skt. Mahakala]

N: (said in agreement) Daikoku-san, Daikoku-san. (raising pitch, as if thinking about it) Daikoku-san, Daikoku-san, yes, I also honor Daikoku-san. Well, he's a *kami* of business, right! Well, around

here, the kami of business is Inari-san. Inari-san is pretty much the *kami* of business...

[not everyday, but]... Only on New Years. We give *omiki* [sake]. And then *okagami*-san [New Years pounded rice cakes]- we offer *okagami*-san. And then we light candles and in the morning we have *ozoni* [soup] . . . (trails off) Each of the sixteen, all of them for three days! That's what we do. But only on New Years. And around the first of the month and then the fifteenths of the month we make sure to honor these places. On the first and the fifteenth, at the very least we light a candle. They call the candle *ohikari* (the light).

J: Twice a month?

N: The first and the fifteenth.

J: And that's when you clean them up?

N: Oh of course we have to clean them up.

J: That's also each month?

N: Two times, that too. Then we make offerings and pray. Something like "May we live in health again this year," right? "May business be good." Well, we pray like that. And then the 21st is the death anniversary so the monk comes to visit us. And we ask "May we live in health, one more year" (laughs loudly) That's the kind of thing we ask for! (whispered and trailing off) Well, it's like they say: if there weren't any ancestors, then I wouldn't have been born. We have to respect those ancestors, you know? We have to take care of them. That's the feeling they give me...SO, in the morning, every morning, I pray (祈る *inoru*) to the *hotoke*-san. I wake up in the morning, and before eating I wash my face and then I go to the *hotoke*-san and Benten-san (unintelligible), and then next the bath *kami*-san, the toilet *kami*-san and bow (*ogamu*) to all the rest of the *kami*-san...It really- it really is hard to take care of all of them!

If it is so "hard," then what motivates Nakamura and those like him to continue these ritual cycles? Certainly there is his duty as the eldest son to perpetuate the traditions of his ancestors, and Nakamura-san is clear that the way he learned to do these things was by listening and watching his own parents. There is also a clear connection of each deity either to a place in the house (toilet, well, garden, stove etc.) or with the location of the

house (“Around *here*, the *kami* of business is *Inari-san*”), so establishing the sanctity of place is also important. The fact that the ancestors are the most revered and first to receive offering also hints at the importance of time, since the ancestors are receding in time, whereas the *kami* are understood as ever-constant. The most important facet of the *kami* of the house are that they are *in the house*, and therefore made subjects of the household. This explains why the ancestors, who are by definition identified with the household, are the primary objects of veneration, despite the fact that other *kami* may be described as more powerful and lasting.

Ten Graves and Countless Ancestors

As mentioned in Chapter 2, household graves, especially in the city, are typically located away from the home, and provide a link between the parish temple and the domestic altar that becomes especially important during memorial occasions. In Nakamura-san’s case, his family’s tradition has been to establish separate grave plots for each married couple. In addition to his patrilineal ascendants’ graves, Nakamura-san has also taken it upon himself to maintain (at considerable expense), the graves of three generations of his paternal grandmother’s terminated patriline, and four other deceased relatives who died without children (two great-aunts who died in childhood, a younger brother and an great aunt and her husband⁸²). As a result, Nakamura-san, who is the fourth generation successor of his household, is responsible for the care of ten different grave plots (Table 9.1). On the death anniversary of each one of these relatives, as well

⁸² In this last case, the great-aunt was Nakamura-san’s father’s father’s younger sister. Her husband was an apprentice carpenter under the tutelage of Nakamura-san’s paternal grandfather and not only adopted the household name, but married into the family.

as the widely observed memorial holidays of *Ohigan*, *Obon* and New Year's (see Chapter 2), Nakamura-san visits the cemetery to change the flowers and clean the stones.

1. father and mother
2. paternal grandparents
3. paternal great-grandparents
4. paternal grandfather's eldest sister (died as a child)
5. paternal grandfather's elder sister (died as a child)
6. younger brother (died unmarried)
7. paternal grandfather's younger sister and husband/ husband married into family, apprentice carpenter of grandfather (took master's name)
8. wife's parents
9. wife's paternal grand-parents
10. wife's paternal great-grandparents

Table 10.1: Relatives represented by the ten graves tended to by Nakamura-san

As the eldest son and heir of a well-established Kyoto family, the social demands for Nakamura-san are tremendous. Aside from grave maintenance, Nakamura-san is responsible for entertaining attending family members on the major holidays of New Years and *Obon*, as well as on the numerous periodic memorial occasions for recently deceased members of the household. These are expensive affairs and require a good deal of preparation on the part of Nakamura-san and his wife.

When Nakamura-san told me of the ten graves, I was initially confused. Typically a household would have only one grave, inscribed with the family name, where the remains of all deceased members of a household were interred. Occasionally there would be the need to erect separate graves for a deceased relative who had “nowhere else to go”—in other words, someone who had adopted another name (usually by marriage) and had no line of descendents. Nakamura-san's case follows this pattern for the most part, with the exception that rather than having a single grave for the patriline, each

married couple has erected their own separate grave, a situation that makes Nakamura-san a little uneasy about his own memorial:

J: How many graves are there?

N: In my household we traditionally erect a stone for each married couple and put both of their names on it.

J: So when you pass away, your son will erect one for you and your wife?

N: Well it would be really nice if my son would erect one for me but. . . (laughs nervously) I'm a little worried about that! (laughs)

N's Wife (NW): (deadpan) I don't think he's going to set up anything for YOU! (laughs)

Further on in this interview I asked again what plans Nakamura or his family have for continuing this pattern of ancestor veneration, considering the fact that it seems so time consuming and expensive. This time Nakamura-san seemed less able to find humor in situation. Still somewhat smiling, he took off his glasses, hung his head and rubbed his face as if he had pondered this a long time without resolution. His wife, still in good humor decided to answer for him:

NW: (smiling) We don't need a stone!

N: Because the plot is expensive and our children won't continue the rites!

Nakamura-san's tone was not angry, but rather sympathetic and sad. He then told me that he has been considering consolidating the graves replacing them with a single household grave. The relatives whose remains would not be able to be interred in this grave (such those of his wife's patrilineal ascendants), would be ritually disposed of, to which Nakamura-san's wife jokingly interjected, "We might get some sort of ancestral

vengeance for that!” The land that the graves currently stand on would then be sold, and there would be little need to observe memorial rites for individuals, since any visit to the grave would constitute a visit to all of the deceased of the household. Still, Nakamura-san seems undecided, or ambivalent about consolidating his ancestral graves, evading direct responses when I asked about the matter. It wasn’t long before Nakamura-san’s wife chimed in, saying to her husband, “You have to decide one way or another before you *die* you know!” Her laughter eased the situation a little.

NW: Where the bride is from, it’s *kami-san*. They worship (*matsuru*) *kami-san*. And we’re Buddhist, right? The *hotoke-san* side. That part is completely different.

N: I think that the things you do are a little different.

J: Yes, but, don’t you have quite a lot of *kami-san* here? (all of us laughing)

N: When you say that *kami-san* and *hotoke-san* are different, well, but the *kami-san* and the *hotoke-san* are exactly the same. (NW laughs a little) They’re both exactly the same but, the, the kind of way you worship, the holidays—these things are of course, the things you do seem to be a little different. (J: I see) Yes. So that’s the kind of thing that’s difficult [for her] to comprehend. So if she were to say I don’t really want to be giving water and tea every morning, well then [the tradition] will have remained until then. Even if she says, if she says we didn’t do that sort of thing at my house so I’m not going to keep [your traditions], well that’s just that. (NW small laugh) right?. That’s just the end, right?

Nakamura-san’s attitude is diplomatic. Like most Japanese, he doesn’t see a difference between the deities and the buddhas, and the ancestors fit in with all of them. The important thing is the continuity of tradition. For Nakamura-san, the end of tradition is the end of his own sense of identity—“just the end, right?”

While decisions made concerning the graves and the family altar are limited participants, festivals, as noted above, are much wider. The *Obon* and New Year's festivals in particular give people the notion that the ancestors have returned to this world and that

N: What they say is that the soul (*tamashi* 魂), the soul comes here, comes back to the house. It is like a homecoming.

J: from the grave?

NW: Right, right. That is what they say.

N: Only during time period do they come back, here, that means that the ancestors are protecting us, so we have the sending-off-fires. The *daimonji*, that's what they call the sending-off-fires. That's when they return to their graves (using honorific verb forms). During that time, well, we give offerings at the altar, and well, do a lot of things. That's special to Japan!

NW: And then at morning, afternoon and evening we give them rice.

N: I'll tell you all about it later...I'll tell you about it now. This is like—Oh this is hard [to explain too]! (laughs)

J: There are certainly a lot more things to it, aren't there? It is about a week long, right?

N: yes, yes. That is perhaps one of Japan's traditions—I think it is a tradition. It is religion and tradition.

Another “religion and tradition” that Nakamura-san and his wife have spent much time and energy on is the New Year's celebrations. As described above, New Years is typically associated with visits to Shinto shrines but grave visitations are also a standard practice. For an eldest son like Nakamura-san, this time of year is busy with visits from family. At New Years, Nakamura-san makes his own *mochi*, pounding it into small balls and offering it to each of the *hotoke* and the deities.

Although it is common to replace the domestic altar, or *butsudan* as it ages, Nakamura-san's *butsudan* is antique, passed down from previous generations. It is a beautifully carved and gilded altar, fit snug into an alcove next to the *tokonoma* (alcove), decorated with an antique scroll picturing the saint-like figure *Shotokutaishi*, whom Nakamura-san refers to as his household's "founding ancestor". Although not completely sure, he believes that the *butsudan* was purchased by his grandfather. The lacquer in some places is chipped, and Nakamura-san apologizes for its shabby appearance:

J: The *Butsudan* is also from prior—

N: Yes that's right. It's a really o--ld (draws out words) *butsudan*. It's really, hurting though. I really must get it fixed. It's really hurting. Well, it's and old *butsudan*, you know? So, I can't really make it like new again. Of course. (whispered) it would be much better just to dispose of it but, well, up till now, I've been allowed to use it [by the ancestors]

J: This was your fathers?

N: Oh it's from the second generation grandfather [Nakamura's paternal grandfather]

J: Oh, then it must be quite old!

N: Yes it's quite old. Going to be about one hundred years old in a little bit if I'm not mistaken...If I could repair it that would be nice. Make it clean—it's called "*arai*"—from the *arai* they take off all the stains and I think that they could make it look nice, but...

J: And the Buddha statue?

N: t The Buddha statue is, something like, well I don't really know for sure but, something like (sucks in breath) From what I've heard, they say that it's quite an old Buddha...That's why I don't have the heart to dispose of it. Because it's the ancestors' Buddha, you know?

J: The ancestors?

N: Because this Buddha has been passed down from the ancestors. That's what they say. And changing this *butsudan* is really. . . you know? I can't give them up (laughing) even if they get old!
(laughing)

In the same room, hung in the honored place close to the ceiling were the black and white portraits of his parents and grandparents. It is hard to be in the room without the feeling that they are looking over you.

Nakamura-san worries that his son won't keep up the family's traditions, citing the fact that since they don't live together, his son won't know what to do. Also his son's wife, whose family is of a different Buddhist sect, will not know what to do. In the past, women and men of the same Buddhist sect were commonly arranged to marry each other, but recently, these considerations have diminished. According to Nakamura-san, his daughter-in-law shows no interest in learning the family traditions, and Nakamura-san and his wife are somewhat resigned to this. For the time, Nakamura-san continues the ways of his ancestors, but whether he will be the last generation to do this or not, it's still hard for him to tell.

At what point in one's life course does one become more appreciative of the rituals regarding the ancestors? What does this mean for their trajectory? In Nakamura-san's case, he answers,

N: So for me—if you were to ask me if I felt like doing this when I was in my thirties, I would probably say I didn't. (J: Oh) If I was thirty. (J: Yes) Well, but that sort of thing, thinking about looking after [traditions] and that, *I'd say it doesn't happen until you get to be fifty or so...*

NW: Of course, after your parents die. When you think "Oh, this happened to my parents." Well at least you'll want to remember them. Yes.

J: And so that's why you continue doing this?

NW: Well, if they continue this, that's good but... (laughs) really!

N: Well that's right. Everyone says "what are we going to do now, blah blah blah blah!" Oh, when I die, I don't know what's going to happen, afterwards. I don't know if they'll continue [the practices]. Well, that's like, at that age, if they have the feeling that they want to continue or if they're not at the age when they want to, that's a hard thing for anyone to answer, isn't it?
If they're someone in their thirties that really wants to do all that, that's really a person who has appreciation. (J: oh) Well, I don't really know but, well that's where I think there's the generation gap, or, different thinking. Well, even now, people in their twenties, teens—probably if you're in your twenties you don't even think about having *ozoni* (traditional soup) at New Years! Even though you're a Japanese person...

The weakening connection to place also affects Japanese ancestral traditions as well as participation in other community relations. In Nakamura-san's neighborhood for instance, older buildings have been torn down and replaced with large, cheaply built apartment complexes called "mansion" (マンション). The people living in these mansions are mostly community outsiders whom Nakamura-san says have little interest in participating in the activities of the neighborhood self-governing body (*chonai* 町内), which is responsible for organizing community events such as local *matsuri*, fire drills or litter removal. Nakamura-san often bemoans this trend, reminiscing nostalgically about the old days when his neighborhood was a lively place, with children and adults gathering in front of their homes, playing games and exchanging gossip.

Community, to Nakamura-san, depends upon the feeling of a connection to a particular place, which means that children born in a particular neighborhood stay in that neighborhood and preserve its traditions and the traditions of their parents. On the wall above the special alcove of the house, Nakamura-san himself proudly displays a large

certificate he received for living in the same neighborhood for over 100 years. Even though he moved to the house that he is currently living in the 1940's, his family has lived in the same district for over 120 years. This way of living, however, is changing with the gradual “nuclear-ization” of the family (*kakukazokuka* 核家族化) as well as the “mansion-ization” of central Kyoto (building of large, mostly single bedroom apartments in more traditional residential districts).

Two consequences of these social changes bear particular attention: the decline in traditional household ancestor memorial practices and the decline in traditional family based elder care. Both of these trends are directly related to the weakening of interdependent bonds within the household and larger society. Both trends also weaken the conditions for the transmission of family traditions and family history. Although Nakamura-san does not comment much on his plans for late life, it is clear that he feels some anxiety regarding the continuity of his family's ancestor memorial traditions:

J: Is [the nuclear family] a concern to you?

N: It's a concern. If something were to happen, will they be able to help me? Of course even if you telephone ... (laughs) I guess you could call that sort of thing the passing of the ages [*jidai no nagare* 時代の流れ]. It's the passing of the ages. Japan's (wide smile).

J: Sometimes when one's parents get older, then once more—

N: Well, I guess there's the possibility that they'll come back home but, it's not like, it's not 100%! (laughs loudly)

J: Is that so?

N: (still laughing) Absolutely not! But you can't know until the times comes. There's absolutely, there's no insurance, right? There's no formal agreement that they'll come home.

As noted above, family and community in Japan are social units whose main function is to affirm one's identity through membership. As the continuity of this sort of consciousness recedes, the chances for ancestor memorial traditions to be passed down are few. Continuity of the family is perceived not only spatially, centered around a particular place, but also temporally, involving a sense of belonging to a larger cohort of individuals and a succession of individuals that extends into the past and future.

Ancestor rituals, particularly those involving several family members are occasions for reminiscing about the deceased, and as such, the older members of the family are honored as well for their knowledge of past people and events. In the passage above, Nakamura-san clearly presents his views on time and space in regards to the continuity of tradition. To Nakamura-san, the fact that his son doesn't live with him means that the traditions won't be learned, and he defends against this fear of abandonment by repeatedly stating "it's the passing of the ages."

Continuity and Tradition

Nakamura-san's son doesn't seem to want to carry on the traditions of the household, at least not to the extent that Nakamura-san currently does. As far as Nakamura-san is concerned, this has to do with co-residence. Co-residence implies a certain degree of interdependence and reciprocal exchange. On the other hand, living apart not only implies distance, but the inability to engage in regular reciprocal engagements. When visits are made, they are only made because of an emergency or some other necessity. In Nakamura's view, the relationship between descendent and ancestor should mirror that of the father and son.

N: For generations this is, well, if my son who is the successor doesn't keep [traditional customs] then that's a problem, but... (laughs). Well, you know, we don't live together so he doesn't understand. Two generations, we lived together so that's why I think you have to do this sort of thing. Well, you're allowed to do these things.

Now, even my son has left, he's living separately so doing this sort of thing is... Maybe he saw some of that when he was a child, but, since he got married, well, whenever a little break comes, it's not like he's going to come over her. So, well, there's a lot of things to it. He stops in on *ohigan* and *Obon* and such. After all, you have to take care of the *hotoke*-san. That's-- well, It's nice if he comes around then but... He's living separately so you just can't pass things on so easily. (J: Oh) There's all these things that well, depending on the sect, there are different things to do. (J: Oh) Passing those things on just isn't—It's just become difficult in this day and age. More and more.

Well that has to do first of all with co-residence. When you don't co-reside, it's a little difficult. (J: co-residence?) Living together. In the same living quarters. It's called two-generation co-residence. It's because it's gotten more difficult to have two-generation co-residence. Young people these days, well, it's like 'we want to have a house for ourselves, we want to have our own domain (J: domain?) Well "domain" or house. It's hard because they want to have their own domain or house and so these nuclear families are leaving. It's not an absolutely bad thing but, it's just like that. It isn't that they're doing the wrong thing either. The reason that the ancestors aren't important is really because there isn't an *ie*. I think that sort of thing, I guess you could say that lately it's weakening a little. The appreciation has, you know?

J: The appreciation has weakened?

N: Well I think, isn't it because the appreciation has weakened? . . . if you place importance on the household, well when you say household it means two generations co-residing or else three generations, you listen to what your parents say, or else while your grandfather and grandmother are still alive. Because they teach you good things. They would absolutely never teach you the wrong thing. Oh, it's the best if you hear these things from when you are little. (J: from when you are little?) From when you are little, from your childhood.

Nakamura-san is entering a stage of dependence, and yet doesn't feel that he has a right to that dependence. His sons have moved away and his other immediate family are either dead or old like him. Although his participation in his community offsets his feelings of dependency, the burden this imposes on him cannot last but for a few more years.

Summary

Nakamura-san's daily life is filled with tradition. It is as if he is involved in a constant effort to maintain and perpetuate tradition, which he relates to having a sense of continuity of memory of past times and places. Despite this, he voices both concern and resignation when it comes to continuing these traditions when it comes to his own family.

The ambivalence he feels concerning the continuance of ancestor memorial in his household is closely associated with Nakamura-san's feelings about his own transition to old age. Just as he wishes that his son will care for the numerous ancestors, their graves, the *kami* and the festivals, he also wishes for greater care for himself—a care that he is too ashamed, perhaps, to voice. This sentiment is evidenced in his way of drawing together the themes of ancestor worship and co-residence in his narrative where, at several points he voiced that it was the responsibility of the eldest son not only to care for the ancestors but for the household itself, including the retired members. At several points when we would be discussing tradition and the family in our interviews, Nakamura-san had the tendency either to laugh at his discomfort or hush his voice to a whisper.

Nakamura-san believes that because of the changes in modern Japan there is less connection to place, there is also less concern with preserving the family ancestor traditions such as maintaining the festivals, care of the gravesites and household rituals. The adaptations that households have developed to adjust to the changing society do not fit people like Nakamura-san. A connection with the past, even the old and worn *butsudan*, blackened with decades of burning candles and incense, is nevertheless,

indispensable to Nakamura-san who has himself deferred so many of his own desires for the sake of the family.

Certainly social positioning has put the responsibility of the care of the ancestors in Nakamura-san's hands. But in addition to this is a feeling of deep attachment to and affection for the past, to the memories of his parents and his own younger days. As his wife says, his generation *cannot* stop observing the traditions. Not necessarily for fear of some other-worldly retribution, but because it betrays their emotions.

Chapter 11: Growing Old in Japan

The Life-History Project

In June of 2005 I attended a workshop on conducting life-history interviews with elderly people in Japan. The workshop was organized by a local youth center, and the participants (apart from myself) were all native Japanese people between the ages of sixteen and twenty-nine. The purpose of the workshop was to prepare the younger participants to conduct a series of “life-history” (*denki* 伝記) interviews with local elderly volunteers, eventually compiling a written biography. These biographies would be designed, illustrated and hand bound by the young interviewers and presented to their elderly interviewees in a ceremony on “National Respect for the Aged Day” (*Keirōnohi* 敬老の日, September 19th)⁸³. The project was covered extensively in the media, appearing in regional newspapers and even television news broadcasts.

The main presenter at the workshop is the director of a “day service” center in Kyoto. “Day service” provides morning to afternoon services (baths, activities, meals and occasional fieldtrips) to persons who no longer have the capacity to participate in the more active and independence oriented senior welfare centers, but do not require full-

⁸³ Respect for the aged day was originally celebrated only in Hyogo prefecture on Sept. 15th and was called “Older Person’s Day” (としよりの日). This became a nationally celebrated from 1938 as “Day of the Aged” (老人の日). In 1966 this became a national civic holiday and was renamed once again “Respect for the Aged Day”(敬老の日)(Kawabata, Atsumi and Shimaura 2001:12). Half a year prior to the establishment of “Respect for the Aged Day,” the suicide of an elderly person living alone sparked discussion in the Japanese cabinet, prompting then Prime Minister Sato to call for an increase in retirement homes and other eldercare facilities.

time nursing or hospitalization. Because day-service centers are subsidized by the prefectural, city and local governments, they are able to offer inexpensive, high quality care-giving services.

The presenter began the workshop by asking us from what age one becomes “old” (*kōrei* 高齢). The first person from the audience that he asked guessed 65, the next person 70. Another person answered 75. As the director continued to go around the room, the rest of the participants tended to agree that the onset of old age is somewhere between 65 and 75. This perception is consistent with survey data from the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, which reported in 2005, 46.7% of respondents said that old age begins after the age of seventy, while 14.0% said after sixty-five, and 19.7% after seventy-five. The age at which most people think ‘old age’ begins has increased since the last survey taken in 1999⁸⁴.

Of course, outside of parochial cultural convention, there is no universally accepted chronological age at which a person becomes “old,” nor are there specific developmental features, physical, psychological or otherwise that can definitively show if one is “old” or not. For one thing, one grows old only gradually. For another, one can be old in some respects and not others. Lanum and Birren (1995) note that “because different systems [psychic, somatic, social] age at different rates, the relationships [between them] do not remain the same, so that the old person may be phenomenologically different from the younger self” (1995:523-524). In other words, no

⁸⁴ “Kōreisha tte Nan Sai Kara?” 高齢者って何歳から? (“At What Age Does ‘Old Age’ Begin?”) Asahi Shinbun July 26, 2005. A survey in 2005 by the Ministry of Labor found that more than 40% of respondents in all age ranges considered old age to start around or after 75. Those in the 65-74 category were the most likely to respond 70, and those over 75 were the most likely to respond 75 or over, indicating a self-identification beginning at about 70 with old age. Besides chronological age, all survey respondents noted “loosing physical ability” as the chief marker of having reached old age.

single factor, psychic, somatic or social can adequately account for the experience of old age. Senescence, or “those processes and changes that link aging to mortality” (Mayer 1987:21) can be identified by looking at biological and psychological changes in the person, but to equate aging with senescence reduces our perceptions of aging to the stereotype of the frail and declining person. The *Merck Manual of Health and Aging* (2004) is an example of this equation of old age and senescence, though in a slightly masked form. The *Merck Manual* identifies two kinds of age assessment standards that are more meaningful than chronological age alone: biological age and psychological age. For biological age, relatively healthy people are considered young, while those who show signs of vision or hearing loss, for example are biologically old. For psychological age, someone who “works, plans and looks forward to future events” is considered psychologically young, or “young at heart” while those who do not have these traits, we are left to assume, are old (*Merck Manual of Health and Aging*: 2004:5)⁸⁵. While medical approaches have given us detailed descriptions of why certain symptoms or conditions are more prevalent as one ages in adulthood, by describing a healthy old age as “young,” they deny the possibility of other ways of understanding late life.

Nonetheless, the medical perspective, which understandably places emphasis on epidemiology and senescence, was the viewpoint offered to us at the workshop. Our presenter explained to us that the official term for people over the age of seventy-five is “late old age” (*gokikōreisha* 後期高齢者). After seventy-five, he continued, even healthy people see an increased change in their bodies, such as hearing loss, vision

⁸⁵ No description of someone “psychologically old” appears in the manual, perhaps a hopeful omission.

impairment and short-term memory deficiency. He added that because of these kinds of changes, older people find it more and more difficult to comfortably leave their homes, take public transportation or talk to others on the telephone. Physical deterioration makes it more difficult to do everyday housework or bathe oneself. A general continuity was traced for us from chronological age through biological health and finally to behavior.

He then offered us practical advice on how to conduct the interviews with this model of old age in mind: smile, remember their names, do not avoid eye-contact but also do not stare, do not try to correct them or point out that they've already told a particular story and do not joke about fantastic tales that they might tell you. While the idea of the "honorable elders" (Palmore and Maeda 1975) was not absent in the presentation, it nonetheless shared space with the idea of the elderly as emotionally delicate and even childlike, an ambivalence that has been echoed by others who have commented on the perceptions of the elderly in Japan (Tsuji 1995: 198). The message was that elderly were not only different from us in many ways, but that they will show signs of physical or mental decline, and that they should be indulged and deferred to. In order to understand this message, it is important to know how old age is perceived in Japanese culture.

The cultural role old people in Japan has been a subject of much debate (Thang 2000b). Palmore and Maeda's (1975; 1985) discussion of "the honorable elders," where old age is equated with "prestige and honor" has contributed to images of Japan as a geriatric utopia, and has been the topic of much debate and criticism. Similarly, Wada (1995) argues that Japanese "paternalism" and respect for seniority contribute to the valued status of the elderly, again describing ideology rather than actual perceptions. According to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (2004), when asked "What is

your image of old age?" over 70% of respondents answered "declining mind and body, great concern with health." Other, far less popular responses were "rich in experience and wisdom," "little income, concerned with finances," "not bound to time, can follow anything they want," and "likely to be old-fashioned." Interestingly, the older respondents were less likely than younger ones to choose "declining mind and body" (63.3% of those over 75, and 74.1% of those in their twenties), but even less likely to choose "rich in experience and wisdom" (28.4% over 75 and 51.9% in their twenties!) (2004 White Paper part II, p.309 table 2-(2)-9). These survey results point out the sense of ambivalence about the image of elderly that is well represented in folklore and literature (Tsuji 1997; Kawai 1997; Yamaori 1997a, 1997b), a point that I will develop later in respect to the life-cycle.

One example of social aging in Japan is the rite of passage that follows retirement. In Japan, the national age of compulsory retirement for most company employees and civil servants was, until recently, sixty years old. In 1939 all citizens over the age of sixty were eligible for a pension. As of April of 2006, the age of compulsory retirement, as well as pension benefits was raised to sixty-five, although several public services reserved for seniors are still available after sixty. In 2005, 19.7 percent of people over the age of sixty continued to work, receiving only a partial pension payment. These working seniors are no longer being considered "old," since they have at least partially deferred the full retirement process.

At the conclusion of the youth center presentation, the day-service center director and the coordinator of the project emphasized that the elderly volunteers have had interesting lives (especially since they lived during the difficult years of WWII and its

aftermath), and that we would be doing a wonderful service for them by helping them revisit their old memories. This offers two additional related elements to Japanese views of old age, namely that the elderly are repositories of tradition and history and perhaps embody a more authentic “Japanese-ness” than that which is found in the current global youth culture, and that an important aspect of old age is reminiscence.

The implicit goals of the interview project were not only to provide young people a chance to interact with the elderly, but also to benefit the elders themselves by providing them a social activity and a sense of imparting knowledge to future generations. The assumption is that with fewer co-residing three-generation families, younger people have become uncomfortable with interacting with older people. As for the elder participants, it was believed that this project would offer a socially and cognitively stimulating way of reviving a positive sense of accomplishment and offer a chance to benefit the community. As I consulted with the coordinator who initiated the interview project, it became increasingly clear that another objective was to develop a particular scripted narrative arc of each person’s life, starting from the youthful and happy pre-WWII years, through the difficult but ultimately character building war and its aftermath, and eventually to the re-establishment of normalcy, and the current enjoyment of old age. We were learning a particular historical narrative that we were to tie to the personal narrative of the interviewee. I was urged by the coordinator to ask my interviewee about children’s games, school trips and other leisure activities before the war began. As for the war years, I was told that asking about food rations, forced labor and lost relatives would usually elicit good responses. Then, for old age, I was advised to ask questions about exercise and health regimes, grandchildren, hobbies and social functions. It was

unclear whether this script was meant for the benefit of the youths conducting the interviews, the elderly interviewees, or both. What it does do is mark individual experience as historical, and the elder as an artifact of a past that can be remembered and reflected upon, but which has ended and will not return. While the storytelling elder seems to be in control of their narrative, their story is literally written and therefore fixed by the young interviewers, who then return this crafted retelling to the old.

This project centered on the assumption that the elderly, while physically feeble, are nonetheless socially valuable because they are rich in memory⁸⁶. It is also the elderly who represent the image of memory disintegration in the form of senility. Given the dramatic historical context of the lives of elderly Japanese today, this tension between memory and forgetting is repeatedly emphasized. This has become internalized by older adults themselves, marking themselves as the last Japanese that remember life before and during WWII.

Living to Old Age in Japan's Aging Society

The United Nations definition of an "Aging Society" is when 7% of the population is aged 65 or older. By this definition, Japan became an "Aging Society"⁸⁷ in 1970. Between the years 1970 and 1994, the percentage of the population of 65 in Japan doubled to 14%, the fastest growth in this statistic of any nation in recorded history (Kinsella 1997:19). Currently, the combination of increasing longevity and decreasing fertility has increased the percentage of adults 65 years old and older to over 21% of the

⁸⁶ "Reminiscence therapy" (Jap. *Kaisō Ryōhō* 回想療法) is believed to have some clinically measurable effects in both Japan and the US (Lin et al. 2003). It is believed to improve general well-being and symptoms associated with depression.

⁸⁷ Kawabata et al. (2001) pg. 52

current total population, making it the oldest society in the world⁸⁸. This percentage is expected to grow steadily for about another 20 years as members of Japan's second baby-boom (*dankai no sedai* 団塊の世代 those born between 1947 and 1949) grow old, before beginning to slowly drop off.

In addition to having a large elderly population, Japan also has the longest average life-expectancy of any country in the world: 85.6 years for women and 78.8 for men. Although this is impressive in its own right, it is even more so when we consider that only about fifty years ago, the average life expectancy was only 70.1 years for women and 65.3 for men. Along with the increase in longevity has come an increase in the number of years the elderly are likely to require professional nursing assistance or care from their families. This is a result of the decrease in infectious diseases, and the greater occurrence debilitating conditions with a longer course, such as arthritis, rheumatism, mild stroke, senile dementia⁸⁹.

Fertility rates in Kyoto and Japan in general are dropping even as the number of people over the age of sixty-five is rapidly increasing. Media representations of Japan's low fertility/aging change problem (*shohshikoureika mondai* 少子高齢化問題) are usually attended to by remarks on the problems this introduces, and possible solutions to

⁸⁸ Yomiuri Sinbun reported on "Respect for the Aged Day" (2006, September 19) that there were 25,560,000 people over the age of 65 in Japan (from the Japanese Ministry of General Affairs census). Furthermore, the percentage of those over the age of 65 is expected to rise to 26% of the general population in ten years, and over 40% of the population by 2055. Men over 65 accounted for 17.4% of the general male population, while women over 65 accounted for 22.5% of the general female population.

⁸⁹ Plath (1980) prophetically writes that "if the essential cultural nightmare of the nineteenth century was to be in poverty, perhaps ours is to be old and alone or afflicted with terminal disease" (1). Recently the use of the phrase "*kodokushi*" 孤独死 meaning "solitary death" without living friends or relatives to have cared for the deceased in old age, or to take care of last rites, seems to have eclipse the phrase 過労死 (death from over-work) as the current crisis in dying.

them. The main problems are ‘how do we encourage more children’ and, more importantly, “who will care for the elderly” (Fig. 11.1).

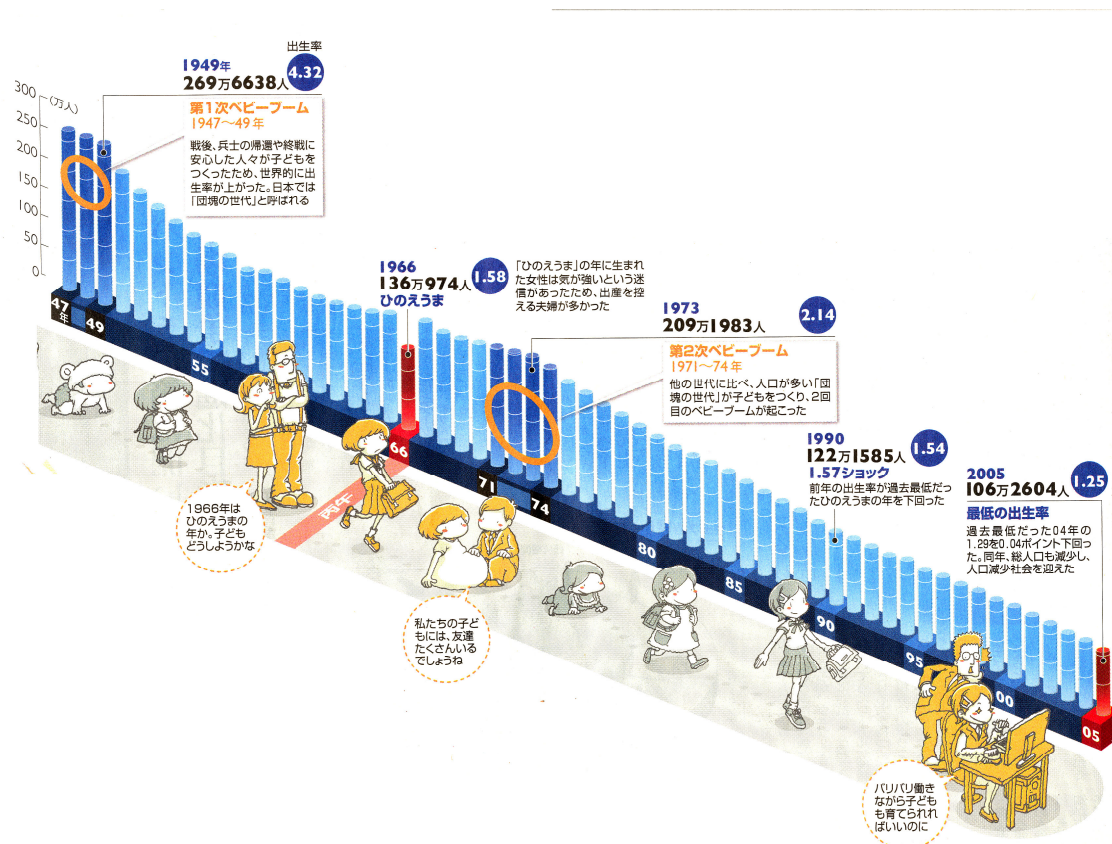


Fig. 11.1: A diagram shown in a Japanese newspaper indicating the fertility decline in Japan since WWII. The portions of the graph circled in orange indicate ‘baby booms,’ while the red bars indicate years with exceptionally low birth rates. (Asahi Shinbun, July 28, 2006)

These problems are obviously grand in scope, and are complicated by changes in residence patterns, workplace policies and national and transnational movements of individuals. In addition to these main problems there are a host of other problems, such as declining college attendance, a shrinking labor force and the lack of policies encouraging immigration.

Age Groupings: the “young-old” and the “old-old”

Although there are countless terms in Japanese for persons in old age, there are few that describe different specific trajectories or statuses within the general category of the aged. For example, the Japanese equivalents of “young-old” and “old-old” translate simply as “early-term elder” (*zenkikōreisha* 前期高齢者) and “late-term elder” (*kōkikōreisha* 後期高齢者). Traphagen lists nine of the most commonly used colloquial terms for a person in old age, as well as the response of older people to these words (2000:99-101). The majority of the terms gave people an overall negative or neutral impression, with “grandpa/grandma” (*ojiisan/obaasan* お爺さんお・婆さん used for non-kin as well) being the only with a highly positive reaction⁹⁰. Traphagen importantly notes that “grandpa/grandma” can also have negative connotations (2000:77). When talking about older adults with informants I did my best to use the terms they employed, which were usually the more neutral *nenpai* (年配) or *otoshiyori* (お年寄り), both of which are roughly equivalent to “a person of many years” and are softened by using an honorific pronoun for person.

Not surprisingly, official or bureaucratic terminology, such as *kōreisha* (高齢者), which in usage is similar to the use of the term “senior citizen” in the United States, is almost never used by the elderly to describe themselves or other specific persons, but reserved for older people in general, or social, economic and political issues that face the elderly. Once, while having a meeting with several staff and clients of a health and

⁹⁰ A study of terms for old age terms in the US conducted by Wassel (2005) found significant differences in the terms that younger and older people felt appropriate for describing old age. In particular the study pointed out that while the young avoided terms they felt were pejorative, the older respondents rejected terms that seemed too euphemistic (Nohlgren 2005).

welfare center to organize a special event, one of the staff absent-mindedly used *kōreisha* to describe people at the center, leading a man in his seventies to interrupt her and yell “Who are you calling a *kōreisha*!?” Everyone in the room laughed at this outburst of mock anger, diffusing some of the tension that is felt by these “young-old” clients between being independent and active retirees and *kōreisha* dependent on pensions, insurance and municipal institutions.

The various terms used to describe old age cover a broad spectrum of feelings regarding aging, as well as the diversity of late life trajectories. In setting out on my field research, I was aware of the huge diversity of experience in old age, single culture, is a way to force more complex interpretations of what it meant to grow old. Attention to this is surprisingly lacking, or perhaps taken for granted in most of the standard survey material which bear similarities to the homogenization of ethnic groups and genders.

Still, as obvious as it may seem, it is important to reiterate that aging in Japan, as elsewhere, old age is not a uniform experience, just as the development of identity at any point in the life course does not conform to a single uniform pattern. The self in old age is developed and managed according to historical, social, somatic and psychological factors that shape the individual and are shared, processed and adapted in respect to one’s cohort, family and larger social world. Some of these factors, through their circulation in broader discourse, are more frequently adopted and become widely adhered to than others. Therefore, despite the diversity, there are limitations, and patterns emerge that allow scholars to apply interpretive models and condense similar individuals into meaningful groups.

One useful framework for understanding the different styles of aging in Japan is introduced by Merry White (2002:170), who divides the “older generation” into the *kyujinrui* 旧人類 (“old-breed,” born around 1925) and the first post-war generation (born around 1945). The “old-breed” was raised during the war, “came of age after the war and began families in the late 1940’s and early 1950’s” (2002:170). The first post-war generation are the children of the “old-breed,” who were “encouraged by their sacrificing parents to stay in school longer and accumulate social capital in academic credentials,” growing up in a “climate of bureaucratic employment and galloping urbanization” (2002:170).

While I have found White’s categories useful, it is also important to emphasize the diversity of experience of the “old-breed generation,” in particular, which most of my informants were part of. Within the “old-breed,” I find at least three large separations: The “Meiji old-breed,” (born -1915, in the Meiji era 明治時代) “Taishō old-breed” (born 1915-1930 in the Taishō era 大正時代), and the “Wartime old-breed” (born 1930-1940, early Shōwa era 昭和時代). As can be deduced from the last category, the major differences between these sub-generations of the “old-breed” is the fact that they were at very different periods of their lives when the tremendous changes and traumatic events of WWII occurred in Japan. In volunteering at day-service centers, I frequently came in contact with the Meiji old-breed, men and women who were in their late 90’s, and whose identities had largely solidified by the time of the greatest difficulties of WWII. In contrast, the Taishō old-breed, which made up the bulk of my sample, were very young adults at the time of the war. While their maturity gave them some resources for coping

with the war, it nonetheless has become an important focal point in their conception of self. The “Wartime old-breed” is a rather restrictive group meant to identify those who, during WWII, were old enough to remember the traumatic events of the war and its aftermath, but still too young to have understood it or actively participated in it. The Wartime old-breed were born at a time when the war had already begun, and started to become independent just as the worst of the war’s aftermath was ending. I don’t intend to develop a full analysis of each of these generations and sub-generations, because this would exceed the aims of this research. I think it is important to at least review some of their main characteristics.

The “Young-Old”: The first post-war generation (b. 1940-1945)

Those who were born between 1940 and 1950, during the height of the war, do remember its aftermath, but by the time they reached their adolescent years, the Japanese recovery was beginning to pick up speed. These “boomers” are credited with the post-war Japanese “economic-miracle,” and not only have a deeply felt sense of making up for the tragic circumstances of their parents’ generation, but also bear the guilt of having succeeded far beyond their parents’ accomplishments.

Those in their sixties are for the most part, still healthy, active and vital and seek recognition of this. The young-old are perhaps the most visible group the of elderly in Japan, and many take advantage of their ample leisure time and robust health to pursue their interests, either through social clubs, community volunteering, tour groups or by taking part-time work. This generation also tends to have a idealized notion of the United States culture, as if it was almost a saving grace of Japan. One of my informants, born in

1945, even idealized General MacArthur and his iconoclastic corn-cob pipe as symbols of American superiority. He told me that he was happy that Japan had lost the war to America, since, in his opinion, things would have been much worse if they had continued the way Japan was going. This surprised me, since he didn't seem at all like a progressive thinker in other aspects.

The “old-breed” (b. -1940)

Those born before 1925 remember clearly the early days of the war, the sense of mission and urgency that prevailed before the harsh consequences made life difficult. This cohort, now in their mid-eighties and older, nurture a sense of nostalgia for the past, and for many, overcoming the difficulties of war has instilled a deep sense of the importance of basic value of survival and the principles of selflessness and mutual help. These principles, if maintained in later adulthood, provides this generation with a kind of comfort in spite of their increasing frailty. In general, those who I spoke with in the Meiji or Taishō old-breed generations found that they had many resources for adapting to the trauma of the war, and continue to utilize these coping strategies in old age.

Those in the “Wartime old-breed” generation suffered the worst out of the three sub-generations. Born roughly between 1930 and 1940, these children were too young to be sent to war, too old to avoid labor, and endured the most difficult years at home, sometimes with parents or older siblings sent to the front lines. Forced work in war industries and the threat of bombing raids made their adolescence, that time of most consequence for the development of a future adult personality, a perpetually traumatic time. One man in this cohort whom I interviewed regularly frequently repeated to me his

story of gathering body parts from the site of a bombing, which he described shaking and stuttering as “Hell on earth” (*ikijigoku* 生き地獄). He and some other boys transported the remains to a temple for last rites, and because all of the trucks were being used for the war, the bodies were moved by donkey-cart. He was only fifteen years old at the time. He also described the trauma of having to demolish buildings in his neighborhood, including the houses of his friends, as a precaution against the spread of fires in the event of a bombing. This man remembers going to school only at night, when it was considered safer to be out. While he remained in Japan, his older brother, whom he idolized, was fighting for Japan in Burma at that time.

All Japanese people who lived through the war lost friends and relatives, sacrificed deeply and suffered personally. However, because these sub-generations were at very different points in their lives during the war, their different experiences of WWII in terms of the development of personality would later characterize their adaptation to old age.

Japanese Approaches to the Old Age and the Life-Cycle

As I use the expression, the “life course,” or the self over time, also describes the way that an individual interprets, anticipates, and remembers their progression to maturity. As described in Chapter 1, the life course has been approached by specialists in two basic ways: as a continuous narrative of gradual development, and as a series of interruptions and readjustments. These two approaches are not mutually exclusive, and in fact have been formalized in cultural customs such as rites of passage, wherein older generations reproduce interruptive moments in the life-course, and thereby reinforce

continuity in their own lives. This combination of interruption, integration and reproduction or repetition has given strength to the idea of the “life-cycle” as a more encompassing or holistic framework by which to view the life course. In Japan, the notion of life course as a cycle, or spiral, rather than linear and progressive, is dominant.

Since medieval times, the most significant rite of passage marking the transition to old age has been the celebration of the sixtieth year of life, or *kanreki* 還暦⁹¹. *Kanreki* literally means a return, or re-cycling through the calendar, since after sixty years, one has passed through five cycles of twelve years on the Chinese lunar calendar, so that one’s birthday once again occurs in the same astrological year as one’s original birthday and therefore one has symbolically returned to the origin⁹². At a *kanreki* celebration, the idea of rebirth is signified by wearing red clothing, which, in earlier times, only children and old people are permitted to wear (Embree 1939: 214)⁹³. Even today, those celebrating *kanreki* may be given the traditional bright red vest (*Chanchanko* チャンチヤンコ), hat and sitting cushion or alternatively some other small red accessory⁹⁴. After *kanreki* the Japanese celebrate the ages 70 (*kiju* 喜寿), 77(*koki* 古希), 88(*beiju* 米寿), 90(*sanju* 卒寿), 99 (*hakuju* 白寿), 108 (*chaju* 茶寿), 111 (*kōju* 皇寿) and finally 112 and

⁹¹ 61 according to ones birth age, where one begins life at age one. When celebrating *kanreki*, it may still be referred to using this older reckoning system.

⁹² In pre-modern Japan, the highest mortality rates were for children and old people, and in one calculation of the average life expectancy (excluding children) for the years 1771-1870 according to one temple registry shows that men lived an average of 61.4 years and women 60.3 years (Hirota 2005:4-5). It is not surprising then, that those who lived to the age of sixty were seen as very close to the transition to the other world at that time. In addition, old people after death are said to be returning to the other world, while the souls of children are said to originate in that same other world. This folk belief is consistent with Buddhist ideas of reincarnation, but is not elaborated on in moral terms of hierarchies of rebirth.

⁹³ Beardsley et al. (1959) note that the color red (*aka* 赤) is associated with newborn babies both in Japan and in China (common word for a newborn is *aka-chan*(赤ちゃん). Red is a color of vitality and strength.

⁹⁴ Current etiquette manuals note that it is also acceptable to give gift certificates or theater tickets rather than something red

over (*chinju* 珍寿). This tradition originated with the celebration of court nobles' birthdays and only recently became popular among ordinary people (Tsuji 1997:198)⁹⁵.

The notion of the life-cycle, and particularly the affinity between children and elders symbolized by the red of the *kanreki* ceremony, has been frequently remarked in studies of Japanese folklore (Yamaori 1995). According to Japanese folklorists, children and the elderly are traditionally to be treated with care and indulgence, because they are both seen as closer to god (*kami*), a notion that is echoed in Ruth Benedict's "great shallow U curve" representing childhood and old age as the periods of life where one is able to indulge in dependence (Benedict 1946:254). The tendency to use the cultural implications of dependence to identify elders and children is not limited to Japan (Hockey and James 1993). And while this analogy may be adopted by older adults themselves as a way to cope with dependence, it is also frequently contested. In Japan, one way in which this contestation may occur is through ancestor memorial, since the act of memorializing the ancestors serves to reposition the elderly person in the role of the active caretaker, even as one remains the child of the deceased parent. Looking at this model of the life-cycle gives further clues about the association of children and the elderly as semi-deified beings.

Summary

Old age in Japan is viewed as a stage in the human life cycle that extends beyond the individual to include both descendants and ancestors. Old age is not a single stage in

⁹⁵ The words for these age markers are commonly used by the elderly, but unlike *kanreki*, there is little meaning attached to them, since the characters used to write them are merely chosen based on their resemblance to the numerical figures they signify.

a progression of age grades—it is a transition to a new life. Although the successive stages of life are marked by numerous ritual events, these events serve to integrate the individual into the broader life-cycle of the family. In the following case study, I will show how old age, when understood from a life-course/life-cycle, influences ancestor memorial. Whereas the previous case study (Chapter 4) focused mainly on the way that rituals for the ancestors influence old-age identity by confirming a sense of personal continuity and tradition, the next case study will look at how events that occur over the life course shape future perspectives on old age, family and the afterlife. Nishida-san's early experiences not only pre-adapted her for future experiences of loss and old age. Importantly the presence of the ancestors plays a continuing role in her narrative of aging.

Chapter 12: Nishida-san (88)

Meeting Nishida-san

The first time I met Nishida-san, she began our conversation by saying “I’m 88 years old, and I still have all of my teeth!” She then smiled wide revealing a couple of silver teeth, but no dentures. By all measures, Nishida-san seems to be in good health for her age, but does complain about intermittent nerve related pain (perhaps neuralgia) and fatigue. Nishida-san visits her doctor nearly every week, as much for chatting and enjoying the serene waiting room as for medical attention (“They play classical music. Sometimes in the morning I’ll fall asleep there!”). Nishida-san has been going to the same clinic for over forty years. Her original doctor has long since passed away, and Nishida-san currently sees his grandson. She also makes regular visits to her massage therapist, which, with her insurance, only costs a few hundred yen a visit. These are the kind of things she considers as the benefits of being old. Nishida-san’s complexion is smooth and almost unblemished, gracefully lined with thin, delicate wrinkles. Her thick silver hair was cut short with a modest well-groomed wave (Fig 12.1). Recently, Nishida-san told me, she has been taking regular strolls around the neighborhood, usually with the help of her eldest son who lives together with his wife, daughter and Nishida-san and has taken over the family silk weaving business. Nishida-san calls these strolls “exercise for the mouth,” (*kuchi no undō* 口の運動) since they are organized around dropping in on neighborhood friends, and involve more sitting and chatting than locomotion.



Figure 12.2 Nishida-san outside of her *machiya* home.

In addition to her strolls, Nishida-san continues to work for the family business. “I’ll work as long as I can. As long as I don’t become *boke*” she told me once, and I couldn’t even imagine such a sharp woman ever becoming senile. Like others her age, Nishida-san has a conscious fear of forgetting and the consequences of it. Besides this, Nishida-san has few anxieties about growing older. She is in good health, she benefits financially from both state and family support, and she has an heir and successor to the family business who will not abandon her anytime soon.

My first meeting with Nishida-san was arranged by the community youth center that set up the workshop on old age that (Chapter 1), and which had ties to the local community’s senior welfare groups. Nishida-san is well known among the members of her tightly knit community, since for nearly thirty years (until she turned 75) she had been a member of the social welfare duties of the local Civic Welfare Association (*Minseiiinkai* 民生委員会). Although initially shy towards the idea of participating in a

life-history project, she eventually assented to the requests of other current community leaders who were contacted by the youth center.

During most of our interviews, Nishida-san and I would sit in a six mat room of her early twentieth century *machiya* used for receiving visitors. In the summer months, the sliding paper doors between rooms were left open allowing a faint breeze to enter from the small central courtyard. In the winter, the drafty house would be heated by several carefully placed gas space heaters. In the very back of the house, down a narrow corridor past the kitchen and washroom was a large room housing a small silk weaving factory that has been producing silk neckties since 1916. The locomotive-like clanging of seven heavy cast-iron power-looms and other machinery used in the factory are so loud that it was a wonder to me that they could scarcely be heard from where Nishida-san and I sat during our talks only a couple of rooms away. Still, the fact that this was a weaver's home was evident from the tall stacks of boxed orders and the shelves full of bobbins shimmering with silk thread.

As was the case with Nakamura-san (Chapter 10), Nishida-san's house also serves as a workplace, with the office in the front room and the factory in the rear, and since Nishida-san herself remains involved in some small book-keeping tasks and customer relations, our interviews always needed to be firmly scheduled well in advance. This tendency had more to do with her busy schedule, her many friends and her various formal and informal responsibilities than with her personality. When we did meet, Nishida-san was always prepared for my visit, offering me a cup of tea or snacks before pouring some tea for herself from a small hot pot positioned on the floor within reach. She always sat at the same place at the table, leaning against the china cabinet.

Nishida-san's Life-History

School years

Nishida-san has lived in Kyoto her entire life. Born in 1916, Nishida-san belongs to the generation of the “Taishō old-breed”. As the youngest of five siblings, she was constantly doted on by her brothers and sisters. While the other siblings were born only a year or two apart from one another, Nishida-san was born nearly eight years after her closest sibling. As a result, she never thought of her siblings so much as peers, but rather as pseudo-parents. Her parents, on the other hand, were somewhat distant, retiring early in Nishida-san's life and taking on a more grand-parenting role relatively early in her upbringing. When her father died, Nishida-san, still in her teens, went to live with an elder sister, who had a home in Kyoto. When Nishida-san married, a few years later, her eldest brother stood in for her deceased father to broker the customary marriage and provide the customary dowry of furniture and kimono.

Nishida-san has few memories of when she was very young. Because she was always closely looked after by her older siblings she had few close same-age playmates. She enjoyed school, but described herself as an average student, neither the last nor first in her class. Her proudest accomplishment during grade school years was having perfect attendance. As for home life, she lived with her siblings, parents and grandparents, and one of her earliest memories was the warmth of her grandmother's back when she would come up behind her to give her a hug.

Nishida-san belonged to a fairly wealthy family living in downtown Kyoto, so as a young woman, Nishida-san attended a girl's preparatory school (*jogakkō* 女学校),

which was rare for most girls of that time, and studied traditional Japanese arts such as of tea, calligraphy, poetry and textiles. Nishida-san was particularly fond of traditional Japanese poetry. Around this time, inspired by one of her poetry instructors, she began to carry with her a small memo pad on which she would jot down her observations, insights and occasional poems. Nishida-san was encouraged by her instructors to submit her poetry for publication, but after a few publications in news magazines after entering junior college, she stopped submitting her works. Nishida-san continues to write poems however, usually in the 5-7-5-7-7 syllable style of the Japanese *tanka* 短歌, or courtly verse. She enjoys composing these poems most when she is inspired by something new, such as on a drive in the countryside. During one of our interviews she told me that a few years ago, when she was visiting a neighboring prefecture, she wrote:

*In the evening
I see Mt. Hira,
Covered in color,
Hometown Shiga,
The light falling sparsely*

Nishida-san sometimes complained that as she grows older, she isn't able to go out very often, and so hasn't been so inspired to write new poems. The tendency to draw inward was common among older Japanese I spoke with, but Nishida-san seemed to remark on it with modest resignation, "when you're around the same things all the time, you don't want to write poems."

Nishida-san recalls hearing the announcement that Japan had entered World War II, on the radio during one of her school classes. At the time, she had very little idea of what this meant, or what the eventual consequences would be. It was a time of great

nationalism in the country, and everyone was mobilized to help the war effort. Nishida-san, along with other girls from her neighborhood were organized into work groups and sent to work cleaning ships on the Japan Sea. As with her elementary school days, Nishida-san remembers receiving a certificate stating that she never missed a day of work, and she herself recalls how she was always motivated to do her best, no matter what. After a year of this work she returned home.

Although Nishida-san is modest about her education, it is clear that she excelled not only in the fine arts but also in mathematics, a quality that made her an attractive match for a Kyoto weaving family in need of an accountant. One of Nishida's Japanese sewing instructors helped introduce Nishida-san to her future husband, the heir to a weaving firm that produced western-style neckties. The heir of the firm had two younger sisters, but they had both graduated school and moved on to other jobs, leaving an accounting position open. The courtship was short, and Nishida-san soon left school to work for her in-laws. "I pleaded with them to just wait until the fall," Nishida told me, "but they insisted that I come. It was just like I was an office worker being hired!" Nishida-san married in 1942. Nishida-san's husband was able to avoid military service in the middle of WWII due to health problems contracted while working previously in Korea. Because of the shortage of food during the war, Nishida remembers, the family had to buy the ingredients for the wedding feast in advance, and give them to the banquet hall to have food prepared for the reception.

Marriage and Childbirth

A few years after marriage, Nishida-san gave birth to a girl. The delivery was difficult, and for about two months, Nishida-san stayed at the hospital in a near comatose state. After she finally regained consciousness, she found out that her relatives had already begun funeral arrangements for her. Just before she came out of her unconscious state, Nishida-san recalled having a vision of being in a wide field, high with grass and flowers, and having an altogether such a wonderful feeling that she wanted to continue passing through it. Her eyes lit up as she told me the story, but she then leaned back and told me that she heard voices calling her name in the other direction, and she stopped, and returned. Nishida-san's health was recovered, but her daughter died only eight months later. Rather than have the child put into a coffin and escorted out of the back of the hospital, the staff, out of sympathy, allowed Nishida-san to carry the body of her child home in her arms wrapped in a blanket. She was let out of the front door, as if the child was still alive, avoiding the usual stigma attached to death⁹⁶.

“She was so heavy!” Nishida-san told me, in a tone both melancholy and resigned, “Only ten months old, but so heavy...Even putting her on my knees, she was heavy...” Nishida-san rode in the taxi like that to her home where the funeral was arranged.

J: When your child died, did you have a funeral for her?

⁹⁶ Dead bodies were typically taken out the rear door of the hospital, and Nishida implied that this was a shameful experience. The infant mortality rate at this time was still quite high, being prior to the introduction of many western medicines and techniques. According to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare statistics, the infant mortality rate in Kyoto prefecture for the year 1940 was 77.4 per 1,000 live births. In contrast, the infant mortality rate fifty years later was 4.9.

N: We did. Well it was during the war, and then it was only a ten month old child too... But anyway, we had a proper funeral. . . They didn't just dump her into a coffin and send me home, but they told me to hold her and take her home. Usually you can't go out the front entrance to a hospital with a coffin, but if you go out as if you have a living baby, you can go out of the usual gate... But still, even a baby, even a baby is heavy. So heavy. (J: 10 months old?) 10 months. So very heavy. Well, when she died, I couldn't even move, I just thought that she was so heavy and I returned like that in the taxi. She was so heavy. Really the wisdom that I got from that was, I wanted to hold her, always, I wanted to be this way with her, I wanted to play with her but, I couldn't do it, I just had her weight on my knee, I felt her weight on my knee.

The weight of her dead child is repeatedly emphasized, perhaps as a metaphorical expression of the emotional weight of this experience, or in contrast with the assumption that small children shouldn't be so heavy. It is interesting to note that the Japanese word Nishida-san uses for "heavy" is *omoi* 重い, which is a homonym of the word "thought" *omoi* 思い, as in the words for empathy (*omoiyari* 思いやり) and remembrance (*omoidae* 思い出). As Nishida-san realized that she couldn't hold or play with her child, she realized that what she was left with was only *weight*, or maybe the thoughts of her child. Nishida-san's description of her child's death emphasizes the process of grief work, in that she was able to disassociate the thoughts about the child from the dead body, and keep those thoughts with her in her mind.

Nishida-san's hardships did not end with her sickness, nor with the death of her first child. During World War II and its immediate aftermath, food was in very short supply, and there was little demand for silk neckties. The military had resorted to collecting every bit of iron they could from households, including ordinary pots and pans and the iron looms that Nishida-san's family had been using. Previously wealthy families were reduced to planting potatoes in the small gardens around houses. Nishida-san's

mother-in-law was able to help the family through her connections to distant rural area. She would go and collect vegetables and bring them home, careful not to let on to other passengers how heavy her bags were. Since people in the countryside often needed kimono for wedding dowries, this often proved to be a good means of exchange.

Nishida-san soon had two more children, both boys, in the years shortly before the end of the war. After the war, Nishida-san's husband took a job with the occupying government as a translator (he long had an interest in English, and would read only English language newspapers). This required him to work long hours and take frequent trips to other cities. In 1951, only five years after the end of the war, Nishida-san's husband passed away due to acute pneumonia. Nishida-san blames his death on his time spent in Korea, which she believes he never fully recovered from, and the stress of his heavy workload.

After her husband's death, Nishida-san raised her two sons with the help of her in-laws, in the house where we sat to conduct our interviews. Nishida-san's natal siblings sometimes helped out with watching the children when she had to go out for business. Still unfamiliar with most of the aspects of running a weaving business, Nishida-san relied on the help those in her community, and learned accounting skills and marketing practices from those she had business relationships with. The times were difficult, but in the end, her strong community ties gave her strength.

Nishida-san's mother-in-law and father-in-law have now passed away, as well as all of her siblings, making her one of the oldest surviving member of her family. She keeps close relationships with her remaining relatives, especially her living sisters-in-law, whom she is closest to in age. She also stays in close contact with her classmates from

her days at the girl's preparatory school, who gather at least twice a year for formal reunions in addition to several smaller reunions. These reunions are some of Nishida-san's happiest times of the year, and she often remarks on what a good time she has with her former classmates.

These days, Nishida-san describes her weaving business as modest, but steady, thanks to a large number of old and reliable clients. Unlike many of the other craftspeople in Kyoto's Nishijin 西陣 silk-weaving district who have continued to focus upon kimono products and handloom weaving, Nishida-san's factory does not seem to be in any danger of closing down soon (Hareven 2002). Because the factory utilizes powerlooms to produce high quality neckties, business remains stable, even at a low rate of production compared to larger factories. Nishida-san put both of her sons through college, and although she did not pressure either one into taking over the family business, the eldest son eventually moved back home, married and had a child. This was Nishida-san's first grandchild, a girl. Soon afterward, the eldest son took over the family business and is now in charge of most of the business affairs. Nishida-san's younger son moved to a town in a neighboring prefecture, married and had a daughter as well.

The eldest son is an avid outdoorsman, having been a cub scout in his younger days, and is an intrepid mountain climber now. His photos of Japan's mountain landscapes decorate the entryway to their home and his frequent outings are a source of constant concern to Nishida-san. He is a strongly built and gentlemanly figure who would often sit with Nishida-san and me, smiling warmly as he tried out his English phrases with me. Nishida-san encouraged him, beaming with pride. Despite the close quarters, there is little evident rivalry or tension between the two.

Later Years

In her later years, Nishida-san gained prominence in her community as a well-connected person and a strong and sensible survivor. When she was 45, she was nominated to be a representative of the community's Civic Association (*minseiiinkai* 民生委員会). She took the appointment, and was delegated to the community welfare position, which involved looking after the elderly members of the community, particularly those men and women who were living alone and were considered to be most at risk of succumbing to depression, illness and death. Throughout her thirty years as a civic leader in her community, Nishida-san became intimate with many of the people in her neighborhood, and was often the first person that would be contacted in the event of a dispute or crisis such as death. Now, retired from her civic position, Nishida-san helps out with the weaving business, utilizing her skill as a meticulous note-taker, and while she remains strongly involved in community matters, she does not participate regularly in any old age clubs or the local senior welfare center.

One day, approaching the New Year's celebrations, I sat in Nishida-san's house as she carefully cleaned her home altar. She took each item out of the cabinet-like altar, beginning at the lower shelves and moving upwards. She set the items on a small table next to the altar: candles, flowers, oranges, incense, a bell seated on a round cushion, memorial tablets, cups for water and tea, prayer beads, matches. The only thing that she did not remove, before she cleaned the altar with a small feather-duster, was the small statue of Amida Buddha in the very back. This statue (standing about 15cm tall) is old and was given to her from her ancestors (*senzo*). She takes out the *ihai* one by one and

explains to me their significance. The largest is for the household ancestors. The second is for the mother and father-in-laws. The next is for Nishida-san and her husband, with Nishida-san's posthumous name filled in with vermillion. The smallest is for her daughter, and stands at about half the size of a normal tablet (Fig 12.2).



Figure 12.2 The memorial tablets (*ihai*) of Nishida-san. The inscription in red is her death name, and will be filled in with gold after she dies. The smallest is for her deceased daughter.

As Nishida-san cleans, she tells me in the concerned tone of a former community welfare leader, about people in her neighborhood who died without having prepared properly. Nishida-san is a seasoned professional at post-death arrangements, often having to instruct the bereaved families what to do, from getting the death certificate to funeral arrangements.

- N: After an individual dies, we have to clean up. If they live in a rented place.
- J: Rented place?
- N: A rented house. If they die there. When one old man died, that's up to the social workers. Even if it is my region, others will come out to help and we'll have a number of people cleaning. So we take all the unnecessary things, put out all the trash—one old man politely wrote it all out—the Buddhist priest, for example, who should come, and from the *chōnai*, who should come, he wrote it all out, so we followed as best we could, but, if we didn't have something written out like that, and it if was someone without any money, in the end, we'd go around and ask for money, and everyone would put in a little, and we could dispose of all the garbage... for people who don't have any family. The civic group would have to take care of all of it... We'd have to give a simple funeral for the person too.
Well, I feel bad, but when someone in this *chōnai*, an old man died—do you understand “*otsūya*”?
- J: *Otsūya*?
- N: When we look after the deceased for one night, right next to the body. It's supposed to be the family that looks after the deceased, but if you're alone, there's no one to do that for you, right? So the civic group said we'll have to do this, but I felt like, I'm scared to do this by myself! (laughs) It's a little creepy! (laughs more and pushes me jokingly) to be with a dead stranger! I can't do it!
Then the head of the house next door asked me, “Nishida-san, what will you be doing about tonight?” and when I said “I'm doing *otsūya*,” he said, well, I'll come and keep you company. So he came with about four people and we stayed up drinking tea and chatting! (laughs).

Nishida-san's familiarity with death and with the aftermath prepared her for facing thoughts of her own transition to the next world. A constant theme in her narrative of the “good death” is the idea of community, as opposed to a “solitary death” (Chapter 4). This also reflects on Nishida-san's idea of a “good old age,” since it is the preparation in old age that insures a moral death.

Perhaps, more than anyone else I had the privilege of interviewing, it was Nishida-san who always struck me as having the most comprehensive and integrated sense of a life narrative (Chapter 1). Although she had experienced several hardships,

(most prominently the early loss of her father, first daughter and husband), and had lived through the poverty of World War II and its aftermath with two small children, her adaptation to these conditions and her powerful ability to recover are exceptional. If there are any lingering anxieties (if only potential) in Nishida's life, she seems to manage them through her cohesive and consistent worldview and her ability to remain active and involved in other people's lives. Although Nishida-san may become gradually more confined to the home, and less able to help out with the business, she will nonetheless be able to maintain her friendships and closeness to her family as long as she keeps her mental acuity.

Nishida-san's narrative is framed by a theme of continuous interdependence: as a young girl, she had the feeling of being cared for by eight "parents" in addition to her grand-"parents"; when she married, she found it easy to form close relationships with her in-laws and husband; after her husband's death, she reached out further to other community members, ending up as a prominent community member herself. The interdependent structure of the Nishijin district may have helped Nishida-san during these times, since, as a Japanese professor of economics once told me, in defiance of standard economic theory, people in Nishijin *try* to remain in debt, since this insures that relationships are maintained over time. Interdependence has become a vital part of Nishida-san's life narrative, her adaptation to old age and her religious outlook.

Aging and the Role of the Ancestors

Nishida-san's ancestor related practices not only reflect her philosophy towards life and death, her inter-dependence on family and community and her humble dedication

to social superiors, but it also adds an intimate and affectionate quality that transcends and condenses all of these factors into a culturally shared symbolic form. I do not assume that Nishida-san is fully conscious of the minutiae of symbolic significance of her relationship with the dead. After all, she doesn't need to be. She has already worked the spirits into her worldview and into her life narrative. The integration between past and future, obligation and affection, has been a long process that has only changed in subtle and familiar ways that seem to have required little self-conscious introspection on her part. Indeed, the changes in religious belief or practice that have taken place over Nishida-san's life follow the basic pattern of Japanese religious pragmatism—the spirits exist to fulfill different, largely this-worldly needs that arise during one's life (see the case of Nakamura Chapter 4)

In the following section, I will describe the relevant features of the role of the ancestors in Nishida-san's adaptation to old age and the life cycle. I will begin with an overview of the development of Nishida-san's religious perspective, and practice over her lifetime. While her basic beliefs are generally consistent over time, several factors suggest that as she has become older, religion has taken on a more prominent role in her life. Secondly I will examine several instances of dream or vision experiences involving the world of the spirits and her interpretations of these experiences. Dreams or visions of the deceased are common in Japan, especially among women (Traphagen 2004a., 2004b). Having the benefit of Nishida-san's life-history helps us to understand these experiences not only as manifestations of cultural models, but also as references to particular individual psychic activity expressed in culturally constituted symbolic forms.

Nishida's Religious Development

One of Nishida-san's earliest childhood memories is visiting the Shinto shrine on Mt. Atago to pray to the fire deity that resides there. This ritual is typically performed at the end of July, one of the hottest times of the year and involves a four hour hike through the mountain forest that would be moderately strenuous even for healthy adults. Because of the heat, the shrine visit is usually done at night by lantern light, and the small paper blessing received there are taken home and placed above the stove to protect the house against a fire⁹⁷. Because she was still young at the time, Nishida-san only remembers the difficulty of the climb, and didn't come to appreciate its meaning until long afterwards.

Nishida-san's birth family belonged to the Jōdo 浄土, or Pure Land sect of Buddhism⁹⁸. Nishida-san's family had a home altar, and as a child, she remembers being taught to honor the ancestors enshrined there. The importance of reverence and gratitude to the ancestors is something that she now passes on to her own grandchildren:

J: So what did you do at that time [childhood]?

N: Well, in my case, since I was little [I was raised to believe] you have to honor the *hotoke-san*. And then if you get something tasty, if you get something special, first of all is the *hotoke-san*. Well that's just become natural to me. I don't think twice about it.
My—even the granddaughter here, ever since she was little, from the time she was a baby, I'd say, “OK, go pray (*ogamu* 拝む)” so she'd pray. That's just become natural, so even now when I make some warm rice, [I

⁹⁷ At the time wood-burning stoves were used in most houses and fires were frequent and very destructive.

⁹⁸ Nishida-san's birth family lived in the same ward as Nakamura-san (Chapter 3). Areas of this ward were also famous for kimono production, and many of Nishijin's households were moved from this area several decades ago. This may explain the fact that Nishida-san's family would have the same religious sect affiliation as a house in the northern Kamigyō ward of Nishijin. As mentioned in Chapter 2, this sect was established by Hōnen (法然 1133-1212) who left the dominant Tendai sect 天台宗 to promote a practice of singular devotion to Amida Buddha and the paradise that Amida inhabits. Jōdo is one of the most popular and powerful sects in Kyoto today, and its central practice is the recitation of the *nenbutsu*

think] “grandma liked polished rice, I ought to give her a bowl” and heap some rice in a bowl and go make an offering.

But anyway, we’re all right now allowed to live because of the grace of the ancestors (*gosenzo-san no okagede, imagenzai, ikisasareteiru* ご先祖のお陰で、今現在生かさされている). Or you could say we have been brought to life, whatever. But you mustn’t make light of the ancestors. [you should] do your best to not worry the ancestors, (J: yes) saying that, even if you have something you’re worrying about, [the ancestors] will protect you! (*laughs*)

J: Something you’re worrying about?

N: Even if you have something you’re worrying about, the ancestors are there for anything. We ask, “This, this, I’m so worried about this, please make it better.”

J: Was this the same even when you were young? What kind of worries did you have? For example, when you were young, something you worried about?

N: Well, of course I was going to school, so [I’d pray] so that my grades would go up. I would try as well, but I’d ask for [the ancestors] to help me. (J: your grades?) I was a stickler about getting good grades...

When Nishida-san married, she married into a family of the same sect of Buddhism, and therefore had to make few adjustments to her familiar regimen of religious practice.

Rather than having to undergo a harsh “wife-hazing” that typically involved the mother-in-law enforcing the new wife’s observation of family ancestor traditions, Nishida-san claims that she was often praised by her mother-in-law for her religious uprightness.

Nishida-san’s deceased daughter is represented by a small memorial tablet on their home altar. Her husbands’ parents have a larger one, and Nishida-san herself has had a tablet made with her husband’s name next to her own. Nishda-san’s posthumous name is engraved in the tablet and colored in vermillion. When she dies, she tells me, her name too will be filled in with gold like that of her husband.

In Kyoto it is not common to receive a posthumous name before one has died⁹⁹. Nishida-san received her Buddhist name after she underwent a layperson's ascetic training exercise (*shugyō* 修行) that culminated in a nighttime enactment of the soul's journey from this world to the next, guided only by a small single candle and the occasional guiding attendant¹⁰⁰. A longstanding active member of the temple women's group, Nishida-san decided to undertake this exercise after her retirement. Taking ritual austerities or going on pilgrimages is common upon retirement. Many feel that one should undertake these religious austerities while one is still relatively healthy, while filling one's time and perpetuating moral obligation.

In addition to undergoing additional Buddhist training after retirement, Nishida-san used the bulk of her initial pension payment to purchase a new domestic altar. Although her son initially suggested that she take the money and use it for an overseas vacation, and simply to have the old altar refurbished, they decided after some consultation that getting the old altar re-gilded (at a cost of 1.2 million yen, or about \$11,000) would be more expensive than just getting a new altar. After deciding on an altar to buy, they arranged for the performance of the requisite rituals for moving the souls of the enshrined dead to their new altar. The replacement of the domestic altar also

⁹⁹ This practice may be associated with geographic region. When I visited an island off the coast of the Ise Peninsula 伊勢半島 (Mie-Prefecture 三重県) I noticed that a number of gravestones were engraved with the name of both spouses (the living spouse having the letters filled in with vermilion). Although I visited several cemeteries in Kyoto, it was extremely rare that I would see even one gravestone like this.

¹⁰⁰ *Shugyō* is closely associated with the notion of selfless discipline (cf. Kondo 1990) and while rooted in Buddhist ascetic training rituals, is also used for non-religious forms of intense training where one is forced to put aside one's own emotions for the sake of a larger goal. *Shugyō* is also the term used to describe the soul's journey into the afterlife (Chapter 2)

happened to be close to the 50th anniversary of the death of Nishida-san's father-in-law, so the two rituals could be conveniently observed together¹⁰¹.

While perhaps not as comprehensive or as broad reaching as Nagaoka-san (Chapter 10) in her ancestor related activities, Nishida-san is also exceptionally devout. The memo pads that she uses for writing poetry and daily notes are filled with a meticulous catalog of memorial and funeral occasions in the same way that people in western societies keep a record of the birthdays of their friends and family in order to send gift cards. To get a sense of the busy schedule that Nishida-san keeps, I quote at length from one of our interviews:

N: Every month is the anniversary (*meinichi* 命日) of the *hotoke*, right? Every month anniversary is the day that the ancestor died. So in my case, my husband died on July 6th. Then grandfather is March 24th. Then grandma is October 9th. Then I-(J: was that your father's? The father of this house. Then it was the mother of the house. And then my husband. And I had one child that died, right, the oldest. That was in July. So on these days I try to offer things that they liked. Then every month, (it is hard on the priest, of course to come so much), so every month on the 9th, the newest *hotoke*-san, grandma was October 9th. Every month on the 9th he comes to do a service for us.

J Oh, the priest comes here?

N The priest, right. Every month on the 9th. Then when he comes he reads all the others' death names. Then we celebrate the *shoutsuki-meinichi* (祥月命日). On March 24th we light a candle and say "Good morning. May we live one more day in happiness" . . . Well, it's the *feeling* that the ancestors are over there you know? (J: Over there?) The feeling that the ancestors are always staying close by to me, you know? Even if, say, my grand-daughter, if she's late coming home, then I'll pray "With you're permission I'm going to rest, but my grand-daughter hasn't come back, may she come home safely." And that's the end. Nowadays, you could say the ancestors are the closest people to me (*jibun no techikana hito* 自分の手近な人)...I guess you could say that they are what let me live most peacefully

¹⁰¹ *Butsudan* services often combine memorial services when transferring souls to a new altar.

As described in this passage, Nishida-san has a highly detailed mental calendar of particular death days of her relatives, as well as an understanding of the appropriate ritual observances due on each of these days. From her description, we can conclude that it is not only a matter of obligation, but also the feeling of intimacy and affection, or closeness that motivates her memorial rituals and that it is this force that gives her a sense of peace.

As described in the Chapter 1, a life-course perspective allows for greater depth of analysis than focusing on self-narrative alone. Nishida-san's case gives an excellent example of the role of narrative in psychological adjustment to old age as well as a case study of how old age might be managed by other elderly people. Nishida-san's sense of continuity and integrity cannot be understood without an understanding of her relationship with the past and the future, with both reminiscence and anticipation. In my interpretation of Erikson's life-cycle model, reminiscence is most clearly associated with the last stage of life—the creation of a sense of integrality that transcends the threat of death (Chapter 1). What I am calling anticipation in the case of Nishida-san's perception of old age, is closely connected with Erikson's sense of "hope." For Erikson, "by old age...hope is an 'attitude' that represents the revelation of creation in one life now nearly complete, a simple sense that the created life 'is good,' as in 'and he saw that is was good.'" (from miscellaneous papers and notes, quoted in Hoare 2002:79). While this quote bears some overtones of Christianity, the notion that "hope" takes on a new and vital meaning in old age can be seen in Nishida-san's views of her own old age. Nishida-san maintains her feeling of "hope" because of her firm commitment to the care of the spirits of the family dead, which gives her a sense of perspective on her own life, by

evoking reminiscence, but also a sense of care that can be expected in the future, through anticipation.

Dreams and Visions of the Ancestors

Another indication of the intimacy and attachment that Nishida-san feels towards the dead are her dreams or visions of the recently deceased. Although many of the people that I spoke with either denied having dreams or said that they always forgot their dreams as soon as they woke up, Nishida-san is an exception to this. Nishida-san is able to articulate what she felt these dream experiences meant and integrate them into her waking life.

As described above, Nishida-san's first experience of a vision of the other world occurred while she was recovering from the birth of her first child. While this experience involved her own near-death experience, Nishida-san has also had encounters with the spirits of the dead through subsequent visions. Nishida-san's orientation towards interdependent relationships naturally orients her towards communication with those around her, and if the spirits are never so far away from their living counterparts, why wouldn't the dead be able to contact Nishida-san?

Although Nishida-san's case emphasizes some of the positive ways of aging, that doesn't mean that the fear of abandonment and the shame that this brings is entirely absent from her mind. The dreams that Nishida-san has of the deceased give evidence that despite her positive orientation towards the transition to death, Nishida-san holds deep shameful feelings of having abandoned the dead.

Dream #1

- J Do you often have dreams?
- N Dreams? Oh I have them all the time. Well, but for me, I have dreams when I'm sound asleep, then when I open my eyes they disappear just like that (*laughs*)...but that aside, um, how should I put this? Well I don't know if you're going to believe Jason-kun, but [it happened] when I was sleeping here (points to the room behind her where the *butsudan* is). Since grandma died it hadn't been 49 days and all, so it wasn't the time for her to have become a *hotoke*.
- J Become a *hotoke*?
- N Right. See you can't become a *hotoke* until after 49days. After 49days you do the *kimei* (忌明) ceremony and then the person who died becomes a *hotoke*. So it was before then, and, well, always, see the mistress of this place, my husband's mother, we lived together. So when she died, I didn't have any way of depending on her. Until now I was always saying, "grandma this, grandma that," [and] depending on her... Well then I had to wake up early in the morning and leave for some business. So before I went to bed I said to the *hotoke*-san "grandma, I'm sorry, but tomorrow early in the morning, I have to wake up by five. I'm a late sleeper, so if I oversleep please wake me up!" Then I slept. Then, well, I would have turned on the alarm clock. But [this time] I forgot to put on the alarm clock, so it wasn't going to ring. I just prayed to the *hotoke*-san and slept. Well however early (I go to bed), I can't wake up before six. Not until six. Then I heard a voice say to me (gently, in a slightly hushed, voice) "wake up! Kaori-chan, wake up! ... I opened my eyes, and I heard the voice over here, so I opened [the door] and there was grandma, right there! So I said "Oh grandma, thank you!" (*ookini* おおきに) "Thank you for waking me up!" Things like this are real!

What this story evidences is a desire to continue bonds of affection and interdependence in the household. Nishida-san felt dependent upon her mother while the mother was alive, and this was carried on after death. The fact that Nishida-san had spent several years caring for her aging mother is not noted in her narrative, but the reversal of dependency is an important function of ancestor memorial. Nishida-san cared for her mother-in-law cared for her mother-in-law for several years until her death. After death, the relationship of caregiving returned to the prior state, with Nishida-san now feeling dependent on her

mother-in-law, even though the spirit of the mother was also dependent on Nishida-san for care in the afterlife.

In a second dream experience, Nishida-san describes a visit by the ghost of one of her sisters. The sister is identified as an old woman, and therefore it is reasonable to assume that she is closely identified with Nishida-san herself.

Dream #2

N One time—my sister lives in X. My sister who always looked after me died in X... um...she properly entered the grave of another one of my elder brothers. So I hadn't been able to go for a while. Then, uh, at the time too, it was in the morning before I had [fully] awoken. The dreams I have when I am fast asleep at night disappear just like that, but maybe it was when I couldn't tell if I was dreaming or having a vision, and that sister came over here. "The flowers at my grave are withered," [she said] and I was totally shocked! "Oh dear grandma (*obāchan*)!" I thought— [perhaps seeing some confusion on my face] Oh, well she's my sister but ever since I was a child, I'd call everyone "grandma, grandma". It's grandma here! [motions to the other room], but when I suddenly opened up [the screen of the room], there wasn't a trace of her. Anyway, I thought that it was strange that the flowers at the grave would be withered, since the wife of my brother in X, [the brother] who is buried in that grave, is just not the type who would let the flowers wither. She goes out of her way to venerate the ancestors, so I was concerned about it and I called over there. I even called over to the X house, but I couldn't get an answer. So I called some other places and couldn't get though there either. And so it was getting to be the afternoon, and I'll never forget it, it was November third in the late morning on a holiday, so I was just relaxing, doing as I pleased and taking it easy. And then after noon I thought that I'd try calling over to her niece's place. The X sister's niece. (J: The sister's?) Yes, my brother's wife's. (J: To your brother's wife's place?) Right, so I called her niece when she answered I said "Is this K-chan? K-chan, has anything happened in the M [Nishida's natal family] home in X? "Goodness, grandma how did you know?" she said, "how did you know?" she said to me, "Is there something wrong?" I said, and then she told me "Grandma Yoshi-san in X's had to have heart surgery and was taken to the hospital!" That's why they weren't able to go to the grave. The water—that's why I had a vision of my sister coming to me saying that the flowers on her grave were withering. So I was surprised, and it was November third and even though it was a holiday I asked my son to take me right away to X, and so I went to pay her a get well visit. "Oh you, Kaori-chan, how did you

know?” she said to me. So I told her, “Well, this morning grandma came up to my pillow and told me that the flowers on her grave were withering.” And when I said this, she was surprised, saying, “really?!” (laughs) Nobody had gone to the grave. The flowers were withered and bone dry (*kara kara kawaiteta* カラカラ乾いてた). I went to X and then I went to the grave and changed the flowers.

... My sister was in Kyoto as well. But because she had our natal surname she could go into someone else’s grave, so, X. When she was in Kyoto I said that I’d take care of her until she died. She lived until she was 93. So I was taking care of her until she died, but when she did die, this *hotoke-san*, since she couldn’t as well enter in with the Nishida *hotoke-san*, so sister took care of things. We asked X, the X sister, she is very serious person, so when [my sister] died in Kyoto we had the funeral, and when she became bones (cremated), on that very day she said “Thank you, I’ll receive this from you grandma and return home.” Then she went back home carrying the bones...

The association of the dream request to replace the grave flowers and the real emergency (Grandma Yoshi’s heart surgery) is interesting. It is almost as if Nishida-san’s premonition of ancestral neglect had actually been a case of neglect of living people. Nishida-san also notes that she took care of the deceased person in her later years, and thus there is a sense of inter-dependence or reciprocity being perpetuated between the two. The appearance of the ghost in Nishida-san’s retelling of the dream only makes sense to her when she understands that it relates to the heart surgery of another living family member. When this element is added to the narrative, the abandonment of the grave, symbolized by the withered flowers, is not only a depiction of Nishida-san’s own feelings of shame after being “abandoned” by her sister, but is transformed into a way to relieve the shame of her relatives who themselves are coping with the possibility of another abandonment. Nishida-san’s concern for the grave was, no doubt, initiated by her own feelings toward her sister, but the meaning of caring for her spirit carried over into the realm of living relationships. In this case, caring for the elderly (Grandma Yoshi

in the hospital), leads to neglect of the ancestors. Following this logic, Nishida-san's caring for the ancestors acts as a way to ease the burden of her family.

In the last dream that we shall analyze, Nishida-san describes an experience of seeing the ghost of her sister-in-law, who was reminding Nishida-san to attend a memorial service. Although the ghost's appearance was frightening, Nishida-san did not seem disturbed by it at all:

Dream #3

- N Just the other day, In H, I was told to come for the 49th day [ceremonies] but I couldn't go. So she said we'll wait until sister [Nishida-san] comes before interning the remains. She waited until the hundredth day for me. H too, the wife of my brother there died around last New Year's, she waited for me. (J: this year?) This year. She was also ninety-four years old.
- J Ninety-four too? That's chilling. [Nishida-san's sister had also passed away at this age]
- N Yes but she was vigorous, up until the last evening she was vigorous. (J: How strong!). The night before at about 11 o'clock, from the back of the house she said: "The hallway, why's the light on? Leave it on a little longer." She said something else and went to sleep. In the morning, I woke up, and said I'd go call grandma for breakfast. When I went to go call her she was dead. Just like that! Then I went like this to make a phone call. I went for the funeral, but for the 49th day, the timing was bad, I couldn't go because I so many things to do piled up, so I said I'd come to the 100th day, I promised. Then, the day before [the 49th-day memorial], in the evening, I went to the store, and I thought, I have to go tomorrow, I'd better tidy things up. So in the evening I finished everything up. I went over there and shut out the light, and I was going to the kitchen when I looked back for a moment and my sister that I was going to visit the next day was standing there, dressed as she always was, stooping over and shuddering (腰を曲げて、ちよろちよろ立ってた). I looked over quickly and she was holding something like a futon rope. I looked up and I said, oh, it's K-san. That's her name. "K-san, you've come to get me? I'll be there tomorrow without a doubt." When I did this there was nothing there. No shadow or form. When I told my daughter-in-law that when I went to the shop K-san came to get me for tomorrow she was so scared she wouldn't come to the store! (laughs) "Grandma, it's so scary!" [she said] "There's nothing to be afraid of. She only came to say come tomorrow" I said. (J: sure.) So from sister's point of view,

well because I couldn't come to the 49th day, I didn't have a choice but to wait I suppose. If I went the next day, I could properly inter the remains for her. She had come to tell me I absolutely had to come.

In this dream/vision, Nishida-san's visit by the ghost of her sister-in-law is a reminder. It is asking her to remember, and to memorialize—remember to remember. In this sense, Nishida-san is not only looking back on the memories of her deceased family, but looking forward, or anticipating the occasion. When Nishida-san says to the ghost, “you've come to get me?” I felt a shiver. I thought that Nishida-san might be referring to the ghost coming to take her to the other world. I was relieved after Nishida-san assured the ghost that she would be at the memorial. In this way, I found myself sympathizing with the relieving sensations of memorial.

The dream experiences of Nishida-san highlight the continuum between *reminiscence* and *anticipation*, integrity and hope, and thus complete the circle of the life-cycle. In the sense that the dreams recall the memories of the deceased, and the relationship between Nishida-san and the deceased, they can be likened to reminiscence. On the other hand, the spirits that appear in the visions also compel Nishida-san to future-oriented actions, such as taking care of a grave, or attending a service. In this sense they are visions of anticipation, leading Nishida-san into some future action.

Reminiscence can be distinguished from simple recall or remembering as being “a process of acquiring personal existential meaning,” or “a process of recalling long-forgotten experiences and events that are memorable to the person” (Lin et al. 2003:298). In the context of ancestor memorial, reminiscence involves not only remembering personal experiences, but also impressions of those who were alive at earlier points in

one's own life and the values one attached to them. It is not only a remembering of persons or times, but of *oneself* with that person and in that time.

In contrast with reminiscence, *anticipation* is a process through which one acquires existential meaning by projecting oneself into the future, and while this may require inferences from past experiences, it also acquires newer intuitive or unconscious information. That is, *anticipation* incorporates, but is not limited to inferences based on prior experience. It is the sense that things will work out a certain way, even if we don't know how—it is, in short, hope.

Traphagen (2004a., 2004b.) has written about dreams that elderly women in rural Akita prefecture have of their ancestors, but Nishida-san's pattern of dream visions, is somewhat different than his depictions. For example, Traphagen suggests that women who have dreams of the ancestors are seeking to extend their care-giving role in their post-parental years. To Traphagen, this explains why women are seen as more closely associated with the dead, and why they report more dream experiences of the dead. The argument that women try to extend their care giving role into old age is also Traphagen's argument for why women are likely to be the main caretakers of the domestic altar (2004b:139). In Traphagen's explanation, mothers first care for the children, then their elderly parents or in-laws and then for the family in general via the dream messages from the ancestors:

Managing and performing the ritual activities of the family, as well as conveying ancestral dreams, may be one way in which elderly women maintain the caregiver role, and certainly is an expression of the conceptual equation of women with care giving (2004b:145)

Traphagen's interpretation is useful, in that it shows how older women try to maintain bonds of care with the dead. However, this interpretation gives us only a narrow structural explanation of these dream experiences, namely that they are the result of a continuation of gendered socialized behavior. Traphagen's explanation recalls similar explanations of ancestor worship (see Chapter 1), where attitudes towards the elderly were simply carried over to the ancestors.

My impression of Nishida-san's dream experiences differs in that I see them as condensations of her desire to be *cared for*, the fundamental basis of which is the longing to be cared for by a mother and by sibling guardians. In support of this interpretation, the ghosts that appeared to Nishida-san were all mother figures to her—people whom she referred to as “*obāchan*” (grandmother), even though they were sisters or sisters-in-law. This provides a link between Nishida-san's childhood mother and her longing for a nurturing “mother” in old age. The fact that Nishida-san's own first experience of motherhood ended in loss is important, since it provided the basis upon which she would reassert her role as mother (to her sons and community) as well as the basis of her desire to recover a sense of motherhood through caring for the ancestors.

Transition to the “Other World”: Reminiscence and Anticipation

To link the poles of *reminiscence* and *anticipation* we are in need of a transition between the past and the future. Transition is one of the overarching themes in Nishida-san's narrative of death and the world of the spirits. Rather than seeing death as a sudden and irrefutable fracture between this world and the next, death is only one part of a larger

transition that begins in old age and progresses through death and mourning as one becomes a *hotoke* and eventually a household ancestor.

One way of recognizing the transition from this world to the next is to say that the deceased is “becoming a *hotoke*” (*jōbutsu suru* 成仏する). As noted in Chapter 3, becoming a *hotoke*, is far from having the connotation of total extinguishment from the cycle of birth and death, but rather, the *hotoke* reside in a liminal zone where they are at once removed from, but also closely affected by their living descendants. They are where they are *felt* and where they are *remembered*. While some people feel the real presence of the ancestors in the graveyards or at the *butsudan*, others say that it is just one’s own feeling (*kimochi* 気持ち) that is ever there, and that the place where the ancestors really reside is in the hearts (*kokoro* 心) of the living.

Nishida-san, who never lets me leave her house without a small bag of candy, enjoys buying slightly nicer than usual incense and candles for her *butsudan*. She is excited when she finds a shop that sells moderately priced flower arrangements with a nice color scheme, and goes out of her way to get grave flowers there, despite the fact that standard flower arrangements for graves or altars can typically be found near the check-out aisles of most grocery stores.

In the same way, Nishida-san is grateful when she herself is remembered by friends and relatives with gifts throughout the year. Ancestor memorial ritual is, after all, basically an exchange relationship that binds the living and the dead (see Chapter 3). The ancestors are believed to protect the living, and in exchange the living make offerings and keep the ancestors in their memories. Nishida-san, whose brothers and sisters cared for

her as a child, and who received help from many relatives and neighbors after the death of her husband, seems to have developed a deep appreciation of generosity and interdependence that is reflected in her spiritual life.

- N: But I'm thankful to my parents, I'm thankful to my brother, and I go to their graves now. [slight laugh]. But anyway, my brother told me that I have a bad heart.
- Y: Oh, really?¹⁰²
- N: "You have the worst of these (motions to her face) among any of our five siblings. Have a good heart," he said...Because you have the worst face among the five siblings, if you don't have a good heart (*kokoro* 心) you'll never make it in the world.
- J: Is that what your brother said?
- N: Yes, my brother. My eldest brother. He was the most handsome. Out of my five siblings, he was the most handsome. My elder sister was also pretty. She wasn't like me with all these little marks on her face. (laughs)I understood that. My brother was tall, he was built, he had a pointed nose—
- Y: Oh, he must have been very good-looking!
- N: He was very good-looking. And my sister was beautiful. She had that quintessential Japanese hair—so beautiful. And I was small, I was the third [sister] so there was nothing left. I was the worst...But anyway, however people said something about me, bullied me, I was, in the end, for myself, my personality was sort of undaunting. So going straight ahead, on some path, I'd say oh, I'll go along on this path. That was my way. I'd go along—undauntingly, well, undauntingly sounds a little too presumptuous, but...I guess you'd say I'm an irresponsible person. I don't know if it's right, but I just go along with it for the time being, so I just go on some different sidetrack. I'm irresponsible. If you want to put it badly, I'm an irresponsible person.
- Y: No, no, no, no! (all laugh)
- N: Yes, I'm irresponsible about all kinds of things! (laughs) Well, ... I've had this has happened to me, that has happened to me, my husband died, my child died, my relatives have all this problems, fights, divorce, affairs...This thing and the other thing—what is it all?

¹⁰² Y is a Japanese interviewer that accompanied me on visits to Nishida-san's place for the "life history project"

Well, I've come to my conclusion. I've had some good kids, but well, I've been through some tough times, so I've gotten stronger for it, right? I don't have a husband here to consult with about things, That's the only thing I can't really help. . .

Nishida-san's sense of "ego-integrity," or seeing how the events in her life have shaped her personality and made her "stronger," is apparent in this transcript. Nishida-san does indicate feelings of shame (of not having a beautiful "face," and feeling "small," her feelings of being "irresponsible"), but rather than concentrating on the negative consequences of this, she has turned them into assets for facing old age. One might say that she has faithfully followed her elder brother's advice, and cultivated a "good heart," that would help her face the difficulties of her life and maintain interdependent relationships with others, even after their deaths. Nishida-san constructs a transition between her memories of the past and her anticipation of her future by forming a self-concept in the present based on interdependence. The past made her who she is, and the present will make her who she will be.

Summary

Nishida-san's life history brings many aspects of the life-course into perspective. From a developmental perspective, Nishida-san shows a clear progress through life events and rites of passage from young age to adulthood. The fact that Nishida-san was consistently cared for by mother or father-like figures in her early years and maintained this sense in her adulthood is reflected in her balanced attitude towards both individual responsibility and reaching out to others. Her ability to adapt to situations of dire need were met by her own determination to remain inter-dependent with others.

It is hard to say that Nishida-san is representative of the common situation of elderly people in Kyoto. She does however illustrate some of the important aspects of aging in Kyoto that most people I spoke with could identify with: an increased commitment to family tradition, the use of both family and state resources, and a dedication to perpetuating the memory of the ancestors and the family dead. In Nishida-san's life, these aspects were consistently interwoven throughout her narrative, so that speaking about social work included mortuary concerns, and family support involved traditions and other customs not usually associated with eldercare.

Nishida-san, while believing strongly that one should take advantage of what elder services the community offers, has little need herself to use them. She has remained relatively healthy in body and mind in old age, and whatever problems she has had in regards to her health have been accommodated by adequate family and medical support. Remaining in the house has provided opportunities for engagement, since she remains well connected in the neighborhood and with clients, and can help with basic secretarial tasks.

One important part of Nishida-san's narrative continuity is her close connection with her deceased family. Through memorial of the dead, Nishida-san daily invokes the presence of the dead in the house, and in her own psyche. The repetitive re-instantiation of these lost loved ones in her mind brings them to the foreground of daily life decisions, and thus towards future anticipation. This anticipation is most explicitly evidenced in her dream/visions of the ancestors, whose appearance gives Nishida-san the suggestion that they are soliciting her attention to some family related need. Anticipation, for the elderly invokes death, but if death is not seen as an end, it may also reveal a sense of hope. For

Nishida-san, death does not seem to be the endpoint of any anticipation. Nishida-san, in her dutiful observation of the ancestral rites, in her lay practice and in her upright moral life anticipates death as a means of maintaining an interdependent role in the household.

I argue that belief in the perpetuation of the spirits and the need to care for them after death gives symbolic representation loss and moral responsibility for Nishida-san. Nishida-san's ability to reach out to others after experiences of loss seems to be strongly associated with her early dependence upon multiple parent-figures and the social network that was available for her in post-war Japan at the time. While maintaining her business, she took on additional social work activities and nurtured her development of care. She needed support and was able to give support in equal measure. In the end, Nishida-san has come to embody the ultimate values of Erikson's model: integrality and wisdom. In terms of the former aspect, she has developed a recognizable and meaningful self-representation in terms of the past, and a recognition that this past is not to repeat itself. In terms of the latter, she has become a local leader and both a moral and spiritual leader in her own family.

On "Respect for the Aged Day," Y and I presented our compiled life-history to Nishida-san at a ceremony held in the same room of the Youth Center where the presentation at the beginning of this chapter took place. After the ceremony, a crew of NHK reporters covering the event asked us to sit with Nishida-san as she read through some of the things that we had written (Fig. 12.3).



Fig 12.3 NHK films Nishida-san reading her life-history book on “Respect for the Aged Day”

When Nishida-san got to the part where we had written “I wouldn’t have been able to do all of these things if it wasn’t from all of the support that I received from others,” tears began to well up in her eyes. She grabbed my hand—the first physical contact that we made after three months of interviews. Ever since that day, Nishida-san continues to write to me that she re-reads the simple book on each “Respect for the Aged Day.”

Conclusion: New Departures and Returns

Remembrance and Return

In September 2007, after spending a year writing and analyzing my fieldwork data, I had the opportunity to return to Kyoto and conduct several follow-up interviews with primary informants. My arrival in Kyoto was greeted eagerly by most of my friends and informants, and I was soon busy scheduling times to meet, preparing small gifts and pedaling once again through Kyoto's streets to houses, cafes, senior centers and community events.

One of my first reunions was with Nakamura-san (Chapter 9). The September weather was still hot and humid, and the cakes that I had brought for him and his wife were dangerously close to melting when I arrived at his *machiya* home. I parked my bicycle in front of the house and entered through the garage as I usually did, announcing my arrival. Seconds later, I was being ushered in by both Nakamura-san and his wife, and to my surprise, I was led directly to the rear room of the house, where the domestic altar is kept. I had only entered this room once, during the ceremony described in Chapter 9, but had never sat and talked with Nakamura-san there. Nakamura-san, smiling, watched me closely, perhaps anticipating my hesitation at his invitation to sit where normally only close associates or honored guests would be seated. I glanced at his expression once again before stepping into the room, now smiling myself.

In terms of our relationship, Nakamura-san's gesture was more meaningful than any words that had ever passed between us. Of course in one sense, the gesture could be

seen as a marker of his status and benevolence towards me, but it was also a sign of how closely linked our lives had become. Distance and time receded with my return, as if the very fact that I remembered him, or that I had returned, gave Nakamura-san a sense of gratitude and intimacy with me. He had forgotten nothing about me, and his own loyalty to the memory of our relationship was profoundly recognized in this instance; he gave his feelings form by the simple placement of a table and two cushions. We sat facing each other, as we had on many occasions in the past, but we were suddenly conscious of a new sort of relationship, and perhaps a new sense of possibility—that of return. Nakamura-san took the cakes I brought, and without looking inside the bag, thanked me, and placed them as offerings on the altar standing open behind me.

The visit to Nakamura-san's home is only one example of similar receptions that I received at nearly every reunion. The generosity and openness of my informants had little to do with my efforts at keeping up with them during my time away. In fact, I was concerned that my spotty communication during the interim period would make these visits awkward and brief. After the visit with Nakamura-san, however, I remembered what I had been told before about how Japanese social relationships resemble buckwheat noodles: thin, but very long. Even small gestures of recognition if continued over time, become more meaningful than singular grand displays of affection.

Following the meeting with Nakamura-san, the busy days of my return visit swept past, and the mountains and streets of Kyoto were soon painted in their breathtaking palette of red, orange and gold and flooded with school children on fieldtrips. I continued to meet and conduct interviews until the final days of my stay, and while my arrival was met with cheerfulness and enthusiasm, there was also something about these

last visits that made them heavy and bittersweet. These were farewell visits, and to the older informants it seemed that these were, for all they knew, our final days together.

In one instance, Sato-san (chapter 5) and another interviewee, Hasegawa-san, took my wife and me out to dinner. After they had loaded us down with bags of small gifts, the four of us stood saying goodbye on the busy sidewalk outside the restaurant. Sato-san had come by bicycle, while Hasegawa-san was taking the subway; so it was here that we would say our farewells. Sato-san, fumbled around for a few minutes before remembering where he placed the key to his bicycle lock, while my wife and I said our long farewells to Hasegawa-san, whose eyes, it seemed darted to the ground even more anxiously than usual.

H: Goodbye Mr. Jason. Take care of yourself. (*bowing and taking my hand*)

J: This won't be the last time we'll see each other. (*smiling, trying to cheer up the atmosphere*) You'll have to live a long life so that we can meet again!

S: (*hurriedly approaching us and interjecting*) No-no-no! When you're our age, you don't say things like *that!* We never know what is going to happen tomorrow! (*he shakes his head and looks down, signaling the end of the discussion*)

J: (*turning again to H*) My apologies. (*looking again to H*) Well then, take care of yourself...

I watched as Hasegawa-san disappeared down the stairwell, waving goodbye until he was out of sight, as is customary in Japan. Sato-san walked with us a while longer before departing as well, in his own style, nonchalantly wishing us well before hopping on his bicycle and launching down the street, never looking backwards.

My wife and I then walked to a nearby women's clinic, where she was having her standard monthly prenatal examination. Even as we walked, I couldn't help but feel a

chill as I thought about what Sato-san had said, and about how Hasegawa-san looked at us before disappearing into the unnatural light of the underground subway entrance.

A Visit to Nishida-san

My wife was six months pregnant when I invited her to come with me on a last visit to Nishida-san (chapter 4). News of our expectant parenthood signaled to my informants a new kind of legitimacy as an adult, and marked a major new development since we last lived in Kyoto. We were given small red brocaded protective amulets for safe childbirth. We also received frequent admonitions to keep Robin's swelling belly warm, and to be careful doing things like riding a bicycle or walking down stairs. At first these comments seemed exaggerated, or even invasive, but as time went by, we felt that they were perhaps simply a way of voicing concern; they were signs of attention, but not genuine worry.

Nishida-san, who had met Robin on only one other occasion during our previous stay, beams when she sees her again. She immediately notices that Robin is pregnant, and asks Robin how far along she is. When Robin replies "six months," Nishida-san looks surprised, and remarks, "You don't look six months. Maybe it is because you're taller. Usually women get a lot bigger!" she says, pointing at her own stomach.

We all settle down in the middle room of the house, and after some tea and light conversation, I begin the interview. Nishida-san's sister-in-law had just passed away only a couple of weeks prior, and because there were no descendants to perform the funerary or memorial rituals, Nishida-san took it upon herself to see things through. As Nishida-san explained, the sister-in-law had advanced diabetes, and was prone to fainting

spells. One day, while sitting under the warmth of a *kotatsu*¹⁰³, her feet slid down close to the heat coils, burning them severely and resulting in the amputation of one leg at the knee. She died a few weeks later, presumably from some related cause. Nishida-san looks directly into my eyes, saying,

I thought, how should we send her off? There is the 49 days memorial, right? I thought she'd be so lonely, since she didn't have anyone to do that for her... (*smiles and perks up*) So I petitioned *Jizō*-san. There's a person in the neighborhood who has a *Jizō* [altar] in the back of his house, so I prayed there and offered chants. I can't do it here, since our family names are different. *Jizō* is the protective Bodhisattva of children, but I thought, well this should be good enough!

As mentioned earlier, *Jizō* is regarded by Japanese Buddhists as a bodhisattva that is particularly helpful in the present age, and is therefore believed to be more concerned with the desires of people in living today. Six statues of *Jizō* often stand at the gates of a cemetery, symbolic of his power to travel throughout the six realms of existence to save all beings. Given this power of travel, *Jizō* is sometimes thought of as a guide for lost souls, particularly children, as they enter the other world. When I asked why she prayed to *Jizō*-san, Nishida-san responded, "The other world is a dark place. Don't you think it would be hard to walk with only one leg? So I prayed to *Jizō* to guide her."

After our conversation, I tell Nishida-san that Robin and I need to be leaving soon, and she stops us, saying,

¹⁰³ *Kotatsu* 炬燵 are low tables with a heating device placed underneath. The heater may be located on the underside of the table, or, in some houses, in a recessed floor underneath the table so a person's legs can be extended.

- N: Well then, why don't we at least make a short visit to *Jizō*? It's very close to here, we can go before *Jizō* for your child.
- J: We would love that! Is that alright?
- N: Oh of course it is! If you have a little time, we can go quickly and pray for your baby's health.

I explain what is happening to Robin while Hirai excuses herself for a moment. We pack up our things and Hirai returns and slips on a pair of soft tan shoes shorter than the length of my hand. She drinks a glass of water and grabs her small black bag and her cane, as she leads us out.

Jizō Ceremony

Although I had attended many religious ceremonies during my time in Japan, this was the first time that I had ever been taken so spontaneously to a ceremony. It was especially unusual since it would be in honor of myself, my wife and our unborn child. It also struck me as strange that we were going to the same *Jizō* shrine where Nishida-san told me she was conducting memorial services for her deceased sister-in-law. What about the standard pollution taboos? What about the fact that *Jizō* is also commonly associated with stillborn, miscarried or aborted fetuses? It was obvious that there was much more to ceremonies like this than the standard associations would have us believe.

Nishida-san leads us around the corner, and then stops in front of a small women's clothing boutique, stepping inside to greet her neighbors. Robin and I wait outside, not sure if we should follow. I had expected the altar to be one of the frequently seen structures set up along public streets or on a quiet corner surrounded by houses. However, Nishida-san soon motions for us to come inside, and we are led through the

shop and into the home of the owners in the back. The inner room of the home is elaborately decorated with brightly colored hangings depicting various Buddhist figures venerated by the esoteric sects of Buddhism. Robin and I enter the house cautiously and follow Nishida-san to an alcove in the back, opposite the toilets, where two rough and weathered statues of *Jizō* stand. An altar was placed in front of them, with a place to stand flowers and burn incense. It seemed as though the whole house had been built to accommodate these statues, which, in comparison, seem ancient.

Only a week earlier I visited a temple, not too far away, that also had a special altar dedicated to *Jizō* and to the spirits of dead children. Stone images, similar to the ones Nishida-san led us to, were piled up before a pool of water with small jets underneath the surface providing a kind of current. Visitors would light candles and incense, recite prayers in front of the *Jizō* statues, and then gently wash their dedication plaques with a ladle, as if bathing a child, before slipping them into the pool, where they would float down the “river” and be received by the temple. My guide at the temple explained that the stone images came from all around the area, and that as the area became urbanized, these abandoned *Jizō* statues were gathered by the temple.

The *Jizō* statues in the back of this clothing shop may well have been there for centuries, abandoned reminders of some long past tragedy. As we enter, a man comes out of the toilet and greets us enthusiastically, still buttoning his trousers. He seems to be in his late sixties or early seventies, and wears thick glasses and a wide smile. He wants to begin the ceremony as soon as possible, and ushers us towards the statues. He lights the candles, and instructs me to light three sticks of incense and place them at the altar. After I finish, Robin is given incense and directed to do the same. She follows my

example, stabbing the incense in the burner, and putting her hands together with her eyes closed. Nishida-san gently rubs her back in encouragement. When we all sit back, the man stands in front of the altar and makes a short dedication before reading the “Heart Sutra” from a small standard chanting book¹⁰⁴.

When the ceremony was finished, we thank the man and get up to leave. When I look over to Robin, I notice that she is in tears. Nishida-san touches her comfortingly, and we all move towards the door, thanking the man repeatedly. As we approach the threshold between the house and the shop, the man who conducted the ceremony brings the sutra book to us, telling us to take it with us. I protest out of courtesy, but he looks at me directly and says, “It is not for me, it is because *Jizō*-san told me to give this to you.” Once he sees that I’ve understood, he continues, saying, “This [the book] is a *kami*, and you should take it with you and place it under her pillow when she gives birth”. He wraps the book up in white paper, and hands it to me. “Your boy is going to be healthy and strong,” he says as I take the small package with both hands, bowing, bewildered but grateful.

When I leave the shop, I see that Nishida-san is standing close to Robin with one hand on her arm. She speaks in a hush, so I only catch part of what she is saying. Nishida-san is telling Robin that she had a child that survived a difficult birth, only to die later, and that she knows how difficult it is to have a baby, and how much she wants our baby to be safe and healthy. Robin’s face is wet with tears, but she manages to smile and nod, even if she can only half understand what is being said. Satisfied, Nishida-san then

¹⁰⁴ The “Heart Sutra” or “Great Heart of Perfect Wisdom Sutra” (Skt. *Prajñāpāramitā Hṛdaya Sūtra*, Jp. 摩訶般若波羅蜜多心經, *Maka Hannyaharamita Shingyō*) is the most popular and widely distributed Buddhist sutras in Japan. It is chanted in all of the major Japanese Buddhist sects, and hand-written copies of it are frequently used as offerings at temples (see Hanh 1988 for commentary on the sutra)

turns to me and takes my wrist with her small hand. I suddenly notice that she barely comes up to my shoulder.

Nishida-san looks at me, her back half turned to Robin, and lowers the tone of her voice slightly, saying,

N: Be sure to take care of her.

J: I will. Thank you so much for all you've done for us.

N: Thank you for coming to visit me again. Come back and visit again while I'm still alive! (*giggles, standing in the street, slightly tipped over her cane*)

J: Take care of yourself and live a long life for us! (*getting on our bicycles*)

N: Come back again while I'm still alive! *Sayonara!*

With these words, Nishida-san thanks us and waves goodbye in the street just outside her friend's shop. In contrast to the exchange with Sato-san and Hasegawa-san, Nishida-san doesn't balk at the hope of return—a hope magnified in this context of praying for new life.

Reflections on Jizō and the Life-Cycle:

The *Jizō* ceremony took me by surprise. In my mind, and from what I had read, *Jizō* was associated primarily with stillborn or aborted fetuses, and not with memorial services for older adults or prayers for safe birth. For Nishida-san, however, no such distinction was made. *Jizō*-san was a guide that passes through this world and the next, that connects the living and the dead. Such a conception of *Jizō*-san is seen also in the senior welfare pilgrimage activity mentioned in Chapter 4.

The *Jizō* ceremony underscores the notion that ancestor memorial is not only about venerating the deceased and coping with a sense of mortality, but it is also about establishing a continuity of interdependent relationships between the deceased *and the living*—it establishes a sense of continuity between the self, the spirits of the past, the spirits of those alive now, and the spirits of those who will be born in the future. Perhaps the *Jizō* ceremony was a way for Nishida-san to reflect on the loss of her own child, while giving a blessing to our child. Or a way of showing her concern for our child that would deepen her relationship with our family which would continue after she herself had passed away. In any case, the ceremony aesthetically links past and future, bringing satisfaction in the present.

[more]

In the case of Nishida-san, I point out that the acceptance of inter-dependence into one's identity may have precursors in earlier experiences, and that these are pre-adaptive for facing the particular challenges of old age. In the previous three cases, however, this kind of pre-adaptation to interdependent and continuous relationships was obstructed by other concerns over the life course as well as broader changes in Japanese society. In these cases, events of life were dealt with as they came, but not necessarily as part of a larger and continuous project. In old age, the realization of the lack of such a project of having positive interdependent relationships is buffered by the introduction of a new realm of relationships represented by ancestor memorial.

In Sato-san's case (Chapter 5), the distance that he keeps from family members and his drive towards autonomy has resulted in a transition to old age in which he feels deeply shameful and where he strives to maintain control. Sato-san feels relief when he

visits his wife's grave because he feels that she accepts his love in ways that he doesn't see his other relatives or friends accepting. Sato-san's pattern of mourning shows that through continuing bonds, individual grief can be transformed into a greater understanding of the self in old age. As he recollects and reminisces about his deceased wife, he is also reflecting on his own identity, his own death, and his responsibilities for his future.

Ogawa-san's case (Chapter 7) is similar to Sato-san's in that she also relies on the approving eye of her ancestors to maintain a sense of a positive identity as an older adult. Since Ogawa-san is a woman, however, the opportunity and encouragement for asserting autonomy over her lifetime has been limited. Still, Ogawa-san exhibits the same dynamic of shame concerning a premature death of an intimate family member, and the resulting desire to try to control the family. Ogawa-san's own protracted illness in her late adolescence, followed by her mother's abrupt death, left an indelible impression on further relationships. Ogawa-san found herself unable to build positive interdependent relationships with her husband and her children, and as a result, the spectre of abandonment in old age looms large for her. Participating in ancestor memorial allows Ogawa-san to regain a sense of satisfaction that she could not find at earlier points in her life, or that may have seemed unavailable at the time. For Ogawa-san, the ability to attain a sense of positive interdependence with her mother through ancestor memorial gives her a sense of her own meaningfulness in old age, which is able to suppress feelings of shame and dependency at home.

Nakamura-san (Chapter 9), feels the same shame and abandonment in the first two case studies, but in his case, it is associated with the loss of household traditions,

which are represented foremost by the dedication to the ancestors. Nakamura-san, who was raised in a devout household, feels a loss of continuity in his own identity as an older adult as a result of the separation between himself and his children. Nakamura-san feels that because his sons do not *see* the rituals, they won't continue them. Another way of interpreting his feelings is that because Nakamura-san doesn't feel like he is being *seen* by his children, he won't be cared for in his last days or after death. Nakamura-san's case highlights the role of social structure and responsibility in determining one's attitude towards religion, as well as the way the feeling of shame and abandonment carries over into larger cultural domains of tradition.

On the surface, Nishida-san resembles Nakamura-san, in that they are both from old Kyoto families, and they both conduct business out of their traditional *machiya* homes. Both are devoted to their ancestors and participate in community events and other groups. The difference between Nishida-san and Nakamura-san is their sense of continuity and interdependence as elements of their own identity as older adults. While Nakamura-san feels a decreasing sense of security, and attempts to defend against this feeling through ancestor memorial, Nishida-san feels engaged and cared for, and expresses this through her own desire to care for both ancestors and the living. I have argued that Nishida-san's own upbringing and life experiences have played a major role in pre-adapting her to reaching this point in old age. Memory plays a major role in Nishida-san's case, and underlies her ability to cope with difficulties and to care for others. Memory and interdependence, as seen in the case of *boke* ("being out of it" Chapter 2) are closely related, and Nishida-san's ancestor memorialization can be seen as an extension of her own desire to remain socially influential in old age.

Conclusion

Each of the four duets summarized above represent a different way of growing old in Japan, a different way of coming to understand what it means to be old, and a different way of managing the emotions that accompany this transition to a new identity. To become an older adult in Japan means developing a self that can incorporate feelings of mourning and loss, maintain increasingly asymmetrical inter-generational relationships, generate a sense of continuity, and use memories to find a new and perhaps more expansive notion of hope. Although each duet focused on each of these themes separately, I do not wish to imply that they are by any means exclusive, or that the work of ancestor worship can be limited to specific tasks. Sato-san not only mourned his wife's death, but also struggled to maintain a sense of autonomy in relation to his children. Ogawa-san's worries about living with her daughter are inseparable from her own memories of her parents and her struggle to find a sense of hope beyond old age.

What this means is that ancestor memorial has a much broader and complex role in the lives of the elderly than previous scholars have noted. As I have shown, ancestor memorial cannot be understood simply in terms of the Japanese household ideology of filial piety, succession and inheritance. Even if we expand this ideology to a notion of an "unconscious tradition," as Yanagita Kunio does, or elaborate on the psychological impact of succession as Fortes suggests, we are still basing our interpretation of ancestor memorial on a particular model of the family that is not necessarily descriptive of current realities. Older adults in transition, seeking models for their new identity may fall back on these cultural models in order to understand their experience, but there is inevitably some slippage that occurs due to the particular psychosocial needs of each individual.

Nakamura-san's devotion to his family tradition of ancestor memorial is symbolic of much more than the perpetuation of the family ideology—it is his identity as an older adult that is at stake.

This dissertation began with two basic assumptions: that the elderly practice ancestor memorial differently than younger people, and that this difference is related to the experience of growing old. There is little need for new data regarding the former premise, since survey data and anthropological observations have consistently recognized that the elderly take a special role when it comes to ancestor memorial. The second premise is not so easily defended. It requires that we have an understanding of the experience of old age and can link this to the beliefs and practices of older individuals.

Erik Erikson's psychosocial life-course model served as a guide to this research, but some elaboration is necessary to adapt his model to the Japanese cultural context. The strength of Erikson's model lies in the fact that it does not represent aging as a strictly linear and progressive development as some of his critics have claimed, but rather it can be seen as a constant negotiation between ascendant psychosocial dilemmas, past memories and future anticipations. This interpretation of Erikson has been overlooked or mis-interpreted by other life-course theorists. If, as Erikson suggests, identity over the life course evolves in terms of latent potentialities as well as reminiscent revisions, there is much more fluidity between developmental stages of emotion and inter-personal relationships than has been previously accounted for. This fluidity lends itself to cross-cultural application, especially when paired with Levy's theory of hypo- and hyper-cognized emotions. While maintaining the general structure of Erikson's eight stage epigenetic life course model, Levy's work suggests that in spite of emotional ascendance,

the expression and phenomenology of certain emotions may depend upon other stages. Guilt, therefore maybe felt as shame, or generativity as ego-integrity depending on the cultural context. Erikson's and Levy's main contributions to this study are the notions of life stages organized around psychosocial dilemmas and the fundamental idea that the psyche develops over the entire life course, within a cultural context.

Erikson's model of psychosocial development does not explicitly include ancestor memorial, but in his description of the last stage of development Erikson does indicate the need for future guides, and for a new conception of one's parents that allows them to act as guides. The need for guides or models of selfhood in the wake of experiences of suffering is explained by Parish (2008), whose efforts to cope with his cancer diagnosis initiated reminiscence and reflection about his own ancestors:

I faced a loss of identity: I was no longer even recognizable to tothers, nor did I know who I was, at least not with the ease and fluency I had taken for granted. Based on my cultural values—self-reliance, being in control of my life—I judged myself rather harshly as failing in those aspects of being a person that mattered most to me: as a father, as an independent person, as a rational person, but my search for *model of suffereing* (and if need be models of dying) was in part a search for compassion and I suspect, for a certain absolution or release from the duties of life. (Parish 2008: 136 emphasis mine)

The “duties of life” might have been an apt title for this work. Each of the case studies highlights an individual's attempt to continue the arduous task of simply being a self, when the losses and pains of age push that self towards the unknown. But still, the “duties of life” persist. One goes on living and trying to make sense of living, even when living hardly resembles the life of past years. The ability to construct a sense of self that can adapt to aging is dependent on the availability of guides or models, and for older Japanese adults, the most important models for aging are the ancestors.

Erikson's formulation of "ego-integrity" cannot be isolated, since it depends upon the development of the individual at all of the previous stages. In other words, it is not a culmination of the the life course, but rather it is a new stage rooted in the previous stages. This model of the life course is very close to the Japanese cultural idea of the life course, wherein a person proceeds from childhood to old age and then to ancestorhood in a cyclical, rather than progressive fashion. Smith (1974) and Traphagen (2004), though astute in their observations that ancestor memorial is central to Japanese life, do not incorporate a life cycle model in their analysis. Smith concentrates on general patterns of emotional attachment without pursuing the life course events that generate these patterns and emotions. Similarly, Traphagen concentrates only on health in late life, and overlooks the complex role of reminiscence and perceptions of past selves in his depiction of ancestor memorial. Neither Smith, nor Traphagen then give a full description of ancestor memorial and its relationship to life course development.

In Japan, "old age" is clearly delineated as a particular stage of life (Chapter 11). But what does this stage of life entail? Old age in the Japanese context can only be understood in terms of the stages that bookend it: mid-life and ancestorhood. In this sense, old age is not understood so much as a relationship towards death, but rather as a relationship towards transition and continuity, which is symbolized in memorial. This study has gone beyond previous ones by emphasizing the importance of the role of the context of old age experience. By context, I mean not only the historical and political context, but also the way ancestor memorial fits within the context of a different life-narratives and personalities. By connecting earlier life events, recurrent dispositions, and

current modes of relating to the ancestors, this study connects thinking about both the psychological and cultural vicissitudes of the life cycle as it is experienced in Japan.

While my research has contributed a much needed psychological and developmental depth to the study of ancestor memorial, it also provokes new questions about how these psychological processes or understandings work in different contexts. There are three main aspects of aging and ancestor memorial that, although they fall beyond the specific aims of this research, I believe could contribute to the arguments made in this dissertation.

The first is the issue of gender. Gender arises as an issue at many points in this study, as a psychological developmental factor, a social factor and a factor in aging. I do not know of any research that has been done in Japan regarding the differences between male and female practice of ancestor worship and the reasons or motivations behind them. Yet, the *obasuteyama* tale, the frequent association of women with ghosts and the tendency amongst the women I spoke to, to have dreams or visions of the dead indicate that there are some strong connections between gender, aging and ancestor memorial in Japan.

The second issue that deserves more inquiry is that of negative examples—older people who do not practice any kind of ancestor related rituals. During my fieldwork I met many of these individuals, mostly men nearing retirement who have never felt a strong connection to place or family tradition. These individuals usually referred to death as “mu” 無 (nothingness/emptiness). Others who practiced ancestor memorial now, but who expressed little interest in their own memorial were generally more ambivalent. Still, in my small sample, these people seemed to be men who continued to work of whose

time remained focused on previous work endeavours. In other words, the people who did not participate as much in ancestor memorial were men who resist the transition to old age. While this generalization is consistent with the findings of this research, it would require further study to definitively confirm.

This dissertation has attempted to deal with both the universal experience of aging and loss as well as the specific cultural dynamics of contemporary Japanese society. If the findings of this study hold for Japan, they can only be made stronger by comparing the results cross-culturally. Abandonment and shame may be specific components of Japanese narratives of loss, bereavement and old age, but this does not mean that this same dynamic cannot be found in cultures with similar patterns of in/out distinctions or emphasis on certain kinds of familial interdependence over the life course. Comparing this Japanese data with that of other cultures would strengthen the significance of both the universality of grief as well as the cultural diversity of its expression.

The perception of old age as incongruous with the world outside, which seems to move ahead at a pace that belittles the contributions of the elderly, and which the elderly themselves perceive as bewildering, and the world of the ancestors are unmistakably different. For older Japanese adults, in addition to “this world,” there is the “other world” of ancestor memorial. This is the world of memory and memorial, in which the old relationships with spouses, parents, children or friends can become new.

When I was spending the day with my neighborhood social welfare association, whose meetings were held in an unused room of a local elementary school, an older woman approached me, looking around the room and saying,

After we graduate, we don't come back to the elementary school building, but really after junior high school, we cut off our ties with our school. Then we get to be over 70, and we are given this opportunity to come back here. Then I think, "I myself was once young!" and we remember all those old things... There's no way of avoiding getting old [pointing to her cane] getting old is harsh (*kuyashii* 悔しい)...But there is the other world! Everyday you look in the mirror and your appearance (*sugata* 姿) changes little by little, and you think about going to the next world... you don't think about it when you're young, but as you get older, you start thinking about it...

This woman's hope for a life beyond old age, beyond her cane and the "harsh" reality of aging, is firmly centered in her belief in the "other world". Her eyes lit up when she spoke to me, looking around the old school building, perhaps not unlike the one that she herself attended. In that moment there was not only a sense of a cycle completed, but of a cycle that would continue to repeat. Just as coming back to her childhood school represented a nostalgic communion with the past, becoming an ancestor represents a new cycle leading into her future. The mirror becomes a realization of a present identity and of what lies beyond. I am reminded of the *obasuteyama* story, and the sentiment of "over and return" once again.

In his conclusion to *Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan*, Robert Smith (1974) wrote, "What I believe will happen is that observances on behalf of the spirits of the dead ... will become the dominant form of Japanese ancestor worship before the century is out" (Smith 1974:225). In other words, memorialization based on individual affection and identification with the ancestors will replace the code of duty and obligation that had dominated earlier. What Smith may not have fully realized at the time was that the pioneers of this new way of relating to the ancestors are the elderly. It is the elderly that provide the bridge that links past and future, recollection and anticipation, the dead

and the living. As long as the Japanese continue to live to old age, ancestor memorial will continue to resonate with their sense of self and the place of that self in the world.

APPENDIX I: CHECK-LIST OF BASIC INTERVIEW TOPICS

1. locating data- birthplace; parents; grandparents; siblings; other relatives
2. childhood- play; friendships; family interaction; chores; discipline
3. education- relationships with teachers; peer relationships; aspirations for future work
4. mid-life- dating/courtship; marriage; children; employment; leisure activities
5. old age- work and retirement; care of parent/other relatives in old age; health; leisure activities
6. family and religion- parents' relationships with each other; parent's religion; other family traditions
7. *omairi*: growing up, earliest memory of *omairi*, who taught the ceremonies
8. death: first experience of death of loved one, following experiences, differences in personal reaction versus others' reactions
9. funeral: important aspects of funeral/funeral rites, feeling afterwards; thoughts on one's own funeral; thoughts on alternative funeral arrangements
10. graves: frequency and occasions of *ohakamairi*; thoughts on one's own grave arrangements
11. *butsudan*- frequency of memorial occasions; practices at the altar
12. Why do you feel it is important to honor the ancestors?
13. participation in other religious activities/organizations- buying *omamori/mayoke*
14. concept of soul or spirit- speculations on life after death; experience of sensing a spirit; personality of spirits; feelings towards family spirits; feelings towards non-familial spirits
15. dreams- dreams of deceased relatives or friends; other recurrent dreams; experiences/stories of advice or warnings given in dreams
16. ancestors and child socialization: personal experience of confession or apologies to ancestors; use of ancestors/father to discipline children

17. growing old- age considered the threshold of old age; anxieties regarding old age; ideal old age (good old age); differences between young and old
18. Differences in spiritual practices/values in youth and in old age
19. gender- differences (mental/ social); general division of labor/responsibilities; attitudes towards aging, religious attitudes associated with gender
20. thoughts on the possible relationship between age and religion
21. personal changes in religious views with age

APPENDIX II: LIST OF PERSONS AND PLACES

Abe no Seimei 安部清明
Ajari 阿闍梨
Amida Nyorai 阿弥陀如来
Aoi Matsuri 葵祭り
Aum Shinri-kyō アウム真理教

Benten 弁天

Daitoku 大徳

Enryaku-ji 延暦寺

Funaoka 船岡

Gion 祇園

Gion Matsuri 祇園祭り

Gozan Okuribi 五山送り火

Hieizan 比延山

Hina Matsuri ひな祭り

Hōnen Shōnin 法然上人

Hiyoshi Taisha 日吉大社

Hōkyōji 宝鏡寺

Hotei 布袋

Ichihime Jinja 市比売神社

Ichijōji 一乗寺

Inari 稲荷

Iwama-ji 岩間寺

Jizō Bosatsu 地藏菩薩

Jizō Bon 地藏盆

Jōdo Shinshu 浄土真宗

Jōdo-Shu 浄土宗

Kaihōgyō 回報行

Kamigamo Jinja 上賀茂神社

Kannon Bosatsu 観音菩薩

Kannon Bosatsu 地藏菩薩

Kiyomizu-dera 清水寺

Kūkai 空海

Matsuo Taisha 松雄大社
Miyamoto Musashi 宮本武蔵
Meiji 明治
Mokuren 目連

Nara 奈良
Nagaoka 長岡
Nishijin 西陣

Ōmoto-kyō 大本教

Reiyūkai 霊友会
Risshōkōseikai 立正佼成会

Saichō 最澄
Saikoku 西国
Sanzu no Kawa 三途の川
Sekizenji 赤禅寺
Shaka Nyorai 釈迦如来
Shichi Fukujin 七福神
Shijō Street (四条通
Shimogamo Jinja 下鴨神社
Shinnyōen 真如苑
Shinran Shōnin 親鸞上人
Shotoku Taishi 聖徳太子

Tenri-kyō 天理教
Tō-ji 東寺

Ususama Myō 烏枢沙摩明王

Yakushi Nyorai 薬師如来
Yasaka Shrine 八坂神社
Yomi 黄泉

GLOSSARY

- Amae あまえ “passive love”
Anoyo あの世 the ‘other world’
Anshin 安心 feeling of being at peace, tranquil, relieved
- Boke ボケ mild senility, or “being out of it”
(O) Bon お盆 Mid-summer holiday when the spirits of the dead are believed to revisit their homes
Bosatsu 菩薩 Bodhisattva
Butsudan 仏壇 Domestic Buddhist Altar
- Chōnaikai 町内会 Block Association
- Daikon 大根 daikon radish
Danchi 団地 large apartment blocks
Danka 檀家 Buddhist parish
Dankasedai 団塊の世代 “Baby boom” generation
Dei-saabisu sentaa デーサービスセンター Adult day-care centers
Denki 伝記 life history narrative
Dentō 伝統 tradition
Dokonsei ど根性 perseverant
Dōzoku 同属 linked family system
- Fuda 札 protective talisman
Fūshū 風習 custom
- Gaki 餓鬼 Hungry Ghost
Gakku 学区 School district
Gankō oyaji 頑固親父
Genkan 玄関 entranceway to a home
Genze riyaku 現世利益 This-worldly benefits
Giri 義理 social obligation
Gokikōrei 後期高齢 late old age (75 and older)
Gokuraku 極楽 paradise
- Haji/ Hazukashisa 恥 shame
Haka 墓 Grave
Higan 彼岸 the other shore: Buddhist holiday held on the Spring equinox and Fall solstice for the sprits of the dead.
Hōmyō 法名 see *kaimyō*

Honne 本音 true feeling, private self
 Hotoke 仏 Buddha, spirit of the dead
 Hoyo/Hoji 法要・法事 periodic memorial service

Ie 家 corporate household
 Ikibotoke 生き仏 “living buddha”
 Itobatakaigi 井戸端会議 women’s gossip circle

Jigoku 地獄 hell
 Jisa Boke 時差ぼけ jet-lag
 Jogakkō 女学校 young women’s school

Kaigo 介護 care, usually of the elderly
 Kaigo tsukare 介護疲れ fatigue from (elder) care
 Kaimyō 戒名 name given after death
 Kaisō Ryōhō 回想療法 reminiscence therapy
 Kakukazokuka 核家族化(nuclear-ization” of the family
 Kami 神 Deity. Shinto, Christian or other traditions. Also used for deified ancestors.
 Kamidana 神棚 “God Shelf”; Domestic Shinto Shrine
 Kanreki 還暦 age 60, a full cycle of the life according to the Chinese zodiac
 Katei 家庭 Household
 Kazoku 家族 family
 Keironohi 敬老の日 respect for the aged day September 19th
 Kimei 忌明 the last of the 49 day ceremonies for the recently deceased
 Kiyomi 清み purification
 Kō 講 mutual aid group
 Kōden 香典 “incense money,” gifts of cash given at funerals
 Kodoku shi 孤独死 dying alone
 Kokoro こころ・心 heart/mind/spirit
 Kokubestushiki 告別式 social gathering following funeral
 Konoyo この世 this world, the physical world
 Kōreisha 高齢者 older adult, senior citizen
 Kotatsu 炬燵 warming table
 Ku 区 city ward
 Kuyō 供養 Offering
 Kyujinrui 旧人類 “the Old Breed.” roughly refers to those born before WWII

Machiya 町屋 traditional Japanese townhouse
 Mairu 参る to go/come (humble form); to visit a shrine, temple or other sacred place
 Maisō 埋葬 burial

- Manshon マンション apartment buildings
 Matsuri 祭り Festival
 Meinichi 命日 death anniversary
 Minseiiinkai 民生委員会 Civic Association
 Miokuru 見送る to see someone off
 (O) Misoka お晦日 period before new year's when many visit graves
 Miyagata 宮型 Japanese-style hearse
 Mizuko 水子 deceased child
 Moshu 喪主 principle mourner
 Muenbotoke 無縁仏 unconnected or abandoned spirits
 Mushūkyō 無宗教 non-religious person
 Mushinron 無神論 non-religious person
- Nagusameru 慰める to comfort
 Nasu なす eggplant
 Natsukashii 懐かしい to miss, nostalgia
 Nenpai 年配 older person
 Ninjō 人情 human feeling
- Obasuteyama/ Ubasuteyama: 姥捨山 “The Mountain of the Old Crone”
 Oiru 老いる to age, implying an attainment of wisdom and experience
 Omamori お守り protective talisman
 Omoiyari おもいやり empathy
 Oni 鬼 demon
 Oyakōkō 親孝行 filial piety
- Raigo 来後 depictions of Amida's retrieval of the soul of the dead
 Rei 霊 spirit, ghost
 Reihai 礼拝 worship, veneration
 Reikan 靈感 sense of spirits
 Reinosha 霊能者 shaman, spiritual advisor
 Reiteki 霊的 spiritual
 Rōjin 老人 old person
 Rōjin fukushi sentaa 老人福祉センター Senior community center
 Rōsui 老衰 death from old age
- Sabishii 寂しい lonely
 Sahō 作法 procedure, way, form
 Saishi 祭祀 making offerings to the spirits of the dead
 Sangen nagaya 三軒長屋 building consisting of three attached houses stylistically similar to *machiya*

Sankotsu 散骨 scattering remains
 Seishin 精神 spirit
 Seishinteki 精神的 spiritual
 Seizen Keiyaku 生前契約
 Senpai 先輩 senior person
 Senzo 先祖 ancestor
 Sesshin 接心 meditation practice
 Shakai fukushi kyōkai 社会福祉協会 Social Welfare Cooperative Association
 Shikitari しきたり custom
 Shimekazari 注連飾り New Year's decoration placed outside the home
 Shinbutsushūgō 神仏習合 unity of deities and buddhas
 Shirei 死霊 spirit of the recently deceased
 Shizensō 自然葬 natural burial
 Shōshikōreika 少子高齢化 low fertility, aging society problem
 Shōtsukimeinichi 祥月命日 death day anniversary
 Shūchishin 羞恥心 shame, humility
 Shugendō 修験道 mountain ascetic training practice
shugyō 修行 training, usually religious
 Sosen 祖先 ancestors
 (O) Sōshiki お葬式 funeral
 Sūhai 崇拜 worship, adore

 Tanka 短歌 a traditional style of courtly verse
 Tamashii 魂 soul
 Tate 縦 vertical, hierarchically oriented relationships
 Tatemae たてまえ public self
 Tengoku 天国 heaven
 Tōba 塔婆 literally “pagodas,” but used to refer to pagoda shaped plaques given as offerings to the dead
 Torii 鳥居 Shinto gate
 Tōri Niwa 通り庭 central courtyard of traditional machiya
 (O) Toshiyori 年寄り older person, elder
 Tsuya 通夜 Buddhist wake

 Uchi 内 in-group
 Ujiko 氏子 parishioner of a Shinto shrine
 Ujikami 氏神 protective deity of a parish

 Yoko 横 horizontal, egalitarian relationships
 Yūrei 幽霊 ghost

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Yomiuri Shinbun (YS)

(2006, September 19) “Keirō no Hi” “Kofuku na Chōju Shakai ni Shitai”

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