

hall, cremation, transportation of guests, photographs, and gratuities for the helpers. The payment for the priests depends a great deal on the posthumous name you request and varies between 150.000 and 1.350.000 yen. The grave and gravestone will cost between 200.000 in a public cemetery and between 400.000 and 7.000.000 yen in a temple or a private cemetery, plus yearly recurring expenses.

The amounts others must give in the form of condolence money (*o-kōden*) is between 5.000 yen when not related and 10.000 to 100.000 yen when related. The family of the deceased person then needs to give a return gift (*o-kōden-gaeshi*), preferably high-quality objects with a brand name.

Funerals lie at the core of a household's self-representation, bringing together not only relatives but large networks of persons linked to the deceased individual. At the same time many levels of professional help are required, including that of priests and temples. Hence high costs are not surprising, but worth calling attention to in the context of the topic discussed here. Moreover, additional costs will occur for the sequence of memorial services (*hōyō*) and offerings (*kuyō*) that follow. Though not all services are equally elaborate, they will take place on the 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th, 35th, 42nd, 49th, and 100th day after death, and then on the 2nd, 3rd, 7th, 13th, 17th, 23rd, 27th, and 33rd year after death.

Understanding Japan through its Rituals

The information presented above did not have the aim to give details of rituals or gifts. Precise descriptions of the presently valid norms can be obtained from the flood of appropriate books and magazines and, of course, on the Internet, where the Japanese keywords will as a rule also produce English-language information. It should also be remembered that in Japan there are considerable regional differences, and certain groups of the population such as Christians will consciously differ from the norm with regard to their adherence to ritual.

The point being made in this paper is on a more abstract level, underscoring the degree to which a) exchanges in daily life, b) events for celebration, and c) sorrowful events are occasions for giving money, objects, and one's energy on the basis of the requirements of the season or the occasion. Daily life throughout the year can thus said to be punctuated by a dense sequence of regularly and irregularly recurring situations at which more or less heavy demands are made on what a person can produce. It is no surprise, therefore, that a structure of time characterized by such a sequence of expenses is highly supportive of thinking in terms of networks in which outgoing expenses can be balanced by a flow of incoming investment in a planned and predictable way.

Comparable patterns of exchange exist elsewhere too, so we should avoid thinking of Japan as particular. However, it is legitimate to ask what can make adaptation to Japanese ritual difficult for us. I have already drawn attention to the ambiguity of our word "ritual" which may find no equivalent in Japanese. Also, we can point to extremely intricate rules in Japan for marking self-other relationships

both on the level of ritual as well as of communication in general, where we sense broader possibilities of choice on our side, together with less investment in energy for choosing the correct verbal and nonverbal registers, at least at this moment in history. We may also say that the density of exchanges throughout the year, the extent of the expenses involved, the expectations attached with regard to return favors, together with the attention paid to many small details, visibly creates a high level of stress in Japan, and at the same time permits very little personal deliberation as to shape, time and content of the exchange.

A specific element in the nature of the costs of ritual in Japan is their link to theoretical concepts of world order. These have for a long period in history stressed the interdependency of all things and are unknown on a practical level in the modern West.⁷ Thus although the order of the yearly cycle is also mirrored in our culture, with few exceptions (e.g. Easter or Christmas), it is less compelling in a social sense (as opposed to an agricultural sense), especially with regard to the precision of activities, goods, and money required.

For us, therefore, observations on the price of ritual contribute to the understanding of present-day Japan in a number of ways:

a) The complex details for the rituals and their costs are taken from books published and on sale at this very present moment. Therefore, no matter whether they portray ideal or real rituals, they silently admonish everyone that there is a norm, and that this norm is valid also for those with little money and energy to spare. We may thus assume emotional tension between awareness of norms and the possibilities to cope with them.

b) Similarly, I assume a high level of inner conflicts – perhaps reflected in desperately opting for financial debt – in a context where change may be felt necessary but cannot go against the expectations of others.

c) Change may be coming more by force than by anything else. We might expect this force to be on the level of ideas and debates about what it should look like. However, such debates appear far less common than we might surmise, and the concept of, and the wish to reestablish, a society with clearly shaped relationships appears of paramount importance.⁸ Thus it is largely left to the force of economic developments to dictate the shape of change.

7 The concept of interdependency can be found both in all forms of teaching materials, from school books to materials for counseling and emotional support (often distinctly Buddhist in their approach) or guidance for company trainees, as well as in direct parent-child or teacher-pupil communication. I have dealt with this notion of interdependency as an element of a cyclic understanding of existence (in which everything is linked to something before it and something after it) in Ackermann (2010).

8 Again, norms outlined in schoolbooks or materials for new company employees make this point clear, as do the surprising number of books and articles on general sale in Japan containing clear-cut admonitions to “behave decently” and equally clear-cut condemnations of inconsiderate behavior.

Understanding Japan through Criticism of Ritual

Not ritual itself, but the price of ritual is indeed subject to debates and recommendations. Particularly funerals are discussed as too costly, especially in the face of weakened emotional ties with relatives, neighborhood and company, and with it the reduced wish to use funerals and graves to demonstrate status to anyone.

A critical view of funeral rituals is presented in the widely read *Nihon no ronten* (2011) by Shimada Hiromi, author of the book *Sōshiki wa, iranai* (Funerals? not necessary). Shimada (cf. Shimada 2011: 66-69) stages a head-on attack on the *Bukkyō-kai* (“the world of the Buddhists”), which he sees as having a grip on people’s purses by insisting on all sorts of rituals performed by priests for the ordinary population. Shimada is not alone in this; similar criticism is often voiced in Japan. In his article he reminds us that Japan has, after all, been under the spell of the song *Sen no kaze ni natte*,⁹ in which the deceased are portrayed as turning into wind, light, birds or stars, with no need for big funerals.

Shimada also shows how big companies like Aeon have gone into the funeral business, making their costs crystal clear, unlike the Buddhist establishments, who remain vague on this point. On the other hand, he stresses the role of the business world (*gyōsha*) in actually raising the costs of ritual. Formerly, he says, people in a village exchanged money, objects and services with the aim of mutual help, but he sees a good portion of all expenditure today just turning into profits of big business (cf. Shimada 2011: 66).

In her book *Kankonsōsai no himitsu* (Secrets of the rituals, Saitō 2006), Saitō Minako argues in a similar way and shows how big business operations aggressively propagate ritual, and then drive up the prices. Saitō above all aims to draw people’s attention to the fact that they have more options than they realize to save money, especially when using public services for funerals and developing a range of new and exciting ideas for weddings.

In her book *Nihonjin no shin sahō* (New forms of etiquette for the Japanese, Tatsumi 2005) and her Internet sites,¹⁰ Tatsumi Nagisa takes a slightly different point of view. Her aim is to have the Japanese perform their rituals in an up-to-date fashion, but she makes it clear that ritual is ritual, and *jibun nari ni* (just going your own way) will not do. She therefore calls for a new code of legitimization of ritual more adapted to the specific generations participating. Presenting money, she says, is still the custom, but she introduces polite phrases by which you can at least refuse to accept return gifts (discussed as one of the points in her chapter dealing with new approaches to *o-kaeshi* (return gifts), cf. Tatsumi 2005: 56-72).¹¹

9 “Do not stand at my grave and weep”, translated from the English in 2001 by Arai Man. The third line, “I am a thousand winds that blow”, became the title of the Japanese version.

10 <http://www.sahou.com/15sahou.html#up> (last consulted February 12, 2010).

11 An interesting public Internet site helping people find ways to simplify the rituals of exchange is *Kankon Sōsai no kansōka undō* (Movement to simplify ceremonial occasions), <http://www.city.irusa.saitama.jp/index.html> (last consulted Feb. 12, 2010).

This last point actually changes the quality of self – other relationships, based as they are on giving and getting something in return. Tatsumi tries to overcome this dilemma by introducing the concept of *kimochi ga ii* (to feel good) (Tatsumi 2005: 305). This transforms ritual as a mirror of natural order into one of individual feeling, and one wonders how far Tatsumi is influenced by Western debates on dichotomy between feeling and rules. Tatsumi's rationale is the increasing irrelevance of the order of links between households, and to ancestors who stand for a household's name, skills, and property. Japanese rituals, however, she sees as still so fixed in the concept of households as basic social units that no legitimate new rituals appropriate for a modern society have been able to develop (cf. Tatsumi 2005: 277-280).

We may ask why critical stances like those of Tatsumi, Saitō, or Shimada, have only been taken at such a surprisingly recent point in time. To find an answer it appears worthwhile to reflect upon the structure of Japan's economic development. Well into the 1980s there was much optimism about economic growth, which – in the face of intensifying contacts with societies outside Japan – was often interpreted as a result of Japanese social order. Thus high investment in ritual to secure the social order and with it the continued flow of money, goods, and services seemed profitable. Following Saitō (cf. Saitō 2006: 84-98) I therefore recommend reconsidering ritual in the light not just of an idealized distant past but also of forces that decisively shaped it in the 1960s and 1970s and sought to crystallize Japanese identity in its form as the economic superpower it had then become.¹²

Still, critical reflections on the costs of ritual must be contrasted with the enormous bulk of materials introducing nothing but its classical forms and stressing that shame (*haji*) will result from any mistake. It may be that these materials just bluntly serve the interests of many a publisher who knows that his books will sell if they appeal to people's fear of shame, yet their very prominence cannot be without effect and could well be contributing to a reluctance to be too critical of the costs of ritual.

Is the Price of Ritual in Japan too high for Outsiders?

I will give four tentative answers to conclude with:

1) Relationships within Japan require very careful observation of the movement of objects, money, and energy from self to other, and the correct interpretation of

12 Saitō (cf. Saitō 2006: 64) sees the publication in 1970/1 of a series of normative books by Shio-tsuki Yaeko on how to structure ceremonies as one of the most important steps aiming to freeze traditions and thus make them uniformly available to the entire Japanese population – understood now as a homogenous middle-class in a powerful economic nation. For a noteworthy short discussion of the connection between present-day developments of ritual and the changes of the economic and employment structures in modern Japan see also *Kyūsoku ni henka suru Kankon Sōsai no jōshiki* (The rapid change of the structure of ceremonial occasions that has [so far] been taken for granted), Sep. 27, 2004, http://ikeda-farm.mo-blog.jp/kabure/2004/09/_1.html.

such movement from other to self. These complex movements are certainly the object of emotional preoccupation in Japan and thus require equivalent efforts by outsiders.

2) Movement of objects, money, and energy between self and other are based on specific rather than general rules about timing, form and content, and they allow relatively little individual judgment. Thus the costs, the performance, and the dense cadence of rituals of exchange inside Japan make contacts from afar often difficult to maintain.

3) In present-day Japan, people may see themselves caught between acknowledging the form and timing of rituals on the one hand, and the inability to perform them for lack of money, energy or time on the other. However, criticism of rituals is hardly voiced in the sense that they might be “empty, fussy, unnecessary, or wasteful of time and resources”. Instead we may find the wish to rewrite a ritual script in accordance with the decreasing amount of resources available. This, however, still leaves us with uncomfortably little room for mistakes.

4) Rewriting of scripts for ritual is indeed occurring at a fast pace. However, this does not reintegrate many Japanese who see themselves outside the household and company networks which had sustained rituals of exchange together with their high costs. At the same time the call to adhere to exactly performed ritual does not seem to have lost its normative force. The result could well be a wish to withdraw from society out of fear of not properly performing rituals. For us, communication with persons who seek to withdraw will not be easy.

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