

Mortuary Rites in Japan

Editors' Introduction

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A REMARKABLE STUDY appeared in France in 1907, a work that informs the essays in this special issue on "Mortuary Rites in Japan" in fundamental ways. Written by the sociologist Robert Hertz while he was young, it begins with the following observations:

We all believe we know what death is because it is a familiar event and one that arouses intense emotion. It seems both ridiculous and sacrilegious to question the value of this intimate knowledge and to wish to apply reason to a subject where only the heart is competent.

Yet questions arise in connection with death which cannot be answered by the heart because the heart is unaware of them. Even for the biologist death is not a simple and obvious fact; it is a problem to be scientifically investigated. But where a human being is concerned the physiological phenomena are not the whole of death. To the organic event is added a complex mass of beliefs, emotions and activities which give it its distinctive character. We see life vanish but we express this fact by the use of special language: it is the soul, we say, which departs for another world where it will join its forefathers. The body of the deceased is not regarded like the carcass of some animal: specific care must be given to it and a correct burial; not merely for reasons of hygiene but out of moral obligation. Finally, with the occurrence of death a dismal period begins for the living during which special duties are imposed upon them.

(HERTZ 1960, p. 27)

Hertz was not a romantic. Trained in the sociological methods of Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, he utilized Indonesian (of the Malay Archipelago) funerary practices as his exemplary case, for it provided a limited set of comparative data upon which to base a more

general hypothesis about “collective representations of death” in societies “less advanced than our own,” and in particular those where secondary burial was a key feature of mortuary practice. His reliance on ethnographic field reports and his social evolutionary assumptions notwithstanding, Hertz’s seminal analysis anticipated the wider-ranging study of rites of passage that his contemporary, Arnold VAN GENNEP, published two years later (1909). Hertz’s conclusions are framed phenomenologically around three principal overlapping and interrelated manifestations of belief and practice that he identifies in his second paragraph—that is, the body of the deceased, the “soul,” and the community of survivors—but his analysis is fundamentally informed by a sensitivity to ritual process, and most especially by what he called the “intermediate period” (what Van Gennep would term the “liminal stage”) between life and death. The fates of the three principals in this process are interlinked, so they must be mutually resolved.

The editors believe that the essays collected here are deeply (if not consciously or explicitly) indebted to Hertz’s insights. Each adds notable nuance to our appreciation of the dynamics of death in Japan, from Patricia Fister’s exploration of the relic-making activities of the seventeenth-century Buddhist nun Bunchi to Angelika Kretschmer’s extraordinary study of “Mortuary Rites for Inanimate Objects.” The essays are organized according to the historical order of their content, and each highlights the ways that Hertz’s (by now) rather unstartling attention to the roles of body, soul, and community has remained an illuminating if inconsistently brilliant beacon for students of Japanese religion.

Mark Blum’s investigation of the conceptual and practical conflicts and accommodations that marked Shinshū Buddhist funeral productions through the seventeenth century, for example, serves to elaborate, and complicate, Hertz’s seminal observations. In “Stand By Your Founder,” Blum illustrates not only remarkable shifts in orthodox and popular attitudes toward the body and “soul” in medieval and early modern Japan, but also the complexity implicit in characterizing a “community of survivors”—especially one with such a variety of agonistic interests at stake. To a great extent, one might say that the repeatedly contingent resolution of tensions between theory and practice among Shinshū devotees was driven by the continuing need to define and affirm the identity of the community itself, which of necessity included both clerical and lay members. Here we see that mortuary rites constituted a recurring site of contention among various social groups, and determinations of orthodoxy and orthopraxy in funerary practices inevitably reflected the shifting social, economic, and political contexts of the (divided) Honganji establishment.

Patricia Fister's article explores the relic-making activities of the Buddhist nun Bunchi and those of her father, Emperor Gomizuno-o. Her fascinating reconsideration of the unexpected relationships that can bind the physical, spiritual, social, and aesthetic in the spaces ordinarily identified with death brings into focus just how suggestive Hertz's analysis has been. Drawing on earlier studies of relic cults, Fister's art historical perspective brings a new texture and immediacy to discussions of what constituted death and immortality among aristocratic Buddhist devotees, and a new twist on the practice of filial piety as well. Mortuary art of the sort discussed by Fister challenges us to reimagine what we mean by corporeal remains: if body fragments collected and enshrined even before the biological death of the donor count as evidence, what about images and icons created out of these fragments? If the survivors understand these remains to continue indefinitely to be animated, in what sense does Hertz's notion of death—even in the processual sense that he emphasizes—continue to be useful? In other words, to what extent is mortuary art like this an artifact of death as opposed to a rhetorical denial of it?

In contrast to the internal identity conflicts that characterized Shinshū funeral practices discussed by Blum, we find in the editors' contributions reminders that "communities of survivors" were not always circumscribed by either putative institutional affiliation (as in Blum's example) or local cultural custom (as Hertz's case would suggest). As Elizabeth Kenney points out in her reconstruction of early modern Shinto funerals, what came to be known as Shinto funerals originated in Yoshida family rites that were marked in the first instance negatively, that is, by the absence of Buddhist officiants at the funeral proper. But we learn also that attitudes about treatment of the corpse and post-mortem care for the soul of the deceased were increasingly important in distinguishing "Shinto-style" funerals from those associated with Buddhism; during the Edo period these distinctions came to characterize communities of "resisters" against the social, economic, and political power of Buddhist institutions under the Tokugawa bakufu system. While Kenney expressly distances herself from this type of analysis, her detailed interpretation of three "scenes" of early Shinto funerals allows us to see the ways in which various communities (from local families to regional and national "nativist" groups) used mortuary rites as pious opportunities to express both solidarity and resistance in a variety of registers. Edmund Gilday's essay, meanwhile, focuses more narrowly on the place of the imperial corpse in the emergence of the modern Japanese state. After surveying the disparate models that the restorationist movement drew on to formulate a coherent alternative to Buddhist ways of death, Gilday argues that

publicly acknowledged imperial burial and memorialization became key elements in the formation of the newly imagined national (Shinto) community.

And yet, as Andrew Bernstein convincingly shows, official encouragement of full-body burial for all citizens early on in the Meiji era (on the model of putatively ancient and filially respectful imperial precedent) resulted in a sudden, unexpected, and ironic shift in popular Japanese attitudes toward the treatment of the dead. Bernstein details how opponents of the government's 1873 ban on cremation were able to maintain their identities as loyal (non-Buddhist) subjects at the same time that they successfully asserted the moral and social propriety of cremation, effecting the lifting of the ban in less than two years and setting the stage for even more dramatic innovations in the decades that followed.

Murakami Kōkyō and Mark Rowe offer fascinating and refreshingly inconsistent accounts of the effects of this cremation debate on modern Japanese funeral practices. First in urban areas like Tokyo and Osaka, and eventually throughout Japan, the practice of cremation came to be viewed as a marker of enlightened modernization, and death itself came to be seen as an increasingly private affair. The business of death, like much else in modern society, was soon commodified, and new funerary practices came to reflect new kinds of communities. The fact that Murakami and Rowe are dealing with different sets of local evidence and focused on slightly different periods, and thus come to somewhat different conclusions about the pace of these changes, is a salient and salutary reminder that generalizations about historical processes are dangerous in any context, but especially in complex societies like that of modern Japan.

This special issue concludes with Angelika Kretschmer's potentially controversial argument that even inanimate objects like needles and shoes can be said to have "funerals," which of course challenges the very premises of Robert Hertz's elegant argument at the same time that it takes him at his word. For Hertz was committed (at least in principle) to relying on "social facts," that is, on what people actually did and said and felt with regard to "death." Kretschmer follows this methodological dictum to its logical conclusion and thereby raises new and unsettling questions about how far from "the heart" we have actually come in our understanding of death since Hertz's time. If we are unwilling to accept Kretschmer's categorical assumptions about death, then perhaps we might find ourselves rereading Hertz's words quoted above with different eyes.

It is clear that there are theoretical as well as practical issues at stake in all of this for students of religion and culture, and we hope

that this special issue on "Mortuary Rites in Japan" will help us recognize and reflect on the implications of taking death seriously. Japan, past and present, offers "exemplary cases" that at once confirm and challenge Hertz's insights into the collective representation of death, and this special issue of the *JJRS* is intended as a contribution to that ongoing study.



While compiling this special issue, the editors came to feel that some general information would be useful. We have thus added two sections: the first provides a general outline of the basic features of a funeral in Japan, and the second section briefly reviews four recent Japanese books on the subject.

Outline of Mortuary Rites in Contemporary Japan

Although the editors thought that readers might appreciate a summary of typical Buddhist funeral rites in contemporary Japan, two disclaimers are necessary. First, this is a skeletal outline of the most basic and enduring elements of Buddhist mortuary rites. Only rituals are listed; activities such as notifying relatives, getting the death certificate, securing permission for cremation, keeping track of mourners and their money, and sending thank-you gifts are not included. Second, it is impossible to capture fully the variety of Buddhist funerals. There are different sects with different scriptures and ritual variations. Furthermore, the members of Soka Gakkai, an important lay religious group, now conduct their funerals without any priest in attendance.

1. Final water (*matsugo no mizu* 末期の水). Water is placed on the lips of the deceased. Often this act is performed in a hospital.
2. Laying out the body. The body is washed (usually gently wiped with water or alcohol), then dressed in a white kimono (which may be made from paper and provided by the funeral company). Light make-up may be applied to women; men may be shaved. The body is laid out on a futon and covered with a blanket or futon; a white handkerchief is placed over the face. A small sword, or a replica of one, is placed on top of the body to ward off malevolent spirits. Next to it is placed a low table on which have been arranged a bowl of rice, a plate of rice balls (*dango* 団子), incense, a candle, a bell or other items.
3. "Pillow sutra" (*makuragyō* 枕経). A priest comes to the house to recite scriptures.
4. Encoffining (*nōkan* 納棺). Several people lift up the corpse, usually together with the futon, and place it in the coffin. Sentimental items may be placed in the coffin.



Figure 1. Funeral altar.

5. The wake (*tsuya* 通夜). Whether the wake is held at home or in a temple, an elaborate altar is set up by the funeral company (Figure 1). When mourners arrive at the reception table outside the building, they hand over an envelope containing a cash “incense offering” (*kōden* 香典) (Figure 2). Meanwhile, one or more priests recite sutras inside. The



Figure 2. The funeral reception area outside a temple.



Figure 3. Incense offering by relatives of the deceased.

mourners may sit down and then stand up to burn incense (Figure 3). The chief mourner (*moshu* 喪主) may make a short speech to the mourners, and the closest friends and relatives may share a meal afterwards. Often enough nowadays, in the case of a natural death in old age, mourners who were not close to the deceased arrive, sub-

mit the cash envelope, say a few words to the relatives, offer incense, and leave. They do not listen to the sutra-chanting and may not even sit down.

6. The funeral (*sōshiki* 葬式). The funeral takes place the day after the wake. The order of the funeral is typically as follows:
 1. A funeral company employee announces that it is time to start the funeral.
 2. The priests recite scriptures.
 3. In some sects, the priest gives a brief sermon or a teaching directed at the spirit of the deceased.
 4. Two or three people, who have been asked beforehand, read brief eulogies.
 5. The priest burns incense.
 6. The more important mourners burn incense in a prescribed order, reflecting status within the household and closeness to the deceased.
 7. The end of the funeral is announced. The funeral for an ordinary person usually takes no more than an hour.
7. *Kokubetsu-shiki* (告別式). The *kokubetsu-shiki*, which used to be held separately from the funeral, is nowadays often conducted immediately after the funeral. The priests may leave the room, take a break, and then come back in. The *kokubetsu-shiki* is the time for mourners who were not particularly close to the deceased to burn incense.
8. Departure of the coffin (*shukkan* 出棺). This stage in the funeral process may include several subsidiary rituals. Mourners put flowers in



Figure 4. Placing flowers in the coffin.

the coffin around the body of the deceased (Figure 4). A wooden staff (to aid on the post-mortem journey) or items of significance to the deceased (e.g., books, eyeglasses, food) may be placed in the coffin. The coffin is closed and mourners symbolically pound a nail into the coffin using a stone. The coffin is then carried on men's shoulders from the house or temple to the hearse (Figure 5). Finally, the chief



Figure 5. Departure of the hearse.

mourner makes a short speech thanking the guests, while other relatives stand nearby holding a photograph of the deceased, the memorial tablet, and sometimes food offerings.

9. The cremation. The hearse, followed by other cars and minivans, drives to the crematorium. Only the priest, relatives, and close friends attend the cremation. Inside the crematorium, usually right near the oven door, a table is set up. On the table are placed the memorial tablet, the photo, a candle, incense, and flowers. The coffin is placed on a moving cart, about waist high. The priest chants sutras; the mourners light incense. Then the coffin is moved into the oven. The body takes about one hour to burn. During that time, the mourners may go to a separate room to drink tea or sake and eat a little food. When the cremation is finished, the oven doors are opened, and the cart is rolled back out. The wooden coffin has been burned away, and bones and ashes remain.
10. Picking up the bones (*kotsuage* 骨揚げ). The closest relatives gather around the cremated remains. Some of the pieces of bone are picked up with chopsticks and placed into an urn. The often-practiced custom is for two people, male and female, to pick up the bones together, both of them holding onto the bone with chopsticks. The urn is then usually placed inside a box with a silk covering.
11. Temporary altar in the house. The bones of the deceased return to the house and are placed on a special altar for forty-nine days (Figure 6).



Figure 6. A post-funeral altar.

Before reentering the house, the mourners are ritually purified with salt sprinkled over their bodies and water poured over their hands. Inside the house, the priest may again chant sutras, this time in front of the temporary altar. The altar is much simpler than the altar that was used at the funeral. It is often a low table with one raised shelf, covered with a white cloth. On the altar are usually the urn containing the bones, the photo, the memorial tablet, incense, a bell, a candle, rice, and fruit offerings. Flowers, either real or artificial, are placed on both sides of the table as decorations. Family members may ring the bell and pray twice a day. When the services are over, the priest is paid and a meal is eaten.

12. Memorial rites. After the funeral, a long series of memorial rites begins. The most traditional pattern is to hold memorial services at the following intervals after the death: every week after the death until the seventh week; one hundred days; one year; two years (this is called the third-year memorial service, and this same “plus-one” way of counting the years holds true for subsequent memorial rites); six (“seven”) years; twelve (“thirteen”) years; sixteen (“seventeen”) years; twenty-two (“twenty-three”) years; twenty-six (“twenty-seven”) years; thirty-two (“thirty-three”) years; forty-eight (“forty-nine”) years; and one hundred years. On these occasions, the family members gather at a house or temple; a priest chants sutras; everyone eats a nice meal.
13. Interment of the bones. Forty-nine days after the death (in practice, the date is flexibly observed), the urn containing the ashes of the deceased



Figure 7. A family grave with offerings.

is taken to the grave and either the whole urn or a portion of the ashes in the urn is placed in a compartment within the tombstone. A priest may accompany the family to the cemetery and recite scriptures in front of the grave.

14. Visits to the grave. Family members can visit the grave any time they want (and some people go every day) (Figure 7). The annual holidays marked for grave visits are: New Year's, Bon (August); the spring equinox; the autumn equinox. The relatives clean the grave, pour water on it, set out food and flower offerings, pray, and talk to the spirits of the dead.

Recent Japanese Publications on Funerals

Mortuary rites continue to be a lively topic among Japanese scholars. Below are brief introductions to four recent publications on funerals.

NAKAMAKI Hirochika 中牧弘允, ed. *Shasō no keiei jinruigaku* 社葬の経営人類学 [The anthropology of administration: Company funerals]. Tokyo: Tōhō Shuppan, 1999. 292 pp. Hardcover, 2,800 yen. ISBN4-88591-598-8.

Nakamaki Hirochika (the author of "Continuity and change: Funeral customs in modern Japan" [JRS 1986]) and ten other scholars have worked together to examine various aspects of the company-sponsored funeral, now a fixture on the Japanese mortuary scene. This business rite of death is an intriguing intersection of religion and commerce. The company funeral is usually held for the founder or chairman of a company, but there are also communal memorial services held for all employees. There are even company graves. The ceremonial display that is usually part of company funerals is intended to enhance the prestige of the company and to forge a bond between the company and its employees. When thousands of employees become mourners, the employer-employee relationship is transformed into a fictive kinship or friendship relationship.

The image of Japan, Inc., popular in the 1980s, is nowadays rejected by most scholars because the vision of corporate Japan fails to take account of the self-employed, part-time workers, and most women. It is true that Japan is not, and never was, a nation of salarymen. Nonetheless, there are still plenty of Japanese men and women whose lives center around their companies—and now their deaths do, too.

It takes time to arrange a large-scale company funeral for a prominent businessman, so a private funeral is held first. The body is cremated, and some days or weeks later the grand farewell is conducted. In most cases, familiar funeral elements are present: the reception;

the altar (often with just a photo of the deceased, sometimes with the cremated remains in a box); incense offering by the guests. Buddhist or Shinto priests usually perform their customary rituals, but they may be outshone by a splendid altar display or by a huge video screen presenting the life of the deceased. Most company funerals highlight non-religious aspects of the ceremony, such as speeches and the reading of condolence telegrams. Employees are drafted to help in the preparations for and management of the funeral (e.g., sending out notices, writing signs, controlling traffic, greeting guests), a modern twist on the traditional participation of neighbors in the funeral process.

In an article on the history of company funerals, Yamada Shinya 山田慎也 looks at newspaper death announcements. These announcements, by definition, extend the audience of death beyond family and friends to the entire newspaper readership. An early example of a company-related death announcement for a bank official was published in 1877. Yamada briefly looks at national funerals (e.g., that of Iwakura Tomomi 岩倉具視 in 1883) as a precedent for company funerals in that they were paid for by the nation, not the family. Military funerals, too, can be considered a precursor of the company funeral. The first use of the term “company funeral” dates back to 1912, when it was used for the funeral of the president of a newspaper company. The first etiquette manual for company funerals was published in 1975, and now most etiquette books include a section on how to behave at a company funeral.

Other articles in the volume present detailed case studies of specific company funerals. Some of these funerals have been held in the large domes used for professional baseball games and rock concerts. Huge video screens provide the mourners with a good view of the funeral action.

This collection of readable articles does a good job of considering the innovative aspects of company funerals while analyzing the ways in which Japanese funeral traditions are transformed, but not abandoned, in these massive rites.

MINZOKU KENKYŪ BU 民俗研究部, *Shi, sōretsu, bōsei shiryō shūsei* 死・葬列・墓制資料集成 (Death, funeral rites, grave system: A collection of documents). 調査報告書 (research report) 9. 2 volumes. Chiba: National Museum of Japanese History, 1999. 998 pp. Softcover, 4,000 yen. No ISBN.

Japanese ethnographers have long emphasized the diversity of local funeral traditions, and this diversity is—so far—still intact. In 1997, sixty researchers, mostly from universities and museums, set out to

document contemporary funeral practices throughout Japan and to record changes since the 1960s. These two volumes present the results of the thirty researchers assigned to Eastern Japan (Hokkaido to Ishikawa) and amount to almost one thousand B4-size pages.

Each of the thirty reports follows the same pattern. First, on the basis of interviews, the researcher gives information on one specific funeral held during the 1960s and on the broader mortuary practices of a given community. Each survey covers the following topics: the family of the deceased (including some elaborate kinship charts); the bathing (or not) of the corpse; the clothes and implements (e.g., coins, staff) for the deceased; the encoffining (who did it, what was put into the coffin); the funeral (who took charge of the reception and of the guests' gifts of money); the amount of incense-money offered by each guest; what, if anything, was given as a return gift; the funeral altar; the removal of the coffin to the graveyard (who carried the coffin, what route was taken); the burial or cremation; the rite of picking up the bones; the return to the house (the route, the purification method); the post-funeral placement of the memorial tablet, photo, cremated remains, and offerings; the post-funeral meal; the subsequent memorial rites. Most of the researchers also provide additional material such as a floor plan of the building in which the funeral was held or long lists of the scores of posthumous names on the family's memorial tablets (going back to 1796 in one case).

The same data is sought for the 1990s funerals. Not surprisingly, the material gathered for the more recent funerals is more detailed and concrete.

Although all the researchers followed the same guidelines, their presentations vary. Some are typed; some are handwritten. Some include photos of memorial tablets, brand-new crematoriums, grave clothes, or old photos of outdoor cremations; others provide maps, drawings and long descriptions of the funeral activities. All the researchers are firmly focused on customs, objects, food, and actions performed by the mourners, not priestly rituals. Thus we are not told in most cases what sutra was chanted, but we learn what was put into the coffin (often cigarettes, sometimes food, and in at least one case a croquet mallet).

Although both Murakami and Rowe mention in this special issue of the *JJRS* the demise of the funeral procession in cities, this research report shows that the procession is alive and well in some rural areas. During the 1960s, there were many cases of *nobe-okuri* (funeral processions, on foot, to the graveyard), and processions are still to be found in the 1990s. We can also read about several cases of burial during the 1990s, even down to details such as what the gravediggers wore.

The richness of this material is astonishing. The reports are so detailed and thorough that readers almost feel as though they are doing anthropology “from afar.” All the multifarious customs described in these reports reveal just how bare-bones the outline is of a typical Japanese funeral presented above in this introduction.

Sōsai Bukkyō: Sono rekishi to gendai-teki kadai 葬祭仏教—その歴史と現代的課題 (Funerary Buddhism: Its history and contemporary issues). ITŌ Yuishin 伊藤唯真 and FUJII Masao 藤井正雄, eds. 405 pp. Tokyo: Nonburi, 1997. 7,300 yen. ISBN 4-931117-23-6.

This book is divided into four sections: history (four articles); the contemporary scene (five articles); two talks and the edited transcript of a symposium on the relationship between Pure Land Buddhism and funerals; and the results of two surveys: one of 618 Pure Land priests; the other of 1428 Japanese people contacted mostly through various channels connected with Pure Land Buddhism, although only 40% of them said they believed in Buddhism.

An article by Murakami Kōkyō in the history section of this book appears in English translation in this *JJRS* issue. An article by Kamii Fumiaki 神居文彰 summarizes what can be known about the funeral of Hōnen (1133–1212), founder of the Jōdo sect of Pure Land Buddhism. Kamii then presents a 1593 funeral manual, which offers a rare and valuable look at Pure Land funeral practices just before the Edo period.

In the second section, two articles are particularly useful: a detailed presentation of Pure Land mortuary rites (by Fujii); and a short discussion of the small-scale movement to scatter the ashes of the deceased (by Itō).

The survey of the priests, which consisted of twelve straightforward questions, resulted in the following sort of information: almost all of the priests have performed funerals for people other than their parishioners; most of the funerals were held in the temple or the home of the deceased; 93% of the priests give a sermon, usually during the wake, in addition to performing the rites. The other survey asked people for details about the most recent funeral they had attended (which in most cases was within the last year), as well as questions about common religious practices such as buying amulets and visiting the family grave. We learn, for example, that 78% of funerals were held in the home of the deceased or in a temple, that most of the people did not know how much the funeral cost, and that 38% were opposed to the practice of scattering ashes. The results are usefully broken down into age groups, showing—and this comes as no surprise—that 80% of people over age sixty regularly worship their ancestors or visit the family grave, compared with only 36% of people in

their twenties (a percentage that is high enough to bode well for the future of ancestor worship).

KATŌ Takahisa 加藤隆久, *Shinsōsai daijiten* 神葬祭大事典 (Shinto funeral dictionary). Tokyo: Ebisu Kōshō, 1997. 510 pp. 18,000 yen. ISBN 4-900901-02-4.

Whatever readers might imagine a "Shinto funeral dictionary" to be, this book probably isn't it. There are no definitions of terms. Instead, this expensive, attractive book offers an assortment of materials.

Part one has two sections. The first presents nine "keyword" essays by established scholars on topics such as the funeral of Tokugawa Mitsukuni, the Kokugaku understanding of the afterlife, and issues in contemporary Shinto funerals. The second section is a longer essay by FUJII Masao (author of "Maintenance and change in Japanese traditional funerals and death-related behavior," [*JRS* 1983]) on the Japanese views of life and death and the other world. Fujii's discussion of what he calls *ikotsu sūhai* 遺骨崇拜 (worship of the remains) covers a lot of ground, from the Jōmon period to World War II. Related to this topic are the articles in this special issue by Bernstein and Fister (and, less centrally, the articles by Blum, Gilday, and Kenney), which analyze variations on the Japanese concern for the post-mortem fate of the corpse.

Part two also has two sections. The first section is an illustrated outline of today's Shinto funerals. A step-by-step outline of ritual procedures, the texts of prayers, and some examples of actual eulogies are provided. In addition, there are good, clear photographs of altars, implements, and ritual actions. The second section gives the results of two surveys of Shinto priests in Hokkaido (101 responses, 1985) and Tokyo (270 responses, 1991). The surveys have little overlap in their questions, so there is no possibility of comparing the answers of Hokkaido and Tokyo priests. Most of the questions concern ritual procedure ("Do you use a banner?" "Do you give a eulogy?"). One interesting question posed to the Tokyo priests asked where the spirit of the deceased resides after the performance of the particular Shinto ceremony (*senrei sai* 遷霊祭) that is supposed to transfer the spirit to the memorial tablet. More than 60% of the priests answered that the spirit still exists in the corpse or ashes.

Part three offers ten articles by established scholars. Some of the articles have been previously published in academic journals. Part four consists of nice clear reproductions of several funeral manuals from the early Meiji era. These booklets are especially valuable for their illustrations of the funeral implements and layouts of the ritual site.

The book concludes with an extremely useful bibliography on Shinto funerals, listing about two hundred articles and a few books.



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