Japanese Journal of Religious Studies 2000 27/3–4

Fire and Earth

The Forging of Modern Cremation in Meiji Japan

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In the summer of 1873, the Meiji government's Council of State declared a nationwide ban on cremation, a Buddhist practice that had long been considered barbaric and grossly unfilial by Confucian and nativist scholars. In response to the prohibition, an alliance of Buddhist priests, educated citizens, and even government officials proceeded to argue that, far from being an "evil custom" of the past, cremation was a "civilized" practice suited to the future. Insisting that cremation was sanitary and that it also saved grave space while facilitating ancestor worship, cremation supporters appropriated state-sanctioned values and aims to win repeal of the ban only two years after it went into effect. Ironically, the end result of the ban was a widely accepted rationale for cremation, which was transformed from a minority practice into a majority one. By the end of the twentieth century, cremation had become the fate of nearly every Japanese.

Keywords: cremation — ancestor worship — public health — *onbō* — graves — Meirokusha — Ōuchi Seiran — Shimaji Mokurai

CREMATION IN JAPAN today is an accepted fact of death. Fueled by a nationwide infrastructure of modern, government-regulated facilities, the cremation rate is virtually 100 percent, defining, in large part, what it means to die Japanese. The practice of burning the dead has existed in Japan since prehistoric times and has been performed by a significant segment of the population since the medieval period, when it was popularized as a merit-generating Buddhist ritual. Yet, despite its adoption by many communities as an act of religious merit, cremation was never mandated by Buddhist doctrine, and most temples and their parishioners preferred full-body burial well into the twentieth century. In fact, it was not until the 1930s that more than half of the dead in Japan were cremated instead of buried; and in some regions, such as Ibaraki Prefecture, the number of cremations did not exceed the number of earth burials until the late 1970s

(Kōseishō Seikatsu Eiseikyoku Kikakuka 1991, pp. 240–43). Although structured around Buddhist rituals such as reading sutras and offering incense, cremation as a universal practice is, therefore, a relatively recent phenomenon, one that is inseparable from the historical development of the modern nation-state.

The rationale behind this phenomenon crystallized in the early Meiji period, when the basic features of Japan's modernity were being argued into existence in the wake of the Restoration of 1868. At the time, cremation became a subject of heated controversy. Reviled by Confucian and nativist officials as "the most unfilial" and "barbaric" of acts, the Buddhist practice was outlawed in July 1873, making it one more casualty in the Meiji government campaign to eliminate "evil customs of the past." The ultimate irony of the ban, however, is that it facilitated the creation of a public logic for the act it was expressly designed to stop. Using newspaper columns and memorials submitted directly to the government, opponents of the ban waged a popular campaign that led to the demise of the prohibition in May 1875, less than two years after it was enacted. The impact of this campaign was not limited to the immediate goal of overturning the ban, since it also generated a modern rationale for cremation that propelled the spread of the practice once the ban was lifted.

In medieval and Tokugawa Japan, communities had burned the dead to emulate the cremation of Śākyamuni Buddha, but in the eyes of many Meiji bureaucrats, anything "Buddhist" was incompatible with "civilization" (*bunmei* 文明). So in order to reinvent cremation as a practice acceptable to the government, its proponents argued that it was advantageous for reasons not uniquely Buddhist. One cleric, Tokunaga Kanmyō 徳永寛明, bluntly appealed to the government by arguing, "even though [cremation] originally derives from Buddhist law, it should be employed for the convenience of the state" (Irokawa and Gabe, vol. 3, p. 813). The ban was justified by the Meiji government on two grounds: first, throwing bodies into flames was disrespectful to the dead and therefore damaging to public morality; second, the foul smoke produced by burning corpses was injurious to public health. Opponents of the ban accepted these terms of engagement and turned them to their advantage, arguing that cremation actually contributed to the physical and moral health of the nation by producing compact, portable, and hygienic remains for use in ancestor worship. Thus, they inverted the charges made against cremation without coming to the defense of Buddhism per se.

Crematory attendants and Buddhist priests, including the prominent Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗 leader Shimaji Mokurai 島地黙雷 (1838–1911), understandably attacked the prohibition; but the defense of

cremation on non-Buddhist grounds also attracted citizens and officials with no obvious Buddhist ties and even those who explicitly eschewed any such connections. Sakatani Shiroshi 坂谷 素 (1822–1881), who was a member of the Meirokusha 明六社,[1] wrote in an essay, "I prefer cremation, although I of course do not believe in Buddhism" (SAKATANI 1874).[2] It is also important to note that the state was composed of officials with competing and often conflicting priorities—ranging from the protection of public finances to the promotion of ancestor worship—and that attempts to accommodate these diverse goals undermined the cremation ban from within the government itself. Indeed, Kanda Kōhei 神田孝平 (1830–1898), an esteemed economist and the governor of Hyōgo Prefecture, delivered one of the greatest blows to the ban when he publicly voiced his opposition to it in July 1874 (IROKAWA and GABE, vol. 3, pp. 753–54).[3]

The incorporation of avowed non-Buddhists like Sakatani and Kanda into the campaign to overturn the ban gave credence to the claim that, rather than being an "evil custom of the past," cremation was a "civilized" practice suited to the future. Of course, the "enlightened" reappraisal of cremation did not divest it of its Buddhist associations. After the ban was lifted, the Buddhist establishment continued to be deeply involved in the management of crematories, and to this day, cremations are usually performed according to Buddhist ritual norms. But the development of a public logic for cremation that was independent of Buddhist meaning and ceremony allowed it to be sanctioned by the modernizing state, which placed the practice under a nationwide regulatory regime once the ban was lifted. This stimulated the construction of modern crematories that, although infused with Buddhist elements, were built and operated according to a civic agenda not contingent on Buddhist belief and ritual. Many facilities in the post-ban era were constructed by groups of clerics, but local governments and corporations with no religious ties also established crematories. In time, cremation was transformed from a practice embedded in specific parishioner-temple relationships into a public service avail-

[1] The Meirokusha was an intellectual circle founded in the summer of 1873 to promote "civilization and enlightenment" (*bunmei kaika* 文明開化) along Western models. It included such luminaries as Fukuzawa Yukichi 福沢諭吉 (1835–1901) and Mori Arinori 森 有礼 (1847–1889).

[2] A full translation of the essay may be found in BRAISTED 1976, pp. 231–33. Translated passages in this article differ somewhat from Braisted's versions.

[3] Governor Kanda submitted a letter to the *Tōkyō nichi nichi shinbun*, 29 July 1874, to protest the state policy. He had played an instrumental role in the land tax reforms of 1873 and was also a member of the Meirokusha. Unless otherwise specified, all biographical information in this article comes from SHINCHŌSHA 1991.

able to all citizens, whatever their sectarian affiliation. Supported by a rationale constructed in the face of an anti-Buddhist campaign, what was once a minority practice spread to every corner of the nation, becoming a marker of "Japaneseness" in the modern age.

Becoming a Buddha

At the time cremation was outlawed, its supporters and detractors understood it to be a specifically Buddhist mode of handling the dead, originating, like Buddhism itself, in India. The practice was referred to not only as *kasō* 火葬, meaning "fire burial," but as *dabi* 茶毘, a transliteration of *dhyāpayati*, the Sanskrit term for cremation (Seidel 1983, pp. 573–74). According to the *Shoku Nihongi* 続日本記, cremation was introduced to Japan by the Buddhist priest Dōshō 道昭, who was burned on a funeral pyre by his disciples in 700. The cremation of Empress Jitō 持統 (645–703) followed several years later, establishing a precedent among the aristocracy (Aoki 1989, pp. 23–27, 75). Recent archeological evidence shows that cremation was practiced in Japan well before Dōshō's time, and the written record suggests that not all cremations in the centuries immediately following Dōshō's funeral were motivated by Buddhist beliefs.[4] By the end of the Heian period (794–1185), however, cremation had become closely tied to Buddhist belief and ritual; and it is a testament to the endurance of this bond that, despite evidence to the contrary, Dōshō's cremation is still commonly cited as the first to be performed in Japan.

There is no scriptural injunction within the Buddhist canon requiring believers to be cremated. In fact, Buddhist texts commonly recognize four different ways to dispose of a corpse: earth burial, water burial, cremation, and exposure in the wild.[5] But because Śākyamuni Buddha was cremated, Japanese aristocrats and then commoners came to see the practice as being particularly meritorious, a means to "becoming a buddha" (*jōbutsu* 成仏) oneself (Shioiri 1988, pp. 133–34). The relics of Śākyamuni were enshrined in stupas; so the cremated remains of those aspiring to buddhahood (or, at least, a Buddhist paradise) were treated similarly, their stupas erected at Mt. Kōya and other sanctified locations.

The process of cremation also served a pedagogical function. While

[4] Cremated remains have been found at more than forty excavated sites dating from the Jōmon (c. 8000–200 BCE) and Yayoi (200 BCE–250 CE) periods. A number of poems from the *Man'yōshū* also appear to refer to cremation practices predating the death of Dōshō (Saitō 1987, pp. 217–22; Shintani 1996, pp. 232–35).

[5] In Japanese, *dosō* 土葬, *suisō* 水葬, *kasō* 火葬, and *fūsō* 風葬 (Nakamura 1989, pp. 120–21).

the remains produced by cremation may have been invested with a measure of immortality, burning bodies starkly manifested the Buddhist teaching of *mujō* 無常, the impermanence of all things. In *Tsurezuregusa* (ca. 1340), Yoshida Kenkō made the following poetic reference to the cremation grounds at Toribeyama 鳥辺山 near Kyoto: "Were we to live on forever—were the dews of Adashino never to vanish, the smoke on Toribeyama never to fade away—then indeed would men not feel the pity of things.… Truly the beauty of life is its uncertainty" (KEENE 1956, p. 232). The link between cremation and the Buddhist theme of transience was made explicit in Edo-period Osaka, where one entered the cremation ground of Sennichi Cemetery 千日墓地 by crossing over *mujō no hashi* 無常の橋, the "bridge of impermanence" (KAMIBEPPU 1979, p. 60).

Moreover, in his discussion of Sōtō Zen funerals, William Bodiford writes that medieval funeral sermons contained "vivid references to the burning flames of the cremation fire, forcing the audience to confront the finality of death." Through these sermons, believers were taught not to fear death but to accept it as the natural complement to life. A positive function was therefore ascribed to the cremation fire, which was a source of spiritual transformation. "Where the red fire burns through the body, there sprouts a lotus, blossoming within the flames," taught one sermon, expressing, as Bodiford puts it, "the transcendence of life and death." Lay observers often interpreted the transformative power of cremation in more literal terms. For example, "many laymen who witnessed the Zen funeral of Prince Yoshihito [d. 1416]… reportedly believed that the cremation fires liberated his spirit (*tamashii* 魂) from his body" (BODIFORD 1993, pp. 201–3). Englishman Richard Cocks also took note of this belief in the early seventeenth century. After describing the arrangements that had been made for a cremation, he remarked, "They verely think that, when the body is consumed, the sole flieth directly for heaven" (COOPER 1965, p. 367).

It appears that cremation remained limited primarily to the imperial family and to aristocratic clans like the Fujiwara until the Kamakura period (1185–1333). But from this time on, it spread among commoners along with popular Buddhism, and by the seventeenth century, its prevalence was significant enough for one Confucian scholar to lament that "there are very few places in the sixty-odd provinces that do not perform cremation" (YASUI 1685, p. 2). Because of the example set by Jōdo Shinshū founder Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1263), who asked to be cremated upon his death and whose remains were later interred at the sect's head temple, the practice took a particularly strong hold in regions with a high percentage of Shinshū believers, including present-day Niigata, Toyama, and Ishikawa prefectures. The funeral of

Shinshū patriarch Rennyo 蓮如 (1415–1499) demonstrated the religious fervor that cremation could unleash among followers of the sect. According to contemporary accounts, once the fire consuming his body had cooled, crowds of believers vied over Rennyo's charred remains, some even stuffing their mouths with his ashes. Those less fortunate apparently had to be satisfied with the surrounding earth and stones (SHINNO 1993, pp. 181–82). By the middle of the Edo period, it had become commonplace among many Shinshū families to send cremated remains to the head temple in Kyoto for interment alongside Shinran, Rennyo, and other luminaries. Consequently, Shinshū believers often did not bother to build individual graves at home (ASAKA 1993, p. 121).

Notable funerals, like that of Rennyo, warranted the building of enclosed structures in which to burn the dead. But for ordinary cremations, a shallow pit filled with brush and wood sufficed. These cremations were often performed by the relatives of those who had died, assisted by fellow villagers acting according to local traditions. For example, in one village located in what is now Akita Prefecture, it was customary by the end of the Edo period for each family to place two bundles of straw under the eaves of its house whenever someone in the community died. These would then be collected and brought to the cremation ground to be used as fuel. Gender was frequently a factor in determining the roles involved in cremation. In a village in the northern section of today's Fukui Prefecture, for example, convention dictated that only men accompany the body to the cremation grounds and only women go to collect the remains (SHIHŌSHŌ 1880, pp. 162–63).

While cremations in some regions were performed by ordinary villagers, in others the task was performed by a professional class of crematory and graveyard caretakers called *onbō*. Two sets of characters can be used to write this term. One refers simply to a Buddhist monk or his residence (御坊), while the other roughly translates into "shadowy death" (穏亡). This dual meaning is appropriate for a group of people who were viewed as quasi-religious figures but also shunned as outcasts contaminated by their regular contact with death.

Living in settlements segregated from nearby villages, in many respects, *onbō* were treated as ordinary *hinin* 非人 or *eta* 穢多, outcasts defiled through occupations that brought one in contact with pollution (*kegare* 穢), including butchering animals and collecting night soil. In legal documents from the Edo period, *onbō* were consistently mentioned alongside *hinin* and *eta*.[6] However, many *onbō* traced their

[6] For example, an order issued in Kyoto in 1707 stated that *hinin, eta,* and *onbō* were all prohibited from performing day labor (KYŌTO BURAKUSHI KENKYŪJO 1986, p. 39).

roots back to the Nara-period monk Gyōki 行基 (668–749), who, in addition to his work in building the great temple Tōdai-ji, was known for establishing graveyards throughout western Japan. Based on the authority of this lineage, these *onbō*, also known as *sanmai hijiri* 三昧聖,[7] extended their management of cremation and burial throughout the Edo period. They may have been segregated from ordinary villagers, but by the same token, their settlements were free from taxation. In the Kinai region, they created a network of guilds centered on Tōdai-ji, and in many villages they enjoyed monopolistic privileges over the handling of the dead, defending these privileges fiercely when they were challenged (KAMIBEPPU 1979; YOSHII 1996). The *onbō* in these guilds wielded control over communal graveyards, giving them relative autonomy. But cremations were also performed in the precincts of official sectarian temples or in nearby "cremation temples" (*kasō dera* 火葬寺) affiliated with them. In these instances, *onbō* functioned, it appears, as temple employees. This was the case for the eighteen cremation grounds clustered in the Senju 千住 area of Edo, among which five were Shin 真, four Nichiren 日蓮, six Jōdo 浄土, one Zen 禅, one Tendai 天台, and one Shingon 真言 in affiliation (ASAKA and YAGISAWA 1983, p. 56).

Full-body burial was still the choice for a majority of Japanese throughout the Edo period (AOKI 1996, p. 48), and even as late as 1897 (the first year for which nationwide statistics are available), only 29.2 percent of the dead in Japan were cremated (NARUMI 1995, p. 61). Nonetheless, by the Meiji Restoration cremation had become deeply entrenched in areas with large concentrations of Jōdo Shinshū believers, as well as in the cities of Kyoto, Osaka, and Edo, where the reduction of corpses into bones and ash allowed parishioners to build family graves in crowded urban graveyards. Although not theologically mandated by Buddhism, cremation was credited with great spiritual merit. As a member of the Tokyo City Council (*kaigisho* 会議所) noted in 1874, "There are those who truly believe that cremation leads to becoming a buddha" (YHS, 24 June 1874).[8]

[7] *Sanmai* is Japanese for the Sanskrit term *samādhi*, meaning a state of deep meditation. From the medieval period, it was popularly used to refer to graveyards and cremation grounds. The word *hijiri* was applied broadly to itinerant clerics and charismatic religious figures only loosely affiliated with monastic institutions (KAMIBEPPU 1979, pp. 58–76; YOSHII 1996).

[8] This comment was made by the leader of the Tokyo City Council, Yoda Hyakusen 依田百川, in response to council member Kobayashi Katsukiyo 小林勝清, who supported cremation.

Extinguishing the Most Unfilial of Acts

Why, in July 1873, did the Meiji state ban cremation? The Restoration government was hostile toward Buddhism in any form, so cremation, as a Buddhist practice, was naturally guilty by association. But by 1873, the worst of the "anti-Buddhist storm" had passed (KETELAAR 1990, p. 78). Although officials continued to institute measures to disempower the Buddhist establishment, they did so in recognition of the fact that Buddhist beliefs and practices were deeply rooted among the populace and were not about to disappear. The Council of State (Dajōkan 太政官) admitted as much in its 1872 order banning unofficiated funerals and requiring that any death rites be administered by either a Shinto priest or a Buddhist cleric (DATE 1974, p. 622). Therefore, the ban on cremation should not be dismissed as just one more indiscriminate attack against Buddhism per se. A year into the prohibition, an ardent opponent of cremation noted that "Buddhist teaching itself does not require cremation, and I have heard there are those [among the Buddhist clergy] who promote earth burial. Even though Buddhism is not abolished, why should there be a problem abolishing cremation?" (YHS, 24 June 1874). It is clear that cremation was considered an evil in itself, for reasons that went beyond the simple fact that it was Buddhist.

In official correspondence leading up to the ban, cremation was subject to particularly harsh condemnation, the Council of State reviling it as a cruel custom that was "intolerable to humanity" (DJR, vol. 2, bk. 269, item no. 6). This sentiment was apparently not limited to government officials but shared by other members of the educated classes. A few months before the ban went into effect, a letter submitted to the *Tōkyō nichi nichi shinbun* asserted that cremation was even more despicable than butchering a corpse with a sword. "How could a filial child, a humane person, tolerate this?" the anonymous author asked, then suggesting that the practice be abolished as part of the nation's efforts to "enlighten" the masses (TNNS, 3 February 1873).

Singling out cremation as uniquely savage had a pedigree extending back to Song-dynasty China (960–1279), when Confucian scholars condemned the burning of the dead as the most unfilial of acts. In ancient China, cremation had been considered a fate worse than death itself; in fact, Song scholars were fond of citing famous instances of cremation being used as a cruel and unusual form of punishment. Popularized as a Buddhist practice, however, cremation had become a legitimate form of managing the dead by the end of the Tang dynasty (618–907); and it apparently thrived during the Song period, judging from the fact that Confucian literati fulminated against it regularly.

Ch'eng I 程頤 (1033–1107), one of the founding fathers of Song neo-Confucianism, lamented that "cremation, the worst of customs of our modern times, has assumed the position of a formal rite, a rite which even filial sons and affectionate grandsons do not consider as heterodox" (DE GROOT 1967, p. 1396).

At stake for Confucian intellectuals was not so much the ontological fate of the dead as the moral conditioning of the living. Buddhists celebrated the transformative power of cremation,[9] but neo-Confucianists viewed such a radical break between the treatment of the dead and the living as a profound threat to the filial devotion on which the fate of a family and the wider social order depended. In the words of one district magistrate from the Song period, "a man who burns his parents commits the grossest possible sin against the *hsiao* [孝 filial devotion].... Taking them up to cast them into a fire is the very highest pitch of cruelty; there is in such deeds nothing that tallies with the natural feelings of man" (DE GROOT 1967, p. 1403).

Confucian assaults on the "unnatural" act of cremation were almost always made in reference to the deaths of parents, because these were the deaths that marked a transition of power from the older generation of a household to the younger. While the death of a small child or a sibling may have been sad, in terms of the ritual continuity of a family, it was insignificant. The death of a parent, however, necessitated that the succeeding generation establish its moral legitimacy through the proper expression of filial sentiment. After all, the grief expressed by a mourning child (assumed, unless otherwise specified, to be male) became a model of filial piety for *his* own children and *their* own children and so on into the future.

When the parent was alive, filial piety was fulfilled to a large degree by the attention a child paid to the parent's physical comfort. In order to highlight the continuity of this devotion after death, the child was expected to treat the body of the dead parent with the same affection and consideration shown when the parent was still living. It went without saying that a truly filial child would be extremely careful not to harm or show disrespect toward the dead body in any way. "Should some madman or drunkard wantonly cast a slight insult at the coffin of his deceased forefather, the matter would be readily looked upon with the deepest hatred and unbounded animosity," wrote Ch'eng I. And yet, he said, people were prepared to commit the "deplorable" act of destroying a parent through fire (DE GROOT 1967, p. 1397). In this way,

[9] In fact, Chinese Buddhist texts often referred to cremation by using compounds meaning "transformation of man" 化人 or "metamorphosis by fire" 火化 (DE GROOT 1967, p. 1391).

cremation was anathematized as the ultimate act of disregard toward one's parents, making it "the grossest possible sin" against filial devotion.

The anti-cremation position among Confucian scholars hardened over the next several centuries, and in the Ming period (1368–1644), Chinese rulers placed a comprehensive ban on cremation that was later inherited by the Qing dynasty (1644–1912) (DE GROOT 1967, pp. 1411–13). Meanwhile, the Chinese argument against cremation was swallowed whole in seventeenth-century Japan, where "Song studies" (*sōgaku* 宋学) flourished among Confucian scholars, including those who were former Buddhist priests. Like their Song predecessors, prominent thinkers like Kumazawa Banzan 熊沢蕃山 (1619–1691) and Kaibara Ekken 貝原益軒 (1630–1714) reviled cremation as a terrible crime committed against one's parents. Kaibara, for example, wrote that the filial child "loves the flesh of his parent" and, "even though the parent has died, treats [the parent] as if still living." Therefore, cremating a parent was even more reprehensible than "abandoning [the parent's] body in the fields and making it food for the foxes and badgers" (SAITŌ 1987, pp. 242–43). Yasui Sanesuke 安井真祐, in his essay *Hikasōron* 非火葬論 (Against Cremation), also emphasized that one ought to handle the corpse of a father or mother "as if it were still alive" and "not treat it roughly in any manner." Like other Edo-period Confucians, he labeled cremation an offense "contrary to natural feeling," citing the ancient Chinese use of cremation as a form of punishment to support this claim (YASUI 1685, p. 1). He also lamented that the perverse teaching of the Buddha had led filial children astray from their "natural" impulses. In bemoaning the spread of cremation into Japan, Yasui laid the blame squarely on the priest Dōshō, who, in Rasputin-like fashion, had beguiled the imperial family into adopting the vile practice centuries ago (YASUI 1685, p. 2).

Confucian scholars propagated their anti-cremation stance among the educated classes of the Edo period, and as a consequence, families who had burned their dead for generations gave up the practice. In 1654, a high-profile example was set by the court in Kyoto when Emperor Gokōmyō 後光明 (1633–1654) was buried whole, ending the long-standing practice of cremation in the imperial house (SAITŌ 1987, pp. 240–41). Persuaded that banning cremation would, in the words of Ōtsuki Risai 大月履斎 (1674–1734), "certainly generate morality and filial piety" (TSUJI 1955, p. 115), several domains also tried to curb the practice among commoners, though it is unclear how successful they were. Leading the way in this effort was Nonaka Kenzan 野中兼山 (1615–1664), the dynamic administrator of the Tosa domain. Nonaka apparently tried to ban the practice several times but was unable to halt it until he mandated the cremation of executed crimi-

nals. This stigmatization was reported to have eventually ended cremation—that is, of the voluntary sort—in Tosa (MOZUME 1928, p. 710). In 1663, Hoshina Masayuki 保科正之 (1611–1673), the lord of Aizu, also declared a ban on cremation in his domain. The waning years of the Edo period witnessed several more campaigns to eliminate the practice, with Mito prohibiting cremation in 1833 and Chōshū following suit in 1864. A Chōshū native, Okudaira Kensuke 奥平謙輔 (1841–1876), also implemented a ban in Sado when he was put in charge of the island during the first year of the Meiji Restoration (SAKAMOTO 1994, p. 437). The range of domainal bans was limited, and it is not clear to what extent they were actually enforced. But they do demonstrate the degree to which Confucian anti-cremation sentiments had spread among the ruling class of the Edo period, sentiments that would drive the Meiji state in 1873 to condemn cremation as an act "intolerable to human feeling."

Immediately after the Restoration, anti-cremation forces saw their chance to extinguish the practice once and for all. Kyoto officials petitioned the central government in 1869 to let them outlaw cremation, noting that it was a "greatly inhumane" and "truly intolerable" practice. However, they were told that the matter had to be given more thought, since it affected the "unity of the entire realm" (KYŌTO BURAKUSHI KENKYŪJO 1986, p. 533). Also in 1869, a majority of the regime's new deliberative assembly (Kōgisho 公議所)[10] passed a resolution to prohibit cremation, but the Council of State failed to enact it into law (MEIJI BUNKA KENKYŪKAI 1969, pp. 98–99). Perhaps because Restoration leaders had more pressing matters to attend to, no action was taken for the next several years.

In the spring of 1873, however, developments in the government's own backyard prompted the Council of State to enact a nationwide ban. On 22 May the Tokyo police sent a proposal to the Justice Ministry (Shihōshō 司法省) suggesting that crematories be removed from densely populated neighborhoods in the capital. Referring specifically to the cremation temples of Senju, as well as to the cremation grounds at the Reigan-ji 霊岸寺 and Jōshin-ji 浄心寺 temples, the police department wrote: "when bodies are burned, the smoke spreads out in all directions and the severe stench injures people's health" (DJR, vol. 2, bk. 269, item no. 6). The police therefore suggested banning cremation at these three locations and at other places inside and immediately around the "red line" (*shubikisen* 朱引線) that encircled the city's six

[10] The assembly's name was changed to the Shūgi-in 衆議院 a few months after its founding in 1869 and was then attached to the Sa-in 左院 in 1871, to be replaced completely by the latter body in 1873.

main wards.[11] This proposal did not call for a comprehensive ban of cremation, recommending only that any new crematories be built outside the city.

The proposal to relocate crematories was not an entirely new idea. The Senju cremation temples themselves were first established in 1669 after Shogun Ietsuna 家綱 (1641–1680) ordered a halt to cremations at neighborhood temples in Shitaya and Asakusa. However, Ietsuna ordered that cremations be moved to a more distant location because he was offended by the smell of burning corpses when he visited his family's tombs at Kan'ei-ji 寛永寺 in Ueno (ASAKA and YAGISAWA 1983, p. 55). That is, the motivation for moving the temple crematories was to shield the Tokugawa burial grounds from pollution, not to protect the health of common city dwellers.[12] The 1873 request, in contrast, reflected a Meiji concern for hygiene that was shared by bureaucrats and the educated public. A few months before the Tokyo police made their proposal, one city resident submitted a letter to the *Tōkyō nichi nichi shinbun* complaining that the stench released through cremation was "injurious to people's health," adding that he hoped the practice would be abolished (TNNS, 13 February 1873).

The Tokyo police suggested that crematories be removed from the city center, but when their concern for public health collided with the centuries-old Confucian bias against cremation, events quickly took a new direction.[13] The Justice Ministry passed the police proposal on to the Council of State, and the council's general affairs section (*shomuka* 庶務課) condemned cremation in an internal memo as "intolerable to humanity." The memo warned that an official relocation of crematories would translate into de facto approval of cremation on the part of the state and therefore suggested that

[11] The "red line" was established by the Tokugawa shogunate's senior councilors in 1818. It denoted the "lord's city" (*gofunai* 御府内) and, in the words of Katō Takashi, "circumscribed an area that began at Sunemura, a village near the mouth of the Naka River; traveled upstream to Kige village, where it turned west to Senju; ran up the Ara River to Oji and swept out to Itabashi village; and then began a long bend south through the villages of Kami Ochiai, Yoyogi, and Kami Osaki before meeting the sea at Minami Shinagawa." In 1869 the area within the red line was divided into six wards that comprised the inner city of Tokyo (KATŌ 1997, p. 45; SEIDENSTICKER 1984, p. 29).

[12] The fumes released by burning bodies had been a target for anti-cremationists in China as well. In discussing the destruction of local crematories in a thunderstorm, a Song dynasty magistrate wrote, "It is my conviction that their foul stench had spread so far as to cause the offended spirits of the dead to conjointly lay their complaints before the Imperial Heaven, and that Heaven, convulsed with rage, destroyed those crematories, root and branch" (DE GROOT 1967, p. 1402).

[13] The Tokyo police prefaced their suggestion to relocate crematories with the qualifier that "it is not the business of this department to decide whether this practice [i.e., cremation] is proper or not," a clear recognition on their part that their proposal would be controversial.

> since this is an age in which everything is being reformed … how about taking this opportunity to decisively prohibit [cremation]? Naturally, long-standing temple parishioners will be stubborn, and it is difficult for the authorities to gauge the difficulties arising from a sudden ban. So in the meantime, if it is not too inconvenient, perhaps we should solicit the opinion of the Ministry of Doctrine. (DJR, vol. 2, bk. 269, item no. 6)

On 3 June the Council of State contacted the ministry, proposing that the mere relocation of crematories be transformed into an outright prohibition—not just in Tokyo but throughout all of Japan. Shinto nativists at the Ministry of Doctrine jumped at the chance to outlaw the "barbarian custom," as they put it, and gave their reply within twenty-four hours of receiving word from the Council of State: ban cremation (DJR, vol. 2, bk. 269, item no. 6).

The prohibition of cremation was of course anti-Buddhist to the extent that cremation was a Buddhist practice. Those who argued against cremation from the Song period to the Meiji Restoration, whether Confucian scholars or Shinto nativists, consistently blamed the Buddhist clergy for encouraging the custom. In fact, throughout the bureaucratic communiqués leading to the ban, Meiji officials repeatedly claimed that cremation had originated in India and had only been brought to China and Japan through the corrupting influence of Buddhism. Yet, in an era when anything "Buddhist" was subject to condemnation but not necessarily proscription, the Meiji government sought to ban cremation for more specific reasons, isolating the act as a menace in and of itself. The argument against cremation first developed in Song China, where the practice was identified as "the greatest possible sin" against filial devotion. This moralistic stance was imported into Japan in the Edo period, and after the Meiji Restoration it was augmented by a new understanding of cremation as "injurious to people's health." This hybrid of a new concern for public health and a long-standing characterization of cremation as "unfilial" constituted the foundation for the ban, setting the terms for the subsequent controversy.

Out of the Ashes

On 18 July 1873 the Council of State declared in no uncertain terms, "henceforth, cremation is forbidden, as stated in this edict" (DATE 1974, p. 640). Under Tokugawa rule, funerals had been subject to sumptuary laws aimed at maintaining class distinctions, but the shogunate had never attempted to standardize the disposal of bodies

throughout Japan. Even the Shinto funeral movement of early Meiji did not compare to the cremation ban in terms of its national impact since, in the case of the former, it was up to local activists whether to promote the new Shinto rituals or not.[14] The cremation ban was truly an unprecedented intrusion of state authority into the deaths of ordinary Japanese, a one-size-fits-all policy that made no allowance for personal circumstances.

This does not mean that the order was obeyed uniformly throughout the country. Evidence shows that the ban was flouted in areas where the practice of cremation was deeply rooted. In an inquiry to the Home Ministry (Naimushō 内務省) dated 13 January 1874, officials in Ishikawa Prefecture asked how to deal with one man who, after having buried his father in accordance with the law, later exhumed and cremated him. And on 12 April 1874 (only about a month and a half before the ban was repealed), community leaders throughout Aomori Prefecture were warned to keep the cremation ban firmly in mind, as there were reports of people defying the government's will (Aoki 1996, pp. 48–49). But while there were those who did not comply with the ban, it was successfully enforced in many regions—especially in more easily monitored urban centers—and the resulting hardship and resentment generated one of the "great debates" of early Meiji, in the words of Makihara Norio (1990).

The government presumed to know what was best for the moral and physical health of the nation, but protesters argued in newspapers and petitions that it was no business of the state to determine how mourners disposed of their dead. In the *Meiroku zasshi* 明六雑誌, Sakatani Shiroshi described in emotional language the impact of government policy on his own family. He began his essay by relating the death of his eldest son the previous summer, then wrote: "there are no words to describe how I felt in my heart" when visiting the grave a year after his death. He said his son "was put in a big vat covered with a thick pine board"; and his family, being poor, was forced to quickly bury it in swampland by the local temple. Sakatani confessed, "I am considering reburying the remains later, but I do not have the resources, and this has increasingly become a concern. Therefore, I have come to think, 'ah, how would it be to allow people the freedom to cremate as before, leaving the matter in their hands?'" (Sakatani 1874).

The call for mortuary freedom did not require converting state

[14] For overviews of the (largely failed) attempt by nativists to replace Buddhist death rites with Shinto ones, see Bernstein 1999, pp. 44–100; Mori 1993, pp. 134–43; and Sakamoto 1994, pp. 418–47.

officials into cremation supporters. A "pro-choice" argument of sorts, it aimed instead to convince those officials that they could afford to agree to disagree with individuals under their rule. One of the more eloquent proponents of this view was Ōuchi Seiran 大内青巒 (1845–1918), the prominent Buddhist activist who, in 1874, founded Japan's first pan-Buddhist magazine. The moral argument against cremation held the practice to be "contrary to human feeling" and thus presumed "human feeling" to be something normative that could be guided from a ruling center, i.e., the Meiji state. In his memorial to the Sa-in 左院 (the legislative bureau of the Council of State), Ōuchi countered that "human feeling" was molded by custom and was therefore subject to local variation. If, as supporters of the ban maintained, cremation was "intolerable" to those with the correct measure of "human feeling," how could they explain the distress produced by the ban? In Shiga and Ishikawa prefectures, those prevented from burning the dead tried to "alleviate their feelings" by piling firewood on top of graves and lighting them on fire, said Ōuchi. Although he called this proxy cremation something "foolish" done in remote areas, it nevertheless showed the depth of the commitment to cremation, a phenomenon that should be understood by the government to be an expression of human feeling, not a corruption of it. "Even beasts and birds are moved by death. Therefore, people are moved and cry whether they bury in the ground or whether they cremate." Consequently, "Why should we make the customs and views of one person standard throughout the realm?" he asked. Ōuchi punctuated his argument by writing,

> it is insupportable to say that districts practicing cremation do not produce any good, filial people and that households practicing burial do not produce wicked, immoral children. Therefore, we should not argue about the reasonableness, the feeling, and finally, the right and wrong, of cremation versus earth burial.… This is a matter already within the hearts of the people, and the government should not interfere.
>
> (IROKAWA and GABE, vol. 3, pp. 751–53)

Not all of the ban's opponents were as emphatic about this point as Ōuchi, but most did frame their efforts as a defense of personal or local freedom against state control, calling on the government to leave the decision of whether to cremate to individual mourners and their communities. Kondō Shūrin 近藤秀琳, a Jōdo Shinshū priest in Tokyo, ended his petition to the Sa-in by writing, "I wish that the choice of cremation or earth burial were left up to the desire of each chief mourner and that the feeling of depression among the people were dispelled" (IROKAWA and GABE, vol. 4, p. 312). Of course, the fact

that there was a ban to start with meant that the government was unwilling to leave its hands off the minds and bodies of the masses. At the time of the prohibition, the government was in the midst of its campaign to proselytize state teachings, coordinated by the Ministry of Doctrine (Kyōbushō 教部省). The nascent state was also tightening its grip on the bodies of its subjects through the creation of a new household registration system and the establishment of a conscript army, among other measures. It would take more than the enunciation of a laissez-faire principle to undermine the ban. Therefore, the ban's opponents did not rest with the argument that, because the expression of "human feeling" was a relative phenomenon, the state should allow freedom of choice. In order to gain a sympathetic ear both within government circles and without, they became cremation boosters, actively promoting the benefits of the practice.

Because cremation was banned for reasons that were not limited to cremation's status as a Buddhist ritual, the defenders of cremation could challenge those reasons without having to come to the defense of Buddhism itself. In advocating cremation, the ban's opponents directly addressed the concerns cited by the government when it implemented the ban: namely, that the act of throwing bodies into flames damaged public morals, while the smoke it produced damaged public health. Supporters of the prohibition condemned cremation for polluting the air and corrupting the proper expression of filial sentiment, but their opponents hijacked these arguments and claimed that it was the ban that injured public health and severed family bonds. They showed that cremation was integral to the infrastructure of ancestor worship, as veneration of one's ancestors was considered by the government to be a cornerstone of national morality. They also argued that, rather than degrading public health, in the long run cremation contributed to the improvement of hygiene. By adopting the rhetoric of their opponents and clarifying the benefits of cremation, supporters of the practice not only succeeded in overturning the ban but also created a widely accepted rationale for the spread of cremation once the ban was lifted.

The Family That Graves Together Stays Together

In February 1873 a petition was submitted to the Shūgi-in suggesting that the majority of temples in Kyoto, Osaka, and Tokyo be abolished and their graveyards converted to economically productive land. The author of the petition reasoned that, once the spirit had departed, the body was like "the molted shell of a cicada," so it was foolish to treat

the grave as if it were the eternal domicile of the dead. Nativist and Confucian officials were not averse to consolidating Buddhist temples, but destroying graveyards was another matter. In an indignant response to the petition, the deliberative body stressed that worship at ancestral graves was the "wellspring" of civic morality and that the fortification of people's hearts through this practice was the "lifeline of the nation's health." If the government trampled on the graves of commoners, it would not be long before the imperial tombs were themselves destroyed, it warned (IROKAWA and GABE, vol. 2, pp. 439–43).

Despite the expression of such sentiments, the Meiji state seriously compromised the integrity of ancestral graves when it decided to ban cremation only a few months later. In claiming that burning the dead was "unfilial" and "contrary to human feeling," officials condemned the act of "tossing mothers and fathers into flames." But this fixation on burning flesh did not acknowledge the end result of cremation: remains that were compact, portable, and thus easily gathered into family graves. Full-body burial required relatively large plots of land, but the bones and ashes of many family members could be interred either under one tombstone or under individual stones clustered into a small area. The space-saving quality of cremation made it especially attractive to urban households; and by the end of the Edo period, many city residents had come to depend on cremation as a way to maintain family graves at crowded temple cemeteries. Furthermore, cremated remains could be transported over long distances, allowing for the retrieval of relatives who had died far from home. Supporters of cremation therefore hailed the practice as the most efficient means to consolidate deceased relatives in one site and attacked the ban as a sanctimonious measure that, in dividing families from their dead, threw out the baby of "human feeling" with the bath water of cremation.

Even in China, where cremation had been outlawed for centuries, the Qing government permitted the practice in cases where a family member had died far from home and the remains needed to be transported back to the ancestral tomb. Apparently the integrity of the corporate grave site was more important to Chinese bureaucrats than the integrity of the individual body (DE GROOT 1967, p. 1412). But the Meiji ban made no such allowances, following the hard line initially espoused by Ōtsuki Risai in the seventeenth century: "even if [those who die far from home] turn into grass that is trampled underfoot, this is preferable to consigning them to fire" (TSUJI 1955, p. 116).

The government's rigid stance opened the ban to attack as a cold-hearted policy that exiled the deceased from distant relatives. A few months into the ban (November 1873), the Senju crematories petitioned the governor of Tokyo to allow them to resume operation. In

support of their case, they pointed out that there were many travelers who came to Tokyo from distant places; if they died, the only way to return the remains to their families was first to cremate the bodies. "It is deeply lamentable when the corpse is buried in a faraway place and becomes a ghost without any ties," they wrote, appealing to Confucian sensibilities while at the same time expressing a popular fear of homeless souls (TKS, 605.C5.08, item no. 91, pp. 397–98). In a memorial submitted to the Sa-in a year later, Shimaji Mokurai also mentioned that those buried far from home became "unworshiped spirits" and that, even if relatives desired to visit their distant graves, often they could not afford the cost of travel (Futaba and Fukushima 1973, p. 67). A further dimension was added to this argument when Tokyo priest Tokunaga Kanmyō singled out the benefit of transporting the cremated remains of soldiers who had perished on battlefields far from home. Appealing to a government that had just instituted a conscript army, he stated that, if the cremated remains of a soldier were brought home, "naturally, they would be revered" and, as a result, "public sentiment would be harmonized" (Irokawa and Gabe, vol. 3, p. 813). Cremation was thereby promoted as a way to unify not only individual families but also the entire nation.

Cremation was of potential value to any family, rural or urban, whose members died far from home. It was also an attractive option in light of the fact that bodies buried whole were frequently exhumed by wolves or grave robbers, or "disturbed by hoes or exposed in the sand" (Sakatani 1874). But cremation was of critical importance for townspeople who could afford to maintain only small family graves in crowded temple cemeteries. They depended on cremation to keep the dead in close proximity—both to each other and to the living. In their petition to the Tokyo governor, the Senju crematories related the trouble that was caused when families accustomed to relying on cremation were suddenly forced to perform full-body burials. In one city temple with little land,

> the gravestones of different households are lined up right next to each other, so when you try to bury a body, you have to dig up not only the gravestone of the mourning family but also those of neighboring plots.… Disliking this, people rent land from other temples, but then the grave of one family is split in two and the upkeep becomes more troublesome. Furthermore, the cost of renting land and having a hole dug for the grave costs several times as much as cremation, and this is terribly worrisome for the chief mourner.
>
> (TKS, 605.C5.08, item no. 91, pp. 395–96)

There were also city dwellers who buried their dead whole, whether in their own backyards or in temple graveyards large enough to accommodate full-body burial. But even before the ban went into effect, city officials were aware that a significant number of urban residents depended on the space-saving aspect of cremation to create and maintain family grave sites. When the Tokyo police submitted their initial proposal to move crematories from the city center, they acknowledged, "although cremation originates from Buddhist teachings, graveyards in the city are cramped, so it is said that people often have no other choice but to cremate" (DJR, vol. 2, bk. 269, item no. 6). After the Council of State decided to outlaw cremation, it therefore instructed the authorities of the three metropolitan prefectures, Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka, to procure adequate space for mandated earth burial. Kyoto, which had pushed for a cremation ban four years earlier, responded that it had plenty of room at its disposal, but Osaka said it would need to condemn land in surrounding villages to supplement its six main graveyards. Tokyo, meanwhile, calculated that simply seizing empty temple land within the city's "red line" would provide enough grave sites to last about two hundred years. City officials added, in a blunt expression of anti-Buddhist opinion, that even more land would become available as "temple halls and pagodas naturally fall into ruin" (DJR, vol. 2, bk. 269, item no. 6).

The Council of State initially approved Tokyo's plan to appropriate temple property, seeing it as a convenient way to meet the need for more burial space. But when it learned of the proposal, the Finance Ministry (Ōkurashō 大蔵省) condemned the plan in a letter sent to the Council of State. Angrily noting that it was "unseemly" for decaying corpses to litter the capital, the ministry reminded the council that there were plans to build roads and other public improvements in the future and that even more "intolerable" than cremation was the prospect of having to exhume bodies and move them out of the path of development. Most important, however, prime tax-producing land would be converted into tax-free graveyards, depriving the government of a valuable source of income (DJR, vol. 2, bk. 269, item no. 26).

Swayed by Finance Ministry arguments, the Council of State made an ironic about-face, creating a situation that, instead of alleviating the need for burial space, intensified it. The council not only reversed its earlier decision to turn temple property into graveyards but went so far as to inform the governor of Tokyo that it was planning to forbid *all* burials within Tokyo's red line. This regulation would not merely stem the creation of new sites for full-body burial. It would also prevent the use of preexisting graves, meaning that even those families who had never depended on cremation would be forced to abandon

ancestral grave sites, whether they were located in temple graveyards or in plots of residential land (DJR, vol. 2, bk. 269, item no. 26). Over the ensuing months, the Finance Ministry therefore negotiated with the Council of State, the Home Ministry, and Tokyo officials to meet the need for alternative burial sites for the city's populace. They eventually decided to create eight public cemeteries just outside the red line, and with these on the drawing board, the ban on urban burial was scheduled to go into effect on 1 September 1874 (DJR, vol. 2, bk. 269, item no. 23).

As the Senju petition demonstrates, the cremation ban alone created difficulties for city dwellers, and this was true not just in Tokyo but throughout Japan. In Osaka, for example, bureaucrats set aside new areas for burial. Yet, despite attempts to institute price controls, the cost of plots skyrocketed, making it impossible for the poor to buy them (Asaka and Yagisawa 1983, p. 59). And in July 1874, the governor of Hyōgo Prefecture, Kanda Kōhei, submitted an open letter to the *Tōkyō nichi nichi shinbun* asking the Council of State to lift the cremation ban because of public anger over the lack of affordable space (TNNS, 29 July 1874; reprinted in Irokawa and Gabe, vol. 3, pp. 753–54). The decision to outlaw burial within the red line made the cremation ban particularly onerous for Tokyo residents, however. As the September deadline approached, scores of temple priests and parishioners in the capital submitted memorials attacking both the impending prohibition on urban burial and the year-old ban on cremation that was ultimately responsible for it.

Tokunaga Kanmyō, priest at a branch temple of Kan'ei-ji in Yotsuya, noted in his August 1874 petition to the government that there were "thousands of temples of the seven sects and hundreds of thousands of parishioners" within Tokyo's red line and that the approaching ban on urban burial had thrown countless numbers of them into confusion and grief. The parishioners at his own temple were questioning him every day, but he was not able to respond adequately, he wrote. This was because "they don't understand the reasoning of civilization. Mired in old habits, they are simply attached to the graves of their ancestors." In drawing up the new regulations for burial in Tokyo, bureaucrats decided to allow spouses whose mates had already been buried within the red line to join them when they themselves died (DJR, vol. 2, bk. 269, item no. 23). But while an exception was made in deference to the conjugal bond, no allowances were made for other family ties—this despite the fact that, as Tokunaga pointed out, "families put the greatest importance on ancestors." Claiming that he desired to protect "reverence for kami and love of country," Tokunaga asked, "How could people not perform rites for the ancestors?" He

also joined the Confucians at their own game by writing that it was natural "human feeling" for children to adore their parents and that if graves were located far away, the bond between parent and child would be strained and the ancestral rites "thrown into confusion." According to Tokunaga, the most practical way to avoid this fate was to lift the cremation ban and allow people to resume burying cremated remains, if not necessarily whole bodies, within the red line (IROKAWA and GABE, vol. 3, pp. 812–13).

Cremation advocates also argued that new cemeteries outside the red line would be rapidly filled with dead bodies, making them insufficient to meet the growing need for grave space. Buddhist spokesman Ōuchi Seiran conjectured that the public cemeteries would reach capacity within several years, creating a situation in which "graves will have to be built on top of graves so that, finally, coffins will be exhumed and remains disturbed. There will be great concern about people breaking the law and falling into wrongdoing" (IROKAWA and GABE, vol. 3, p. 752). Despite such protests, however, the ban on burial within the red line went into effect in September 1874, and even city dwellers accustomed to earth burial found themselves evicted from their ancestral graveyards. As a consequence, residents of Tokyo, like those of Osaka, saw prices for grave sites rapidly escalate. Only a month after the red line ban went into effect, Shimaji Mokurai noted, "Even though land [for graves] is being sold in this city [Tokyo], the asking price is hard on the poor, so there are complaints on all sides" (FUTABA AND FUKUSHIMA, vol. 1, p. 69). The solution he offered was the same proposed by Tokunaga, Ōuchi, and others: lift the ban on cremation.

By coming to the defense of ancestral graves, particularly those in Tokyo, cremation advocates highlighted the hypocrisy of a government policy ostensibly designed to promote filial devotion and proper human feeling. However, they also addressed the issue of grave space on a more dispassionate level, appealing to the materialistic concerns of a government bent on creating a "wealthy country and strong army" (*fukoku kyōhei* 富国強兵). One cremation advocate, in a letter to the *Yūbin hōchi shinbun,* attacked the wastefulness of the government ban by extrapolating its consequences far into the future: "land in Japan is exceedingly scarce.... If the limited land of Japan is used for potentially limitless burial plots, after several thousand years, the majority of fields will become graveyards." In another letter to the newspaper entitled *Kasō ben'ekiron* 火葬弁益論 (On the benefits of cremation), a scholar at an academy in Tokyo (Satake Keishō 佐竹慧昭) also brought up the issue of urban development. "Right now, for the benefit of the people, the court commands roadwork, and even if there is a temple graveyard in the way, it must be removed," he

observed. Since it was far easier to relocate cremated remains than whole bodies, instead of banning cremation, the government should encourage it, he wrote (YHS, 9 July 1874). Cremation advocates therefore not only sought to preserve access to existing ancestral graves but, by taking a broader and more forward-looking perspective, also argued that cremation provided the best means to maintain contact with the dead in an increasingly urban and mobile world.

Foul Smoke and Rotting Corpses

In order to outflank their foes on the issue of "human feeling," cremation proponents showed how worship at family graves was facilitated by the reduction of corpses to bones and ash. Similarly, when they tackled the charge that crematory smoke was damaging to public health, the ban's opponents deflected attention away from the process of burning itself and onto what it produced: remains that were not only compact and portable but "clean" as well. By arguing that rotting corpses were a far greater menace than burning ones, they successfully turned the issue of public health to their own advantage. Several months into the ban, for example, one Tokyo resident warned in a letter to the *Yūbin hōchi shinbun* that epidemics spread from diseased corpses; and he underscored the fact that these epidemics could filter up from the people to eventually threaten the emperor himself. Cremating diseased corpses was the proper way to manage this danger, he said, adding that it was inconsistent to view cremation as "inhumane" at a time when doctors were dissecting bodies for the advancement of science (YHS, 3 October 1873).

The view of cremation as a measure to protect against disease was by no means new. By the end of the Edo period, it had become common practice in urban areas to cremate those who had died of contagious diseases like tuberculosis, leprosy, and cholera.[15] The custom of burning the dead to stem disease was based not on a scientific understanding of infectious agents but on the folk knowledge of ordinary city dwellers who were loath to handle corpses disfigured with illness. The representatives of the Senju cremation temples admitted as much when they pleaded with the governor of Tokyo to allow them to resume operations on a limited basis. Their petition noted that peo-

[15] During the great cholera epidemic of 1858, for example, when "not thirty or forty days would pass without several people dying in one household," families in Edo who usually preferred earth burial turned en masse to cremation. As a result, crematories were overwhelmed with thousands of bodies stacked in huge piles. Satake Keishō, *Kasō ben'ekiron* (YHS, 9 July 1874).

ple feared the transmission of diseases like leprosy and tuberculosis from afflicted corpses and that, "according to popular belief… if their corpses are burned, the origin of the disease is arrested, and one is relieved of the fear that [the illness] will be passed on to others." The representatives did not cite medical authorities, conceding, "we do not know whether rumors at large are true or not." Nevertheless, they said, "it has been a custom from long ago for families with people afflicted with these diseases to burn them without fail when they die," and even though such a belief might be "baseless" and merely "superstition," it was commonly accepted as true and should therefore be honored (TKS, 605.C5.08, item no. 91, pp. 398–400).

There was no knowledge at this time about the microorganisms that caused disease, but there was a conviction, based on firsthand experience and religious belief, that fire was an agent that could destroy various impurities. "As a rule, there is nothing more purifying for rituals in heaven and earth than fire.… Everyone knows that cypress wood is used in the sacred precincts of Ise to create fire for purification," stated the author of *Kasō ben'ekiron*, who did not limit his advocacy of purification through fire to diseased bodies but recommended cremation as the best method to dispose of corpses in general, since any dead body "rots and gives off a foul smell." Especially in the summer months, he wrote, graves "exude a rotting stench into the heat, which is carried by the wind into the atmosphere and hurts animals and spreads disease, injuring even human life." Through cremation, in contrast, one "transforms a body with five *shaku* 尺 [about five feet] of rotting stench into an extremely pure cache of precious bones.… In this manner, cremation purifies the filthy body and it becomes a means toward worship. Who could call this disrespectful?" (YHS, 9 July 1874).

The supporters of the ban had no trouble calling it disrespectful, vigorously disputing the argument that cremation should be utilized as a sanitary way to manage the dead, diseased or not. One man from Shiga Prefecture wrote to the *Tōkyō nichi nichi shinbun* saying that there was no need to cremate those who had died of infectious disease if they were buried in remote locations (TNNS, 30 August 1874). And the leader of the Tokyo City Council, Yoda Hyakusen, mocked the claim that cremation was a cleaner way of disposal by retorting in a debate with colleagues that, if simply getting rid of the dead body were the highest priority, "then not asking whether it is [emotionally] tolerable or not, we should perform water burials by attaching stone weights to corpses and sinking them in deep ponds or in the ocean." Furthermore, cremation might prevent corpses from rotting slowly over time, but Yoda reminded fellow council members that the process

of burning a corpse was physically repulsive in itself: "The stench pierces one's nose and the hideous sight is unbearable to watch." To emphasize his point, he gave a graphic description of despicable *onbō* who "remove clothes and gowns and chop up bodies with an ax, burning them with bundles of wood. When the bodies fail to completely burn, they throw away [the remains], making them food for birds and beasts. Is this not extremely wretched?" (YHS, 24 June 1874).

Such dismissals, however, failed to stem a growing conviction among the educated public that, compared to full-body burial, cremation was the more sanitary and therefore the more "enlightened" option. This trend was encouraged by a happy coincidence for cremation advocates: at the time Japan banned cremation, medical professionals in the West were just beginning to promote the practice as a progressive method to dispose of the dead. In the October 1874 issue of *Meiroku zasshi*, which was the self-anointed arbiter of "civilization and enlightenment" (*bunmei kaika*), Sakatani Shiroshi wrote that "the rotting vapors of the dead mix with the atmosphere and mingle with the groundwater, harming the public's health"; and he supported his argument by adding, "I have heard there are societies for cremation in America and that cremations are often performed there. In Europe too, there are many arguments being made [for the practice]" (SAKATANI 1874, p. 6).

Sakatani's claim that cremation was being widely practiced in the United States was mistaken, as the first modern cremation there would not occur until the end of 1876,[16] but he was correct about the formation of societies to promote it. Cremation in the Christian world had been suppressed for centuries mainly due to the biblical doctrine of the resurrection, which taught that the dead would be raised from the earth "body and soul" to be judged by God. In fact, when the globe-trotting Isabella Bird mentioned Japan's cremation ban in a travelogue written three years after its repeal, she suggested, apparently unaware of its homegrown origins, that the prohibition had been ordered "as some suppose in deference to European prejudices" (BIRD 1888, p. 325). During the early 1870s, however, cremation was a cause célèbre for prominent medical professionals and social reformers in Europe and the United States. Great Britain's cremation society was formed in 1874 by the eminent surgeon Sir Henry Thompson,

[16] On 6 December 1876, the theosophist and Austrian nobleman Baron De Palm was cremated in Washington, Pennsylvania, in a crematory designed by Dr. Francis Julius Le Moyne, a reformist physician. The well-publicized event drew journalists from "as far away as England, France, and Germany." It also "attracted local residents staunchly opposed to incineration who, according to *The New York Times*, lent to the occasion the raucous air of a prizefight (or an execution)" (PROTHERO 1997, pp. 97–103).

and an American counterpart was convened in New York that same year. Cremation was promoted in "countless books, pamphlets, sermons, lectures, and articles," and one *Philadelphia Medical Times* editorial in 1874 speculated, "it seems as though the ceremony of burning the dead might actually be introduced among us" (PROTHERO 1997, p. 92).

In Europe and the United States, cremation was advocated as a modern, hygienic means of disposal. Since the mid-eighteenth century, concern had been growing about overcrowding in urban graveyards, which were viewed by the medical establishment as breeding grounds for disease. "The doctors assure us that the putrid vapors that emanate from cadavers fill the air with salts and corpuscles capable of impairing health and causing fatal disease," reads one French report from 1774 (ARIÈS 1991, p. 493). The initial solution devised for this problem was to move cemeteries out of city centers and into the suburbs. For example, the early 1780s witnessed the closure of all the great medieval cemeteries of Paris, which were replaced by burial grounds out of town (ARIÈS 1991, pp. 495–96). This trend was duplicated throughout Europe.

By the 1870s, however, doctors like Sir Henry Thompson had concluded that cremation was the long-term solution. Even if moved out of town, corpses continued to emit "poisonous exhalations" that could seep into wells and lead to the "generation of low fevers." Cremation, on the other hand, was clean and efficient. It made the dead "harmless to the living." The practice was further advocated from an aesthetic viewpoint. In his sermon "The Disposal of the Dead," the free religionist Rev. O. B. Frothingham noted that, with cremation, "the thoughts instead of going downward into the damp, cold ground, go upwards towards the clear blue of the skies" (PROTHERO 1997, pp. 94–96).

The Western promoters of cremation faced an uphill battle against a deeply ingrained religious and cultural attachment to full-body burial. As late as 1930 Britain's cremation rate remained under one percent (SABATA 1990, p. 27); and today in the United States, the majority of the dead are still buried whole. In the hands of those battling the ban on cremation in Meiji Japan, however, European and American campaigns were transformed into evidence that cremation was, in fact, suitable for "civilized" nations. References to the growing acceptance of cremation in the West appeared not only in the essays written by enlightenment activists like Sakatani but also in the petitions written by outspoken Buddhists like Shimaji Mokurai and Ōuchi Seiran, the latter noting in his memorial that "recently, foreign doctors have been arguing that buried corpses are dangerous to the living, and in Europe, treatises supporting cremation have been widespread" (IROKAWA and GABE, vol. 3, p. 752).

In fact, the spread of cremation in "civilized lands" became a staple element of almost all procremation essays from the summer of 1874. This trend was supported by an article appearing in the *Yūbin hōchi shinbun* that related in detail the proceedings of a meeting held in London in the spring of 1874 to promote cremation. The article noted that arguments on behalf of the practice were sweeping Europe and that modern equipment for cremation was being built in Italy. Readers were then introduced to a history of cremation in different regions and times, ranging from ancient Greece to contemporary India, followed by arguments concerning its sanitary advantage over earth burial. To reinforce this point, the article mentioned a case of workers building a railway in Quebec who contracted smallpox after digging up land where people who had died from the disease were buried. Finally, the piece introduced suggestions made by Sir Henry Thompson on how to reduce the expense and time involved in cremation through the introduction of new technology (YHS, 5 August 1874).

By strategically introducing the authority of the West, the model for Japan's modernization, cremation advocates transformed what had been a local "intuition" about the health benefits of burning the dead into an internationally accepted "fact" that their opponents found difficult to deny. What made this all the more remarkable is that, in Europe and America at this time, the cremation movement was extremely controversial, not at all representing mainstream belief and practice. Of course, the validation of cremation as a more sanitary alternative to full-body burial did not on its own dissipate the problem of crematory smoke, an issue that cremation advocates were still forced to address. For example, when Tokyo priest Tokunaga argued in his petition that terrible smells were released by bodies buried in shallow graves, he conceded that burning bodies also produced an unpleasant stench. He claimed, however, that cremations did not impinge much on people's lives because they were usually performed at night (Irokawa and Gabe, vol. 3, pp. 812–13). Other advocates did not rest with this lesser-of-two-evils defense, instead accepting that something should be done about crematory smoke. Only a few months into the ban, a Tokyo resident proposed that the problem could be alleviated by building crematories from brick and stone and furnishing them with smokestacks (YHS, 3 October 1873). When the ban was lifted in May of 1875, Tokyo *onbō* were at the ready with plans to construct such facilities. These efforts to clean up the process of cremation set the stage for more thorough modernization in the years to come, a precondition for the acceptance of cremation throughout all of Japan.

Cremation Reignited

While the two-year ban on cremation was in effect, far more was written to overturn than to defend it. Although there were those who publicly argued in favor of the ban, what they wrote was rather predictable, closely reflecting the views expressed by Edo-period Confucian scholars and their Chinese predecessors. For instance, in a letter submitted to the *Yūbin hōchi shinbun* a couple of months after the ban was implemented, an assistant Shinto priest at Tokyo's Minamimiya 南宮 Shrine wrote that it was "heartless" to roast a body "as if it were a small bird or eel" and then applauded the government's prohibition of the "cruel" practice, enjoining his readers to obey it (YHS, 26 September 1873). To its defenders, any inconvenience caused by the ban was justified by its moral purpose. In December 1873, a letter appeared in the *Tōkyō nichi nichi shinbun* claiming that, during the winter months, the cremation ban was a terrible burden on those living in the northeastern Hokuriku region, where it had been customary to cremate the dead on top of the deep winter snows and then bury the remains in spring. Sympathizing with the mourners who were now forced to dig through the deep snow, its author suggested that the government show pity and lift the ban (TNNS, 7 December 1873). A supporter of the ban published a rebuttal soon after, writing that the accumulation of snow in his native Ushū (Dewa) was double that of Hokuriku but that the custom there had always been to bury the dead in the ground: "Even when there are many feet of snow, it is cleared away, and as few as four or five people are sufficient to dig up the earth" (TNNS, 27 December 1873). Deep snow, he wrote, was no excuse to indulge in the barbaric practice of cremation.

When government officials rejected petitions to lift the ban, they too denounced cremation formulaically as too "intolerable" to be defended. In response to Ōuchi Seiran's memorial, the Sa-in wrote that the arguments of cremation advocates "deviate from human feeling, violate the law, and are not worth consideration." It was unnatural to nonchalantly throw the bodies of one's parents into flames, officials said, adding, of course, that people's natural instincts had been perverted by Buddhism. Instead of arguing the points made about grave space and hygiene, the Sa-in dismissed them by claiming that no practical benefit could possibly outweigh the damage wrought by cremation:

> Those who argue for cremation say they worry that, since graveyards are small, if full-body burial is followed as a general rule, bodies will be exhumed and exposed. Or they say that burying a body is harmful to people's health. All of these sorts

> of [arguments], however, derive from reasoning that is devoid of feeling. Since they only pay attention to reason, then certainly, the logical conclusion of their line of argument is to say that, without debating the right and wrong of cremation and burial, we should process bodies into beneficial fertilizer.
>
> (IROKAWA and GABE, vol. 3, p. 753)

Some anti-cremationists did address in a more direct fashion the issues raised by their opponents. In confronting the charge that diseased corpses injured public health and should therefore be burned, they suggested the alternative of burying them in segregated graveyards. And in countering the assertion that full-body burial consumed more space than the nation could reasonably afford, they stressed that communities had been following this practice for millennia without exhausting the land, so why the sudden panic? In an August 1874 letter to the *Tōkyō nichi nichi shinbun*, which began by expressing shock and dismay at Governor Kanda's open opposition to the cremation ban a month earlier, an anonymous writer from southern Kyushu cited the case of his home village, where shortage of space had never been a problem. This was due to the fact that, "when people perform burials, they do not reserve one piece of land for only one body. Because it is common to bury fresh corpses in old mounds, one piece of land is sufficient for the burial of several tens of bodies" (TNNS, 30 August 1874).

Periodic churning of the dead was not an acceptable solution, however, to those Japanese who had grown accustomed to placing the bones of their relatives in urns and then preserving them indefinitely in ancestral graves. The moralistic arguments made on behalf of the ban also failed to curb public discontent, which grew as time passed. Resentment in Tokyo was particularly strong, stoked by the added prohibition on burial within the red line. By the end of 1874, the ban's defenders had failed to gain popular support for the anti-cremation policy, while their adversaries, through letters to the editor and petitions to government officials, had developed a compelling rationale for cremation. Proclamations that cremation was "inhumane" rang hollow in the face of arguments that burning the dead saved space, facilitated ancestor worship, and eliminated the health hazard of rotting corpses.

Badgered by the procremation forces and dismayed at a lack of sufficient grave space, Tokyo officials therefore asked the Home Ministry in January 1875 to lift the ban. In doing so, they repeated the arguments of cremation advocates, noting, for instance, that even in "civilized" Western countries, cremation was being promoted as a

clean and efficient way to dispose of the dead (DJR, vol. 2, bk. 269, item no. 7). The Home Ministry supported Tokyo's case in a letter sent to the Council of State. It emphasized that, despite the expansion of public graveyards in Tokyo, "people of property have bought up several *tsubo* of land each,[17] so there is already a shortage of space," and it reiterated the point that cremation was being promoted as a hygienic measure in the West (DJR, vol. 2, bk. 269, item no. 7). Under pressure from within the government and without, the Council of State grudgingly relented. Acknowledging that the ban was extremely unpopular, the Sa-in drew up a new policy statement at the end of January that reflected the "freedom of custom" argument made by Ōuchi Seiran and other opponents of the ban: "In regard to matters such as burial, the government should not control popular opinion. One must consider the feelings and thoughts of foolish men and women and leave it to their choice. This is not a problem for governance, so the ban should be lifted." Sa-in officials did lament, however, that "the people's deep faith in cremation is not due to belief in natural law, nor out of concern for a lack of grave space, but is actually based on their belief in Buddhism" (DJR, vol. 2, bk. 269, item no. 7).

The prohibition against cremation was officially repealed on 23 May 1875, and on the same day, Tokyo was informed that cremated remains could once more be interred in city graveyards (DJR, vol. 2, bk. 269, item no. 7). The government's action was welcomed throughout Japan. Two days after the ban was abolished, Osaka's *Chōya shinbun* celebrated it in an article entitled *Kasō jinmin no jiyū to naru* 火葬人民の自由となる (Freedom for the Cremating Populace). The newspaper expressed gratitude toward Governor Kanda for his role in overturning the ban (CS, 25 May 1875; cited in ASAKA and YAGISAWA 1983, p. 120). In Ishikawa Prefecture, a Jōdo Shinshū stronghold, many of those who had been barred from performing cremations took advantage of their restored freedom by exhuming the dead who had been buried whole, smashing their coffins, and cremating their remains (AOKI 1996, p. 49).

The decision whether to cremate or not was once more left in the hands of "foolish men and women." But in the ban's aftermath, the government still asserted ultimate jurisdiction over the bodies of its subjects—even if this meant abetting the very practice it had just been trying to extinguish. In Tokyo, for example, residents were once more allowed to bury cremated remains within the red line, but the ban on burying whole corpses remained in place, effectively encouraging city dwellers to practice cremation. Kyoto residents were also informed in

[17] One *tsubo* equals approximately 36 square feet.

September 1875 that they were to bury only cremated remains in the precincts of city temples, full-body burial being relegated to suburban cemeteries (ASAKA and YAGISAWA 1983, p. 88). Such restrictions on urban burial were instituted by authorities throughout Japan over the next several decades, based on the premise—firmly established during the cremation debate—that rotting corpses posed a risk to public health while cremated remains did not.[18]

Diseased bodies were considered especially dangerous, so local authorities not only encouraged cremation by banning urban burial but mandated it during times of epidemic. In September 1877, for example, the Tokyo police ordered that all bodies of cholera victims be cremated (MORI 1997, pp. 204–5).[19] Over the next two decades, the central government gave local authorities the choice of cremating those corpses deemed contagious or quickly burying them in segregated "infectious disease graveyards" (*densenbyō bochi* 伝染病墓地). This second option was eliminated in 1897, however, when a new law required that infectious corpses throughout Japan be cremated (ASAKA and YAGISAWA 1983, p. 31).

A practice once reviled by government officials thus became an important tool in their effort to guard public hygiene. In turn, the public health agenda reshaped the process of cremation itself, encouraging its spread as a civic practice throughout Japan. When the Sa-in initially approved the proposal to abolish the cremation ban, it recommended that Tokyo and other regions establish regulations to manage crematories, taking care to keep them distant from residential areas. Alluding to the abuses of corrupt *onbō*, the Sa-in predicted, "if local officials don't manage them, past evils will arise and the poor will suffer" (DJR, vol. 2, bk. 269, item no. 7). In the months between the decision to lift the ban and its official abolition, the Home Ministry began looking into the establishment of appropriate guidelines, drawing from proposals that had been put forward by cremation advocates. On 24 June, a month after the ban was lifted, the ministry notified prefectural officials of the new rules, fulfilling the anxious prophecy voiced by the Council of State two years earlier: state-sanctioned cremation.

[18] When Nagasaki outlawed full-body burial in its city center in 1888, the *Asahi shinbun* reported that the measure was intended "to protect against epidemics." This does not mean that Nagasaki mandated cremation; in fact, the newspaper noted that alternative cemeteries for burial were being prepared in the suburbs. But since cremated remains could continue to be buried inside the city, cremation became all the more attractive to those who wanted to keep the dead close at hand (AS, 5 June 1888; reprinted in HOSONO 1932, p. 96).

[19] Cholera killed hundreds of thousands of Japanese during the course of the Meiji period. The number of people killed by cholera in 1877 was 8,027; in 1879, 105,786; in 1882, 33,784; and in 1886, 108,405 (KAWAKAMI 1965, p. 131).

The Home Ministry regulations required that crematories in Tokyo be built outside the red line and that those in other regions be located in unpopulated areas with low tax revenue. Local authorities were also advised to take "suitable measures," such as constructing walls around crematories and furnishing them with smokestacks, to reduce the adverse effect of crematory smoke on public health. Finally, the Home Ministry cautioned officials to monitor expenses and make sure that remains were not buried on crematory premises but properly interred elsewhere (DJR, vol. 2, bk. 269, item no. 7).

Working within these guidelines, crematory operators cooperated with local authorities to build a more "civilized" form of cremation, one that would not only ameliorate the evils of the past but also make the practice an increasingly attractive option for the future. Cremators in Tokyo were especially aggressive in this effort. In the month between the repeal of the ban and the announcement of the Home Ministry's new rules, they submitted requests to resume operations and, in the process, transformed cremation from a parochial custom embedded in temple-parishioner relationships into a public service available to anyone who paid the necessary fee. The Senju cremation temples, for example, proposed consolidating their sect-specific crematories into a building that would be split into two sections, one holding three "middle-class" cremation pits and the other holding six "lower-class" pits.[20] A separate structure would also be built to accommodate individual cremations for the elite. According to this blueprint, it was money, not sectarian affiliation, that would divide the dead from one another. Fees for cremation were fixed at standard rates of 75 sen for lower-class, 1.5 yen for middle-class, and 1.75 yen for upper-class cremations, with individual cremations costing 5 yen.

During the Edo period, urban cremations had commonly been performed in primitive structures called *hiya* 火屋 (fire huts), which were usually little more than fire pits topped with roofs to keep out the rain. Consequently, smoke billowed unrestrained into surrounding areas. The proposed Senju crematory, however, would be a substantial building crowned with a tiled roof and a pair of smokestacks intended to disperse the stench of burning bodies. In order to minimize further the impact of smoke on people living nearby, cremations would be performed only between 8 p.m. and 10 a.m. The Senju representatives also noted that cleanliness within the building would be made a top priority and that, in times of epidemic, coffins would be tagged with the names of their occupants so as not to be confused. New rules

[20] The building was constructed around pits much like the ones dug in the open air and filled with brush and firewood.

of operation further specified that corpses were to be handled with care and the chief mourner shown due respect, while crematory attendants were to be prohibited from accepting saké and other gifts from mourning families (ASAKA and YAGISAWA 1983, p. 121).

Dr. Tjarko Beukema, a Dutch instructor at Tokyo Medical College, investigated the new Senju facility in 1877 with a Japanese assistant, submitting a report to the governor of Tokyo in which he praised its cleanliness and efficiency. Witnessing one middle-class and two lower-class cremations—the only difference between the two classes seeming to be that the body in "middle class" was encoffined while those in "lower class" were not—he noted that the stench "was far less than we had previously imagined" and that the crematory attendants went about their business in a very orderly and attentive manner. He concluded that, "as a beneficial, sanitary method, [cremation] should be encouraged," efforts being made all the while to make technological improvements (TŌKYŌTO 1969, pp. 419–23). Over the next few years, in fact, the Senju crematory built coal-burning furnaces and a new ventilation system, also installing lime-based filters to reduce the smell (ASAKA and YAGISAWA 1983, p. 124).

The lifting of the ban stimulated efforts to modernize crematories in Osaka and Kyoto as well. In Osaka, as in other regions, Meiji economic reforms left *onbō* stripped of their feudal rights;[21] and since they lacked the necessary capital to build new crematories, big money filled the vacuum. In June 1876, Sumitomo magnate Hirose Saihei 広瀬宰平 (1828–1914) helped found the company Hachikōsha 八弘社, which built crematories according to government specifications in Osaka's Nagara 長柄 and Abeno 阿倍野 cemeteries (AS, 23 and 25 December 1888; reprinted in HOSONO 1932, p. 205). In Kyoto, meanwhile, Higashi and Nishi Honganji 本願寺, headquarters of the largest two Jōdo Shinshū schools, reached into their deep pockets to fund the construction of that city's first modern facilities for cremation. They designed a pair of crematories to be built next to each other in Toribeno, the venerable cremation ground featured in Yoshida Kenkō's *Tsurezuregusa*. The new complex was erected during 1878 and opened in 1879. Built in Western fashion with brick smokestacks and a ventilation system to manage the smoke, it soon became one of the "famous sites" (*meisho* 名所) of Kyoto and was listed in an 1880 guidebook depicting the attractions of the old capital (ASAKA and YAGISAWA 1983, pp. 88–90).

[21] YOSHII Toshiyuki notes that the collapse of the feudal order left cremators bereft of tax exemptions and monopolistic privileges (1996, pp. 129–31). However, his research, and that of other scholars in this field, does not give a detailed picture of how *onbō* in different areas of Japan navigated the new political and economic environment of early Meiji. Much work remains to be done in this area.

The modernization of crematories did not sweep all of Japan at the same pace. In rural areas, where cremations were usually performed in remote fields and mountain valleys, there was little incentive to reduce or control smoke from burning corpses. Consequently, villages in certain regions continued to perform outdoor cremations well into the twentieth century (ASAKA and YAGISAWA 1983, pp. 33–36; AOKI 1996, pp. 49–50). Nevertheless, the new crematories of Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto became prominent models that were imitated throughout the nation from the 1880s on. They also provided inspiration for the Western cremation movement. In 1878, for example, the English traveler Isabella Bird gained permission from the governor of Tokyo to visit the Kirigaya 桐ヶ谷 crematory, which, like the crematories in Senju and elsewhere in Tokyo, had been rebuilt according to the government's new regulations. In her *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, she favorably noted,

> Thirteen bodies were burned the night before my visit, but there was not the slightest odour in or about the building, and the interpreter told me that, owing to the height of the chimneys, the people of the neighborhood never experience the least annoyance, even while the process is going on. The simplicity of the arrangement is very remarkable, and there can be no reasonable doubt that it serves the purpose of the innocuous and complete destruction of the corpse as well as any complicated apparatus (if not better), while its cheapness places it within the reach of the class which is most heavily burdened by ordinary funeral expenses. (BIRD 1888, pp. 327–28)

In a footnote following this passage, Bird remarked that her visit to the Kirigaya cremation grounds was reported in the 19 December edition of the *Yomiuri shinbun;* and she noted with surprise the paper's claim that she was motivated by a desire to introduce cremation into England. Although she found the paper's reporting to be "very inaccurate," her positive impression was indeed circulated by cremation advocates in the West, appearing, for instance, in Dr. Edward J. Bermingham's 1881 polemic *The Disposal of the Dead, a Plea for Cremation.* In reviewing the state of cremation around the world, BERMINGHAM wrote, "In Japan, where cremation has been in operation for many years, its feasibility is practically proven"; and he supported this assertion with a nearly verbatim reprise of Bird's account (1881, pp. 45–48).

The design of the Honganji crematories in Kyoto also drew the attention of the British government, which requested blueprints in November 1884, the same year that Great Britain decriminalized cremation (ASAKA and YAGISAWA 1983, p. 91). England's first modern

crematory was subsequently built in 1885 just outside London by the British Cremation Society. German cremationists also showed interest in the design of the Senju facility once it had been outfitted with its new ventilation system and lime filters, asking to see its plans in 1883 (TYMS, 9 October 1883). At a time when technology was being transferred overwhelmingly from West to East, this inversion of the usual flow was a dramatic marker of the success of Japanese cremation advocates. The civic rationale constructed during the cremation ban quickly took physical form once the ban was lifted, providing concrete evidence that an "evil custom of the past" had been transformed into a modern means to dispose of the dead.

In fact, this metamorphosis was so thorough that one contributor to a magazine in 1883 felt obliged to remind readers that cremation did have a deeper significance based in Buddhist teachings. He first noted the extraordinary improvements that had been made in cremation technology, citing the fact that "even a country like Germany" had recently requested to see plans so it could build its own crematories. But he regretted that the ban on cremation in Japan had been lifted not because of any consideration of its religious merit but "solely due to its convenience for public health." He added, "Now crematories are being reconstructed, and there is a rumor that all earth burials in Shiga Prefecture will be abolished and everyone forced to cremate. But this is being done only out of concern for public health. Even though there are those who preach this eloquently, one must not stop with this point." Drawing from the writings of Chinese Buddhist monks, he asserted that cremation was an act of religious merit. Not only did cremation aid in "meditation on the two emptinesses 二空 [of self 我 and phenomena 法]," but it also reenacted the passing of Śākyamuni Buddha into nirvana. "The *manji* 卍 (reverse swastika) in one's breast consumes the wood," he concluded, emphatically asserting a Buddhist understanding of cremation as it underwent its transformation into a public health measure (KEK 1883, pp. 6–8).

When cremation was banned in 1873 as a "barbaric" Buddhist ritual, probably no Japanese could have foreseen that, only ten years later, a magazine contributor would feel compelled to remind readers of its Buddhist roots. The fact that one would is a testament to the success of Buddhists and their allies in constructing a modern rationale for cremation that was independent of Buddhist significance. Like other interest groups in the early Meiji period, cremation advocates quickly learned how to turn state-sanctioned values and goals to their own advantage, redefining their scope in the process. Cremation boosters became standard-bearers of filial devotion and Western science, portraying the opposition as a menace to the integrity of ancestor worship

and public health. After the Council of State revoked its prohibition in 1875, some anti-Buddhist ideologues continued to speak out against the practice, but their voices were muffled and soon smothered by the pro-cremation consensus that spread among policy makers and the educated elite. Guided by directives from the central government, local officials worked with Buddhist priests and other private interests to build modern crematories throughout Japan in the decades that followed. Ironically, a consensus that had formed in opposition to a government ban provided another avenue through which the bodies of Japanese, both dead and alive, became subject to bureaucratic control.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AS *Asahi shinbun* 朝日新聞
CS *Chōya shinbun* 朝野新聞
DJR *Dajō ruiten* 太政類典, 5 volumes on microfilm at Meiji University, Tokyo, 1868–1881.
KEK *Kasō en'yu no koto* 火葬縁由の事. *Myōmyō bunko* 妙々文庫 10: 6–8, 1883.
TKS *Tōkyōto Kōbunshokan Shiryō* 東京都広文書館資料. Records of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Archives.
TNNS *Tōkyō nichi nichi shinbun* 東京日日新聞
TYMS *Tōkyō Yokohama mainichi shinbun* 東京横浜毎日新聞
YHS *Yūbin hōchi shinbun* 郵便報知新聞

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