

Life and Death, Funeral Rites and Burial Systems in Early Modern Japan

© Professor Ōtō Osamu, Tohoku University

Translated by Timothy D. Amos and Scot Hislop

Translators Introduction

© Dr. Timothy D. Amos, Dr. Scot Hislop, National University of Singapore

Introduction

The following paper by Osamu Ōtō was presented at the workshop *Death and Dying in Early Modern Japan* hosted in September 2009 at the National University of Singapore. Ōtō is a professor of Japanese early modern history specializing in social and family history at Tohoku University. He is scheduled to retire in March 2012.¹ The workshop organizers invited Ōtō to give an introductory address (*sōron*) to a generalist audience and he spoke for about an hour from the manuscript we have translated. Ōtō chose to contextualize early modern attitudes towards death and dying within the larger story of burial customs in Japanese history. His talk summarized a considerable body of Japanese language secondary sources. It also filtered and condensed many of Ōtō's observations collected through engagement with primary sources over a forty-year career into thought-provoking generalizations. The paper offers rich insight into early modern Japanese imaginations, experiences, and remembrances of death and deserves a wide audience.

Few English language works achieve what Ōtō's paper does in so short a space. Due to its brevity, Ōtō's paper cannot, of course, approach the comprehensiveness or detail found in recent Anglophone publications such as those of Duncan Ryūken

¹ Ōtō's written works include *Kinsei nōmin to ie, mura, kokka: seikatsushi, shakaishi no shiza kara* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1996); *Kinsei no mura to seikatsu bunka: sonraku kara umareta chie to hōtoku shihō* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2001); *Kinsei murabito no raifu saikuru* (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 2003).

Williams or Nam-lin Hur.² For the same reason it does not probe into the emotional impact of death and dying in the way that Harold Bolitho's work does.³ The translated essay below is perhaps in some ways best compared to a recent piece authored by Satō Hiro'o (a colleague of Ōtō's whose work provides the frame for his paper below) which was translated and published as an article in a recent special journal volume on *Shūgendo*.⁴ Ōtō's paper, like that of Satō, arises out of a life and career dedicated to the documentary study of early modern Japan, and it paints this history in broad brush strokes with both clarity and precision. When the paper is read in light of English language scholarship, moreover, it becomes clear that Ōtō's work also makes several important original contributions to knowledge which are worthy of publication in their own right. Written in a classical positivist style with a deep concern for people on the margins, most readers will find something of value in Ōtō's piece to clarify or challenge their own views of early modern Japanese society.

Death and Dying in Early Modern Japan: English Language Literature

Ōtō's work is well-suited to serve as a general introduction to life/death issues in the early modern period. It is concise, accurate, original, and impressive in scope, qualities which become especially clear when it is compared to the growing body of Anglophone scholarship on the subject. While emerging English language work is impressive there

² Nam-lin Hur, *Death and Social Order in Tokugawa Japan: Buddhism, Anti-Christianity, and the Danka System* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007); Duncan Ryūken Williams, *The Other Side of Zen: A Social History of Sōtō Zen Buddhism in Tokugawa Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

³ Harold Bolitho, *Bereavement and Consolation: Testimonies from Tokugawa Japan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁴ Satō Hiro'o, "Changes of the Concept of Mountains in Japan," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, 18 (2009): *Shūgendō: The History and Culture of a Japanese Religion / L'histoire et culture d'une religion*, 89-102. The piece was translated by Orion Klatau.

are few (if any) works that can match Ōtō's succinct piece or emulate his particular socio-historical concerns and the breadth of his narrational brushstrokes. Much of the new work tends to focus exclusively on the early modern period, and within frameworks dominated by considerations of socio-political ordering, socio-religious and socio-economic practice, and Western theological constructs. Ōtō's focuses tightly on social practices and displays a special concern for the lived experience of life/death issues in early modern Japan for a wide range of social actors but particularly for the historically marginalized.

Ōtō's paper charts the development of various institutions related to life and death issues in early modern Japan in order to outline the wide range of social concerns implicated in this institutional history. This primary concern sets Ōtō's work apart from the one other major Anglophone treatise recently published on this topic. In *Death and Social Order in Tokugawa Japan: Buddhism, Anti-Christianity, and the Danka System*, Nam-lin Hur analyses the development of the *danka* system in early modern Japan against the backdrop of the anti-Christian policies of the Tokugawa shoguns. This is the first English language treatise to examine the interstice between these problems and it deserves careful study by early modern specialists. Despite its many strengths, however, the book is not a general treatise on death and dying in early modern Japan like Ōtō's piece below. Rather it is an argument about how attitudes and practices surrounding death came to be dominated by Buddhism and temples despite the caution the "public authorities" showed toward these institutions during the early modern period. While the book is original on many points, such as its complex reformulation of the distinction between "temple registers" (*ninbetsuchō*) and "census registers of sectarian inspection" (*shūmon aratame*), at the level of the particular there are important discussions of real social historical concern which are missing which can be found in Ōtō's essay on topics such as *kodakara*, abortion, and infanticide.

Ōtō's work distinguishes itself from recent Anglophone works on related subjects because its primary focus is placed on the social life of the Tokugawa subject. Duncan Ryūken Williams's *The Other Side of Zen: A Social History of Sōtō Zen Buddhism in Tokugawa Japan* also uses a wide range of pri-

mary sources in his study of socio-religious and socio-economic practices of Japanese Buddhist temples of the Sōtō Zen school from the seventeenth through to the early nineteenth centuries. *The Other Side of Zen* has been rightly praised for its innovative style and method. Ōtō's essay complements this impressive work. At a general level, Ōtō's essay deals with life/death issues in ways which resonate strongly with Williams' study. At the same time Ōtō's paper extends beyond an analysis rooted in the attempt to find the general within particular religious sectarian complexities. Ōtō develops a line of argumentation which, while acknowledging and detailing the socio-religious and socio-economic aspects of early modern religious rites and practices, ultimately sees them as arising out of social necessity (core human needs) and not necessarily due to religious expectations or developments. At the particular level, too, Ōtō's work highlights important explanatory social factors such as the importance of changing kinship ideology in the management of death (such as in his discussion of cemetery arrangements for single laborers), which is a fresh insight in both Japanese and Anglophone literature.

Ōtō's work also engages in a level of generalization that helps better contextualize some of the important Anglophone work on early modern Japanese literature dealing with emotion. In *Bereavement and Consolation: Testimonies from Tokugawa Japan*, Harold Bolitho analyzes expression of grief in three thanatologues. The first, by the Jōdo Shinshū priest Zenjō deals with the death of his young son in 1798. The second by the haikai poet Kobayashi Issa takes up the death of his father, Yagobei, in 1801. The third thanatologue describes the emotions of the scholar Hirose Kyokusō after the death of his wife in 1845. While the texts are, as Bolitho suggests, "extraordinary," they are also, by his own admission, "rarities" because they are personal statements.⁵ It is the extraordinariness of the texts which attracted Bolitho's attention and they are not emplaced in a larger discourse on death and dying in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Ōtō's piece also offers a useful frame for understanding the development of mortuary practices in Japan over the *longue durée* which ties together the various concerns of Anglophone scholars working in the field. In addition to the above monographs a

⁵ Bolitho, *Bereavement and Consolation*, 27-28.

special issue of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* dedicated to mortuary practices in Japan was published in 2000. It was edited by Elizabeth Kenney and Edmund T. Gilday.⁶ Several articles dealt with the early modern period. Gilday's "Bodies of Evidence" showed the importance of Chinese rites in the creation of a distinctively "Japanese" mortuary system by closely examining the funeral and memorial rites of the Kōmei emperor. His essay problematized the Buddhist/Shinto binary within which imperial mortuary practices have been examined.⁷ Mark L. Blum's "Stand by Your Founder" analyzed the development of Jōdo Shinshū funeral practices paying close attention to the way that popular attitudes at odds with religious orthodoxy lead to rulings by early modern figures which attempted to reconcile the two.⁸ Kenney studied two specific instances of Shinto style burials in the early modern period in "Shinto Funerals in the Edo Period."⁹ These, as well as the other essays included in the issue, serve as an introduction to the range of potential topics in the study of mortuary practices in Japan but Ōtō's essay, translated below, provides a larger framework within which to situate such study.

Convictions and Concerns in Ōtō's History

Ōtō's approach to historical research is perhaps exemplified in the two pithy maxims recorded by Nakamura Masanori that appeared to be prevalent in the early days of their research careers: "there is no historical research without fieldwork" (*chōsa naku-shite kenkyū nashi*); and "the method of doing history is found in the documents themselves" (*hōhō*

wa shiryō ni naizai suru).¹⁰ While Ōtō has very few explicit writings on the nature of the craft of history, his work reveals no major disagreement with such dictums. He is clearly committed to deep empiricism – the bottom up deductive approach to the study of history – and to the translators' knowledge he has never hinted at the possibility that inductive research might also on occasion constitute good history. Neither does Ōtō ever seem to suggest that the analytical categories he employs for historical explanation are anything other than neat reflections of the empirical realities of the period he studies. In this schematic names (*namae*), family/household (*ie*) and community (*kyōdōtai*) are all commonsensical categories that embody a semi-universal timelessness, if not always for the human race as a whole then for most people living on the Japanese archipelago. Such positivism occasionally elicits the criticisms leveled at positivist historiography in Western academia over the last century or so. A healthy degree of self-criticism and critical assessment of axiomatic assumptions are every bit the hallmark of good scholarship as are sound logic and proper procedure. But it is often precisely at the point where criticism seems warranted that Ōtō's work often takes a sudden and unexpected turn. In the essay below, this occurs in reference to the work of Yanagita Kunio, through whom Ōtō demonstrates that the need to 'historicize' the household is firmly present within the positivist historical tradition. Such a turn reminds us that if Ōtō is a positivist historian, he is an extremely thoughtful one. In fact, when pushed on the topic, Ōtō remarked in a personal communication that a good historian was one who had a "sharpness of thought" (*atama ga kireru*). We believe this essay displays that.

But while espousing a bottom up approach to the study of history, it is also clear that Ōtō's work is not free of commitments. His work shows that there is a way to care and to be political in one's work that maintains a commitment to the acquisition of basic historiographical skills and time-tested exegetical principles. Ōtō has in fact lived his career as a scholar on the physical and conceptual periphery of early modern Japanese history, and while notorious for speaking his mind regardless of circum-

⁶ Elizabeth Kenney and Edmund T. Gilday, "Mortuary Rites in Japan: Editors' Introduction," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 27 no. 3 (2000): 163–178.

⁷ Edmund T. Gilday, "Bodies of Evidence: Imperial Funeral Rites and the Meiji Restoration," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 27 no. 3 (2000): 273–296.

⁸ Mark L. Blum, "Stand by Your Founder: Honganji's Struggle with Funeral Orthodoxy," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 27 no. 3 (2000): 179–212.

⁹ Elizabeth Kenney, "Shinto Funerals in the Edo Period," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 27 no. 3 (2000): 239–271.

¹⁰ Nakamura Masanori, "Gengoronteki tenkai igo no rekishigaku," *Rekishigaku kenkyū* 779 (September 2003): 29.

stances, it is clearly with respect and care that he treats the elderly, the infant, the impoverished, and the outcaste. His commitment to experience-based models of knowledge reflects a wider commitment to the lived experiences of the people he has studied and the material legacies of the past in as much as they offer tantalizing fragments about these people, and teach us something about who they are and how they carried their various burdens. While such an understanding of history may at points seem utopian or perhaps even a little naïve, at the end of the day “deep empiricism” is the only soil in which good history grows. For Ōtō, good scholarship can certainly grow in other kinds of soil but good early modern Japanese history will only grow in this variety. And few people are as capable as he when working in this soil.

Conclusion

Ōtō’s work is well-suited to serve as a general introduction to life/death issues in the early modern period because it attempts to address the larger picture of those issues within the broader context of Japanese history. Ōtō’s paper is certainly at its clearest when it deals with his main area of specialty, Tokugawa social history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but the paper does not flinch from trying to understand attitudes towards death and dying and relevant social practices within a much broader historical context.

Ōtō’s work is also committed to explaining this history with concepts and categories which have a broad analytical reach. Ōtō is an historian of people rather than ideas or religious practices. He is interested in people’s lived experiences (*seikatsushi*) and how they reproduce themselves over time. Consequently, Ōtō adopts analytical categories such as “lifecycles” and “naming” which have broad theoretical applicability. Classical analytical categories such as “the household” (*ie*) and “the community” (*kyōdōtai*) do feature in his work, but it is ultimately Ōtō’s desire to empirically reconstruct how Japanese people, particularly those on the socio-economic and geographical margins, create and recreate themselves over time that provides the main impetus for his research and sets it apart from other scholarship.

Life and Death, Funeral Rites and Burial Systems in Early Modern Japan¹

© Professor Ōtō Osamu, Tohoku University

Translated by Timothy D. Amos and Scot Hislop,
National University of Singapore

I. Life and Death in Early Modern Japan

(1) *Historical Transformation of Attitudes Towards Life and Death*

With his 2008 publication, *Shisha no yukue* (Whereabouts of the Dead), the intellectual historian Satō Hiro'o generated considerable interest among scholars for his depiction of the historical transition of the attitudes toward life and death held by people who lived on the Japanese archipelago. His basic ideas can be summarized as follows:²

(1) In ancient Japanese society through to the eleventh century, human beings were thought of as comprised of two parts, namely, the soul/spirit (*reikon*) and the body (*nikutai*), and death was understood to be the separation of the soul/spirit from the physical body. The soul-less physical remains of a human body were carried to a burial site and abandoned without further reflection. Ruling elites and the wealthier strata of society buried the dead, constructing burial mounds or stone tombs, but there was no fixed practice of visiting graves. Popular interest lay in the cleansing of souls/spirits which, once purified, would travel to the land of the dead (mountains, caves, nearby islands, etc). Spirits/souls were entities which flew in the air, never resting in one place, and this world and the next were thought to overlap.

¹ This paper was presented at the workshop on Death and Dying in Early Modern Japan, held at the National University of Singapore in September 2009. The workshop was funded by the Japan Foundation and the Department of Japanese Studies, National University of Singapore. Other papers from the workshop were published in the 2010 edition of *Early Modern Japan*.

² Satō Hiro'o, *Shisha no yukue* (Tokyo: Iwada Shoten, 2008), 129-162.

(2) In the twelfth century, with the spread of Buddhism and a belief in the 'Pure Land' (*Jōdo*), the image of the world of the dead as separated from the living proliferated, and the idea that one needed to become purified in order to enter the other world became firmly established. This signified the end of the ancient, one dimensional view of the world and the beginnings of a medieval world view based on the dual structure of the 'this world' (*gense*) – 'other world' (*takai*) divide. People regarded their highest goal after death as the journey to the realm of the Pure Land, and this world was conceived of as a temporary place where one achieved purification. The Buddha of the Pure Land was thought to frequently appear in this world as a manifest deity, acting as a guide to direct people to the Pure Land. Consequently, holy places where the manifest deities resided materialized throughout the country and those who desired to go to the Pure Land visited these sites or had their physical remains entrusted there. Subsequently, burial grounds were no longer places to dispose of corpses but were understood as sacred sites – paths to the Pure Land – where communal memorials for the souls of the dead such as five-storied stupas (*gorintō*) were erected. Souls, having left the bodies or ashes of the deceased, embarked upon the journey to the distant Pure Land and were believed to thenceforth refrain from revisiting this world. Accordingly, the ashes of the deceased kept at a sacred site did not become the object of sustained veneration. Worship at sacred sites, too, was primarily aimed at dispatching souls trapped amongst the physical remains to the Pure Land.

(3) This kind of early medieval world view began to be transformed from around the fourteenth century. People began to desire peace and happiness not only in the next world but also this one. Thus the image of the distant Pure Land as the final destination began to lose its luster. Thereafter, people were desirous that the deceased would remain in their graves after death where they could be worshipped by descendants and serve as protectors of future generations. This is ostensibly the advance of secularization. Considerations surrounding this world become most pronounced in shaping attitudes towards life and death; such attitudes came to permeate every corner of society during the Edo period and the

spread of Confucian teachings also began to privilege ideas of how one should live in the present age. The creation of *ie* (households) based on principles of ancestral succession even among the commoners from the late medieval into the early modern period provided an important condition for this development; late in the early modern era each household built a tombstone as a monument to the dead, continuously performing rites at these memorials, and many family temples (*bodaiji*) developed into communal temples within villages.

(4) The world of the dead shrank, becoming severely delimited with the onset of modernity. The other world was squeezed into the dark corners or confined spaces of this world like graveyards and mysterious places.

Satō's explanation of the historical transformation of Japanese attitudes towards life and death, as well as the overall position of early modern understandings within that history are basically sound. Building on Satō's framework, this paper, aims to further elucidate early modern Japanese aspects of life and death through a general survey of extant literature and historical sources related to the topic.

(2) Birth of the *Ie* and Lifecycles

(a) The formation of a lifecycle view linking the temporal world and the afterlife

Satō supposes that the formation of *ie* among the commoner stratum from the late medieval to the early modern period is grounded in the development of a burial system and an early modern conception of life and death.

The *ie* is a perpetual organizational body with its own name, property, and occupation, and continues directly along a patrilineal line. There are numerous theories concerning when this *ie* developed among different social strata but most scholars seem to agree that considerable progress was made in its development at all levels of society by the latter half of the medieval period. In the first half of the medieval period, the managerial initiatives of ordinary commoners were fluid, whether in agriculture, commerce, or industry. From the fourteenth century, administrative practices greatly stabilized. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, fixed *ie* which con-

tinuously transmitted property and trades as family estates and occupations began to proliferate. Alongside this development came the formation of villages (*mura*) and townships (*chō*) – communities with a constant, shared territorial bond guaranteeing the continued existence of the *ie* – and these collectives became the basic units of society during the warring states period (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries) and later within the early modern political (*bakuhatsu*) system.³

At the end of the period of civil war and during the first century of the Edo period, the development of new rice paddies was carried out on a nationwide level and the average overall productivity of a tract of land increased. Based on this, *fudai genin* (house-servants) who had been subsumed into wealthier farming households, along with collateral relatives, were able to establish their own independent households. Despite numerous regional differences, modest-sized farms managed by small households of about five people became widespread from the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries.⁴ In urban centers, too, small enterprises based on the *ie* became common in commerce and industry.⁵ This created the possibility for many men and women to become household heads and overseers.

In the early modern period, not only farmers, merchants, and artisans, but all occupations came to form their own social groups. They were comprised of skilled groups of workers who carried out these occupations and were governed by the Bakufu and daimyo domains according to their particular status designations. People's occupations and overall survival were basically guaranteed through the *ie* and these professional occupation groups; and in the

³ Sakata Satoshi, *Nihon chūsei no uji / ie / mura* (Tokyo: Asakura Shobō, 1997), 60-109; Katsumasa Shizuo, *Sengoku jidairon* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1996), 1-63, 93-128.

⁴ Ōtō Osamu, *Kinsei nōmin to ie / mura / kokka* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1996), 50-69, 197-292.

⁵ Fukai Jinzō, "Kinsei toshi hattatsuki ni okeru Osaka Funaba-chō chōnin shakai no dōkō," *Bunka* 43 (3/4) 1980, 200-203; Yoshida Nobuyuki, *Kinsei toshi shakai no mibun kōzō* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1998), 45-120; Inui Hiromi, *Kinsei Osaka no ie / machi / jūmin* (Tokyo: Seibundō, 2002), 11-149.

peaceful world of the Tokugawa period the possibility of leading a stable life expanded greatly. As a result, people came to have a strong desire for longevity and numerous lifestyle guides (*yōjōsho*) dedicated to elaborating ways to live a long and healthy life were published and widely accepted. Rites of passage marking the end of certain phases of the lifecycle also began to stabilize at every societal level.

In *ie* directly linked to official state power, such as those of the shogun or daimyo, the coming-of-age ceremony (*genpuku*) was held during early childhood in order to enable boys to politically and socially quickly reach adulthood. Ordinary commoners' lives, however, complied with the following lifecycle.⁶ A 'child' (*chigo*) before the age of seven (counting in the old customary fashion in which a person was age one at birth) was still considered to belong to the world of the gods (ancestral spirits) but after that was accepted as a fellow member of the human world as a 'child' (*kodomo*). Boys at around the age of fifteen moved from the realm of children to adults based on their ability to do the work of adults. Girls reached adulthood slightly earlier at around the age of thirteen, with their first menstruation taken as a sign of sexual reproductivity. After marrying and succeeding to the household headship, both sexes became male and female heads of an *ie* bearing the responsibility for the management of the household. After retiring from these statuses, men and women became 'retirees' (*inkyō*). Socially, people who passed the age of 61 (*kanreki*) were considered to have reached old age. The corvée labor dedicated to the domain lords or regional community was only shouldered by mature men between the ages of 15 and 60 and all elderly people were absolved from having to provide this service.

Men changed their names at the end of every phase of the lifecycle and each name represented their life stage and household rank / social status (*mibun*). Although some women serving the imperial court were awarded titles and ranks by the Emperor and were able to change their childhood names, the majority of women from around the fourteenth century continued to use their infant name (*warawana*) from the time of birth right

⁶ Ōtō, *Kinsei nōmin to ie / mura/ kokka*, 185-189, 109-166; Ōtō Osamu, *Kinsei murabito no raifusaikuru* (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppankai, 2003).

through to adulthood. This suggests that society held that women were incapable of becoming mature.

Posthumous names were granted to people at their time of death. From the middle of the seventeenth through to the eighteenth century, even among commoners the dead received posthumous names from the temples where they were registered, and they built gravestones on which these names were engraved. Tablets and death registers (which also recorded posthumous names) were created and the descendants of each family venerated their dead individually. Death in the temporal world meant the birth of the spirit in the next life. The posthumous name was the name used in the next life and its consecration indicates the gradual recognition by people of the particularity of spirits. Accompanying the widespread development of the *ie* and the establishment of temple affiliation, the dead eventually overcame their anonymity, began to retain their individuality, and came to be remembered as such by descendants and society.⁷

During the Edo period, commoners were controlled by domain lords through the temple population registers. In one important sense these served as a kind of record of this world in contrast to death registers which were designed to order the affairs of the next. Death registers were kept not only at the affiliated temple but they were also placed inside the Buddhist altar in each home (*kakuie*) along with an ancestral tablet and becoming the object of memorial services.

Individual spirits, initially remembered through Buddhist services designed to memorialize the anniversary of their deaths, gradually lost their individuality, became purified, and eventually became

⁷ According to Philippe Ariès, commoners in Europe from around the sixteenth century also escaped from anonymity; gravestones with engravings recording the memory of the departed became widely diffused. This was made possible by the formation of the early modern family. In Japan, the same situation developed through the widespread formation of a perpetuating *ie*. Firippu Ariès, *Zusetsu: shi no bunkashi*, translated by Fukui Norihiko (Tokyo: Nihon Editaa Sukuuru Shuppanbu, 1990), 69-74. Originally published as Phillipe Ariès, *Images de l'homme devant la mort* (Paris: Seuil, 1983).

indistinct, pure ancestral spirits which merged and sublimated into *kami* (god) after the thirty-third or the fiftieth anniversary after the burial ceremony (*tomuraiage*). Thereafter they were observed as ‘ancestors’ (*gosenzo*) in rituals at certain times of the year: New Year’s, Festival of the Dead, and the Autumn Equinox. Conversely, ancestors who became gods were thought to look after and protect the descendants of the household.

This view of life and death was famously explained by the folklorist Yanagita Kunio in his 1946 publication *Senzo no hanashi* (Talking about Ancestors). Yanagita authored this book at the end of the war because he was deeply concerned about the collapse of the *ie*. He believed the *ie* had supported traditional Japanese attitudes towards life and death and wished to emphasize the ancient nature of this Japanese institution. When looked at historically, however, the attitude towards life and death he portrayed only became widely disseminated during the Edo period after the appearance of the *ie* among the commoners.

Herman Ooms, following Yanagita’s work, has analyzed the corresponding relationship between the rites of passage of the living as well as those of the dead in the spirit world, positing that the world of the living and the dead comprised a contiguous, circular structure.⁸ Ooms’ theory suggests that a view of a lifecycle emerged which transcended the worlds of the living and the dead: people were born in this world from the realm of the gods (ancestral spirits), matured, married, became the heads and wives of households, and after death received the memorial rites of their descendants returning them back to the realm of the gods. This kind of lifecycle was established in regional communities which supported the continuation of the *ie*. As a consequence, the lifestyle norm of preserving family property inherited from ancestors, and working for the continuance and prosperity of the *ie* by applying oneself to one’s occupation, took firm root in the Edo period.⁹

⁸ Heruman Ōmusu, *Sosen sūhai no shinborizumu* (Tokyo: Kobundō, 1987), 96-103.

⁹ In Chinese and Korean society, the dominant world view was that even if the physical body died life would continue for time immemorial as long as there was a male descendant whose blood (or *qi*) maintained a link the paternal line. This idea is still

(b) Deviation from the lifecycle

Spirits without *ie* or descendants became *muenbotoke* (dead without any connection). Even if an *ie* continued, however, not every person after death could become an ancestor (*senzo*). Conditional requirements to become ancestors included marriage (becoming a male or female leader of an *ie*) and bearing children. The unmarried, or those who divorced and died without remarrying, were treated as *muenbotoke*. This kind of custom has been widely discussed in folklore surveys studying oral traditions.

Women of no relation to the direct line but who for various reasons had to remain in the home of their birth were treated as ‘burdensome’ (*yakkai*); they were not considered to be fully-grown adults either at the level of society or the household and became designated after death as the ‘restless dead’ (*muanbutsu*) – that is, they became entities which

strongly present today. As a result, the credentials needed to perform rites for the dead can only be held by a male descendant whose blood (or *qi*) connected them to the paternal line. When there is no direct male descendant and a son is adopted, he must be a male with the same surname (the symbol of paternal blood relations) as his paternal blood relatives; it is not permitted to adopt males with a different surname who do not have paternal blood relatives. Shiga Shūzō, *Chūgoku kazokuhō no genri* (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1967). The Chinese system of surnames entered Japan around the 5th century and from that time clans (*uji*) – paternalistic blood-related groups where the names of people and kin groups are identical – emerged. In the medieval period we witness the birth of the *ie* and people’s lives become focused on maintaining the continuity of these organizational groups. Ancestors became the ancestors of households and the head of the household also became responsible for religious ceremonies. *Ie* became patrilineal and in the event that there was no heir or when the heir was incompetent, a son with a different name and no blood connection was adopted and the *ie* was continued as if there was a blood relation between the two. Therefore, the generational ancestors of households in Japan are not necessarily connected by blood.

deviated from the circular lifecycle. While the divorce and remarriage rate was high in early modern Japan (as is often pointed out), it is clear that remarriage was also conceived of as a way of driving away trouble from the household and returning life-cycles to their ordinary state.

From the end of the seventeenth century, the amount of spare land in rural villages which could be divided up and transferred to branch households (*bunke*) became scarce, signaling a general shift to a system of single inheritance. With this development, the male offspring either entered another household and succeeded as an adopted heir or built his own household rooted in a new occupation. Failure to do so meant not conforming to the normative lifecycle. From the middle of the seventeenth century, for example, a number of intellectuals and doctors emerged from the households of elite villagers, indicating the proliferation of a system of single inheritance. Many young people also migrated to the city looking for a new life at this time, but were often unable to succeed an established household head or find someone to adopt them. Failure to build their own household, however, also had tragic consequences for the afterlife. *Hiyōtori*, single males with only their labor to sell, congregated in large cities like Edo. Their bodies were collected after their death by their guarantors, *hitoyado* (the people responsible for initially finding them work), and buried in the graveyards of temples affiliated with these groups. It was not, however, burial in the strict sense of the term; the corpse was basically thrown away with some dirt scattered over the body, and no gravestone was used to mark their burial ground.¹⁰ Their death was anonymous and these men transmogrified into *muenbotoke* who dwelt on the fringes of the great cities.

(3) Chosen Lives

(a) Conception of *kodakara*, abortion and infanticide

Whether in towns or villages, small managerial *ie* proliferated widely in the early modern period, becoming the subject of religious rites for the dead and ancestors, and embodying the desire for the

¹⁰ Nishiki Kōichi, *Edo no sōsō bōsei* (Tokyo: Tokyo-to Kōbunshōkan, 1999), 49-130.

eternal perpetuation of one's descendants. This transformation also became the catalyst for the emergence of a strong conception that children were the fundamental entity that permitted the perpetuation of the *ie*. In this period, the idea of *kodakara* (children as a treasure) became universalized.¹¹ As childbirth was strongly required of women as a duty, childlessness itself metamorphosed into a sin. This is evidenced in phenomena such as the emergence of *umazume jigoku* (Barren Women's Hell) – a hell into which women who did not bear children descended.¹²

On the other hand, the planned moderation of the number of household members in small managerial *ie* to maintain minimal levels for their sustainable existence became an indispensable part of ensuring *ie* continuity. This was done through late marriage, leaving only the heir at home and removing all other children from the household, as well as the adoption of direct birth-control techniques such as infanticide through abortion or *mabiki* (the discarding of newborn babies) – common practices in historical periods without well-developed contraceptive methods.¹³ Nishikawa Joken in his 1721 text *Hyakushō bukuro* (A Bagful [of Advice] for Peasants) recorded that the discarding of all infants born after the third child was a common village practice. The ideas that children were precious and something that could be readily aborted or discarded were obviously two sides of the same coin.

Nishikawa also made mention of a custom of discarding one twin. The burden of childcare which resulted from bearing twins was substantial, particularly as *ie* were ever decreasing in size. Legends exist, moreover, about mothers who bore twins being despised as having 'beastly wombs' (*chikushō*

¹¹ Kuroda Hideo, *Ikai no kodomo: kinsei no kodomo* (Tokyo: 'Ukiyo-no-naka-nokodomo-tachi' Kumon Shuppan, 1993), 222; Ōta Motoko, *Kodakara to kogaeshi* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2007), 66-81, 279-353; Shibata Jun, "'Nanatsu-mae wa kami no uchi' wa hontō ka," *Kokuritsu rekishi minzoku hakubutsukan kenkyū hōkoku* 141 (2008): 124-131.

¹² Saitō Ken'ichi, *Kodomo no chūseishi* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2003), 196-214.

¹³ Ōtō, *Kinsei nōmin to ie / mura/ kokka*, 113-115; Ōtō, *Kinsei murabito no raifusaikuru*, 21-24; Ōta, *Kodakara to kogaeshi*, 81-95, 161-257.

bara). It is quite conceivable that one twin was often discarded out of fear of social stigmatization. It is also recorded in a variety of written sources that infants were discarded immediately after birth when there was a conspicuous deformity or weakness. Those infants could not be relied on for their future labor and they were presumably discarded because of the burden they presented in terms of maintenance and nursing.

Life deemed unessential for the continuation of the *ie* was eliminated but no expense was spared in the raising of infants whose lives were sanctioned. The basic early modern view of childbirth and child-rearing was “make few children but raise them well.”¹⁴ Generally speaking, the temple registers, too, indicate that the number of children in commoner households ranged between one and three. In villages and towns, children were both the offspring of individual households and the community, and the latter also provided support for their birth and rearing.

(b) Birth management by the shogunate and feudal domains

At the end of the early modern period, the shogunate and feudal domains began efforts to manage and control the childbirth and child-rearing practices of peasants. From around the middle of the eighteenth century, poor harvests and famines struck repeatedly and often and large numbers of people either starved to death or died of illness. Moreover, with the permeation of a commodity-based monetary economy, stratification among peasants intensified and large numbers of landless peasants drifted into urban centers. As a result, the peasant population in rural villages declined, particularly in the northern Kantō and Tōhoku regions, the number of uncultivated fields increased, and the total amount of annual land taxes (*nengu*) lessened. Aware of these problems, the shogunate and feudal domains embarked upon policies to increase the rural population by prohibiting abortion and infanticide, establishing systems for reporting pregnancies and births, and instructing peasants in ways to secure the sup-

¹⁴ Takahashi Satoshi, *Kinsei sonraku seikatsu bunkashi josetsu* (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1990), 95-124.

ply of sufficient funds to support newly-born babies.¹⁵

Veneration of the souls of children and infants whose lives were ended through abortion and infanticide was not historically practiced but by the end of the early modern period, religious authorities commonly taught that abortion and infanticide were sinful actions contrary to human ethics. Almost as if signifying acceptance of these teachings, women’s groups (*nyoninkō*) began to build prayer mounds for this purpose.¹⁶ The management of childbirth and child-rearing by feudal lords was based on the logic of “children are public entities and not the private property of parents.”¹⁷ This logic is clearly linked to modern childbirth and child-bearing policies. Families had their parental rights stripped so that children became the offspring of the emperor and the property of the nation and motherhood came under the management of the state through the slogan “bear children and multiply” as a part of Japan’s “enriching of the nation and strengthening of the army” (*fukoku kyōhei*) efforts. In modern legal discourse, abortion came to have its very own statute. Infanticide was subsumed under the category of murder. Despite these developments, however, abortion and infanticide continued to be practiced in modern Japan outside the watchful eye of the state. It is possible to read into this a basic conflict between the logic of ruling authorities and the general populace who resorted to any means at their disposal to control birth in order to maintain their daily lives.¹⁸

II. Funerals and Graves in Early Modern Japan

(1) Funerals and Mourning

¹⁵ Sawayama Mikako, *Shussan toshintai no kinsei* (Tokyo: Keisō Shobō, 1998), 95-121; Ōta Motoko, *Kodakara to kogaeshi*, 161-226.

¹⁶ Nishigai Kenji, “Edo kōki no nyoninkō,” in *Bukkyō minzokugaku taikai, volume seven*, edited by Togawa Anshō (Tokyo: Meichō Shuppan, 1992), 178-184.

¹⁷ Takahashi, *Kinsei sonraku seikatsu bunkashi josetsu*, 110.

¹⁸ Mōgi Yōichi, “Kindai Mie-ken’iki ni okeru mabiki kankō,” *Buraku mondai kenkyū* 184 (2008): 71-109.

(a) The People who Took Care of the Corpse and Carried out the Funeral

Whether it was cremation or burial, the job of preparing the corpse was thought to be polluting so it was common for the families or for those considered to be of humble origin to carry out the tasks. As the concept of death as polluting weakened, these tasks began to be carried out by mutual financing associations (*kō*) and the “five-man group” (*gonin-gumi*).¹⁹ One possible reason for the waning of the idea that death was polluting was the spread of memorial services invoking Amida.²⁰ Other reasons include knowledge from experience that nothing bad happened when coming into contact with the pollution of the dead as well as learning about the customs of other regions.²¹

In the latter half of the 1870's the Ministry of Justice (*Shihōshō*) compiled *Zenkoku minji kanrei ruishū* (A national compendium of the customs of the people) to serve as a reference for the drafting of a civil code. It was based on an investigation of customs throughout the entire country. According to this source, funerals in the majority of places were carried out completely by mutual financing associations and “five family neighborhood units.”²²

Throughout the early modern period, however, there were specialist undertakers. The undertakers from the Kinki region (the area around Kyōto, Nara, and Osaka) are especially well-known. Called *onbō*, they were people of low status who managed cremations, burials, and grave sites.²³ In some places in

the Kinki region, *hinin* outcastes carried out the cremations and burials as well.²⁴ At Ise Shrine, they were in charge of burials.²⁵

The disposition of the corpse as well as the pacification of the spirit of the deceased was important not only to the family of the deceased but also to those living in the same village or town. *Zenkoku minji kanrei ruishū* shows that villages and neighborhoods had systems to make sure that funerals were carried out. In many places the mutual financing association or the five family neighborhood units provided the labor and paid the expenses but there were other places where the village or the neighborhood as a whole supported the performance of the funeral. In some areas, the villagers or residents of a neighborhood were required to participate in the “send-off” for the corpse (*miokuri*) and in others it was the common practice to provide money or items for the funeral (*kōden*) as a whole neighborhood or village. There are also examples of wealthy members of a village or neighborhood providing for the funeral expenses of poorer members.

As mentioned earlier, those who died unmarried became a *muenbotoke* but they received memorial services from the *ie* to which they belonged. When an *ie* had no successors, the spirits of the *muenbotoke* received memorial services from the wider community.²⁶ The community not only ensured the physical survival of its members, it also served to secure the peace of their souls after death.

(b) Differences in the Scale of Funerals and Alms for the Weak and Poor

The scale of a funeral depended on the social status of the deceased and the social standing and economic power of the deceased's household as well as on the position of the deceased within the household and his or her age at the time of death.

no *sōsō* wo sasaeta hitobito” in *Shi no bunakashi* edited by Egawa Atsushi and Nakamura Ikuo (Kyoto: Shōwadō, 2002).

²⁴ Kinoshita, “Kinsei Nihon no *sōsō* wo sasaeta hitobito,” 92.

²⁵ *Zenkoku minji kanrei ruishū*, compiled by Shihōshō (Tokyo: Seishisha, 1976, originally published 1880), 165-166.

²⁶ Ōtō, *Kinsei nōmin to ie / mura / kokka*, 341.

¹⁹ Inokuchi Shōji, *Bukkyō izen* (Tokyo: Kokin Shoin, 1954); Aruga Kisaemon, “Fukō inshinchō kara mita mura no seikatsu,” in *Sōsō bosei kenkyū shūsei* (Tokyo: Meicho Shuppan, 1979, originally published 1948).

²⁰ Aruga, “Fukō inshinchō kara mita mura no seikatsu,” 246.

²¹ Yanagita Kunio, “Ushi to shi to tabemono,” in *Sōsō bosei kenkyū shūsei* (Tokyo: Meicho Shuppan, 1979. Originally published 1933), 185.

²² Ōtō, *Kinsei nōmin to ie/mura/kokka*, 325-343 provides analysis.

²³ Takada Yōsuke, “Sanmai hijiri” in *Shiriizu: kinsei no mibun-teki shūen* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2000); Kinoshita Mitsuo, “Kinsei Nihon

For example in Tajihi Village²⁷ the Yoshikawa family of wealthy peasants created a document called *Kagyō-kō* (Thoughts about the family business). This set of instructions to the family contains directions²⁸ for large- and small-scale funerals. The scale was based on the relationship of the deceased to the current household head. Large-scale funerals were to be held for grand-parents, parents, and wives of the head. Small-scale funerals were to be held for siblings and children. Funerals for aunts and uncles were based on small-scale funerals with some adjustment for the age of the deceased. Compared to the funerals of direct ancestors and spouses, the funerals of lineal descendants and collateral family members were simpler and those of the young even more so. The scale of funeral reflected the social order within the *ie*. According to the document, alms in the Yoshida household were given to the blind for large- but not for small-scale funerals. In the status-based society of early modern Japan, alms were given to those deemed to be socially inferior such as members of the blind or *hinin* guilds and it became the practice to offer pious alms for the benefit of the deceased at memorial services. The Yoshida family gave out alms if the deceased had high status within the family, thus differentiating among the dead through the scale of the memorial service. According to *Yoda kakun mimochi kagami* (1730), the household precepts of the *nouveau riche* Yoda family, giving alms to outcastes when visiting the graves of parents was an act of 'filial piety.'²⁹

(c) Disposition of Those who Died while Traveling

The environment for travel improved in the early modern period and people began to traverse the highways more frequently, for a wide variety of purposes. Particularly from the end of the seventeenth century, travel to temples and shrines and private excursions for pleasure burgeoned among commoners. As a cash economy developed, more

people began to travel for business or to work in other regions. Many of these people became ill and died while on journeys, forcing both local groups as well as the shogunate and feudal domains to come up with measures to handle such situations.

The shogunate's systematic approach to the problem of those who died while traveling began in 1688 as a part of Tokugawa Tsunayoshi's³⁰ edicts forbidding cruelty to living things (*shōrui awaremi no rei*). The system reached its full form by 1767. Before this, local social groups and feudal domains had diverse policies but in 1767 there was a unified national approach. First, the death was reported to the local authorities. If the deceased's hometown was known, a message was sent there to find out whether the deceased should be buried at the place of death or if people from the hometown wanted to take over disposition of the remains. However if the deceased's travel papers stated that he or she preferred to have his or her remains buried at the place of death, then the deceased³¹ was interred without contacting the hometown. If the money for the disposition of those who became ill or died while traveling was not forthcoming from the person's village or family, then according to the shogunate, it would be paid for by the village or the town where the deceased had fallen ill or died.

Matsumoto Junko has investigated the disposition of the remains of those who died in the post town of Kōriyama.³² According to her research, several things are clear. First, the graves of those whose identities were known were placed close to the household graves of the families who had cared for them before death while those whose identities were unknown were buried around the periphery of the graveyard. Second, most of the deceased who had been identified were given posthumous Buddhist names while the unknown generally were not. Third, a *mokari* (also known as a *mogari* or *sagitcho*) was built atop the graves of the unknown

²⁷ In Takada County of Aki Province. Currently part of Aki-Takada City in Hiroshima Prefecture.

²⁸ Ōtō, *ibid.*, 310-324.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 382-383. The Yoda family was from Shimo Ijiri village in the county of Yamanashi in the province of Kai.

³⁰ 1646-1709. The fifth Tokugawa shogun.

³¹ Takahashi Satoshi, *Kazoku to kodomo no Edo jidai* (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1997), 144-147.

³² In the province of Mutsu, now Kōriyama City in Fukushima Prefecture.

deceased.³³ A *mokari* was constructed by using a rope passed through the top of a fence made of branches or bamboo constructed around a grave to bundle it into a conical shape. The understanding of the purpose of the *mokari* differed depending on the region but in some places it was said to ward off wild animals and malign spirits or trap the soul of the deceased. They were sometimes built atop the graves of children or single adults—in other words, *muenbotoke*. It is not known why they were constructed on the graves of the deceased whose identities were unknown but perhaps it had to do with fear of the soul of the unknown deceased. The deceased who could be identified were often listed in the death registers of their family and the parish temple and were more likely to have mortuary tablets made and memorial services conducted for them. The unknown dead entered the afterlife with no name and no relatives to care for their souls.

The remains of those who died in Kōriyama while traveling were not taken care of by specifically designated members of outcaste groups but those who died in the castle town of Wakayama had their remains taken care of by members of *kawata* or *hinin* villages. They were ordered by the chief prison guard to prepare the remains, place them in a casket, and then pass them on to the *onbō* funerary specialists.³⁴ There were relatively few people of outcaste status in the Tōhoku region³⁵ so the disposition of the corpse was generally carried out by people of peasant or townsmen status. In addition, the “two grave system” (which I will discuss later) was rare in the Tōhoku region so it seems to me that the concept of *kegare* (pollution) was much weaker there than in the Kinai region.

(d) Laws Defining the Period of Mourning

Tokugawa Tsunayoshi valued social status and formality highly and used them to maintain social order. He used the law to regulate order among fam-

ilies and relatives. The establishment in 1684 of *Fukuki-ryō*³⁶ (Regulations for Mourning) is one example. It was based on systems used by the imperial court and shrines from the medieval period onward and determined the number of days of mourning and of absence from work (because of the pollution of death) based on the relationship between the mourner and the deceased. These regulations made clear in a legal sense the parameters of the family and attempted to regulate the organization of families and relatives. Tsunayoshi's code was revised three times before 1736, when it was put into its final form by the eighth shogun, Tokugawa Yoshimune.³⁷ Samurai were originally trained to kill but by the middle years of the early modern period they were required to take leave from their work for the domains or the shogunate during the period of mourning. Even the samurai were now supposed to avoid the pollution of death.

Tsunayoshi was a devoted Confucianist and mourning was a chief ritual (*rei*) for him. Most important was the relationship between parents and children. According to the regulations of 1736, the period of mourning for a parent was to last 13 months and the mourner was excused from work for fifty days. This was the longest period of mourning in the code. In Japan *ie* were often passed to an adopted child in order to allow them to continue in perpetuity. According to the regulations for mourning, an adopted child who succeeded his adoptive father was supposed to carry out the same level of mourning for the adoptive parent as for a biological parent. In this way, the Chinese system of mourning was adapted to the system of Japanese *ie* and the filial piety of adopted children to adoptive parents was encouraged.³⁸ The relations of biologically-related parents and children were also emphasized, however. Adoptees were still supposed to carry out formal mourning for their biological parents. And

³³ Matsumoto Junko, “Yukidaore-bito to yosomono no kanbyō,” *Tōhoku daigaku Tōhoku bunka kenkyūshitsu kiyō* 42 (2001): 77-80.

³⁴ Fujimoto Seijirō, “Kinsei jōkamachi no yukidaore-shi to ‘katazuke,’” *Buraku mondai kenkyū* 184 (2008): 29-36.

³⁵ Where Kōriyama is located.

³⁶ We have followed Ōtō's reading here. The more usual reading of the characters is Bukki-rei. Note that the source in the next note reads the same Chinese characters as “*bukki-ryō*.”

³⁷ Hayashi Yukiko, *Kinsei bukki-ryō no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Seibundō, 1998), 3-36. Tokugawa Yoshimune lived from 1684-1751.

³⁸ Hayashi, *Kinsei bukki-ryō no kenkyū*, 135-147.

while women who married into other families were told by pedagogical manuals that to put their in-laws first was the highest form of filial piety, the codes of mourning put their biological parents first and their in-laws second.³⁹ Furthermore, those under the age of seven were exempted from mourning and their deaths were also excluded from the codes of mourning. Young children were not forced into formal mourning but they were still required to be restrained (*enryo*) for fifty days upon the death of a parent.⁴⁰ The mourning codes were also circulated among the Edo townsmen and their publication meant that they spread among the wider commoner population.⁴¹ By examining *Zenkoku minji kanrei ruishū*, it is clear that while the days of mourning may have been longer or shorter in places, the customs of mourning spread widely among the populace.⁴²

(e) Funeral Rites for Ruler and Authority Figures

Depending on the social status of the deceased, the meaning and effect of death was quite different. The deaths of rulers and authority figures are important matters of state and many countries have had national systems of mourning.

In Japan, from the medieval period onward, upon the death of an emperor, an imperial relative, or a politically powerful person, court rituals were postponed and other functions such as religious rituals, festivals, and the taking of animal life were regulated according to *Tenka shokue* (Pollutions Affecting the State).⁴³ In contradistinction to this, the Tokugawa shogunate created rituals of mourning which included the temporarily prohibition of the use of musical instruments and cessation of con-

struction work when a person of high status or great power within the shogunate died.⁴⁴

During the first half of the seventeenth century, the shogunate's laws prohibiting the use of musical instruments were limited to Edo and there were no standardized rules which governed when they were applied. From the latter half of the seventeenth century, the regulations spread to other domains and the rules came to have the character of national mourning rituals. The regulations went into effect only for the shogun, the emperor and his or her family, the heads of the three branch houses of the Tokugawa family, and important figures in the shogunal government such as members of the Council of Elders (*rōjū*). By basing the number of days that music and construction were to be halted on the status of the deceased, the regulations acknowledged the power and status system of the Tokugawa state headed by the shogun. Many domains issued similar regulations prohibiting music after the death of the lord, his family, or an important government official. There are also examples of music being avoided after the death of a local resident in a town or village.⁴⁵

(2) Grave Systems

(a) From Collective Grave Markers to Individual Grave Markers

As belief in the Pure Land increased in the twelfth century, the practice by Buddhists and the nobility of erecting grave markers (shaped as stupas) where the body was buried began to spread widely. In eastern Japan, from the early thirteenth to the middle of the fourteenth century, the practice of erecting a stone memorial marker in the shape of a slab (called an *itabi*) mushroomed among resident landlords and the upper levels of the commoners.⁴⁶ These were created in order to plead for rebirth in

³⁹ Ibid., 159-180.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 127-128.

⁴¹ Shibata, "'Nanatsu-mae ha kami no uchi' ha hontō ka," 118-123.

⁴² Ōtō, *Kinsei nōmin to ie / mura / kokka*, 345-359.

⁴³ Kuroda Hideo, *Ō noshintai; ō no shōzō* (Tokyo: Heibon-sha, 1993).

⁴⁴ Nakagawa Manabu, *Kinsei no shi to seiji bunka* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2009), 18-139.

⁴⁵ Ōtō, *Kinsei nōmin to ie / mura / kokka*, 353.

⁴⁶ Chijiwa Itaru, *Itabi to sono jidai* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1988). Suitō Makoto, *Chūsei no sōsō / bosei* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1991), 195-217. Satō, *Shisha no yukue*, 129-162.

the Pure Land for either the person who erected it or for the deceased. The general populace began to inter their remains beneath *itabi* which served as community memorials. The places where they were erected came to be seen as sacred spaces that served as routes to the Pure Land.

With the middle of the fourteenth century as a dividing line, the erection of *itabi* decreased rapidly. In their place, a small five-storied stupa engraved with the name of the deceased made its appearance and the *itabi* which were erected also came to serve as gravestones.⁴⁷ Until the mid-fourteenth century in the Kinki region, large five-storied stupas (*gor-intō*) were used as mass memorial markers but from this time onward, small individual five-storied pagoda grave markers made their appearance.⁴⁸ During the sixteenth century, the early modern square stone pillar marker also began to appear.

Satō Hiro'o argued that the mass memorial markers were a mechanism designed to help transport souls to the Pure Land and the places where corpses and cremated remains were interred were not places where memorial ceremonies were carried out. Individual stone grave markers, however, were premised on the idea that the soul lingered with the physical remains. They served as a way of remembering the dead and as a site of continued ceremonial ritual.⁴⁹ However, where the memorial marker was erected in a different place than where the remains were interred (the dual grave system), the memorial marker was thought of as a place (*yorishiro*) the soul could inhabit for ceremonies. At any rate, the continuous implementation of regular ceremonies for the deceased resulted from the rise of *ie* which endured across generations.

(b) Simplification of and Disparity among Grave Markers

From the end of the medieval period until the beginning of the early modern period, only nobles, warriors, priests, and the upper strata of commoners

erected grave markers. During this period, the main forms of grave markers were five-storied pagodas, *itabi*, and stupas (*hōkyō intō*). In the early modern period, the upper strata continued to use grave markers in the style of the medieval period. From the latter half of the seventeenth century, however, the formation of *ie* among the general commoner populace was underway and individual *ie* began to erect simplified grave markers for their dead. The styles of the markers depended on both time and place but included natural rocks as well as markers which took the form of mortuary tablets, ships, and square stone pillars.⁵⁰

Simplified memorial markers were used not only by commoners but by the eighteenth century for the graves of shoguns and feudal daimyo as well.⁵¹ Magnificent mausolea were erected for the first three lords of the Date house of the Sendai domain, but following the death of the fourth lord, Tsunamura in 1719, stone memorial markers in the shape of slabs forming a pagoda were raised instead.⁵² The need to spend large sums of money to construct magnificent mausolea in order to aggrandize the shogun and the feudal lords decreased as the bakufu system became more firmly established. In addition, it seems likely that the financial problems which beset the shogunate and the domains from the middle of the early modern period led to simpler funerary arrangements.

However, in the early modern period, social standing and rank were used to maintain social order and this could be symbolized via grave markers. So although grave markers in general were simplified, they still reflected the social position of the deceased within and outside the *ie* as well as the status and economic power of the *ie* itself. These things were displayed in the style and size of the marker, the person chosen to make the marker, and the rank of the posthumous Buddhist appellation granted to the deceased. There are examples of people of low status such as *eta* and *hinin* who were granted posthumous Buddhist names that showed

⁴⁷ Suitō Makoto, *Chūsei no sōsō/bosei*, 195-217. Satō, *ibid.*, 171-172.

⁴⁸ Yoshii Toshiyuki, "Yamato chihō ni okeru sōbo," in *Kōkogaku to chūsei kenkyū 3: chūsei shakai to funbo* (Tokyo: Meicho Shuppan, 1993).

⁴⁹ Satō, *Shisha no yukue*, 208-210.

⁵⁰ Ōtō Osamu, "Haka no kataru kinsei," *Shiroi kuni no shi* 576 (2004): 6-9.

⁵¹ Sekine Tatsuhito, "Kinsei daimyōbo ni okeru honsō to bunrei," *Rekisho* 99 (2002): 24.

⁵² Ōtō, "Haka no kataru kinsei," 5-8.

they had low rank in the afterlife as well.⁵³ *Eta* and *hinin* were recorded in different temple registers from the other social classes not only when they were alive but after death as well.⁵⁴ There are many examples of *eta* in particular becoming parishioners of special family temples.⁵⁵ In other words, the lowly were discriminated against in this life as well as the world to come.

(c) The Emergence of Grave Markers for Children

It seems that it was uncommon to mourn or perform rituals for children who died before the age of seven in the medieval period. Instead, their corpses were placed in a bag and disposed of in the mountains or moors.⁵⁶ But during the early modern period, family size became smaller and the fewer children who were born were raised more carefully. The death of a child became a source of deep grief for the family and simple funerals were performed. Grave markers were made, posthumous Buddhist names were granted, and the deceased children were memorialized individually.⁵⁷

In the early modern period, there are numerous grave markers with posthumous Buddhist names containing the words *dōji* (young boy) or *dōjo*

(young girl) carved on them. Most of them have an image of Jizō Bosatsu⁵⁸ carved on them as well. The youthful deceased were said to be on the banks of the River Sai in the land of the dead, trying to pile up pebbles into stupas for the religious benefit of their beloved fathers and mothers. However, whatever they managed to pile up was knocked over by devils. Jizō was said to rescue the children from this situation. This belief gave rise to the idea that Jizō was a Bodhisattva for young children. In fact the belief that the banks of the River Sai were a special region in hell for dead young children arose from folk religious beliefs at the end of the medieval period.⁵⁹ In other words, as the flip side of the consciousness of children as precious (*kodakara*), a special region of hell specially reserved just for them arose. This seems to have been a warning to parents to be careful when raising children so that they would not fall into hell.

(d) The Dual Grave System

Graveyards for the interment of the deceased have been created since ancient times but from the end of the medieval period the custom of erecting grave markers spread and the single grave system⁶⁰ became differentiated from the dual grave system. When the grave marker is erected where the remains are buried, this is the single grave system. When it is erected elsewhere, this is the dual grave system. Among believers in Jōdo Shinshū (True Pure Land Buddhism), there was also the custom of placing part of the cremated remains in the parish temple or the Ōtani Mausoleum (part of Nishi Honganji in Kyōto) and not erecting a stone grave marker.

The two grave system was widely practiced in the Kinki region as well as in parts of the Chūgoku (Western Honshū), Shikoku, Chūbu (Central Honshū), and Kantō regions. It was extremely rare in the Tōhoku (Northeastern Honshū) and Kyushu regions. In areas where it was practiced, the concept of death

⁵³ Kobayashi Daiji, *Sabetsu kaimyō no rekishi* (Tokyo: Yūzankaku Shuppan, 1987), 249-342.

⁵⁴ Kobayashi, *ibid.*, 183-188.

⁵⁵ *Zenkoku minji kanrei ruishū*, compiled by Shihōshō (Tokyo: Seishisha, 1976, originally published 1880), 3.

⁵⁶ Kuroda Hideo, *Kyōkai no chūsei; shōchō no chūsei* (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppan-kai, 1986), 226.

⁵⁷ Ōtō, *Kinsei nōmin to ie / mura / kokka*, 120. In Japan, the formation of the *ie* provided the impetus for increased attention to children and this gave rise to the consciousness of children as precious (*kodakara*). When the children died, grave markers were raised for them. In the West, the rise of the modern family which occurred from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, was accompanied by increased intimacy between parents and children and it is in this period when tombstones for children became common (Ariesu, *Zusetsu: shi no bunkashi*, 380).

⁵⁸ The Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha.

⁵⁹ Kuroda Hideo, "Sai no kawara," *Rekishigaku jiten #3* (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1995). Saitō Ken'ichi, *Kodomo no chūsei-shi* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2003), 156-195.

⁶⁰ Shintani Takanori, *Ryōbosei to takaikan* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1991).

as polluting was strong and the places of burial were distant from settlements, located in such areas as mountains, moors, riverbanks, and beaches. The memorial sites which the bereaved visited were often erected within the precincts of the settlement's temple or in the environs of the settlement. In the Kinki region, the fact that the disposition of the corpses was handled by members of low status groups such as *sanmai hijiri* or *hinin* was linked to the power of the taboo of the pollution of death.

The taboo of impurity is thought to have developed among the aristocracy of ancient Kyōto. Regions far from the capital such as Tōhoku and Kyushu had a weaker conception of impurity. I have not studied the situation in Kyushu but in Tōhoku there were few people of outcaste status and it was usual for farmers and townsfolk to take care of corpses. Even dealing with dead horses and cows was not, in the Hirosaki domain, the special work of *eta*. The farmers skinned the dead animals themselves and the term *eta* was not used until after the middle of the eighteenth century; those who worked with leather were simply called leatherworkers.⁶¹ In the Sendai domain, those who worked with skins and leather were called *eta* after the fashion of the shogunate but this usage did not diffuse among the general populace where members of these professions were called "pelt and leather workers."⁶² Perhaps this was because the sense of impurity was not as strong.

(e) Shifting Graves

In the early modern period, it was most common for each *ie* to have a demarcated grave site and for grave markers for couples or individuals to be erected there. For couples, individual grave markers were usually raised in pairs. Grave markers for couples who had served as heads of the *ie* through the generations stood in a row and around this were raised markers for deceased children or those who had died as single adults. In other words, the distribution of *muenbotoke* in early modern graveyards

⁶¹ Namikawa Kenji "Kinsei hokuō chiiki ni okeru hisabetsu shūdan," *Kaihō kenkyū* 19 (2006): 121.

⁶² Kujirai Chisato, *Kyōkai no genba* (Toride: Henkyōsha 2006), 144.

shows the creation of small families centered on the male and female heads of the *ie*. This is emblematic of the *ie* structures of the commoners as well as the average samurai families of the period.

However, creating a graveyard where each person has his or her own individual marker means that burial space will eventually become insufficient. So in the later years of the early modern period, graves inscribed "The Ancestral Grave of House X" or "House X's Grave" began to appear. These were grave memorials for the *ie* as a collective. In 1884, the opening of new graveyards was forbidden and in 1897, in order to prevent the spread of disease, cremation spread rapidly throughout the country and the number of collective family graves quickly increased.⁶³ There are examples of a single grave memorial being shared among the various groupings of the family in places where the ties were strong between main and branch houses of a family.⁶⁴ This practice was especially prevalent in Tōhoku.

Today, family grave memorials are common. In cases where an only child from one family marries an only child from another, there have come to be memorials which commemorate the families of both spouses. Memorials engraved with words such as "love," "rest," "flight," "thank you," and "peace" have also appeared. Temples which guarantee eternal memorialization after death in communal grave sites for those who die single or for couples without children are a reflection of contemporary realities. As society changes, so do graves.

Translators Afterword

Today, we take Japanese mortuary practices for granted, but as Ōtō's essay clearly shows, these practices have changed considerably over history. Mortuary practices shaped, and in turn were shaped by, cultural attitudes, geographical variation, state regulation, economic factors, as well as adoption and adaptation of continental ideas and practices among other things. Ōtō's work, however, far from resorting to a popular kind of ahistorical theory of

⁶³ Ōtō, *Kinsei nōmin to ie / mura / kokka*, 295-300. Ōtō, "Haka no kataru kinsei," 11.

⁶⁴ Mori Kenji, "Sōbo no Shokei to Sosen Sai-shi," *Kokuritsu rekishi minzoku hakubutsukan enkyū hōkoku* 41 (1992): 264-272.

modern social constructivism, shows that an understanding of early modern social life is crucial for piecing together modernity. It also demonstrates that the only real way to generalize about death and dying in the long expanse of Japanese history is to identify and account for these changes and variations.

In a study that covers a broad range of topics including lifecycles, *ie*, and state management, as well as the various deviations and anomalies surrounding social practices implicated in life and death issues, Ōtō shows that there is both continuity and discontinuity into Japanese modernity. His essay reveals how practices pertaining to life and death were created and recreated again in the early modern period and that historians must deal with the empirical record carefully if they are to correctly identify and understand the possible linkages between that period and the modern era. Ōtō's work suggests continuities in places where modern historians have perhaps not found them to date, such as in practices of infanticide and in the fate of the single urban laborer, but as can be seen in his discussion of the *ie*, he also finds and acknowledges historical discontinuities in ways which retain a strong degree of nuance. His work explicitly rejects the classical modernist essentialization of the institution by Yanagita who gazed upon it with modernity-fatigued eyes, but it also implicitly disavows the politically-driven modern historical constructivism exemplified in the works of scholar such as Ueno Chizuko. Perhaps most significantly, however, while Ōtō examines the institutions surrounding the state, community, and individual, it is clearly the last group that elicits most of his attention, and he demonstrates with clear evidence that early modern Japanese society was profoundly shaped by distinctive and dynamic attitudes towards mortality. The essay also suggests that while moderns are perhaps to some extent now limited in their choices for imaging their time in this world and the afterlife, they are nonetheless no less active in their attempts to create and recreate themselves through their evolving understandings of life and death issues.