



# DEATH AND DYING IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

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This book, based on extensive original research, explores the various ways in which Japanese people think about death and how they approach the process of dying and death. It shows how new forms of funeral ceremonies have been developed by the funeral industry, how traditional grave burial is being replaced in some cases by the scattering of ashes and forest mortuary ritual, and how Japanese thinking on relationships, the value of life, and the afterlife are changing. Throughout, it assesses how these changes reflect changing social structures and social values.

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# 6 Contemporary transformation of Japanese death ceremonies<sup>1</sup>

*Haruyo Inoue*

## Introduction

*Sōsai* is the Japanese term for funeral ceremony that is used to encompass all death rituals. The term is composed of two characters; *sō*, meaning funeral, and *sai*, meaning (ongoing) religious rites. Japanese traditional death rituals do not finish at the end of a funeral but, as these words symbolise, continue for 33 years, or in some places 50, through the conduct of Buddhist memorial services (*nenki*) for the spirit of the dead.

One of the characteristics of Japanese death rituals is that they are deeply related to ancestral religion. Japanese believe that, during life, a body is embodied with a living-spirit (*ikiryō*) but upon death, the spirit leaves the body in the form of a dead-spirit (*shirei*). The dead-spirit exists in the living world for a short period as a violent and hostile spirit. Continuous ceremonial rites are conducted by that person's descendants to pacify the dead-spirit and transcend it into a deity (*sorei*) that will protect its descendants. Today's Japanese funerals and ceremonial rites are based on the ancestral religion that combines household values with Buddhism, which is rooted to this dual logic of spirits.

In the traditional Japanese patrilineal household system (*ie*) practiced before the Second World War, the eldest son succeeded his father as the head of the household and inherited the ceremonial rights. The system was legalised by the Meiji government in 1898, which made the deceased belong to the household as a collective unit, and was worshipped as household ancestors by descendants. The death rituals at the time were predominantly Buddhist rites.

After the Second World War and the economic boom in the 1990s, contemporary Japanese society moved towards the nuclear family with a high proportion of elderly and a low number of childbirths, where the concept of the household system weakened. Nuclear families lost function as a collective unit and the basis of Japanese society shifted from collective consciousness to individual consciousness. This chapter examines the changes in funerals and the rituals of graves and Buddhist altars in a society that moved its fundamental unit to the individual. In particular, I focus on the drastic changes in the mortuary rites of the deceased after the 1990s.

Before going into discussion it is important to clarify how the term ‘ancestors’ was defined in the past literature, and how I differentiate the use of the term in this study. According to Yanagita, ‘ancestor(s)’ are the first and continual heads of a household (Yanagita 1946). Ancestor worship is embedded in the structure of the household system (Takeda 1957: 13) and is a unique collective rite for a household (Yonemura 1974: 27–28). The fundamental characteristic of the concept of ancestors is the continuity of a household. This implies that descendants worship the household dead as their ancestors, and in turn, worshipped ancestors ascend into deities and protect the household. In this ancestral framework, the dead becomes a household ‘ancestor’ after the accumulation of rituals. Earlier death studies were limited by their assumption that all dead become ancestors. In order to understand death in contemporary Japan where the concept of household is attenuating, we should not assume all deceased become ancestors. I am specific about using the term ‘ancestors’ in this chapter. I use the term ‘living’ (*seija*) as opposed to the ‘dead’ (*shisha*), and the ‘close family dead’ (*kinshin shisha*) to describe the deceased of family members. I only use the term ‘ancestors’ to refer to the dead who are continually worshipped by their lineal descendants of a household. In other words, many dead are not worshipped as ancestors in contemporary Japan.

### **Urban funeral transformation**

The recent trend in major Japanese cities is the increasing number of funerals that abbreviate the traditional process of the funeral ceremony and conduct only the end, cremation. It can be described as ‘direct funeral’ (*chokuso*): As a representative of the non-profit organisation Ending Centre, an association that assists in providing dignity in death and funerals, I have received many calls on this. A typical question is, ‘We don’t want to conduct the entire funeral but want to cremate the deceased. Where can I ask for this service?’

A direct funeral is an extreme form of body disposal. In reality, there are many interpretations of direct funeral. Some people use the term direct funeral to signify ‘no funeral gathering, only cremation’, which means no Buddhist priest, no public announcements about rituals, and no traditional ceremony, but instead having a farewell with close family members. Others equate direct funeral with ‘family funeral’ (*misso*), literally translated as secret funeral.<sup>2</sup> What does direct funeral include? Does it include ritual process other than cremation? Does it limit attendants to family and friends? The meaning of direct funeral varies according to how and what the bereaved consider appropriate or necessary for the deceased at the time of final departure. The definition of direct funeral is not yet established, leading it to synonymous usage with ‘no funerals’, ‘only cremation’, ‘secret funeral’ (*misso*), ‘family funeral’ (*kazokuso*), ‘family and relative funeral’ (*miuchisō*), ‘farewell gathering’ (*owakarekai*), and ‘memorial gathering’ (*shinobukai*).

I asked two funeral companies with branches in all 23 of Tokyo's wards to take statistics of funeral forms. The results showed that 15–20 per cent were direct funerals, and 12–36 per cent were family funerals, which include secret funerals and family and relative funerals. In short, direct funerals and family funerals add up to 30–50 per cent of all funerals today in Tokyo (Inoue 2006).

The simplification of funerals can also be observed in the awareness of funerals by residents of Tokyo and its suburbs. In the '2001 Report on the Funeral Cost and Other Items' (*Sogini kakawaru hiyoutou chosahokokusho*) (Bureau of Citizens and Cultural Affairs Metro Tokyo 2002), 59.1 per cent of people stated 'they want their funeral to be an intimate affair within family and friends', an increase from 47.2 per cent in 1995. Including those who answered that 'they don't want a funeral ritual but want to be buried by intimate family and friends', it amounts to 70 per cent, increasing from 50 per cent in 1995.

In the 'Investigation of Awareness towards Funerals' (Hakuhodo Seikatsukenkuyo 2003) performed in 2002 among 365 urbanites aged 10 to 70, we can also see new funeral trends on the rise. This multiple-choice investigation reported 76.2 per cent preferred 'plain funerals' (*jimiso*) and 'music funerals' (*ongakuso*). The same investigation showed that 76 per cent of respondents considered a funeral to be an occasion to say farewell to close family and friends. With regard to preferred attendees, 99.5 per cent people answered they wanted close family and friends and 52.6 per cent wanted friends from hobbies and other activities. Finally, 70 per cent of the informants refused to have Buddhist posthumous names, which typically cost about 400,000 yen (US \$4,000).

### Privatisation and individualisation of funerals

The bearers of traditional funeral rituals were kinsmen, local community, and company relations and networks when the ritual was based on the collective unit of the household or family rather than individuals. Today, many Japanese refuse to invite participants who do not share the emotional loss because they were either not acquainted with the deceased or because they were attending a funeral out of social duty to the chief mourner. In many cases contemporary Japanese funeral attendees are only those who were close to the deceased. People are inclined to 'live one's way and die one's way' expressed in the frequently used phrase 'one's way' (*jibun rashiku*).

Japanese funerals have been transformed to a ritual based on the individual as a unit rather than the collective household or family as a unit (see Table 6.1). This transformation is in two parts, privatisation and individualisation, where the former is the privatisation of ritual attendance while the latter is the individualisation of the ritual unit. Individualisation of the ritual unit means that the focus of the funeral shifted from the household to the deceased as an individual. With this individualisation came funerals that are free from Buddhist temples. While the 'parishioner household system' (*danka seido*)<sup>3</sup> was in place in the Tokugawa period (1603–1868), Buddhist temples were intimately tied to households as their parishioners, and funerals that served the

*Table 6.1* Contemporary trends of death ceremonies

	<i>Traditional ceremony</i>	<i>Contemporary trend</i>
Attendants	Family and relatives, community relationships, company relationships	Privatization-family and friends who knew the deceased
Ritual unit	Household collective, family	Individualization-the deceased
Ceremony	Buddhist ceremony	Free-from-religious ceremony-abbreviation of traditional rites

household naturally had Buddhist priest(s) to conduct the ritual. The individualisation of a funeral means that the family and friends do not have to depend on Buddhist temples or priests, and Buddhist priests are less frequently invited to today's funerals. These changes have happened mainly in urban areas but are also spreading to rural areas.

Privatisation, according to Kiyomi Morioka, implies 'the separation of the private realm from the communal realm and the respect of privacy as well as clarification of private conscience' (Morioka 1992). I understand one of the contemporary funeral trends as privatisation, meaning the privatisation of the ritual space where the only attendees are those of family, friends, and those who share the loss of the deceased. Vladimir Jankélévitch's framework will clarify this point. Jankélévitch categorised death according to its proximity using the grammatical forms of first person, second person etc., with the closest to the death as the first category (as in I), next closest as second category (as in he/she), and furthest the third category (as in they) (Jankélévitch 1978). Following his usage, the privatisation of ritual will include deceased as a first category and his/her family and intimate friends as second category, but excludes the third category of others who are not related to the deceased.

This privatisation goes hand in hand with individualisation. Morioka also states: 'Individualization follows privatization while the individualization progresses the privatization' (Morioka 1992). As observed in a commonly used Japanese saying, 'I will feel sorry to my ancestors for doing such a thing'<sup>4</sup> – a Japanese person defined oneself and one's actions according to one's ancestors. However, with the decline in respect of household and ancestors, Japanese are coming to see themselves as individuals and now value those relationships they nurtured. In an individualised society, family members or others cannot replace the death of each individual from a network because specific individuals cultivated these ties. In other words, relationships based on an individual die together with that individual. As a corollary, an individual-based funeral limits its participants to those who knew the deceased. In reality, however, many people who knew the deceased are themselves too old to attend their friend's funeral and only close family members attend such a funeral.

## Appearance of alternative systems in graves and burials

What are the influences of the nuclear family structure on graves in contemporary Japan? As discussed earlier, the traditional household system was based on patrilineal descent, where the eldest sons of a household successively inherited the household title. In contrast, the contemporary nuclear family is based on a couple, a husband and a wife, each with equal rights. The form of nuclear family changes through time and it ends in one generation; when the children move out it takes a 'couple only' (*fūfū dake*) form, when either partner dies it takes a 'solitude' (*dokkyo*) form, and finally when the last partner dies a nuclear family ends. If we compare the household system and nuclear family as 'couple based systems', there are two clear distinctions: (1) unilateral vs. bilateral, and (2) perpetual vs. single generation. As traditional households are replaced by nuclear families in contemporary Japan, these differences have led to new forms of grave systems.

Another factor that influenced the grave system is the break-up of a nuclear family. Since the 1980s, some Japanese wives began to stand up for themselves against the ideal of the patrilineal descent system. As a result, the divorce rate, number of late marriages, low number of childbirths, large number of women remaining single, and childless has increased. The affect of these decisions on the grave system implies an increased number of graves without a successor. Commonly, traditional Japanese graves are maintained by a successor who pays grave maintenance fees, which in turn, gives utility rights to the grave. When the grave maintenance fees halts and the grave has no surviving relatives (*muen*), then the space can be reformed according to the Reform of Graves and Tombs without Successor (*muenfunbo no kaisō*) Law.

The *alternative system* (*daitai shisutemu*) of graves/burials appeared in the 1990s from the above-mentioned environment. Traditional graves took the form of grave succession that was originally supported by the ideal of household perpetuity but it began to collapse together with that ideal. After the cultural time lag (Ogburn 1922) new changes began to appear on graves after the attenuation of the ideal, which I call, '*alternative system*', where the household grave system was abandoned and was replaced by alternative grave forms and burials.

These new grave forms and burials can be divided into four categories: 'free-of-succession' (*datsu keishō*), 'bilateral' (*Sōhōkā*), 'nature trend' (*shizen shikō*), and 'individualistic' (*kojinka*) graves/burials (Inoue 2003a) (see Figure 6.1). The 'free-of-succession' graves are the ones that do not require a successor such as 'perpetual memorial graves' (*eitai kuyō bo*) or amalgamative graves (*gōdōbo*). 'Bilateral' graves are 'two household graves' that allow bilateral kinsmen, parents of both the husband and wife, to be buried in the same location. In 'nature trend' graves, the scattering of ashes or planting a tree (i.e. tree burial or cherry burial) replaces the headstone. In the 'individualistic' graves, each gravestone is selected and designed by individuals who prepare their own burials without relying on their descendants.

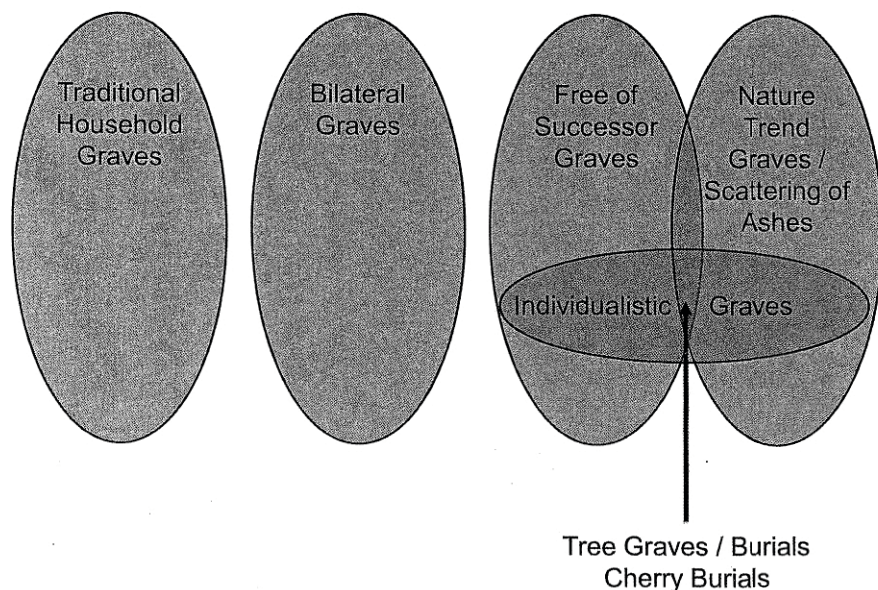


Figure 6.1 Different graves in contemporary Japan  
 Drawn by Hikaru Suzuki.

In the following sections, I will elaborate on these forms of alternative grave/burial systems, namely, free-of-succession graves and nature trend burials as major examples of new graves and burials in contemporary Japan. I will also discuss the ‘personal remembrance’ (*temoto kuyo*, literally ‘memorial at hand’) that are replacing Buddhist altars as a ritual that is emerging due to the increasing number of nuclear families.

### *‘Free-of-succession’ graves*

The traditional form of grave succession met the needs of the perpetual household system, but not those of contemporary Japanese nuclear families, which only last for one generation. Free-of-succession graves arose in the 1980s, reflecting the needs of nuclear families. They increased throughout the 1990s and there were 500 free-of-succession gravesites by 2003 (Rokugatsu Shobo Editorial Department 2003). Their numbers continue to increase today.

Who are the consumers and why do they apply for free-of-succession graves? One might assume they are singles or childless couples, but the top two categories both have children. According to the application received by Myoko Temple (Myokoji) for *Annonbyō* (free-of-succession grave sites) in Niigata Prefecture, in 2003 the two top categories of people who applied for a tree burial/free-of-succession grave were people with a daughter (25.7 per cent), and those who had a son (22.2 per cent) (see Table 6.2). These statistics



Table 6.2 Graves that do not require successors: Reasons for applying entry into *Annonbyō*

Reason for entry	No.	%
Only child is daughter (Purchases by parents 105, Purchase by married daughter for her parents 11)	116	25.7
We have a son but:	100	22.2
• we like the environment and nature of <i>Annonbyō</i> (48)		
• we prefer not to rely on the son (19)		
• we can not rely on the son (17)		
• son is not married (14)		
• son lives overseas (2)		
We have no children	89	19.7
Single and not married (Female 40, Male 3)	43	9.5
Wives who do not wish to be buried with their husbands (24),	40	8.9
Wives who rejects husband's household graves (13),		
Couples who reject husband's household graves (3)		
Divorcee	25	5.6
Re-married People: (Remarried Couples 13), (Remarried wives who wish to be buried separately from their husbands 7)	20	4.4
Others	18	4.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>451</b>	<b>100.0</b>

show that people with sons, who were assumed not to have problems with the traditional pattern of grave succession, were actually the predominant consumer of free-of-succession graves. We can conclude that the perpetual household ideal contradicts the contemporary nuclear family lifestyles, even for those with sons.

### *Nature trend burials – scattering of ashes and tree burial*

The second alternative grave/burial system grew in the 1990s: the scattering of ashes in 1991 and the tree burial in 1999. The Japanese views on the scattering of ashes have changed rapidly since it began. Three major statistical investigations can be used to understand public views of scattering of ashes: 'Consensus on Graves' (*bochini kansuru yoron chōsa*) was conducted by the Government Information Office Minister's Secretariat Cabinet Office in 1990 (Government Information Office Minister's Secretariat Cabinet Office 1990), 'Investigation on the Opinion of Graves' (*bochini kansuru ishiki chōsa*) led by Mori Kenji in 1998 (Mori 2000), and 'Changes in the Views towards the Dead and Memorialism—Comprehensive Investigation of Funerals and Burials' (*Shishato tsuitowo meguru ishiki chōsa—sōsōto hakani tsuiteno tōkeigatu kenkyū*) led by Suzuki Iwayumi in 2003 (Suzuki I. 2003). In the following examination, I will refer to these investigations by the year they were conducted.

The 1990 study was conducted soon after the scattering of ashes was first advertised and its results reflected peoples' objections to a new idea; 56.7 per cent of respondents said that the scattering of ashes should not be accepted.

in contrast to the 21.9 per cent who were supportive. People voiced, 'it is sinful to throw away the ashes of one's ancestors'. The two subsequent studies quickly reversed that result. In the 1998 investigation, 74.6 per cent stated that the scattering of ashes 'should be agreed' or 'should be accepted if it is the wishes of the deceased-to-be', and by 2003 the same answer further increased to 78.3 per cent. From these data we can confirm that the scattering of ashes has received general public acceptance. People who answered that they wanted that practice performed on their own remains has increased from 12.8 per cent in 1998 to 25.3 per cent in 2003. The questionnaire was rewritten in 2003 to ask people to choose either 'total scattering of ashes' (*zenkot-susankotsu*) or 'partial scattering of ashes' (*bubunsankotsu*), and 9.5 per cent of the people supported the former and 15.8 per cent supported the latter. Partial scattering of ashes was preferred because it was seen as considerate to non-supporters of this new practice.

Since the 1990s, many urbanites have expressed their preference to be buried under trees. This idea did not originate in cities but was started by Shoun Temple (Iwate Prefecture), headed by the head priest, Chisaka Genpo, who first coined its name (Chisaka and Inoue 2003; Inoue 2002). According to statistical data regarding the 'Investigation on the Views of Tree Burial Applicants' (*Jumokuso shinseisha no ishikichosa*), the top three reasons to choose tree burials were: (1) return to nature; (2) a successor is not required; and (3) prefer the act of planting a tree and be able to sleep under it (Inoue 2002). The third answer suggests that some people preferred to have a symbol of some kind rather than having nothing as in the case of scattering of ashes. Because the investigation allowed informants multiple answers, percentages of these three reasons were 76.5 per cent, 43.7 per cent, and 41.5 per cent respectively (*ibid.*). What is noteworthy is the second answer where tree burial is also seen as a substitute for 'free-of-succession' graves. We can conclude that tree burials encompass the ideas underlying 'Free-of-succession', 'Nature trend', and 'Individualistic' graves discussed earlier (see Figure 6.1).

### **Cherry burial – attempt to support nuclear family in the age of individualisation and disconnection**

We have arrived at the era of *society of disconnection* (*muen shakai*). The term *disconnection* (*muen*) became widespread in 2010 following an NHK special broadcast and connotes a society where support networks are absent and there is no one to rely upon when one is ill. More than 32,000 deaths are considered *disconnected-death* (*muenshi*) due to the lack of family or friends to claim the deceased's body for burial. The function of kinship in the nuclear family is in decline along with community and company relationships. Disconnection is a general trend seen in developed countries in the post-economic growth phase.

Taking care of the elderly, caring for those who fell ill, and conducting death rituals for the deceased were necessary functions of a family. Lifestyles,

however, have changed in various ways. An increasing number of elderly parents do not live with their children while there are many without spouses or children. Due to low childbirth rates, there are parents that lose their child; the only person who could have been their bereaved or chief mourner. Today's elderly have to find help outside of their family in times of need. Japanese elderly are facing immediate and real problems namely, 'who will take care of me when I am sick?' 'Who will feed me when I am immobile?' 'Who will take me to the toilet at night?' 'Who will dispose of my body when I am dead?'

In 1990, a group of researchers of death and funerals came together to address the problem of disconnection and formed the Association Considering Graves and Connection in the Twenty-First Century (*21seikino ketsuento hakawo kangaeru kai*). Its purpose was to support the changes in graves from 'kin' to 'connection'. After three years, the association replaced the term 'graves' with 'death rituals', and became the Association Considering Death Rituals and Connection in the Twenty-First Century (*21seikino ketsuento sosowo kangaeru kai*). It had become clear to them that graves were only part of the death ritual problem. The term 'connection' (*ketsuen*)<sup>5</sup> was used to suggest that we have to make our own 'connection' replacing 'kinship' (*ket-suen*) in the era when family is no longer reliable. In 2000, the association shifted from 'considering' to 'practicing', while renewing its name to 'Ending Center' and gaining non-profit organisation status (now NPO Ending Center). In 2005, it began to provide 'cherry burials' (*Sakuraso*) – a branched out tree-burial – as part of their activities. The reasons for choosing cherry burial is shown in Table 6.3. The cherry burial was conceived with three aims: coexistence, partial anonymity, and the replacement of family function.

The first characteristic of cherry burial, 'coexistence' (*yuruyakana kyodo-sei*), allows people to have a burial without successors. The consumer of a cherry burial has burial rights in a specific location but each space is connected with others. If a grave is comparable to a house, then a cherry burial is comparable to a condominium. In such a form, despite a lack of family

Table 6.3 The reasons for choosing cherry burials

<i>(Lists top three choices from each person)</i>	<i>N = 183</i>	<i>%</i>
Return to nature	140	76.5
No need of a successor	80	43.7
Planting a tree and sleeping underneath it	76	41.5
It is part of protecting nature	58	31.7
Religious institutions will keep maintenance	47	25.7
Existing support system in afterlife (i.e. delivering ashes, responsible for burial)	36	19.7
Iwate Prefecture is my hometown or close to my hometown	16	8.7
I can enjoy it before death by having nature experience and visiting hot springs	12	6.6
Others	12	6.6
The location is close to where I currently live	2	1.1

successor, one will be celebrated at the 'collaborative memorial services' (*godo ireisai*) during cherry blossom season. There is no need for succession or the management of graves by a family member, but, if one so wishes, one could succeed the burial site. The cherry burial embraces family members and non-family members alike and is not restricted to the unit of family. People gather around a cherry tree for eternal sleep. Those who sleep under the tree and those who visit the dead are all connected by fellowship that goes beyond kinship relations.

The second characteristic of cherry burial is 'partial anonymity' (*hantoku-meisei*). In a traditional grave, each stone is carved with a household name and is surrounded by an outer frame. Without successors, these graves will be abandoned or destroyed as disinherited graves. On the one hand, the cherry burial specifies the burial location of each individual but does not place any outer frame between the dead, which makes it a large collective gravesite. On the other hand, no symbol marks each individual but there is a nearby plaque with the names of the deceased. Hence, partial anonymity is kept in the cherry burial; the precise location of the individual is not specified but their names are carved on the plaque. If one does not wish to have their names on the plaque his/her wish is granted.

Finally, carrying out the cherry burial replaces the family functions that are lacking in a disconnected society. At the Ending Center, we provide services for those who do not have anyone to conduct a funeral for them. People who need someone to act as their chief mourner can apply for 'pre-need funeral contracts' (*seizen keiyaku*) that guarantees the performance of their death ritual by a third person.

A cherry burial does not build a boundary between self and other households; it aims to free oneself from household obligations. This does not promote isolation but advocates connection with those who share a similar way of life and death. Its policy is to embrace relationships within and beyond one's family, through a tree, by returning to nature. People who choose cherry burials are full of life because they choose the way they want to die. Cherry burial is another method for a discontinuous nuclear family; it frees Japanese from the household perpetuity obligation.

### **Rituals for the deceased at home replacing the Buddhist altar**

In the post-war era, ties to relatives and neighbours have attenuated. For some, a daily relationship with their deceased has come to replace the weak ties among the living. A new phenomenon has been observed 'personal remembrance', where the bereaved keep the remains/ashes of the deceased close by so that they can have a continuous relationship with the deceased. Some people leave the deceased's urn at home, or place the deceased's ashes in an artistic pottery so that it can be displayed. Some bereaved grind the deceased's bones into powder in order to have it made into a ceramic plate or a pendant, and some even go further to make a diamond.

An elderly couple experience a series of dispossessions over the years; they are deprived of the role of parents when children move out, they lose the role of employee when they retire, and a surviving spouse loses the role of a partner when their loved one passes away. As they age, spouses depend on each other to overcome these earlier losses but the final loss of a partner is damaging to their lives. The final stage of a nuclear family is solitude (*dokkyo*) where the bereaved mourn their loved ones and this remains unchanged even with the collapse of the household system. When the patrilineal descent system attenuated, it is this raw feeling of intimacy to their spouse that is emphasised in death rituals. Elderly bereaved talk to the deceased by placing his/her ashes nearby. When one's spouse passes away and the bereaved is the only surviving family, the bereaved often treat the deceased as if they are still alive, namely taking the deceased's ashes to travel and taking the ashes wherever they go. The spouse's ashes replace one's spouse in the final stage of solitude in a nuclear family. As such, different forms of 'personal remembrance' that do not use a traditional Buddhist altar have arisen. These rituals have several characteristics, namely, spouse-like (*hanryosei*), individualistic (*kobetsusei*), distributive (*bunpaisei*), mobility (*keitaisei*), and a point of contact between the living and the dead without graves.<sup>6</sup>

These characteristics of personal remembrance supplement functions that weren't fulfilled by other death rituals. A 2006 investigation on 'the changing views of rituals for the deceased at home', involving 100 people who purchased items used for 'personal remembrance',<sup>7</sup> confirmed that people talk to and provide offerings to the deceased in much the same way as on the Buddhist altar. People may have graves, traditional Buddhist altars, or Shinto altars but 'personal remembrance' is performed to suit the lifestyle needs of today's bereaved. In Buddhist altars, one can observe ancestral rites at the lineage level, whereas the 'personal remembrance' is a form of memorialism mentioned by Robert Smith (Smith 1974) at the domestic level (Inoue 2004a, 2006).

## Conclusion

Traditional Japanese death rituals, rooted in the dual logic of spirit and body, combine the value of household with the Buddhist structure. However, rituals centred on household succession have declined in contemporary Japan. Today's social structure contradicts the continuity of household as a collective unit and people are seeking death rituals that can be practiced with individuals as the focal unit. The shift to the nuclear family is a major factor that changed society from focusing on the collective to the individuals. Today, the number of various lifestyles is expanding; increasingly there are people who do not have a spouse or children, and with the low birth rate and increased longevity, it is not rare to see parents outlive their children. These situations lead to cases where there is no chief mourner or successor to a grave.

It is obvious that the traditional death rituals no longer fit the lifestyles of contemporary Japanese and alternative ways are being sought. People are abandoning rituals that do not make sense to them, as seen in direct funerals, non-religious funerals, the scattering of ashes, and other alternative ways that correspond to their needs. We see alternative new practices formed as in 'free-of-succession', 'bilateral', 'nature trend', and 'individualistic' burials/graves. These practices have all moved away from the previous value embodied in the patrilineal descent household system.

In funerals, the trend for personalisation built on top of individualisation. In the post-war economic boom, local community and kinship declined while corporate relationships increased. With the economic bubble ending between 1990 and 1992, however, the era of corporate relationship ended, together with the decline of lifelong employment. Moreover, longevity made it difficult for the elderly to attend their old friends or siblings' funerals thereby scaling down funeral sizes. More funerals today exclude attendants who are obligated to the bereaved and had no acquaintance to the deceased. Funerals function as a confirmation of intimate family ties as well as a process of grief work.

The attenuation of household perpetuity does not mean that people mourn less. On the contrary, without the emphasis on the patrilineal succession on death rituals, intimate relationships take centre stage. People prefer to mourn their dead through 'personal remembrance' rather than through the medium of Buddhist altars, because it allows them to keep the deceased close and provides flexibility to talk to them wherever and whenever they wish. Such practices are the result of solitude in the final stage of nuclear family where the bereaved treats the deceased's ashes/bones as a living 'partner'.

Why the popularity of the nature trend burials? On the one hand, it reflects people's wish to return to nature in the high-tech industrial age. On the other hand, it freed people from having to have a successor of graves and depend on their unreliable children. The nature trend is flexible and all embracing. It has both the characteristics of individuality, by allocating each space for the dead, as well as communal fellowship by being together with other non-kin members under the same tree. The death rituals that support coexistence are expected to increase as the post-war generation selects their ending choice.

## Notes

- 1 This chapter is translated by Hikaru Suzuki from the Japanese.
- 2 *Missō*, literally translated as secret funeral, is a funeral conducted among close family and friends. It is often conducted before company funerals (*shasō*) where company representatives take the role of chief mourner in these funerals rather than the deceased's families (Suzuki 2000: 103).
- 3 See (Bernstein 2006: 32–33).
- 4 This is the direct translation of the Japanese, '*konna kotowo shitewa gosenzosamani moushiwakennai*'.
- 5 'Kinship' (*ketsuen*) and 'connection' (*ketsuen*) phonetically reads the same in Japanese, but are written with different characters for '*ketsu*'. The first '*ketsu*' for

kinship is written with the character for 'blood' and the second 'ketsu' for connection uses 'connect'.

- 6 Spouse-like (*hanryosei*) characteristic implies that when a bereaved outlives his/her spouse conducting 'personal remembrance' becomes part of living with the deceased and provides meaning to their lives. Individualistic (*kobetsusei*) characteristic implies that 'personal remembrance' reflects the changing values from ancestors to individuals. Distributive (*bunpaisei*) characteristic means there are equal rights among children to provide prayers to their parents, and the ceremonial right is no longer limited to the eldest son. Mobility (*keitaisei*) characteristic implies that 'personal remembrance' has advantage to graves that requires a successor by being mobile.
- 7 The author conducted this investigation from 20 July to 7 August 2006 by asking consumers who purchased items necessary for home rituals at Hirokuniya, a store in Kyoto.

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