Ritualization and Sacrality

De-ritualization of Kankonsōsai.
Peter D. Ackermann

Materials on Kankonsōsai (Instruction manuals for the correct performance of ceremonial occasions related to becoming adult, weddings, funerals, and other crucial points in time) are extremely visible in Japanese bookstores and homes. This bears witness to the idea that at certain moments in life faultless interaction with others (on a social level) and, as it were, with a transcendental level (through which one aims to secure protection, well-being and prosperity) is essential. It has always been evident that in Japan normative rules and concepts should not be mistaken for reality. They may, indeed, correspond closely to what actually happens, in which case we need to ask what motivates people to adhere to prescriptive norms, or they may represent something people just want to know about "in case they need it" (but never actually adhere to). Recently, however, an increasing amount of materials is becoming available that openly discusses the contrast between norms and reality, in the case of Kankonsōsai both as actual performance and on the level of interpretation. My paper wishes to present some insights into these debates.

Change and Continuity in a Japanese Childhood Ritual. The Evolution of Shichigosan.
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Observing the evolution of a childhood ritual as Shichigosan through time, allows me to analyze a custom that has maintained a certain continuity from the distant past to present. Its practice was never discontinued to a significant degree. Even if certain patterns observed in rural areas have disappeared, they have been replaced by the pattern that was created in Tokyo during the Edo period. The continuity of the ritual depends on a set of factors and these factors can emerge from a careful tracing of those circumstances that have accompanied, helped or affected its development such as: historical and social change, changes in life style, taste, and values, growth of industries and influences from the market economy. The study of this ritual, on the one hand can demonstrate that the practice of a custom, today viewed by the majority of Japanese as part of their cultural traditions, represents a social process through which actors decide to adopt certain patterns of a ritual and to drop others in order to meet needs required by changes in circumstances. On the other hand, the study of this family ritual throws light on the values related to family life and children, in particular, and on the modifications that these values underwent through time. The paper would like to place the analyses of Shichigosan in a broader study of Japanese childhood rituals and in the theoretical discourse on issues as tradition, and the role of rituals in a contemporary modern society.

Ritual Boundary Crossing and the Emplacement of Time: Japanese Year Changing Customs Via the Anthropology of Religion.
Millie Creighton, University of British Columbia

This paper explores Year-End (Omisoka) and New Year (Oshogatsu) customs in Japan utilizing perspectives from the Anthropology of Religion. While providing the ethnography of Year-End and New Year in Japan, it also shows how time gets conceptualized as a place and put in its appropriate placement. The paper applies classic anthropological paradigms derived from Malinowski on Magic, Science, and Religion, from Radcliffe-Brown on Ritual Value, and from Turner on Ritual Liminality, to show how Japanese Year End and New Year customs separate the sacred from the profane in Japanese life and the passage of time, while showing the greater importance of placing ritual boundaries on the annual cycle in Japan then in some other cultures. This is highlighted by showing how the same application of classic anthropological perspectives on religion and ritual reveal that the same emphasis on “changing times” in North America only occurs once a century or even millennium.

Purity and Danger in the Censorship of Videogames in Japan

William H. Kelly, Professor, School of Global Studies, Tama University, Associate Member, Nissan Institute of Japanese Studies, University of Oxford

Emile Durkheim has defined a crime in terms of the degree to which it offends the sensibilities of a community of people, noting that it does not offend because it is a crime, but rather it is a crime because it offends. Applying this notion to the censorship of videogames in Japan and focusing specifically on the censorship of violence, this paper examines the ways in which violence is treated by the Japanese organization responsible for the rating of videogames. Drawing on a wide range of examples, it is argued that the sensibilities of Japanese censors with regard to particular patterns of violence are at least partially elucidated with reference to notions of purity and danger vis-à-vis death, the corpse, bodily injury and blood for example.

Winning Souls, Hearts, and Minds: Debating Christianity and Buddhism in Omihachiman, Shiga Prefecture.

Bruce White, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Doshisha University, Kyoto Japan

Takahashi is a practical and independent man in his forties. Growing up in the town of Omihachiman, Shiga Pref., once home to the American-born missionary, teacher and architect William Merrell Vories (1880-1964), Takahashi is used to the presence of Christian ideas, churches and priests in his hometown. The town of Omihachiman even has a "Vories hospice" where Christian approaches to pastoral care continue under the supervision and guidance of the resident chaplain. Takahashi was born into a typical household in the town. His great grandfather was the local Buddhist temple priest, and his family house has relied on the temple for practical, religious and spiritual guidance, rites and celebrations over the last known generations. This paper follows the story of how Takahashi and his hippie (California-resident) older brother oversee their mother's last months in the local Vories hospice, and then, following her death, how they begin to negotiate her funeral and the rites and costs associated with her passing. The paper looks to uncover some of the tensions that arise when the power of local temple priests and practices is challenged by the relative efficiency and economic advantages of Christian ways of dealing with the concrete and spiritual practicalities of death. For Takahashi and his brother, now the only two surviving members of the family, a decision to change religions is tempting but

maybe outweighed by a sense of familial loyalty to the local temple. But will such loyalty remain after this event, will it be strong enough to maintain any future dependence on the religious structures which have traditionally managed and dominated life for people in towns such as Omihachiman?

Public Events and the Japanese Self-Defense Forces: Aesthetics, Ritual Cycles and the Normalization of Military Violence

Eyal Ben-Ari, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

In this paper, I examine two annual public events held by the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF): an air-show conducted at Hamamatsu Air-Base and an open-day organized by an infantry regiment in a camp in the north of Kyoto Prefecture (in Fukuchiyama). My aim is to explore the relationship between military violence and its acceptability. In other words, I would like to explore how the armed forces' potential for war-making is socially and culturally "normalized," that is, turned into "natural" – albeit important – parts of society. My assumption is that if one wants to understand the social and cultural significance of violence, then the armed forces would seem to be a key research site. It is in this light that my focus on the SDF should be seen: on the groups and people who variously prepare for, perpetrate, perform, or simulate organized violence and the ways in which this violence, or its potential, have been social and culturally normalized. As I show, however, the historical context of Japan – with its anti-military ethos, constitutional limits on the military, and terrible memories of World War Two – make this normalization especially problematic. I thus focus on the aesthetic aspects of the two events held by the SDF and then place them in the context of a wider ritual cycle by which the Japanese military's potential for violence is turned into an accepted part of contemporary Japan.