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メタデータ	言語: eng 出版者: 公開日: 2009-04-28 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: 森岡, 清美 メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	https://doi.org/10.15021/00003371

Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan: Continuity and Change

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INTRODUCTION

Accompanying the change of *ie* after the Second World War, ancestor worship among the Japanese has also changed considerably. The concept of ancestor has largely shifted from a unilineal descent to a bilateral orientation. This change has been accelerated by a widespread acceptance of the nuclear family form. As to the function of ancestor worship, jural or political functions such as those that legitimize one's social status have weakened, whereas personal or informal functions as a memorialization of one's dead ancestors or an emotional consoling of their spirits have been strengthened. The *butsudan* or Buddhist altar, the central object of ancestral rites inside the private house, is still kept in many Japanese households. Variations exist, however. There can be temporary delays in setting up a *butsudan*, establishing a shelf in a corner of a room to serve as a *butsudan* substitute, as well as direct disuse of the custom. Even among those who own a *butsudan* the rate of the ritual performance is not high, and the forms of practice vary. These tendencies are all related to an increasing significance of personal over formal functions of the worship.

In this chapter the form of practice based on the *ie* or household is referred to as "classical ancestor worship". That which has appeared in the process of the transition of the *ie* is called "modified ancestor worship". In present-day Japan, classical ancestor worship is still found in agricultural and mountain villages, and the modified form tends to occur in urban areas. Further, even "modified ancestor worship" is rare among some nuclear family households.

"Ancestor worship" refers to the totality of the belief in the superhuman power of the dead who are recognized as ancestors, and the rituals based on this belief. The dead are not always ancestors. Ancestors must have real or adopted descendants who are admitted as legitimate in the context of ancestor worship. Legitimate descendants are those who succeed to the social status of the ancestors and who consequently assume the right to worship ancestors. Ancestor worship is, therefore, indivisibly connected with the patriarchal family and the patrilineal descent group.

Ancestor worship is neither simply a mental representation of ancestors nor an action of love and respect extended to them as if they were alive. The performance of a set of rituals is a requisite of ancestor worship, with a belief that dead ancestors

have a superhuman power. In this sense, ancestor worship is a central problem in discussing the relationship between a patriarchal family and religion, and was in fact the core of the relationship between the Japanese *ie* (traditional family household of Japan) and religion. In contemporary Japan, however, the nature of ancestor worship has been changing, responding to, and forming one aspect of, the change in the *ie*. This chapter attempts to analyze the continuity and change in ancestor worship of the Japanese in this process of recent change.

ANCESTOR WORSHIP AND ITS FUNCTIONS

The *ie* or household is a social institution which has continued in Japan over generations unilineally through the male line. According to existing research findings, ancestors in *ie* comprise all the household heads together with their wives since its foundation. When a founder established a new *ie* as a branch household, ancestors from the main household were sometimes transferred over. In addition, the founder of a main family was sometimes connected genealogically to the Imperial Household or to other powerful families in previous periods. Ancestors under the *ie* system were shown systematically on a lineal genealogy that included not only actual ancestors but not infrequently, imaginary ones.

The generational depth of ancestors differed greatly depending on social class. Not a few politically powerful families claimed an imaginary descent from the gods recorded in the Japanese sacred scriptures, the *Kojiki* or *Nihongi*. But for most commoners, it was difficult to trace their actual ancestors back beyond a few generations.

Japanese folklorists maintain that an ancestor retains his individual characteristics for a period of time but gradually frees himself from the impurity of death and loses his individuality, finally merging into the general ancestral soul of the *ie*. This is true only for commoners, however. Among politically powerful families or those with religious authority, each ancestor retained his individuality and was separately worshipped. Even among commoners, the spirit of a founder or of a special restorer of an *ie*, or that of an ancestor who died an unhappy death was not fused into the general ancestral soul.

Among the principle functions of ancestor worship are:

1. *Status Legitimization*

Ceremonial attention to the ancestors serves to prove that the present head of a household has legitimately succeeded to the social status of his ancestors. This is especially important for households holding political power or religious authority. In such households, there is more tendency for each ancestor to retain individuality in order to demonstrate that power and authority have been properly handed down.

2. *Stabilization of Inter-generational Relations*

Demonstrating symbolically the ethics of filial piety to the dead helps an heir resolve his ambivalent feelings toward his living parent. This supports the well-

known proposition of M. Fortes (1961, 1965). In Japan, the practice of shifting the headship of the household to the heir while the former head is still alive is widespread. The functional resolution of ambivalence is not as important as in a society where the domestic power of the head can be handed down to the heir only after his death. Nevertheless, such resolution was especially meaningful for the socially privileged.

3. *Unification of Kin*

N. Hozumi pointed out this function while discussing Japanese law in terms of ancestor worship [HOZUMI 1912: 21–25]. This can be applied generally to unilineal descent groups or *dozoku* in Japan. It is, of course, pertinent to an *ie* that may be under stress.

4. *Strengthening Motivation for Household Continuation*

Periodic ceremonies strengthen motivation for household continuation by deepening one's appreciation of ancestral benevolence and teaches one to pray for their help. Appreciation and prayers were urged by the "Ancestor Religion" espoused at the turn of the century, and, more significantly, by the doctrine of ancestor veneration taught to school children with the aid of the official textbooks of those days.

In parallel with ancestor worship, offerings were made to *muenbotoke*, dead who had no legitimate offspring to worship them as ancestors. These offerings were intended to prevent unhappy incidents which might be brought about by troubled souls. Hence, it can be said that the rites for them had the function of easing the psychological tension of people.

In modern Japan, lower class urban workers lacked the physical means necessary for guaranteeing the maintenance of their households and had to work hard to provide the necessities of everyday life. Under such circumstances, it was not easy for them to perceive any benefit as being bestowed on them by their ancestors, and thus it was not easy to recognize ancestors as those to whom one owes gratitude. Instead, their poverty-stricken situation was often explained as due to the presence of ancestors who could not successfully achieve a state of bliss. While misfortune could be attributed to *muenbotoke* in the propertied classes, the misery of the disinherited could be explained as being caused by ancestors who were not properly worshipped by their offspring. Therefore, a central function of ancestor worship for lower class people was to relieve themselves of tension concerning their present plight as well as possible further disaster and misfortune.

CHANGES IN THE IE AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Concomitant with changes in other social institutions and economic development, the *ie* was gradually changing over the past century following the Meiji Restoration. Changes in the *ie* following the Second World War, however, have been notable especially as the *ie* changes, ancestor worship supported by *ie* is also transformed. It is important therefore to delineate how the *ie* was legally and socially transformed since 1945.

Formerly, the *ie* was physically based on a continuity of property. The corporate family tended to be self-employed in its own occupational specialization. As such it was an independent enterprise based on its own property and capital. However, a meta-economic concept of property as handed down from the ancestors to the present generation has lost influence. Instead, now more salient are newer notions of property as a means of production, or as a commodity for negotiation as in the case of farms now part of suburbs and metropolitan areas. In addition, changes in the industrial structure of Japan has led to a marked reduction in the number of self-employed workers. Households of salaried employees are now in a majority. Even in the remaining self-employed households, not all members are engaged in the family business. Some are gainfully employed outside as is true for part-time farming households. Thus, the diminution of property and occupation as the material bases of the *ie* had made a steady advance [MATSUMOTO 1981: 110-111].

Primogeniture is not only legally abrogated, it has also lost popular favor. Attitude surveys reveal that the rate of those in support of an equal division of parental property among children had reached nearly 50% by the 1960's. Even among those remaining in favor of primogeniture, a predominant majority connected the right of exclusive inheritance with the full responsibility to take care of aging parents. Only a small minority continued to think that all property should be handed down to the heir along with the headship of the *ie*. Although 70% or more remain in favor of the combined residence of parents and a married son or daughter, the assumed reason is the convenience which this arrangement may provide in caring for the aged rather than as a means of continuing an *ie* form of living. Those who regard it unnecessary to adopt a child in order to continue an *ie* line when there is no real offspring now number about half the population, while those who stress the necessity to adopt a child to succeed *ie* has fallen to about one third of those contacted [MORIOKA 1980]. Thus, the notion that the *ie* should be handed down generationally has become less and less popular.

As to family composition, along with urbanization, the increase of nuclear family households has become marked in postwar Japan. However, because of the drastic decrease in the number of children per woman it is estimated that the percentage of nuclear families will remain constant or decline, and the stem family household in which parents and their married child live together will become more common. Yet the so-called contemporary stem family household is more like a generational combination of two nuclear families of parents and their married child rather than the single unified household in existence under the *ie* system of former days. In the *ie*, the axis of family life lay in the parent-child dyadic ties. Thus two nuclear families were bound together firmly by a filial relationship. On the other hand, the focus of the present-day family, especially those formed recently, is placed on the husband-wife relationship. Therefore, even when there is a three generation family, it is merely a residential alliance of two nuclear families. The notion of a continuation of *ie* over generations has almost totally evaporated.

Because of vulnerability to weather conditions or to the economic fluctuations,

the households with an independent small-scale business worshipped guardian deities often associated with the ancestors who laid the foundation of the business. Now, since workers' households depend on large enterprises that employ their breadwinners, it is unlikely for them to practice such ancestor worship. In a family centering around the parent-child relationship, the extension of filial piety to their dead ancestors lead immediately to ancestor worship. In a conjugal family, however, this sort of attitude does not tend to occur.

As noted above, the drastic change in the *ie* system, which may well be called a collapse of the traditional family, naturally should have devitalized ancestor worship. However, the "Japanese National Character Study" reveals that the ratios of respondents who affirmed their paying reverence to ancestors were 77% for 1953 and 72% for 1978, the decreasing trend being less conspicuous than anticipated [TŌKEI SŪRI KENKYŪJO 1979: 42]. This suggests that the meaning of "ancestor" has changed between 1953 and 1978. Presumably, the concept of "ancestor" in 1953 was close to that defined at the beginning of this chapter, but by 1978 has changed considerably far from its original meaning. A change in the view of ancestor is assumed to have taken place. With the decline of the concept of ancestor based on the *ie* system, a new concept devoid of the *ie* premise may have emerged. Along with such change, the pattern of worship may also have become modified.

CHANGE IN THE CONCEPT OF ANCESTOR

I will review the actual status of the concept of ancestor by making use of research findings completed since 1960. Since the data were obtained only from community studies, they are fragmentary but nevertheless they are mutually supporting. According to a survey of 87 households conducted in 1974-75 in a farming community in Okayama Prefecture, "ancestors" meant, for more than 70% of those interviewed, the founder of household, the household heads since the foundation, ancestors of the main household, or the household heads of all generations including those of the main household. That is, a majority held the traditional concept as defined above. However, for the remaining 30% or less, ancestors were either all those who died in their households or all the dead enshrined at their *butsudan*, or their deceased parents, etc. In other words, all deceased family members were included in their concept of ancestor. For them, closeness of blood relationship was more important than lineality [YONEMURA 1981: 153]. A 1972 study of 142 households in a hot spring town in Yamagata Prefecture revealed that two thirds of the respondents considered the founder of an *ie* or all the deceased heads and their wives as ancestors, while for 20% or more ancestors were the dead close kin on both husband's and wife's sides. S. Yonemura, who made the Okayama study, interpreted his findings as an extension of the concept to ordinary family members beyond household heads and their wives. Yet it is questionable whether this is a change that occurred after the war; it is possible that the system of ancestors held by commoners was so extensive as to include some ordinary household members. At

any rate, the regarding of deceased bilateral kin as ancestors, which was entertained only by a minority of the respondents in the Yamagata study, is different in quality from the traditional concept of ancestor.

Behind one family of procreation exist two families of orientation on the husband's side and on the wife's side. On this basis a bilateral concept of ancestor may emerge. It has been kept latent, however, under the *ie* system. Again, we should not hastily summarize this as a new postwar phenomenon, though we admit that it certainly accords with the decline of the *ie* in postwar Japan.

This contention is based on replies to the question asking whom the respondents regarded as ancestors. Other than this, the tablets installed in a *butsudan* permit an estimation of the extension of "ancestor". In 1963 R. J. Smith employed this method in studying 429 urban households in Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka and 166 rural households in Iwate, Mie and Kagawa Prefectures [SMITH 1974: 152-186]. According to his findings, 93% of the tablets were of the dead on the descent line of the *ie*, whereas those for nonlinear kin including relatives on the wife's side averaged only 6% of the total. Because the percentage of nonlinear tablets was higher in cities than in rural areas, Smith concluded that the presence of nonlinear tablets is a newer trend and serves as the opening wedge of family-centered ancestor worship as opposed to household-centered ancestor worship [SMITH 1974: 174]. Also, in Yonemura's research conducted in Okayama Prefecture, a few instances of tablets for the nonlinear deceased such as kin on the wife's side were reported. In addition, there were tablets for siblings who died unmarried, divorced or childless even when married. In other words, a unilineal concept of ancestor remained dominant, yet an emergence of a bilateral concept was indicated by the data [YONEMURA 1981: 154]. The coincidence that both Smith and Yonemura confirmed an emerging bilateral concept of ancestor suggests that a shift is taking place from a concept of household-centered ancestor to family-centered ancestor.

This shift can be summarized as a change from a unilineal view which includes distant ancestors beyond even indirect experiences, to say nothing of direct personal contact, to a concept which limits ancestors to close kin within the range of direct experience, but extends bilaterally; and as such a change from an obligatory concept which should include all the dead on one's descent line regardless of personal preference, to an optional one which limits ancestors to the deceased close kin whose memories are cherished by offspring. This should indicate a trend toward the collapse of the concept of ancestor as defined in the opening paragraph of this chapter.

The change of concept should accompany a change of function in ancestor worship. The original four functions are social, whereas the newer functions are much more personal, that is, they release psychological tensions through an affectionate reminiscence of the dead and a contributed of their spirits [SMITH 1974: 183; TAKAHASHI 1975]. The former functions have contributed to the stability of household and society, whereas the latter seeks to bring solace and peace to one's heart. Although the percentages of those who affirmed the reverence they paid to their ancestors do not

indicate any marked drop, a shift from an obligatory ancestor of an *ie* to an optional ancestor of an individual, and "privatization" of the function of ancestor worship may be in progress behind the scenes.

CHANGES IN CEREMONY

Under the *ie* system ancestor worship was commonly practiced at a household altar such as a *butsudan* where tablets or objects symbolizing ancestral spirits were installed. Therefore, any change in ancestor worship may be manifest in the possible increase in the number of households keeping no *butsudan*.

According to the comparative study of three areas we conducted in 1965-66, the percentages of *butsudan*-keeping households were 92% in an agricultural community in Yamanashi Prefecture (92 households), 69% in a business area in Tokyo (103 households), and 45% in a white-collar workers' residential area in Tokyo (106 households). The variation among areas was in the same direction as anticipated. We classified the households into two types; nuclear family households (without old people) and extended family households (with old people). Almost 100% of the extended family households keep a *butsudan* regardless of rural-urban or occupational differences, as the following figures show: 98% in the Yamanashi farming village, 93% in the Tokyo business area, and 100% in the Tokyo residential area. In contrast, among nuclear family households, the percentages varied considerably: 83% in the farming village, 51% in the business area, and 31% in the residential area. In addition, the percentages of nuclear family households were 38% in the farming village, 58% in the business area and 80% in the residential area, all contributing to the regional variation mentioned above [MORIOKA 1975: 97-98].

In my 1967 research on a suburb of Tokyo, I observed the *butsudan* ownership rate by dividing the sample into the local residents (54 households) and the newcomers (65 households), and then subdividing them into extended family households and nuclear family households. Although the difference was small among the extended family households (97% for local families and 100% for newcomers), the rates varied widely among nuclear family households (73% for local families and 38% for newcomers). The result obtained was similar to the findings from the comparative study of three areas [MORIOKA 1975: 99-100].

From these studies, it has become clear that the *butsudan* ownership rate was lowest among nuclear family households of full-time workers. Since the number of such households is assumed to have increased in postwar Japan, it is estimated that the *butsudan* ownership rate has generally decreased.

According to a study of the middle-aged or the aged conducted in 1973 in Kakegawa City, the *butsudan* ownership rate for nuclear families was as high as that for extended families where two couples of successive generations were alive. In both household types the *butsudan* ownership rate was significantly higher for the households of the aged (65-74 years old) than for the households of the middle-aged (55-64 years old). This suggests that the incentives to set up a *butsudan* accumulate as time

passes even in nuclear families, especially with the death of the senior generation. Among extended families the *butsudan* ownership rate was significantly higher for households with widows (91%) than for those with two couples intact (68%). The reason for this difference would be that the death of husbands of the senior generation provided a decisive incentive to set up a *butsudan* earlier for the households with widows [TAKAHASHI 1975].

The above mentioned Kakegawa study made it clear that the low *butsudan* ownership rate for nuclear family households reflected a moratorium phenomena in *butsudan* ownership. Along with the increase in the number of nuclear family households, however, it cannot be denied that those who never set up a *butsudan* during their lifetime are also growing in number. The Kakegawa research also revealed that some of those lacking a formal *butsudan* had a simplified altar resembling it [TAKAHASHI 1975: 43]. *Butsudan* like equipment may indicate a stage prior to setting up a formal *butsudan* or may be a relatively permanent altar for ancestor worship. In short, formerly it used to be normal as well as commonplace to set up an ancestor altar such as a *butsudan*; nowadays, the norm has waned especially in large cities. This is partly responsible for the great increase of non-*butsudan* households among nuclear families. Among them, some have an altar resembling a *butsudan* or dispense with it for the time being, whereas others, it is estimated, do not set up a *butsudan* throughout their lifetime. A public opinion poll conducted by the Asahi Newspaper in 1981 revealed that the *butsudan* ownership rate reached 63%. This suggests that a majority of the Japanese have a *butsudan* even today. I would like to call attention to the fact that, however, a few patterns of non-ownership have emerged.

Our next question is about the ways of worship. According to Smith's tablet study in 1963, 457 households had ancestral tablets in their *butsudan*. Of them, 63% worshipped ancestors on the day of *Bon* (Buddhist All Souls' Day); 62% practiced a daily morning rite; 60% performed periodic anniversaries of death; 56% practiced a monthly deathday rite. Only 21% observed all four rituals. Judging from the above figures, ancestral tablets may have been almost neglected in about 30% of the total households.

In the 1964-65 comparative study of three areas, senior students of elementary schools were asked whether they were told to worship ancestors at the *butsudan* by their elder family members. The results were as follows: among nuclear family households, the *butsudan* ownership rate was as low as 48%, out of which a worship-demanding rate was 55% (26% of the total). In contrast, among extended family households, the *butsudan* ownership rate amounted to 97% and the worship-demanding rate was 66% of the *butsudan* owners (64% of the total). In the farming village, the *butsudan* ownership rate was 92%, among which the worship-demanding rate was 65% (60% of the total); in the business area, the *butsudan* ownership rate was 69% out of which the worship demanding rate was 51% (35% of the total); and in the residential area, the *butsudan* ownership rate was 45% among which the worship-demanding rate reached 71% (32% of the total). While the ranking order of

butsudan ownership rates was: first, the farming village; second, the business area; and third, the residential area with a large difference. Worship-demanding rates were highest in the residential area, then the farming village and finally the business area, with small discrepancies. For the residential area, the *butsudan* ownership rate was the lowest, whereas the worship-demanding rate was the highest. This is presumably because wives of white collar workers in that area were mostly full-time housekeepers, and tended to be attentive to their children. On the contrary, in the farming and the business households, for which the *butsudan* ownership rate was high, farming or business is assumed to have occupied too much time and energy of elders for them to be attentive to the little ones [MORIOKA 1972]. This reasoning suggests that the worship-demanding rate may not exactly indicate the practice rate and that the practice rates for farming and business households must be more or less greater than their worship-demanding rates. Anyhow, it is estimated from these rates that about 30% of *butsudan* owning households perform no ancestral rites, thus almost neglecting their *butsudan*.

We should not hastily conclude a decline of ancestor worship from the above observations. There are two reasons at least. First, comparative data for the prewar period and for the period right after the war are lacking. Second, it is possible that the practice rate remains almost the same as before though a change has occurred in the meaning of practice. For example, remember the extremely high *butsudan* ownership rate for the extended family households with widows which the Kakegawa study brought to our attention. For these households, the practice rate must be also high. The meaning of the practice is assumed to lie in the function of consolation of worshippers themselves by means of warm remembrance of the dead, comforting of their spirits, and spiritual contact of the living with the dead which was kept latent in ancestor worship under the *ie* system.

The following remark by Smith [1974: 113] summarizes such a change in the practice of ancestor worship:

...With the weakening influence of institutionalized Buddhism, households no longer need to be so concerned as they once were with the formally prescribed occasions of worship. The household may now worship its ancestors in the way it deems fitting and most efficacious. This may well represent the ultimate effect of the privatization of worship, for it is significant that no household reporting the most common patterns of worship apparently feels constrained to observe the seasonal, semipublic rites to the exclusion of all others...

The privatization of worship is nothing other than the increasing dominance of personal functions in ancestor worship. It has broken down the preeminent and orthodox pattern of worship, diversified the way of keeping a *butsudan* and helped to create forms of worship which are free from the constraints of sectarian and local customs.

RELIGIOUS GROUP MEMBERSHIP AND ANCESTOR WORSHIP

Ancestor worship of the Japanese was combined with Buddhism for many centuries. This was a characteristic of both Buddhism and ancestor worship in Japan [TAKEDA 1981: 19]. In prewar Japan, every family belonged to a religious group, mainly to a local Buddhist church, and a funeral ceremony and ancestral rites were performed in the manner prescribed by the religious group and local customs. Postwar economic growth, however, promoted regional migration and change of occupation, and as a result population with no religious affiliation has increased in urban centers.

In the above mentioned 1967 Tokyo suburban study, we asked both local residents and newcomers whether their households had experienced a funeral as the chief mourner, and, if not, whether they could think of any religious man to whom they might apply for a service when a death would occur. The funeral experience rate was 89% for local extended families, 54% for local nuclear families, 43% for newcomer extended families and 9% for newcomer nuclear families. Among non-experience households, the rate of respondents who had no idea about any religious man to whom they might apply for a service was 0% for local extended families, 12% for local nuclear families, 43% for newcomer extended families and 50% for newcomer nuclear families. Among the local households, the funeral experience rates were high, and for the non-experienced local households an affiliation with a religious group was generally definite, whereas among newcomer households, as represented by nuclear families, the funeral experience rates were strikingly low, and further, half of the non-experienced newcomer households did not know which religious group to ask for a service. They are called a "religiously floating population".

The religious affiliation of the newcomers viewed from the kinds of the religious bodies to which they would apply for a funeral service are: (1) established religions (about 40%); (2) new religions (about 10%); and (3) undecided (about 50%). All the households of the third category kept no *butsudan*. About 80% of the first and the second category had a *butsudan*. Among the *butsudan*-owning households, only one third practiced the "Bon" rite. The practice rate for the newcomer households in a Tokyo suburb was far lower than that in Smith's study. On the other hand, among local households, about 90% were affiliated with established religions (1), and the remaining 10% were new religion adherents (2) or had no definite affiliation (3). All of the first category households, except those with living founders, kept a *butsudan*, and 85% of them observed the Bon festival.

In short, those households as represented by local extended families are affiliated with established religions, mostly own a *butsudan* and practice the Bon rite. On the contrary, those as represented by newcomer nuclear families have neither religious affiliation nor a *butsudan*. In between these two poles, there are households affiliated with an established religion, keeping a *butsudan*, but lacking the Bon practice, and also those with established religion orientation but without *butsudan* ownership, and so forth. These instances are found more frequently among newcomer households than among local resident households.

Established religions, centering around the services for ancestor worship of the household, meet the needs of an individual family to perform rituals. Despite the declining popularity of established religions, people remain firmly connected with them in practicing ancestral rites. The ways to practice ancestor worship are largely prescribed by the established religion to which people belong. On the other hand, for those whose affiliation with an established religion has become tenuous because of residential shifts or other reasons, a variety of forms tend to emerge in the way of keeping a *butsudan* or of practicing ancestral rites.

Some of those who drifted away from the established religion to which they once belonged have come to be affiliated with a new religion. Among those religions, such sects as *Sōka Gakkai* and *Tenshō Kōtai Jingūkyō* do not make much of ancestor worship; yet, a majority including *Reiyūkai* set ancestor worship at the center of their rituals. *Reiyūkai* and offshoot sects from it conceive of ancestors bilaterally, totally different from the traditional concept of ancestor which was based on unilineal descent. They expound that the anguish and agony one suffers at present are caused by his dead ancestors unable to arrive at blissful state and hence in distress; in this respect, too, their concept of ancestor contrasts with that of *ie*, which emphasizes the benefit and the protection afforded by ancestors [KŌMOTO 1978].

For about ten years in the wake of the last war, when the Japanese were suffering from a serious economic shortage, the teaching that ancestor worship should relieve people from distress was persuasive; however, after rapid economic development took place and the living conditions of the people improved markedly, the notion of suffering ancestors has lost its appeal. Yet the concept of bilateral ancestor has become much more acceptable for the Japanese with the increasing popularity of nuclear family households.

The Japanese view of ancestor has been fundamentally conditioned by the way of household life and its change, but also influenced by the doctrine of the religious group to which the family belongs. Established Buddhism, once having been assured its influence by the feudal powers, had controlled the pattern of ancestor worship and, being supported by local customs, it continued to regulate ancestor worship even after the Meiji Restoration. However, it has now lost such an influence because the local custom which buttressed ancestor worship has collapsed under the impact of rapid social change. Thus, a variety of forms have appeared including a total absence of ancestor worship and partial or fragmental performance of the ritual. The weakened influence of established religions has led to the increase of the chances of people accepting a new religion, and as a result, the concept of ancestor and the ways of worship expounded by new religions have also expanded their influence.

CONCLUSION

Along with the change of *ie* after the Second World War a striking change has occurred in ancestor worship which had been supported by the *ie*. In the concept of ancestor, a shift has been observed from a unilineal descent to a bilateral orientation.

This has been reinforced by the concept of ancestor expounded by some new religions and has been accelerated by the general acceptance of a nuclear family form. As to the function of ancestor worship, jural functions such as to legitimize one's social status have weakened, and the personal functions such as to recall one's dead parents warmly and to console their spirits have been strengthened. The *butsudan*, the central object for the practice, is still kept by a majority of Japanese households, although various alternatives such as a temporary delay in setting up a *butsudan*, no ownership through one's life, or the equipment of a shelf resembling a *butsudan*, have emerged. Even among those keeping a *butsudan*, the worship practice rates are not always high and variations are also found in the ways of practice. This tendency is connected with the increasing significance of the personal function.

If ancestor worship of the Japanese has changed in this way, it must be said that the emerging forms are not ancestor worship as defined at the beginning of this chapter. If we call the traditional one 'classical ancestor worship', the emerging one which is bilateral kin centered and personal function oriented, free from the prescribed patterns of established religions, may be called 'modified ancestor worship'. Both the view of ancestor and rites of worship have been modified. In present-day Japan, classical ancestor worship is kept not only in farming villages but also among local households in cities, whereas the modified form has been accepted by newcomer households in cities or in suburbs. We may add that even modified ancestor worship hardly occurs among some newcomer nuclear family households. The above tendencies coincide with the variety found in continuity, change and breakdown of the traditional household in present-day Japan.

Although I emphasized a shift in ancestor worship among the Japanese, I do not deny that the modified ancestor worship existed already in former days side-by-side with the classical one. The latter was the norm claiming to be legitimate and proper, whereas the former was regarded as deviant and hence kept latent. After the war classical ancestor worship has virtually ceased to be the norm. It may remain only a norm, but no longer the sole norm. The modified one also has gained an informal legitimacy. If we can look at the shift from this perspective, we are in a position to treat both continuity and change impartially.

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