

The Natural Funeral (shizensou) in Japan Today

: movement, background, and the next world

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Introduction

With the complete collapse of the feudal system in 1868, the Japanese society experienced rapid modernization. At that time, the Japanese central government embraced a policy to promote many institutions from the West, in the areas of technology, politics, the economy, military affairs, education, and medical care. Western culture was also introduced into many areas of daily life, including clothing and the diet.

However, the traditional culture relating to the inner life of individuals did not embrace such change. This kind of radical change would not be accepted by the majority of Japanese when it came to dealing with their inner life of refinement.(1) These deeply-rooted traditions of their heritage still enrich their inner lives today. These traditions are well-known among overseas intellectuals as well.

There are some subcultures in Japan that are not as well-known in foreign countries. One such example is the funeral ceremony. The tradition of this Japanese subculture has seen considerable change since 1945, when Japan became a defeated country in World War II, especially, after the 1960's when the economy experienced rapid growth and change. One such example of change appeared in the natural funeral ceremony, which is the central object of this study. This change appeared at the last stage of the 20th century.

The purpose of this article is to show the realities of the natural funeral movement in Japan, to examine the demographical and social aspects and then to clarify the idea of the next world. Research of shizensou has just begun. Tetsuo Yamaori (1931-), one of Japanese well-known folklorists, began to research it from a folklore's point of view recently. There have not, however, been few researches from the sociological aspect. It is a rare example that is argued in this paper (Taguchi, 2003, pp.243-281). I will discuss the natural funeral of contemporary Japan from this sociological point of view.

In the first section, the definition of the natural funeral will be discussed. Next, the history of the funeral method in Japan will be outlined. In the 2nd section, I will present the origin of the natural funeral movement and the process of its development. In the 3rd section, this paper will discuss the demographic, social and cultural aspects of the natural funeral movement, based upon a background that involved a large proportion of the population moving

from the farming or mountain villages to the large cities. This resulted in rapid growth in the Japanese economy, which brought about a population explosion in the large cities. The social and cultural aspects include a decreasing population of children, the growing number of nuclear families, a heavy emphasis on ancestor worship, difficulty in management of ancestors' grave and a shortage of cemeteries. In the 4th section, I will try to closely examine the written records of people who experienced the natural funeral, focusing on their deaths, the next world and the important role of nature in the process. An animistic idea of the next world will be brought into view.

1 . What is shizensou (the natural funeral) ?

On the one hand a baby's birth in any society means the replenishment of a group member, while a man's death brings about the loss of a group member's place in society. A man/woman's death brings to an end that person's identity and role in society, including that person's involvement in social organizations, the family, the community, society and the nation. When a person dies, the funeral ceremony is the family's way of openly mourning their loss as well as remembering their loved one. Who will be able to fill the void or take up the role left by this family member's death? Cleansing the dead body, the wake, the formal funeral and the carrying of the coffin out of the house make up the first stage of the funeral ceremony. It is also called *the first funeral* in this essay. People who attend this ceremony should treat the corpse with a respectful attitude of dignity. The belief exists that the soul of the dead, which separates from the body, enters into a peaceful state of calmness, as the religious ritual sends the soul of the dead off to the next world. The second stage in the funeral ceremony involves carrying the coffin out of the house. It is called "the second funeral". There are some choices in the second stage, those being burial or cremation. Burial was the general funeral custom used during the Edo period. The people would mark the grave after burying the corpse. Even after modernization, this custom continues to be used in agricultural areas, fishing villages, and the city suburbs. Most people believed that the grave played an indispensable role in relation to ancestor worship.

Another choice is cremation. Cremation was the custom of choice used in ancient times. Mori discusses the customs and manners of scattering ashes in ancient Japan (Mori, 2003, 179-206). The ancient city of Kyoto in ancient times had crematory facilities to prepare the dead in the surrounding areas. Cremation in modern Japan seems to be a revival of sorts from that of

ancient times. There are, however, two differences, however. First, coal, oil, and electricity are used for crematory facilities in modern Japan, while firewood was used in ancient times (Yagisawa, 1994, pp125-148). Second, ashes are, generally put in the ossuary in modern day cremation, while the ashes of the deceased was scattered on the mountain or field in ancient times.

In the history of Japan, both the burial and the cremation have long been a part of Japanese held tradition since ancient times. According to Ohbayashi, in fact, the culture of funeral in Japan was originally more various (Ohbayashi, 1977). Burial became a generally accepted practice since the Edo period(1603-1867), when the feudal system of Japan was established. Confucianism believed that obeisance to one's superior for ancestor worship was very important. This was the philosophy for government. The ancestor is also believed to be superior; his power protects his descendants, as long as they uphold his memory, worship him and don't disgrace his honor. The philosophy of Confucianism believed that the grave was important. Buddhism also accepted this custom, as did its followers, who worked in cooperation with the governor in the feudal system.

The manners and customs adopted by the common people regarding the rituals of the grave date back to the time of the 1600's. At that time the established temples of the parishioners became certified as Buddhist temples. Following is a brief background to support this historical information.

Christianity was first introduced into Japan by the Jesuit missionary, Francis Xavier, in 1549. His preaching met with some success. At that time Christianity was accepted only by a few local rulers and the farmers, especially in Western Japan. It was generally tolerated until the beginning of the 17th century, when the Tokugawa shogunate eventually banned it and persecuted its followers. The shogunate changed the religious policy because of the farmers' revolt against a local ruler in Western Japan, who imposed a heavy tax on the farmers. The revolt was suppressed by the shogunate because he feared the spread of Christianity among the people. Buddhism was adopted as the new religion for ruling the people. All residents in a local community were required to register their child at birth and at death at the local Buddhist temple, according to the command of the shogunate and the local rulers. Each Buddhist temple was obligated to watch over and care for the residents in their local community. In return, the Temple was expected to preside over the funeral ceremony and memorial service for each bereaved family. The priests would receive an income from offering various services to their parishioners. To receive the rituals of the grave, the residents had to be certified, practicing Buddhists, in their manners and customs.

These practices became widespread in Japan during the Edo period, although there

were some exceptions. Graveyards were constructed in the precincts of the Buddhist temple for religious rites or for ancestor worship. Remains were not buried there under the gravestones; instead, the dead were buried in the graveyards shared by the parishioners in the regional community. Japanese folklorists give the concept of “*both grave systems*,” “*Ryobosei*,” a practice including the use of two kinds of graves (Yanagida, 1969, pp499-520. Satoh, 1984, pp.12-40, Mogami, 1997, pp.121-176). A certain region had the practice of putting up the gravestone in the very place where the dead had been buried. There was an exception, however. The believers of Jodoshinshu, one of the Buddhist schools, did not believe in erecting a gravestone, instead, they used the Buddhist altar enshrined in one room of their house, as a grave.

With the modernization of Japan, the practice of cremation resurfaced, for a couple of reasons. First, the rapid increase in population resulted in the lack of graveyard space, especially in the large cities.(2) To solve this situation, the local governments of the large cities constructed cremation facilities, and made large-scale graveyard sites in the inner cities as well as the surrounding suburbs, which they began to manage. Second, there was no objection among the Buddhist believers to using the cremation facilities because they did not consider cremation to be a taboo.

In Japan, the bereaved family received either part or all of the ashes of the deceased that had been baked in the cremation facilities, operated by the local city government. After a religious ceremony, these ashes were put under the gravestone for the family. The majority of Japanese people still hold to this practice today, which dates back to the time of the Meiji era. It would be an extremely gradual process for peoples’ attitudes to change from acceptance of burial to that of cremation. One hundred or more years would pass before its use became more favorable as it spread from the large cities to the small cities, the towns, and the villages.

There were several reasons for this slow change. First, the slow use of this technology to burn the corpse hindered the spread of the cremation process. Second, it was not necessary to construct cremation facilities in rural regions because the lack of graveyard space caused by urbanization was not a serious problem in those areas.

Since the 1960's, some small local governments have joined together to construct crematory facilities, with the support of the Japanese central government. As a result, almost all residents who wish to use these facilities have been able to do so today. An electric crematory is now used to burn the ashes of the deceased. How to manage the corpse is related to the religious faith of the deceased in each society. Determining their religious affiliation is necessary in processing the remains of a person’s body. The beliefs of Confucianism recommend burial in Japanese society, while the beliefs of Buddhism recommend cremation.

The secondary funeral ceremony of the corpse is a blending of the principles of both of these religious institutions.

In summary, two funeral methods, the construction of the grave for burial and the storing of the ashes of the deceased in the ossuary have been an established part of Japanese society for hundreds of years. The majority of Japanese believe the choice of a funeral method is deeply rooted in the tradition of their heritage, their manners and their customs. Burying the ashes of the deceased under the gravestone is a practice established only in the past 130 years. However, the majority of people cannot imagine considering other choices because their manners and customs are deeply rooted in tradition that dates back to old times.

The attitude of a lot of the Japanese people toward the death of a family member is roughly conservative. Keiko Kitagawa points out, "There is usually a tacit mutual consensus that the bereaved family has a right to decide how to perform the funeral ceremony". We find here an attitude deeply-rooted in tradition toward funeral manners and customs. Kitagawa explains the background related to such an attitude (Kitagawa, 2001, pp.196-197). "This shows that the old idea influenced by the house system which was based on an old civil law(3) remains still in our consciousness. In the house system, only the head of a family was able to plan the method of the funeral, including the ancestor's grave. As a result, until recently almost all Japanese women could not have a part in the planning of their own funeral. While they are alive, they are not open to any new methods regarding the funeral ceremony. Their attitudes about the funeral and the grave still reflect a conservative attitude. In their manners and customs, they still seem to be deeply-rooted in tradition.

However, in the last ten years of the 20th century, there has been, what appears to be, a fundamental change in the culture of the Japanese funeral. That involves the fusion of old elements with new ones. I will now discuss this change.

I begin with the definition of the natural funeral. In a very general sense, it means leaving the corpse untreated, in its natural state, to decompose into the earth from which it was formed. Burial at sea, or the exposure of a corpse to the elements, etc. might be included in this definition. The natural funeral means returning a man's ashes to nature, similar to a kind of ceremony after a body has been cremated. In Japan today, there are discussions which are targeted toward the natural funeral. I will use this definition in the following context.

Nature can be the sea, the mountain, the forest, the meadow, the river or the sky etc. The first natural funeral was conducted on the Sea of Sagami which is near Tokyo in 1991(Yasuda, 2000, pp.215-226). People who hope to have a natural funeral should register with a society called the *Grave-Free Promotion Society*. This society accepts people of any religion. It is a proponent of *the natural funeral movement* and this society will perform such a funeral. The

applicant signs a written contract with “*The Grave-Free Promotion Society*,” regarding the place, the date and the contractual method of the natural funeral. The applicant pays a designated fee, and thereby makes a contribution to *the natural funeral fund* for a fixed amount of money, which is managed by “*The Grave-free Promotion Society*.” A representative from the headquarters of or from one of its branches attends the natural funeral on the expected date in his/her capacity as witness.

The witness's role is to assist in the execution of the natural funeral for the deceased. One example of how this can be done involves a natural funeral that takes place in a mountain area, possibly executed in special place named *The Forest of Rebirth*. A member of the bereaved family will bring the ashes of the deceased person with him/her. The attendants, including the relatives, scatter the ashes on the root of a specific tree. Next, flowers are spread on the ashes, and water, sake, beer, whisky or wine is poured on them. All members then dedicate a short silent prayer to the memory of the deceased. At the very end of the ceremony the representative from *The Grave Free Promotion Society* hands a certificate over to the family to certify that the funeral has been executed for the deceased family member.

A natural funeral ceremony at sea will follow the basic procedure just outlined above for the funeral held in a mountain area. However, there are few differences, one which involves the blowing of a whistle by the captain to mourn the deceased. Another difference involves the three turning movements during the time of silent prayer.

This ceremony is not related to any specific religion, and it is the bereaved family as well as the deceased that decide the details of the ceremony. This may involve the playing of special music that the deceased liked or singing by the attendees. Sometimes favorite poems the deceased enjoyed are also read aloud. The wishes of the deceased and the bereaved family are honored and esteemed above all. This kind of natural funeral is referred to as "the suitable funeral for the deceased" among the bereaved family members. People have a choice of using the funeral ceremony that will bring the most meaning to them. This means choosing between the natural funeral ceremony versus the more traditional ceremony. The individualistic point of view is not deeply-rooted in the heritage of the people as the traditional ceremony.

Even if the natural funeral is seen as a revival of the ancient natural funeral, many people continue to have a hard time accepting the use of this ceremony because they are not that familiar with it. For them, it means losing the grave where their soul lives on, and the loss of the ashes, which are a symbolic foundation of their soul. Originally, the grave itself was viewed as the doorway of entrance into the next world, located in the midst of the surroundings of the grave. In fact, the Japanese are most afraid of being deleted from their family's memory. So they resist the use of any new manners and customs. Accordingly, this *ancient*, yet *new* expressive

funeral form might even create tension within the family, among the relatives and/or the local community. Resistance to change is stronger in the farming villages and local towns than it is in the large cities, because deeply-rooted manners, customs, and practices are more prevalent in the everyday life of the rural residents. A human being is the earthly animal which asks the meaning of its own existence and death. Most Japanese believed that his/her life is owed to the power of "hotoke". Though "hotoke" originally meant Buddha, it generally has come to mean the bereaved afterward in the next life. If the man/woman becomes a "hotoke" in the next world, he/she will soon become 'one' with a member of their own ancestor.

It seems that the appearance of the natural funeral can be viewed as an emergence of a new set of beliefs that has gradually risen in prominence alongside the more traditional beliefs of their heritage. This is seen as a radical change that is taking place in the people's beliefs.

2. Development of Shizensou Movement

For the past one hundred and twenty years, the Japanese people have believed that the performing of a natural funeral was not a sanctioned part of their heritage. For this reason, they have continued to construct graves. A nature conservation movement questioned such a tradition in the 1990s. It tried to defend the watershed forest of Tokyo. In this process, the movement has tried to inform the general public that the construction of large-scale graveyards would destroy the landscape in the natural environment, especially around the large cities. Afraid that the destruction would continue to get worse, more people who lived in the metropolitan areas began to support the "Grave-Free Promotion Society " (It is sometimes abbreviated "The Promotion Society") in 1991. This society has, in turn, continued to support the natural funeral movement. Its popularity continues to spread today. In 1991, "The Promotion Society" performed, for the first time, a natural funeral ceremony in the Sea of Sagami, near Tokyo (Yasuda, 2000, pp.215-226).

Why did this group go ahead and do this? Their leaders found out an important fact. The bereaved family members were only given a part of the ashes of the deceased in a small urn from the crematory. The remaining ashes were being processed as industrial waste. This is still being done today and is not forbidden by law. This also meant that the moderate natural funeral, done according to a specific ceremony, was not against the law.

The article of the law about "corpse destruction etc." stated, "It is necessary to impose the penal servitude code of three years or less against the person who damages, breaks, throws away or steals the remains of a corpse, including the hairs of the deceased or the things put in the

actual coffin. " From the context of this law, it was also a focus of concern as to whether the performing of the natural funeral corresponded to the actual "throwing away" of the "remains". The Criminal Affairs Bureau of the Justice Ministry issued an official statement immediately following the performing of the natural funeral. "In Article 190 of the criminal law, it is the purposes to protect the religious feelings as well as the social manners and customs. Therefore, it is not necessary to prevent the natural funeral, as long as the ceremony for the funeral uses moderation".

Similarly, the Welfare Ministry (later called the Ministry 2001 the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare) issued this official statement: "The Law concerning the graveyard and the burial etc." didn't forbid the performing of the natural funeral. These official statements removed any problems the natural funeral movement might have in performing these ceremonies. As a result, the popularity of this method increased. More natural funerals were performed in various parts of Japan, especially on the seas and in the mountains. The *Promotion Society*, in paid public announcements, advanced the theory of these two ideas "freedom of the funeral," or "*grave-free*" and "*self-decision about the funeral*". Whether these ideas suited those Japanese who favored the more traditional values of their heritage was not the question. These two ideas held strategic meanings for the leaders. In no way were they meant to take away from the manners and customs of those in authority.

Many symposiums were held in various places, centering in Tokyo. The mass media also helped to promote the advancement of this movement. The aim was to foster an attitude of international cooperation between Japan and another country, with the purpose of tying together the protection of the global environment with the natural funeral movement. This movement provided another, yet different, approach and choice from the customary practice of the traditional funeral and the values of morality that supported it. On the one hand, it faced opposition from the conservative people who were deeply rooted in the traditional manners and customs of their heritage. On the other hand, there was the opposition from the business interests groups, which maintained the customary practice of constructing the graves.

As "The *Promotion Society*" movement became better known, with increased membership, the graveyard industry and the bureaucrats who supervised the Environmental Health Bureau of the Welfare Ministry tried to limit the development of the natural funeral by law. They were, However, severely criticized by "*The Promotion Society*" itself. As a result, they were not able to enforce any restrictions by law because they could not justify their reasons for doing so. Afterwards, "*The Promotion Society*" was certified as being a NPO (A Non Profit Organization) by the Tokyo Prefecture in 2002. This NPO is headquartered in Tokyo. The number of members had reached 8,313 people as of August 25, 2004. All staff members, including the chief director, are volunteers. This *Society* has branches in each local region of the country. The number of local

branches total 12 in all.

Moreover, members attend regular branch meetings to keep them informed about its activities. “*The Promotion Society*” also publishes a news letter entitled, ‘*Saisei*’ (it means ‘*rebirth*’ in English), as part of its communication process with members. Their goal is to establish a unity and connection with members and to keep them informed on key issues. The headquarters of “*The Promotion Society*” holds an open symposium yearly that focuses on various themes. In turn, the local branches hold similar meetings to attract new members and promote its goals. Representatives from headquarters, as well as local directors, spend time discussing and answering questions posed from members as well as non-members. These meetings provide a useful exchange of information between these two groups. There is a record of 932 natural funerals conducted from 1991 to November 3, 2004(*GFPS*, 2004, No.55, p.17). Of these, about 70% have been performed at sea. The natural funerals in the mountains are conducted in “*the forests for rebirth*,” which are private lands owned by “*The Promotion Society*.”

There are ten “*Forests for Rebirth*” in the whole country. When a natural funeral is performed at sea, the area of choice must be decided. Natural funerals have been performed in foreign countries as well, including India, China, Mongolia, and America, etc (Yasuda, 2000, pp215-226). In these cases, a representative from the main headquarters must attend as a witness.

3. Background of Shizensou Movement

Some common features are found among people who have participated in the natural funeral movement. First, most participants are people more than 50 years-old, according the data which “*The Promotion Society*” has.(4) Proponents who wish the application of this funeral method must register with the organization that will execute their funeral. They whole-heartedly attend and participate in symposiums or meetings beneficial to this cause. These efforts reflect the serious nature of their intentions, regarding the handling of their own death plans. These people usually fall into the middle or older age category of people. Second, proponents are inclined to be residents who live in the city, especially in the metropolitan areas, where there is a serious problem regarding the lack of cemeteries nearby and hence, the shortage of grave sites (cf. figure 1). There may be a close correlation between the attitudes of those who support a natural funeral and the shortage of cemeteries.

Table 1. Prefectural Populations, the Number of Members of Promotion Society, and the Number of Members per 1,000,000 (Prefectures are Listed in the Descending order of the Number of Members per 1,000,000).

prefecture	population of 2001 (units in 1000)	No of Members (2001)	No of Members (per 1,000,000)
Tokyo	12138	2092	172
Kanagawa	8570	1395	162
Chiba	5968	710	119
Miyagi	2371	219	92
Saitama	6978	596	85
Shizuoka	3781	300	79
Hokkaido	5679	359	62
Kochi	813	44	54
Yamanashi	890	39	44
Ibaragi	2992	125	42
Aichi	7087	278	39
Tochigi	2010	70	35
Niigata	2473	86	35
Nagano	2223	71	32
Gunma	2031	61	30
Hyogo	5571	163	29
Fukuoka	5032	144	29
Okinawa	1329	38	29
Osaka	8818	242	27
Nara	1442	36	25
Iwate	1413	33	23
Yamagata	1241	29	23
Gifu	2111	48	23
Hiroshima	2879	65	23
Kyoto	2646	57	22
Kumamoto	1860	41	22
Fukushima	2125	42	20
Akita	1184	23	19
Mie	1861	35	19
Okayama	1953	36	18

Aomori	1474	25	17
Nagasaki	1513	26	17
Tottori	613	10	16
Ehime	1491	22	15
Shiga	1353	19	14
Saga	876	11	13
Kagoshima	1783	23	13
Wakayama	1066	13	12
Shimane	761	8	11
Miyazaki	1169	13	11
Toyama	1121	10	9
Yamaguchi	1524	14	9
Ishikawa	1182	8	7
Oita	1221	8	7
Tokushima	822	4	5
Kagawa	1022	3	3
Fukui	830	2	2
Total	127290	7696	—

Generally, for most Japanese, the grave is an important symbol for ancestor religious worship. The memory of an ancestor resurfaces in their consciousness as they pray in front of their grave. They are thankful for the life of the ancestor. Those residents in the megalopolis areas who strongly embrace ancestor worship often run into the problem of finding appropriate cemetery space. This lack of graveyard space has created a situation that has inevitably led to the appearance of the natural funeral.

(1) Demographic shift to large cities

First, large cities with a population of one or more million will be examined. A hundred years ago, the ancestors of most residents lived in farm villages. In the process of modernization of Japan (as in other advanced nations), however, most of the population migrated to the cities from farm villages all over the country. Urban residents needed to set up their own graves and/or to manage their parents' graves in large cities. However, the rapid increase in population over several decades has made this very difficult, and city residents are currently faced with the

decision whether or not to build family graves or not.

Before going further into discussion, the demographic background to the above problem will be analyzed. Based on population changes recorded every five years in each prefecture, we find a remarkable tendency for population to concentrate in and around large cities. The population of cities has increased significantly since 1920, except for a decline for about ten years after World War II. For example, the population of Tokyo in 1920 was 3,699,428, but increased to 7,354,971 in 1940. This shows that the population of Tokyo doubled in these twenty years. There clearly was population explosion in Tokyo between 1920 and 1940. Of course, natural population increase, calculated by the difference between births and deaths, contributed to this increase as well, but it cannot be explained solely by this. Therefore, it can be concluded that a large portion of the population increase is due to migration of people from rural villages to Tokyo. What are some interpretations that can be derived from this demographic background?

The rural community research by Kizaemon Ariga (1897—1979), well-known rural sociologist in Japan gives us an insight into problems created by these demographics. He wrote several excellent articles on the relationship between families in Japanese farm villages and population mobility before the conclusion of World War II (Ariga, 1969, pp.272-276). A summary of his discussion is as follows: Once people move from a farm village to a city in order to work, they join fixed social organizations. Thus, even if they are struck by an economic crisis, they will not necessarily return to the farm villages in which their relatives reside. Indeed, in the process of industrialization in Japan, farm villages provided most of the industrial labor force. In times of prosperity, the rural labor force moved to factories in cities, while during depression years, part of the city labor force returned to the farm villages. Of course, some of them became stable commercial labor forces in these cities. Although some of the labor force migrated repeatedly between cities and villages based on economic fluctuations, most remained in the former. Consequently, city population steadily increased over the course of years. Such a phenomenon cannot be explained sufficiently from the viewpoint of economics alone. It is necessary to add a sociological viewpoint.

People who moved to cities from farm villages and found work there were incorporated into various social organizations. For example, they married other urban residents and formed new networks of relatives. Also, at that time the company in Japanese society was not only a place of work, but also a place for socialization with the employers and among the employees. Even coworkers and superiors were invited to marriage ceremonies and/or to funerals. Since neighbors in a city helped each other in everyday life, the relationships were like that of migrants' hometowns. Additionally, associations of people from the same prefecture gave them

an opportunity to bring back memories of lives that they had shared together in the same hometown. It also offered them an important sense of identity.

Urban society is generally characterized by a lack of stability because of people's helplessness. Surely there are some features of the typical urban society in large Japanese cities after World War II. However, urban society in Japan after World War II was relatively stable, because the social and political order was sustained by the various communal connections in large cities. Therefore, urban residents originally from farm villages were able to feel the cities as their second hometowns. From the tendency of continuous increase in city populations during post-World War II period, it can be inferred that urban residents did not return to their hometowns even during economic fluctuations. As a typical example of the population explosion after World War II, we will take a look at the situations in the Tokyo metropolitan areas.

Soon after World War II, the population of Tokyo fell to the level of the 1920s. However, in 1955 when high economic growth started, it increased to 8,037,084, surpassing any pre-war periods. Finally in 1965, it exceeded ten million people, amounting to 10,869,244 persons. Thereafter, the upward tendency of the population of Tokyo leveled off and has been fluctuating at around two million people. In the meantime, population has increased rapidly in prefectures adjoining Tokyo (Saitama, Chiba, and Kanagawa). The population of each of these three prefectures was slightly over two million people in 1947. In 1975, however, at the time when high economic growth was almost completed, their respective populations numbered 3,866,472 persons, 3,366,624 persons, and 5,472,247 persons. After that, the rate of population increase in Kanagawa Prefecture was especially remarkable. The population of the prefecture had expanded to 8,245,900 persons by 1995, equivalent to about 3.7 times of the population in 1947. Similar trends are observable in other prefectures in areas where commerce and industry are concentrated.

There are two factors contributing to the population explosion in these metropolises. One factor is the natural increase due to new births and deaths within large cities. Another is social increase: population increase by inflow of immigrants into urban areas, because of employment, vocational change, and/or proceeding to higher education. It is presumed that during the difficult economic times after World War II, the number of people who returned to their farm villages was small. One reason for this was that people stayed in metropolitan areas because of multilayered social networks, and another is that mechanization inhibited inflow of population back into rural areas. The main labor force of the farm villages, that is to say, young men and women, migrated out into large cities especially from the second half of the 1950s to the mid-1970s. Each farmhouse compensated for the shortage in labor force by mechanizing,

and consequently, jobs requiring human labor like that of prewar periods were lost in the field of agriculture. This meant that rural areas lost the capacity to accept the reflux-flow of people from the cities during economic depressions.

Thus, since high economic growth began in the post- World War II era, many of those who migrated from agricultural villages remained in large cities, even in times of economic depression. They become a central part of the city population. This is clear from agricultural statistics which show sharp declines in both the number of farming households and the number of agricultural workers.

(2) Ancestor worship of those who left their hometowns

Generally speaking, for the immigrants to the cities, farm villages are not only places of nostalgia, but also places to which they were supposed to return. They are also where rites are periodically held to venerate the emigrants' ancestors. Therefore, they are expected return to their hometowns in August and December every year, with two purposes to be achieved. One is to meet with their family, relatives, and friends, and another is to participate in the religious services. However, when most of their family members or close relatives have died off or emigrated out of the villages, there is no longer is a place for them to return. This is when they begin to lose their hometowns. Such people become actual or potential consumers seeking for burial places in urban areas.

Most people who moved to the cities found another home there. As they progress in their life cycles, the social relations in the cities become more important than that of their hometown. Even today, Japanese cities provide immigrants with opportunities to be assimilated into urban social relations. For example, they are invited to attend coworkers' marriage ceremonies or funerals in their workplace, and help in neighbors' funerals. In any large cities, there are many headquarters of associations founded by people from the same prefectures. They are characterized by communality to some extent. Their new social ties have various functions replacing those of their hometown. Therefore, participation in these associations might have served to weaken the ties with their hometowns in everyday life.

Do immigrants to large cities maintain the tradition of ancestor worship? The old Civil Code laws stipulating that only the eldest son inherit a "homestead right" were abolished after World War II. However, the eldest son is still expected to manage the family Buddhist altar and grave, and to execute the rites of ancestor worship. Moreover, he and his spouse are also expected to take care of his parents. If he immigrates to a city, he will have to commission a relative to maintain the house, lands and the grave in his hometown. In such cases, the

relationships between him and his relatives are gradually estranged with generational transitions. Then, he may choose to abolish the family grave in his hometown, and newly construct a grave in a cemetery constructed by developers in urban areas.

On the other hand, second or third sons who left their hometowns have not been held responsible for maintaining their parents' graves, but instead have been socially expected to build their own graves in the city. Indeed for such people, this has been considered a life goal until recent years.

Kunio Yanagida (1875-1962), a famous Japanese folklorist once noted about "becoming an ancestor" (Yanagida, 1969, pp.11-12). According to him, this expression had been used as encouragement for sons who had the potential to succeed in the future but were not first-born sons. As they were often encouraged to do so by others, they themselves often set "becoming an ancestor" as an important goal in life.

The implications of the expression "becoming an ancestor" are also an appropriate statement about immigrants from the country who became permanent residents in Japanese cities after World War II. Even today, however, I would like to think that this norm resides in Japanese consciousness. If this is the case, a son who migrated to the city, would start a family of his own independently of his family of origin, and would leave behind his children a certain amount of property. He would build a new grave for himself, thus establishing a branch family and becoming a new starting point for succession of descendents. His offspring would, in the future, hold rites of ancestor worship for him. Thus, those who decide to permanently reside in Japanese cities are expected to complete the process of constructing social networks by "becoming an ancestor" and constructing their own graves.

Having lost their hometown, these people would form intimate social networks to replace the social ties they had in their homes, and hope to create second hometowns in these cities. However, the shortage of cemeteries in metropolises has become a serious problem. The Japanese government has recognized the situation and established a committee to investigate the problem in 1988. This committee submitted a report analyzing the context and current conditions of insufficiency of burial grounds in metropolitan areas in 1990. Additionally, in 1996, the Administrative Inspection Bureau, a governmental branch, advised the relief of procedural requirements on redevelopment of cemeteries in order to make it easier to reuse older grave sites.

In short, this problem is paradoxical. On one hand, the shortage of cemetery space has become serious especially in the large cities, and on the other hand, the number of *muenbo* (graves of deceased who left no relatives to take care of it) have increased remarkably in the same area. There are two solutions to this problem in large cities. One is to develop new

cemeteries or redevelop cemeteries for abolishing *muenbo*, and another is to popularize *shizensou*. Thus, permanent residents in the big city are pressed with two choices in such a serious situation; either to build a grave in the cemetery constructed by developers, or to choose *shizensou*.

(3) Reduced birthrates and a trend toward nuclear families

The management of a cemetery needs to fulfill growing demands. However, even if they try to abolish *muenbos* in order to expand area for new graves, new *muenbos* will still be required. This is because two social processes are at work: decline in birthrates, and a trend toward nuclear families.

More specifically, the first factor which produces *muenbos* is a decrease in birthrates. The number of elderly people without a male child increases as the birthrate continues to decline. As the oldest son is expected to take on the role of holding rites for ancestor worship in Japan, it is difficult to maintain the grave and the succession of ancestor worship when there is only a female child in a family. Consequently, there might be an increase in numbers of people who wish to choose *shizensou*, which does not require an individual or a family grave. On the other hand, if the customs respecting the direct line of descent are upheld, it logically follows that elderly people without children cannot be buried in family graves. If they are, in which grave they are buried, in general, depends on the courtesy of a brother, a sister, a nephew, or a niece after their deaths.

The second factor which produces *muenbo* is a trend toward nuclear families. This also creates difficulties in maintenance of graves. In past few decades, it has become common for young adults to establish separate households away from their parents. The proportion of people living in a three-generation household has declined, and children longer have the experience of watching their elders pray to ancestors. Consequently, the idea of traditional ancestor worship is fading gradually.

There are two choices from which a permanent city resident can select in order to maintain his grave. One is to actively foster relationships toward his hometown, territorial connections, and/or blood relations, and to ask a blood relative in his place of birth to maintain his parents' grave. In such a case, he and his spouse could expect to be buried in the grave.

Another is to abolish the grave in his hometown and to build a new grave in the city where he resides. As this type of individual increases, demand for graves in large cities also increases. However, some uncertain factors still remain, because one cannot expect his (her) child or grandchild to maintain traditional ancestor worship, since in Japanese society many children are more likely than not to live separately away from their parents.

(4) Religious secularization and graves

Religious secularization is another of the contextual backgrounds as to why people came to hold interest in *shizensou*. Generally in Japan, conventionally, a Buddhist priest's position has been passed down through generations. A specific temple has maintained a fixed relation with specific Buddhist parishioners. In return for religious services which the priest provides to the people, he is compensated in the form of monetary reward. This tendency has grown even stronger over time.

Secularization of Buddhism in Japan has had a long history since the Edo period. Three important features of secularization in recent years are as follows. First, a priest receives a fee called *fuse* from a bereaved family for every religious service that he performs. Secondly, it is common for a priest to charge a bereaved family for creation of "a posthumous Buddhist name," a special name which will be engraved on a gravestone. Thirdly, the temple manages a cemetery as a business, and gains large profits. Antipathy and criticism of such secularization of established Buddhism is strong among people who aspire to *shizensou*.

At the same time, in large cities, the cost for purchasing the usufruct of a cemetery's section and gravestone is extremely high. This is one of the reasons why people in the large cities tend to choose *shizensou*. Due to default in payment of management fees, there are cases where people lose their exclusive right to use the burial grounds. Furthermore, if descendents are unaware of notification for the redevelopment of a cemetery, developers are permitted to dispose of the gravestones as waste materials. Those who are aware of such instability have begun to shift their attention to *shizensou* as a choice for their secondary funeral.

4. Social Relations in *Shizensou*

In Japanese society, statistics of religion do not reflect the actual conditions correctly, because it is not rare for an individual to belong to two or more religions. However, Buddhists clearly occupy 90% or more of population. Therefore, the following discussion mainly relates to Buddhist funeral rites.

With just a few exceptions, Buddhism in Japan today has turned into a religion only for funeral rites and ancestor worship, and people do not expect any other functions besides these. In traditional Japanese society, funerals were mainly executed by priests, family, neighbors, and relatives. However, the funerary form has changed remarkably owing to urbanization and the spread of cremation institutions.

Three such changes are as follows. First, morticians came to be deeply concerned with

funeral preparations. This change started in large cities and has recently extended to farm villages. Secondly, members of various kinds of groups to which the dead belonged while they were alive came to attend funeral rites. Thirdly, the spectacle of seeing the dead off in fields or woods has disappeared from our view for several decades even in farm villages. This was a spectacle in which a long funeral procession which consisted of the family, relatives, and people of shared territorial bonding marched to the cemetery. Ever since morticians began to prepare a motor hearse, only the family and close relatives came to drive to the crematory in cars, and that long funeral procession disappeared from sight.

Generally, changes in the *second funeral* ceremony performed after departure of the hearse have not been as remarkable as changes in the first funeral performed before the departure of the hearse. In the second funeral most bereaved families receive cremated ashes of the dead body, and place them in a family or community grave for storage. On that occasion, the family and relatives attend the ceremony of laying the ashes in the grave executed according to a priest's leadership. This custom is common even now.

However, the new *shizensou* practice does not follow such customs. Even if the dead is Buddhist, a priest does not attend a *shizensou*. Generally speaking, the participants are composed of the family (relatives may also join this) of whom one or more is a member of the "The Promotion Society" and "observers" who are also members of this society. Moreover, if the bereaved family agrees with participation in advance, any member of this society can participate in this ceremony. This new style that members of the enforcement organization of *shizensou* based on the principle of non-profit attend the ceremony and help bereaved family instead of priest is a remarkable feature of *shizensou*.

In Buddhism, each family belongs to a certain temple, and the family receives religious service as a unit. On the other hand, in the "The Promotion Society" enforcement organization of *shizensou*, each individual is a unit. That is, not a family but an individual joins this society. Then, the values of self-determination and personal freedom are emphasized as important. Of course, both admission into this society and withdrawal from it are free of charge. The individual and the society make a contract with each other, and each expect the other to carry out the contract. Observers do not need any qualifications in principle other than holding membership in this society. He or she goes to the ceremony place with the bereaved family carrying a *shizensou* enforcement certificate published from headquarters. He/she usually performs a short "*non-religious ceremony*", offering a silent prayer, and delivering a certificate. This is his/her minimum role. The bereaved family determines the details of the enforcement method of *shizensou* on location. An observer assists the ceremony according to the bereaved family's self-determination. In rare cases, the contractor of *shizensou* may not be a member of

the dead's bereaved family nor relative, but rather, for example, a best friend. Moreover, everyone can contract with the “*The Promotion Society*” regardless of their social attributes and expect a certain execution of their desire.

At any rate, both observers and contractors of *shizensou* are members of the “*The Promotion Society*”, and also become new friends. In *shizensou*, as explained above, volunteer members are dispatched from this society to attend the ceremony in addition to the family or relatives, and help them. Furthermore, interestingly, when a bereaved family gives permission, the volunteer members may scatter ashes there with the bereaved family. Generally, members of the “*The Promotion Society*” were people who have nothing to do with each other before associating themselves with the society. Nevertheless, an intimate and communal network is formed among them.

Now, their social attributes are various, as are their religious and political convictions. Since they share the same values and view of the world as “*symbiosis with nature*”, and “*revolution with nature*”, they form an intimate network.

5. Symbolism of the Next World in *Shizensou*

Shizensou carried out in the pattern described above shows that the old traditional custom of laying ashes under a gravestone are breaking down. However, it is true that for the moment there are still very few instances of *shizensou* compared with old style second funerals.

Even so, according to some investigations (note), over half of adult Japanese are in conditions that make them potential proponents of *shizensou*. Therefore, an increase in *shizensou* can be forecasted with certainty in the future. The specific details and method of today's *shizensou* are different from the scattering of ashes executed in ancient times. For example, although ancient people believed that they looked at the soul of the dead in the rising smoke of the cremation, today's proponents of *shizensou* do not do so. In addition to this, the former did not scatter the deceased's ashes in the sea, but on the contrary the latter do so.

However, certain common features can be found. What is there in the core of people's feeling, beliefs and ideas who support the modern *shizensou* movement? First, it is a strong aspiration towards nature. Second is an extended and diversified conceptualization of the next world. For *shizensou* proponents, the next world spreads out from the cemetery to distant mountains, to the sea, the earth, and the universe. In a word, the concept of the next world has become diversified. This is a significant change which we cannot overlook.

It is true that Western civilization changed many external aspects of Japanese lives.

Railways, spinning mills and enterprises were constructed all over the country. Nevertheless Japanese society has kept many traditional aspects until recently in our spiritual world, for long since the Meiji Restoration. The next world for Japanese has always been within the boundaries of villages or towns. According to Kunio Yanagida, one of the features of the Japanese view of ancestors is that “they repeat exchanges with descendants without going far away after death.” (Yanagida, 1969, p.42) Mogami also discusses this problem and have the similar conclusion (Mogami, 1984, pp34-38).

On the contrary, *shizensou* proponents have expanded the “other world” to the range of all the earth. This paper will examine and clarify in detail the strong aspiration for nature, diversification and expansion of the next world, and the world symbolized by *shizensou* proponents. Data to be utilized are written reports sent by members of “*The Promotion Society*” to the editor of “*Saisei*” (note: this means “rebirth” in Japanese).

The first example is a written enforcement report by a woman whose husband passed away at 59 years old from rectal cancer. His ashes were scattered in the Sea of Sagami. She described the scene as follows (GFPS, 2000, No.39, p.18).

"... we, the relatives and my spouse's friends, took the big sailing boat with the name of Sirana and scattered his ashes in the sea. Now that my husband has been released from his travails of hospital life, I wish him to enjoy his favorite hobbies of travel and photography together with his friend with whom he shared the same hospital room. "

In this case, it is not clear whether the dead's “other world” is the Sea of Sagami or the sea all over the world. Anyway, she imagines that in next world her spouse will surely be able to enjoy the pleasure interrupted in this world. Furthermore, she believes that this world and the next world keep a kind of continuity at a spiritual level.

In another example, the sea as is described as a paradise of the next world. A certain woman who lost her spouse in 1997 donated his body to medical science according to his last wishes. His dead body returned in 2000 was cremated, and his ashes were scattered in the sea in accordance with *shizensou*. A part of her report is extracted here (GFPS, 2000b, No.39, p.18).

"Our family has an inherited grave. However, my spouse drew up a will against traditional funeral rites. Two points were included in the will. One was that his bereaved family did not need to hold a funeral after his death. The second was that his ashes should

be scattered at sea near his beloved Okinawa. He not only wrote these two points in the will, but also repeatedly stated them when he was alive.... He was informed by his doctor that he had cancer of the liver, and had three months to live. He refused all medication, injections, operations and other medical treatment after that. Of course, he did not apply for admission to a hospital either. He put his affairs in order and enjoyed watching baseball games on television. He also created haiku poems. And he met his death calmly three months later as the doctor had warned.”

She visited the Kerama Islands which are composed of coral reefs in October of that year, in order to carry out the *shizensou* with her family and relatives.

"According to the deceased's last wish, we scattered ashes in the sea near the islands. ... Flower petals were scattered in the sea along with his ashes, and we saw my husband off on his new journey there. Then, the ship circled 3 times and sounded a whistle of condolence. We prayed in silence and held the ceremony of separation. In the coral reef, my husband is glad to play with the fishes now. I am thankful to you that such a wonderful romantic funeral rite was able to be carried out. ... I imagined him raising one hand and leaving saying good-bye then. I believe I will surely meet him again. I felt a delicate palpitation of my heart then. "

The sea is the next world for her, so her spouse's *shizensou* in this sea means the shift of the soul of her husband to the next world and the beginning of "a new trip." The surrounding sea of *Kerama Islands* is not the sea of her husband's hometown. Even so, it was chosen as a significant location. The next world then is not a limited nearby area but rather an infinitely widespread space. Furthermore, she imagines her spouse starting out on a new trip, and that she and her spouse are going to be together soon in the next world.

Through these examples, we see the strong will of those who try to free themselves from traditional burial customs. In addition to the example above, there are many other people who have carried out *shizensou* in the sea. If we analyze carefully many reports sent to the editor, we can understand well how they represent the sea. Here is another example (GFPS, 2001, No.43, p.9).

“The Chinese character "sea" is made up of several parts. One of these is another character meaning "mother." The sea is the symbol of a large deep mother's love. I thought this sea was a suitable place in which my mother might sleep. Mother ! Thank

you for living with me, for so many years. "

This is an example from a woman who scattered her mother's ashes in the Sea of Sagami, where *shizensou* is carried out most frequently. She feels the large deep sea is the symbol of her mother's love. This woman imagines that she herself will return to the Sea – i.e. to her mother - as well. In other examples, the sea is talked as "the sea which is the origin of all life." Generally, people who choose *shizensou* in the sea show a strong tendency to imagine the next world as follows ? It is dark and damp in a grave and it is the damp space. Moreover, it is also the space which shuts up the dead. On the contrary, the next world is a bright space in which the dead moves freely around and turn about. The dead's soul is asleep, but when it wakes up, it moves about freely in space. The next world is, so to speak, Nirvana (*note), and the sea is the symbol of Nirvana. The sea where "my mother sleeps" in the example quoted above, as the next world is the perfect space for Nirvana. The bereaved imagine themselves also going there soon and plan reunions with the dead.

What is the image of *shizensou* in a mountain or woods? I will examine some examples below. The first example was performed in 1999 in the "*The forest of rebirth*" in the area called *Niseko* of *Hokkaido Prefecture*(GFPS, 2000a, p.6). The deceased's elder brother contributed the following report to the newsletter.

"We scattered her ashes and petals at the root of a young pine. Then, we read poetry. The last wish of *Setsuko*, a younger sister, was achieved at last. I prayed for her. Oh my sister! Sleep calmly in this forest. And I said good-bye to the younger sister who slept in the forest. "

It seems that this bereaved family who chose *shizensou* generally has the feeling of "having fulfilled a promise with the deceased" as shown in "The last wish was achieved at last" said in this example. Moreover, "*The forest of rebirth*" is symbolized as a place where the dead sleeps peacefully. As we see in this example, the breadth of the spatial image of the next world in the forest is limited compared with that of *shizensou* in the sea. But compared with graves and charnels, it can be imagined as a vast free space.

The second example is written by certain woman who performed *shizensou* of her mother who died at 55 years old in the "*The forest of rebirth*" in the *Kiyoshi Highland* of *Nagano Prefecture*. She wrote in the newsletter of the "*The Promotion Society*" as follows (GFPS, 2000a, pp.5-6).

"... when the mother died, I came to know about the "*The Promotion Society*" from a note described in her notebook. Then, I thought that I would fulfill my mother's last wish as her only daughter. I scattered my mother's ashes in the mountain that I felt a holy place on that day. When I scattered them, I felt I heard my mother's voice in the wind. It seemed that the voice said "thank you my daughter, *Tomoko*." While we were praying in silence, tears welled up in my eyes ceaselessly and I wiped the tears from my eyes. My mother had lived together with me, experiencing many difficulties. However, I was able to think from the bottom of my heart that her difficulties were rewarded by *shizensou*. I have survived and become lonely. My sadness is too deep. However, if my ashes be scattered in these woods, I will meet again with my mother and we will surely be able to live together again. While I expect that that good day will come soon, I live, doing my best now. "

It can be guessed that this family consisted of only two members, a mother and her child, judging from expression of "I have survived and become lonely." The writer thinks that she was able to fulfill her dead mother's hope. The forest where *shizensou* was carried out symbolizes a holy place. She expects that *shizensou* will be executed for her as well, when she dies, and she believes that she shall return to nature and meet her mother again. As seen in the examples of *shizensou* in the sea, meeting again with the dead is not achieved by inviting the dead's soul back to the living world, but rather it is realized when the living pass on and advance to a forest, mountain, etc. which represents the next world. The traditional idea of calling back the dead soul to this world, which is very characteristic to East Asia, is not included in this concept. In the idea of the proponents of *shizensou*, the dead soul enters into various plants in the woods, makes flowers bloom, and becomes fruit and nuts.

This third example is of a certain *shizensou* carried out in 1999 in the "*The forest of rebirth*" of *Nishitama County of Tokyo Prefecture*. About this *shizensou*, the wife of the nephew of an old woman who passed away at the age of 89 wrote in the newsletter as follows (GFPS, 2000a, pp.11).

"It was a very beautiful forest. Many small flowers were in bloom. In the ceremony of nonchalant scattering of her ashes, we were able to fulfill the last wish of my aunt at last. It was a day which will always remain in my heart. I have realized that man returns to nature. At the same time, I was able to realize that my aunt's lifetime was a great one. ... I think she has left us a great gift. I felt we human beings are a part of nature."

She had a desirable impression of the forest, and she told of her satisfaction at being able to fulfill the last wish of the dead. In this report, she imagines assimilation of the human body to the ground, where flowers bloom at each season. Here, the image of the next world is rather weak, but we can imagine that the ashes enter into circulation of lives in nature through *shizensou*. There are many examples of representation of the next world similar to these. As a conclusion drawn from these and other examples, I will summarize below the next world view of people who desire *shizensou* in two points.

First, the proponents of *shizensou* imagine the dead as regaining their own physicality, as existences which continue to live in an indefinite nature. It seems that this tendency is remarkable in the cases of *shizensou* especially in the sea. Secondly, the traditional ancestral idea is faint among the proponents of *shizensou*. In any Japanese traditional local community, the living usually visit their family graves during the period of the *Bon Festival*. However, on the contrary, *shizensou* proponents do not support such a tradition any longer. In fact, we hardly find the term “soul” in any of the newsletter reports, although the soul is sometimes the topic of the symposium sponsored by the “*The Promotion Society*”. However, since the members have various religions, the leaders of this society are prudent in arguing about this topic. Although members are free to talk about souls, the term rarely appears.

However, a single exception can be found in the following enforcement report of a certain observer of this society in the newsletter (GFPS, 2000b, No.39, p.1).

"Many petals formed a beautiful arc that decorated the sea surface forever. I felt that the dead's soul soared up to the heavens".

This is an extremely rare example in which the term ‘soul’ was used. Nevertheless, we can probably say the following about the dead's soul from this. Most of the proponents of *shizensou* do not invite the dead's soul to this world. Whenever the living want to meet the dead's soul, they visit the sea or forest and meet again with the dead's soul there. In other words, the dead's soul is waiting for the day when the living will visit there. We can conclude that the next world view is radically developing.

conclusion

Looking back upon the *shizensou* movement, background and view of the next world, we

can conclude that the leaders of the “*The Promotion Society*” started this massive campaign as a reaction against modernization symbolized by uncontrolled development of land and reshaping and destruction of nature. In order to stop the destruction of nature by development of cemeteries, the demand for graves needed to be decreased. For this purpose, the necessity of a grave had to be neutralized. For this, they introduced the concept of “*grave-free*.” In connection with this idea, they aimed at the release of people's consciousness from the traditional *second funeral* of laying one's ashes under a gravestone, and proposed to Japanese society the concept of self-determination in deciding the method of the *second funeral* after one's death by oneself.

At the same time, on the one hand, they had to show the possibility of *shizensou* as a choice for the *second funeral* besides laying one's ashes under a gravestone, and on the other hand they had to assert the legitimacy of *shizensou*. Thus the leaders of this movement invented a simple ceremony which did not incline toward a specific religion, in order to develop itself as an integrated movement and to give concreteness to *shizensou*.

Thus, the leaders of this citizens' campaign invented various strategic concepts and concrete methodology, in order to attain the target of stopping uncontrolled development of nature. A remarkable invention is the contract of *shizensou* before one's death. Probably, people who face resistance of their own conservative family or relatives would not be able to realize *shizensou* after death without this contract, although this contract is not always foolproof.

This posed a dilemma for the citizens' campaign. In order to stop the development of nature on the basis of the logic of *modernization*, they had to utilize the *modern* logic of the contract before one's death in the *modern* legal system. Nevertheless this campaign resulted in the NPO “*The Promotion Society*” which has obtained many inspired proponents and volunteers in the last ten years, and has carried out *shizensou* in “*forests of rebirths*” and seas all over the country.

This paper focused especially on the *shizensou* proponents' view of the next world. Through examples given above, some features of the view of the next world which many sympathizers share have been clarified. Although they seem to be different from each other, they are common in the point of view that man returns to nature after death. A few members of “*The Promotion Society*” seem to understand this return to nature from the viewpoint of natural science.

Most members of this society, however, believe in the reality of the next world and the perpetuity of the dead's soul in the next world. The soul which goes to the next world continues to live in the vitality of nature, without returning to man's world again. I conclude that

an animistic concept of the next world has remained deep in the Japanese culture and psyche, and has just begun to reappear distinctly through the opportunity of the citizens' campaign of *shizensou*. We see a symbiosis, a happy marriage of nature and animism. Of course, we cannot claim that *shizensou* will shape the mainstream Japanese *second funeral*. However, it will be increasingly welcomed by many Japanese as an important alternative form of funeral rite.

(The End)

NOTES

- (1) This would include such examples as the ukiyo-e, No, Japanese elaborate wooden architecture, chivalry, Zen (a school of East Asian Buddhism), and the tea ceremony, etc.
- (2) Japan, as a modern state, adopted a new demographic policy that would expect to see growth in their population. The population of Japan during the Edo period was about 35 million people. Since that time, the population has continued to increase, especially in the metropolitan areas, and today the population is 120 million or more people.)
- (3) It was enacted in 1890.
- (4) Although many in the younger age group support this method, according to some opinion polls, it is rare that they, in fact, actually carry through with such a funeral. At such a young age, they rarely think about their own death or that of their parents. As such, they do not think to make plans for it, either.

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