

# **De-ritualization of *Kankonsōsai***

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To grasp the workings of interest vs. disinterest in observing rules around ritual behavior in Japan I decided to take a fresh look into what is known as *kankonsōsai*. In the term *kankonsōsai*, *kan* 冠 refers to events covering the period of a person's life from the pre-natal stage up to the moment of becoming an adult. *kon* 婚 refers to the steps from meeting to marriage, *sō* 葬 to the ceremonies related to death and burial, and *sai* 祭 to the proper execution of rituals to remember the deceased ancestors. Most *kankonsōsai* materials include, often as an appendix, information on properly acting and dealing with situations and festive events in other contexts as well, in an abridged way thus overlapping with another body of prescriptive, normative materials produced under the title of *reigi sahō* (translatable as etiquette).

Basically, *kankonsōsai* can be seen as one specific set of rituals, linked to the stages of human life from before birth until after death. Importantly, they cover a field that we should not segment into secular and religious, but look at as stages that require attention paid to both an actual and a transcendental addressee in order to secure safe continuity of life and generations.

The four characters *kankonsōsai* catch the eye of customers in bookstores and even passers-by at small bookstands in the form of a vast number of materials providing instructions for what to do at special events. Also a mass of internet sites on *kankonsōsai* can be taken as evidence for the number of persons today seeking either to teach or to learn their correct performance.

When studying *kankonsōsai* materials we should remember that they are both in the literal sense of the word conservative as well as appealing especially to persons with a conservative frame of mind. In other words, they are materials whose contents of necessity show a cautious approach to new times, aiming mainly at an adult readership born, raised and socialized in the past and now seeking advice on how to act in the present. [1] *Kankonsōsai* must thus by definition be at least in line with assumptions shaped in older times, and the materials devoted to them tend to be characterized by a need to mediate between the generations. Therefore, present-day reality in many an individual case could certainly deviate from what the materials normatively presenting them suggest.

Nevertheless, keeping these points in mind, one of the most striking aspects of present-day *kankonsōsai* materials is how they mirror at least a growing awareness that what they describe need not be understood as rigidly fixed in form and linked to the essence of being a good Japanese citizen. Yet once rituals have lost their deeper levels of meaning conferring strong group identity, can they then still be called rituals?

### **Rituals and Their Agents**

In this chapter I speak of ritual in the sense of recurrent and predictable complex sequences of activity as far as they are learnt behavior whose constituent elements are fully subordinate to a specific meaning of an overall, completed performance with a recognizable identity. If this overall meaningful performance is secured over time by the stability of its core elements, this gives those participating the opportunity to both share and reproduce the ritual and thus develop group identity in relation to it. In my understanding of ritual I thus take up the central concepts developed by Wulf/Zirfas (cf. Wulf/Zirfas 2004a and 2004b; Wulf 2009).

Relatively stable performances of complex patterns of activity can easily be interpreted by outsiders as "culture" or "cultural identity" and appear detached from what the actors are actually doing and thinking. Yet actors are always human subjects, and cultural patterns of whatever kind can only exist on the basis of the human will to perpetuate them, independently of how this will has been brought about – through decision, fear, pressure, or mechanical adherence to the rhythm of community life. Are Japanese social actors today then willing to perpetuate rituals of the past?

At this point we should note that from the later nineteenth century onwards, and quite particularly again in the post-war era, Japan has seen unusually intensive efforts to produce prescriptive, normative materials for a general public (cf. Saitō 2006: 214-222). Consciously or not, the sheer amount and the descriptive precision of these materials have contributed to Japanese identity in the particular sense of something that gives Japan a sense of "self" in the face of its rivals, the Western powers of the time. Books, magazines, schools, influential persons, and, very importantly, company training have all been conducive to what we might call a true over-kill of such normative material. Not only that, but this normative material also had the "fortune" of being distributed within a society that had an extraordinarily developed technology and organization to do so.

The term "ritual" is often associated with a religious dimension and thought of

as packages of activity performed faultlessly and under tension, which I interpret mainly as the result of a communicative situation lacking feedback when the other party is a deity, a transcendent force, a deceased person or an ancestor. In Japan many rituals in this sense were addressed to the dead, and in the immediate historic past they were used to drive home the fixed positions of individuals and social groups in *keifu* (genealogical tables) with all the ancestors present, thereby deliberately linking the living to the dead and creating awareness of place and duty (Saitō 2006: 20-27, cf. also Torigoe 1985).

May we then state that Japanese cultural identity is characterized by a high degree of ritualization? The answer could only then be "yes" if we were able to prove that forces have worked towards freezing the shape of patterned activity over a longer period of time so that separate, distinct elements have melted into dense layers of overall meaning for its performers. However, as mentioned, any mechanism to provide such stability is dependent on human beings who maintain it. No rituals can make up "Japanese cultural identity" apart from living subjects, and these might choose to faithfully perform, change or also reject them.

Obviously, once living subjects no longer show any inclination to perform a ritual, and take no interest in the resulting sense of belonging, the rules that protect the identity of rituals through time will become irrelevant.

### **Historical Context**

Not surprisingly, the de-ritualization of *kankonsōsai* is a topic being widely reflected upon. I will present some aspects of the corresponding debate by first taking a closer look at *Kankonsōsai no Himitsu* (The Secrets of *Kankonsōsai*) by Saitō Minako, published in the Iwanami Shinsho series - influential in shaping intellectual debate in Japan – in 2006. Saitō's book is ambiguous in its aims, making orientation in the course of reading somewhat difficult. It is a very personal book often acidly commenting on rituals and corresponding assumptions from a standpoint highly critical of traditional gender roles. At the same time it seeks to combine the debate about adapting *kankonsōsai* to contemporary Japan with concrete planning advice for all kinds of festive events, details of which would be too numerous to recount here. Finally, and above all, it is also a history book in the sense that Saitō's sharp and critical eye draws *kankonsōsai* out of unreflected assumptions about Japanese tradition and places them into historical context. By thus destroying the mythological aura of *kankonsōsai* she

contributes in a stimulating way to the process of their de-ritualization. [2]

#### From the Meiji period to the *kaisha shakai* of the 1970s

One of Saitō's principal aims is to show the arbitrary nature of the starting point at which complex action related to *kankonsōsai* begins to develop into the kind of ritual we associate with it today. For ritualization to happen, she argues, a number of agents are necessary. The two most important agents that produced what are mostly seen as traditional Japanese ceremonies were, according to Saitō, the state, and entrepreneurs (Saitō 2006: 6-12).

The state, or more precisely, those who in the Meiji period [1868-1912] were able to assert themselves as "the state", had a number of goals to achieve, which they did by establishing rituals. First, proud national subjects on a par with the West needed to be created; second, an authoritarian structure of social order was necessary to secure the interests of the state down to the lowest possible level; third, a clear concept of monogamous man-woman relationships had to be established, considered indispensable for an enlightened society. [3]

These three goals were to be achieved first by propagating so called Shinto rituals, to be understood as extremely ancient and thus authentic and indisputably Japanese, and above all not "religious" as the West understood this word (Saitō 2006: 6-9; 18). [4] Second, these goals were to be gained by expanding the notion of the "house" (*ie*) as it was known among samurai and rich land owners to the entire population (Saitō 2006: 26), which needed to be integrated into household registers and observe rituals built around *nyūseki* (entering the register from outside), and quite particularly also around a common household grave and household ancestors (Saitō 2006: 20-23) [5]. Third, these goals were to be accomplished by using weddings – including weddings of the imperial family - to present ritually a vision of a monogamous husband-wife relationship (Saitō 2006: 21-22).

For *kankonsōsai* rituals to take shape in the early twentieth century still another group of agents was necessary: entrepreneurs. Hotels and restaurants, [6] as well as shrines, joined forces by seeking business and providing wedding packages in line with the state's goals of binding the population into an explicitly non-Western spiritual framework, into *ie*-type extended households, and into a husband-wife pattern of male-female relationship driven home by new shrine rituals. [7] In spite of their non-Western appeal, the latter were clearly modeled after church weddings (Saitō 2006: 11). [8] These first efforts at streamlining the private lives of citizens stood in contrast to

contemporary customs controlled by the local *wakamonogumi* and *musumegumi* (young men's and young women's associations) (Saitō 2006: 27) and including bridal processions without contact to shrines, or *yobai* (creeping into a girl's house), recalled for instance by aged villagers in the mountains of the Aizu region interviewed in 1973 by the ethnographer Yukawa Yōji (Yukawa 1990: 45-48).

As for funerals, they were not given the attention that weddings received. The actual burials were for a long time the responsibility of the villagers themselves, who as a rule appointed individuals (often referred to as *sōshiki-gumi*, the group responsible for burials; Saitō 2006: 14) to help bury the dead on their family land. [9] The attempted abolishment of Buddhist temples in 1868, however, led to their increased activity with regard to funerals and associated rituals as they were forced to seek new forms of business particularly in the field of memorial services (Saitō 2006: 14).

As we approach the Shōwa period [1926-1989] further agents contributed to new developments of *kankonsōsai* rituals: the city, and the print media, including women's magazines (Saitō 2006: 28-29). [10] As ever more people flowed into the cities, they became increasingly isolated from the rules of individual villages and from the norms set by elder men and women there to give order to the human life course. Handbooks like *Kekkon no Shiori* (A Guide to Marriage; Homori 1927) or *Nihon Konrei-shiki* (Wedding ceremonies in Japan; Kodaira 1929) therefore become very explicit about what to do, for instance in order to properly pass through the first night. They gave instructions as to the *neya sakazuki no shiki* or ritual of exchanging sake cups in the room, and the *tokoiri no shiki* or ceremony of the marriage consummation itself, and, if necessary, how to obtain medical help (Saitō 2006: 37-39). They also outlined how to deal with the intricacies of divination tables and the use of the calendar to secure an auspicious fate (Saitō 2006: 39-42). Finally, they informed readers how to prevent misfortune by observing the rules of eugenics, the keyword being *kokka no kenzen* (the establishment of a healthy nation) (Saitō 2006: 34; 42-45).

Interestingly, still in this period very little is said of funerals, which were largely left to the instructions given by the priests of the *bodaiji* (the temple at which one's household was registered), by the administration, and by doctors and hospitals (Saitō 2006: 30).

The final step towards what we think of as Japanese *kankonsōsai* ritual tradition is a post-war development, especially fed by three factors. The first is the wish for stability, growth, and to become an economic power equal to, but different from, the West, the latter point being driven home by *shinzen kekkonshiki*, Shinto style weddings (Saitō 2006: 57). The second factor is the development of Japan into a *kaisha shakai*, a

society oriented towards the growth of large companies, where personal and family matters were shaped by considerations of employment and career in a company. Consequently, the *hirōen* (the wedding reception), linking *ketsu-en* (family bonds), *sha-en* (company bonds) and *gakkō-en* (bonds created at educational institutions), acquired central importance (Saitō 2006: 62). The third factor was the need to seek balance between the worlds of the young post-war generation about to marry and have children, and those of the middle-aged parents socialized in the concept of households with main and branch families and therefore with widespread and powerful links to equally middle-aged family members and relatives (Saitō 2006: 62).

*Kankonsōsai* related materials thus developed into a very normative body of information, and we can speak of them as supporting *kinshitsu-ka* (homogenization) and *kakuitsu-ka* (uniformization) (Saitō 2006: 57). Increasingly one of the basic aims of all ritual, namely establishing identity by tying essentially different individuals and social units into common performances of recurrent and predictable complex activity, finds achievement as the three groups of actors in *ketsu-en*, *sha-en* and *gakkō-en* heavily rely on *kankonsōsai* for securing psychological, economic and employment stability as well as the inter-generational order necessary to pursue dreams of long-term development.

Not only weddings, but also the rituals linked to death - *tsuya* (keeping vigil), *sōgi* (funeral service), *kokubetsushiki* (the farewell addresses) and others - began to receive attention, as private and company life overlapped and the proper performance of private funeral rituals – as a rule elaborately performed in the house of the deceased person - became a tool to testify to the "audience" of visitors success in one's career and correct integration into and recognition of company hierarchies (Saitō 2006: 59-60; cf. also Martinez/van Bremen 1995).

#### Canonization of *kankonsōsai*

It was not until around 1970, however, that what we may see as the most important step towards ritualization of *kankonsōsai* took place, namely their canonization in book form. This was sparked by the first edition of *Kankonsōsai Nyūmon* (Introduction to *Kankonsōsai*) by Shiotsuki Yaeko (Shiotsuki 1970a; 1970b; 1971a; 1971b), of which over 3 million books were soon sold (*Kankonsōsai Nyūmon* is still being sold, the latest edition dating from 2002; a similarly normative book is Shiotsuki 2009).

As Shiotsuki Yaeko is the elder sister of Sen Sōshitsu, the fifteenth head (*iemoto*) of the Ura Senke tea ceremony school, it is obvious that the Ura Senke played

a leading role in the process of canonization. Canonized *kankonsōsai* meant nothing less than that from then on everybody in Japan would lose face in the standardized world of the *kaisha shakai* if he or she did not observe the rituals propagated by (in effect) a national canon. [11] The wish to belong, a realistic chance of fulfilling this wish by adhering to norms physically inscribed into the individual through ritual, and the outside pressure to belong exerted by the principal social players (family, company, and networks of graduates from educational institutions) managed to produce what many people today will think of as "Japanese tradition".

I have so far dwelt mainly on *kon* (ceremonies related to wedding) and *sō* (ceremonies related to death), but we should also take a short look at *kan* (the rituals marking the path to adulthood) and *sai* (in essence the rituals performed for the ancestors, for instance when inviting them back to one's home at specific points in the year). As *kankonsōsai* moved away from the Meiji through Taishō periods' focus on the extended household as the foundation of the Japanese nation, they on the one hand increasingly interpreted *kon* (weddings) and *sō* (funerals) as events establishing and reflecting social standing, prestige and career in a company. *Kan* and *sai* on the other hand remained more private (Saitō 2006: 69-71). Thus *kan* today also encompasses rituals to mark successive steps on the ladder to university, while *sai* made the jump in meaning from rituals performed for ancestors to seasonal festivities of all kinds, the links between most of these to the ancestors' presumed interest in offspring becoming blurred.

## Agents of De-ritualization

### The de-ritualization of *kon* and *sō*

As mentioned, Saitō, through outlining the arbitrary nature of the steps towards ritualization of *kankonsōsai*, powerfully contributes to the process of their de-ritualization. *Kankonsōsai* are laid open as not being timeless Japanese tradition but the product of concrete agents in concrete contexts. With this authors like Saitō free them for individuals to decide for themselves how they could be used to mark life's important stages.

Who or what, then, apart from authors like Saitō, are the agents of de-ritualization? First, we should mention the forces that brought down *kaisha shakai* during the 1990s and turned Japan into a society of relative job insecurity. This has sparked the notion that observation of correct ritual with the aim of securing position,



standing and career on a long-term basis may be irrelevant. [12] Secondly, very much smaller families and much fewer relatives mean less pressure on individuals to comply with expectations. Thirdly, the wish (and need) to reduce expenses, especially when little reward can be expected for the money spent, is leading to quite unspectacular forms of wedding and the use of public services for funerals.

There is still one other group of agents responsible for de-ritualization, namely so called *wedding producers*, and the providers of funeral services (*sōgisha*). Both are driven by fierce competition to organize the most unforgettable show. In contrast to formerly, such entrepreneurs today deal with persons feeling little or no constraint from national, social or company considerations and are driven by the wish to stage whatever show they fancy to fulfill their individual dreams (Saitō 2006: 82). [13] The norm is no longer the performance of a ceremony that by means of ritual links the expectations of self and others in a predictable manner.

If we consider unreflected practical knowledge acquired through mimetic processes and performed as a natural flow of action and interaction to be an essential aspect of ritual, then the moment this knowledge becomes subject to criticism and questioning, as happens in Saitō's book, we can say that ritual begins to lose its constituting features. [14]

In this sense Saitō not only contributes to the process of de-ritualization by severing the link between a sense of Japanese identity and what has been thought of as tradition: at the same time she also makes the very wish for rituals look absurd in the face of the huge variety of possibilities to produce one's own, unforgettable spectacles. Moreover, she calls for not setting up norms which exclude the many varieties of people who form present-day society (Saitō 2006: 95-96; 182): the unmarried and those with no intention of marrying, people who just want to take things easy (*raku de ii*), the divorced, same sex couples, those who want no funeral, or those who at least in their grave want to be relieved from their husbands (Saitō 2006: 199). [See also Boret, in this volume] Saitō concludes her down-to-earth position by coolly stating that gravestones left scattered around the country are a serious *gomi mondai* (a garbage problem) (Saitō 2006: 208).

A glance at some statistics suggests that the speed of change has sharply accelerated in only 10 years. For instance, in 1994 two out of three couples in Tokyo still officially had a *nakōdo* (go-between) for their marriage, but merely ten years later this was the case for only one out of twenty couples in Japan, and one out of one hundred couples in Tokyo (*Kyūsoku ni Henka Suru "Kankonsōsai no Jōshiki"* 2004, citing the survey *Kekkon Trend Chōsa* [Survey of Wedding Trends], ed. by the Recruit Company).

The text goes on to state: "Formerly, as a rule you asked your superior to be your go-between, but with the collapse of life-long employment this custom has rapidly become rare."

The change of meaning of wedding ceremonies from a ritual joining two households to one staging an individual show has fast led to the demise of *shinzen kekkon* (shrine marriages) in favor of marriages in churches or chapels with their *hanamichi*-type actors' entrance through the audience (Saitō 2006: 112-113). A trend survey of 2004 in the wedding information journal *Zexy* 2005 already indicates 74,2 % of weddings taking place in a church or a chapel against a mere 8,2 % in a shrine; the remaining percent marry with no ceremony at all. The supplement documentation coming with *OZ Magazine Wedding* (2010) and titled "Planning and Money Super Bible" accordingly begins on its first page with a description of weddings in chapel style, which it clearly understands as the most popular form today. [15]

A number of blogs in the internet reflect in hindsight on the meaning of the old rituals, which they state were tightly linked to the fear of missing career chances and losing social standing. As *Kyūsoku ni Henka Suru "Kankonsōsai no Jōshiki"* (2004) puts it, "[the old rituals were] a reasonable price to pay in order to secure belonging." Such a comment, however, in effect says nothing else than that de-ritualization is a natural process deriving from the fact that the rituals have lost their purpose.

In line with these changes it is worth recording that there exists a *Kankonsōsai no Kansoka Undō* (Movement to Simplify *Kankonsōsai*), established with the aim of helping relieve people from emotional and financial stress. [16] Thus the City of Iruma provides stickers for condolence cards which read: "Please accept my deepest sympathy on your (family member's) death. I am a supporter of the aims of the New Life-style Movement and therefore decline any return favor for my funeral offering."

These developments have in a way been foreseeable as they go along with changes in the structure of society. What surprised me in a series of interviews with exchange students from Japan (Summer 2009), however, was the laconic undertone of some of their comments. These included: "Whenever rituals take place I just wait for them to finish." "I am a student and don't know what people in society do" (indicating outright personal disinterest in social norms, combined with the passive attitude that others will tell you what to do when necessary). "During the funeral service the priest recites sutras; *sore wo zutto kiku*" (on the basis of the facial and tonal expression of the utterance translatable here as: "I am forced to listen to them all"). "In former times seating order at the funeral was important; for my family it is not important." "At New Year's mother wants us to come home. However, New Year's is the busiest time in the

service industry, and I am busy too. Father works for a removal company, and also for him New Year's is the busiest time."

The breakdown of importance of being actively engaged in the local community - and by implication observing the local norms for *kankonsōsai* – can be assumed by the following answer: "We used to be personally responsible for our shop. We had no holidays, but we earned well. We had to see that customers came. If you worked you could make a living. However, now there are only chain stores."

### New roles for *sai* and *kan*

In present-day materials for *kankonsōsai* the category *sai* has conspicuously gained in importance. As *sai* – depending on the region – have largely lost their reference to the ancestors they most easily adapt, as mentioned earlier, to the wish for self-presentation on festive days throughout the year. But is cherry blossom viewing or a local *matsuri* still a ritual, or just a "happening", or a performance with no aim of conferring group identity through shared processes of complex action?

True, particularly rural regions are visibly making great efforts to maintain the ritual character of *sai* in order to integrate the young generation in just such processes of establishing communal identity. Yet how far this works depends in the end not on shared feelings but on whether the rural region will provide decent jobs or not.

Also *kan* – the rituals that punctuate the steps in human life up to adulthood – are very popular (Saitō 2006: 146-152). Perhaps more than anything else this emphasis on *kan* portrays the changes in family life, now at least in the large cities usually limited to the two-generation parent-children relationship. Here *kan* has become possibly the last ritual in a modern core family, giving one's children a sense of belonging. In fact, young couples show special fervor in organizing *miyamairi* (visits to the shrine), birthdays, or the rituals to mark particularly the early years of their children's development. As already pointed out, successive steps on the educational ladder are also given due emphasis. Apparently, however, *Momo no Sekku* (the Girl's Festival on March 3) and *Tango no Sekku* (the Boys' Festival on May 5) have suffered on the one hand by an increasing reluctance to mark gender specific festivities, on the other because to fly full-size *koinobori* (carp streamers) or set up large dolls and doll stands is impractical under modern housing conditions (Saitō 2006: 148).

## Where are Kankonsōsai going from now?

I shall conclude my observations on *kankonsōsai* as packages of activity subject to the interplay of ritualization and de-ritualization by recalling that freezing the shape of patterned behavior over a longer period of time, so that the completed performance of separate, distinct activities takes on overall meaning for its performers, is dependent on actors who choose to do so and agents pursuing specific interests.

Drawing on *kankonsōsai* related materials at least three terms can be made out that appear to be having considerable impact on the debates among actors and agents, and could serve to sharpen our focus on some of the forces shaping *kankonsōsai* at the present time: *gyōkai* (business circles, business "worlds") as agents, the debate about *kosei* (individuality), and the concept of *kurashi* (living).

### 1. Gyōkai (business circles, business "worlds")

Perhaps as a result of past educational processes that cemented the notion of Japan as a *kaisha shakai*, Japanese are very quick to see their culture in terms of *gyōkai*. Accordingly, *kankonsōsai* is almost immediately linked to the concept *kankonsōsai-gyō* (i.e. the *gyōkai* behind *kankonsōsai* ceremonies), among which we find "bridal *sangyō*" (the industry providing services related to marriage and wedding ceremonies, including bridal jewelry services, counseling services etc.), "*kekkon jōhō* service-*gyō*" (marriage counseling and marriage guidance bureaus), "life support *kanren sangyō*" (life support services), and all sorts of new "*kankonsōsai kigyō*" (*kankonsōsai* related businesses) advertising themselves on the internet. We also find heated discussions about the traditional *kankonsōsai-gyō* that are making all-out efforts not to become *shayō sangyō* ("setting sun" businesses, i.e. businesses going under). *Kawaru Kankonsōsai-gyō* (2007) makes the following points: "By far the biggest market for "bridal *sangyō*" is that for wedding ceremonies and the accompanying receptions and banquets. However, competition in this market is fierce ... The contexts for *kankonsōsai* are changing with rapid force, and if the *gyōkai* give in to following traditional conventions and notions they will find themselves left behind ... [Like other industries they should] free themselves from fixed concepts and customary practices that have become fetters."

In the face of this kind of text we may risk the statement that *kankonsōsai* today are shaped primarily by the *gyōkai* involved and by the way these businesses respond to the competition they face: for instance, how they organize posture and movement of the participants, dress, colors, space, lighting, the mixtures of Japanese and Western

style, drinks and meals, happenings and presentations, or the entire setting which is quite frequently not in Japan but anywhere around the globe. Whether the activities generated under the guidance of the *gyōkai* can still be interpreted as ritual depends on the relative weight and stability of their core elements, a point that would require a more careful comparative field study, giving us insight into counter forces brought to bear by the customers who in effect dictate limits to how far *gyōkai* may arbitrarily go.

## 2. The debate about *kosei* (individuality)

In Japan of today the expression *kosei* (or *koseika*, taking on individual characteristics) is ubiquitous. Are rituals, we may therefore ask, fading in importance and being replaced by individually determined patterns of activity neither linked to tradition nor meant to "inscribe" into the body of the actors a long lasting sense of identity?

The debate on *kosei*, and with it on the dichotomy of ritualization vs. individualization, reached a climax during the 1990s and early 2000s, as the new *Gakushū Shidō Yōryō* (National Educational Curriculum) took shape reflecting the calls of the business world for more innovation and diversification (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture: 1997-1999). In a sense, this usage of *kosei*, particularly also in *kankonsōsai* contexts, points not only to the wish, but also to the need to produce oneself in a form not fixed in advance but decided directly by the performers themselves.

Of course one could argue that choosing a form of production and self-production that demonstrates *kosei* is in itself a ritual, and it is clear that also the performance of individuality is subject to rules as to what is permissible and what not. Moreover, adhering to *kosei* in the contemporary sense does include the notion of sharing and reproducing ritual, and developing group identity in relation to it, in so far as group identity is formed on the more abstract level of generational identity.

Whether *kosei* contains ritualistic elements or not, it cannot be denied that the term essentially implies a production that should not mechanically fulfill expectations. Thus *OZ Magazine Wedding* (2010: 50) shows that in response to the question, "What is particularly important to you with regard to the wedding party?" 55% say, "To treat each guest individually", and 40%, "To give the party a fresh and individual (*kosei*) style." To the question, "What is necessary when choosing a hall for the ceremony?" 26% say, "That free forms of production are possible there."

Himonya Hajime (2007), author of noteworthy books on new forms of *kankonsōsai* and particularly funerals, formulates the call for individuality as follows:

"One of the characteristics of funeral services in recent years has been their *koseika* (individualization). From the 1960s onwards it was requested that services be the same as other people's, and that they be *hito-nami* (in line with general expectations). Thus funeral services became standardized in form. Now, however, demand is for services in line with the lifestyle of the deceased, services that emphasize the character of the deceased individual, and as a result they are becoming more and more diverse in form."

Saitō (2006: 93) takes the following stance: "Households consisting only of aged, unmarried or divorced persons ... are increasing, so we will be forced to support each other on an individual basis, not depending on *ketsu-en* (blood relationships)."

This all says a lot about the pressures from outside and the changing circumstances, and about the individual perception of networks (company as well as family networks) breaking up or having disappeared. Thus *kosei* should not be equated with "individuality" in the sense that this concept has acquired in Western intellectual history over the last centuries. *Kosei* indeed refers to de-ritualization, yet not as a value for itself but as a reaction to outside circumstances, and, importantly, it always retains its pragmatic focus on strategies for survival. In other words, the concept *kosei* cannot be said to question ritual, rather, it appears as a call and a legitimization to prevent something higher up on the scale of values than ritual, namely the energy and vitality to survive, from disappearing out of view. De-ritualization in this sense turns out to be not a sort of progress, as some who think in very linear terms might assume, but a rebalancing and reordering of the interplay between individual and context.

### 3. The concept of *kurashi* (living)

Expanding upon this aspect of focusing more on the needs of life than on ritual as a value per se I conclude by picking up the notion of *kurashi* developed by Tatsumi Nagisa, who proclaims herself to be a *shōhi kōdō kenkyūsha* (researcher of consumer behavior) and is well known for her publications calling for simplification of customs (Tatsumi 2005; cf. also Tatsumi 2009). Tatsumi distances herself from emphasis on rituals in the life course and focuses on consideration of others' feelings. Accordingly she makes frequent reference to *kimochi* (feelings), and, for *kimochi* to communicate, Tatsumi demands simple common-sense rules for everyday exchanges:

"We already have lots of manuals teaching Japanese tradition and proper, conventional customs (*shikitarī*). However, between these conventional customs and what we instinctively sense to be suited to our everyday life a gap

is beginning to open ... Yet it would be a mistake if we now thought we could just do as we liked. To a certain degree it is good if we have *sahō* (rules of etiquette) that are based on [the idea of] reciprocal *kimochi-ii* (a sense of feeling good) and would help our [positive] *kimochi* being understood by the other person. That way, getting along with other people is made easy, and also enjoyable." (Tatsumi (2005: 1) [17])

It is no surprise that the new illustrated *Kankonsōsai no Shin Jiten* (The R 2007) by Toda Kyōko (but appearing just as a publication by the *Jinzai Producer* [Producer of Able People] Company *The R*) devotes its major part not to ceremonies and rituals but to rules for maintaining good interpersonal relationships inside and outside the core family.

This emphasis on rules for everyday life in my opinion actually facilitates de-ritualization processes. The power of ritual to integrate persons through shared complex learnt activity fades when it is no longer necessary or even possible to shape identities with long-term stability in mind. We may here recall that the most important agents that developed rituals in the past had been the old state, and the companies of the 1960s, both striving for long-term stability built around the concept of national unity and standardized patterns of a life course linked to growing companies. [18] In hindsight, many have come to realize that these agents created astonishingly short-lived rituals, which, however, were perceived to be tradition and taught as such.

What should we make of this switch of focus in materials still carrying the title *Kankonsōsai* from rituals to *kurashi*? Here my tentative answer: If we take a long-term historical view of the norms that have governed Japanese reasoning, we will note that processes of individualization – or also de-ritualization - never stood in opposition to what is perceived and very openly proclaimed as the basic law of existence: that is, interdependency - not in the sense of passive dependency on others, but in the sense of the strong will to act in accordance with the common sense that I get because I give, and I give because I get. With regard to *kankonsōsai* this means we should not be astonished if so called Japanese traditions, crystallized for a period of time into the rituals distinctive for Meiji Japan, for wartime Japan, or for *kaisha shakai* Japan, easily dissolve into higher order but straightforward rules to keep life going through the observance of the *kimochi* necessary for functioning reciprocal dependency. [19]

Thus present-day *kankonsōsai* materials like *The R* (2007) still contain short passages on manners at weddings and funerals, whose purpose however is no longer to secure the goodwill of households or company staff but to guarantee good *kimochi*

should one need to attend such ceremonies. Whether the term "ritual" is suitable here depends very much on how the actors who perform the ceremonies, and the agents who support and legitimize them, understand their activity. At present I would speak of de-ritualization combined with the effort to define activity from the perspective of whether it makes sense or not within the framework of the highly individualized lives most Japanese are leading, or being forced to lead. Thus proper modern *kimochi*, according to the newest normative materials, is extremely straightforward and tightly linked to *kurashi*, focusing on the best way to get through life: For instance, it makes sense not to disturb others with your mobile phone, just as it makes sense not put the watch, the glasses and the false teeth of your deceased family member into the coffin, as these items will not burn (The R 2007: 166).

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## Notes

1. Cf. Saitō (2006: 62), describing a pattern she sees as typical until the 1980s: "The key persons of *kankonsōsai* are, by and large, men and women between 45 and 55 ... Insofar as *kankonsōsai* are a family event, the first time you attend such an event is when you are around 50, that is when your son(s) and daughter(s) have reached the age to get married. At the same time, this is also the age when your parents are approaching death."

2. The reference to *himitsu* (secret) in the title of her book (*Kankonsōsai no Himitsu*, The Secrets of *Kankonsōsai*) Saitō explains as follows (2006: 224): "I have quite arbitrarily used the term 'secret' in the title in reference to the *kenkyū manga* (*manga* introducing scholarly topics) for children called 'Himitsu Series'. All 'Himitsu Series' books have a title containing the word 'Secrets of \_\_\_' ... This implies that they seek to inform readers who have not the slightest background knowledge."

3. Saitō repeatedly refers to this, as on Saitō 2006: 22, where she discusses opposition to monogamy from traditionalists in the context of the introduction of the Meiji Civil Code of 1898, and the fact that the concept of monogamy had little consequences for the Japanese elite, people in the worlds of politics, finance, scholarship or the arts. On Saitō 2006: 142 she refers to the pre-war differentiation between *chakushi* and *hichakushi* (children who inherit and children born to mistresses who don't inherit).

4. On this point cf. for instance Shimazono 2004, Isomae 2005.

5. An interesting point concerning *nyūseki* is that they reflected the efforts of the Meiji Civil Code to prevent women being rejected if they did not fulfill the expectations of the household (Saitō 2006: 21).

6. Special mention should be made of the company Nagashima Konreikai, founded in 1909 and providing a full wedding "package" complete with priest and priestesses and *gagaku* music. All kinds of businesses connected to weddings soon followed, such as restaurants, hotels, halls, beauty parlors, photographers etc.

7. The first wedding at a Shinto shrine took place in 1902 at Hibiya Daijingu. This type of ceremony was soon provided by other shrines as well, notably Nogi Jinja, shrines linked

to the Izumo Taisha, Tenmangū, Heian Jingū and others.

8. Saitō (2006: 11) puts it this way: "The shape of weddings in shrines was influenced by Christian style weddings, or, as some argue, was developed out of an urge to match these."

9. A discussion with a priest at the Zen Buddhist temple of Gujō Hachiman (April 2008) revealed that the Buddhist temple there used only marginally to be involved in funeral ceremonies. The families themselves took their dead to a plot somewhere on the field, and only occasionally were priests asked to come and read a sutra there. However, the Edo period requirement to be registered at a temple (*terauke seido*) did result in a traditional involvement of priests in providing services linked to the memory of the ancestors and their wellbeing in after-life (Saitō 2006: 13).

10. For a detailed introduction to the background of wedding rituals cf. also Hendry 1981, Ronald and Alexy 2001.

11. We should not overlook the investigative activities of the large companies at the time. House, background and adaptation to social norms played a considerable role when persons sought employment and when the baby boom generation was reaching adulthood so that the companies could easily afford to reject all those who did not fit the norms. At the same time, the not inconsiderable number of persons shut out from *kaisha shakai* drops out of sight and has not been given adequate attention.

12. This process actually already began in the mid-seventies, when the notion of economic "catch-up" (with the West), which had underpinned willingness for self-sacrifice and cooperation, started gradually to fade. Naturally it accelerated in the nineties, as for the generation that had entered, or was still seeking, employment at this point in time (often called *shūshoku hyōga-ki*, "ice age for finding employment") investment of effort and energy in a company often clearly did not bring about the rewards it had done for the preceding generation, particularly because no reliable relations between elder and younger employees could develop. (cf. Nishiyama 2000)

13. Saitō (2006: 82) formulates: "The two persons (who marry) are now able to push through their own independence of will."

14. On this point cf. Wulf/Zirfas (2004b: 30-31): "Ritual knowledge is practical knowledge. As such it is performative ... It is aesthetic and takes shape through mimetic processes ... Being practical knowledge, ritual knowledge is learnt through mimesis. This happens as both those acting ritually themselves, as well as those observing such action, focus on the staging and the performance of ritual scenes ... and incorporate them by transferring them into the worlds of their inner imagination. ... This mimetic activity takes place largely on an unconscious level." Wulf/Zirfas (2004b: 35) continue: "Practices incorporated in people's language and body ... are not accessible to them in a systematic way ... The inapproachability (of these practices) secures the 'natural' flow of the scenes on the formal level of interaction ... Ritual knowledge (thus is) tacit knowledge." Wulf (2009 : 28) makes the following point: "Whenever we want to act 'properly' we need practical knowledge, and this is acquired through sensual, body-related mimetic processes in the respective fields ... This implies that types of activity like mental calculation, decision taking, ... but also nonrecurring action or breaking of rules cannot be called mimetic." (By implication, therefore, questioning and critical observation, decision taking, or breaking of rules destroys ritual knowledge. Comment by Peter Ackermann)

15. However, there seems to be again an upward trend in shrine weddings, led by *geinōjin* (people in the entertainment world) (*OZ Magazine Wedding* 2010: 50).

16. The intricate rules of presenting sums of money at *kankonsōsai* events can be studied by those who need to do so in the appendix of most *kankonsōsai* related books. However, also continuously updated materials dealing only with the aspect of presenting money and calculating the necessary return of favours are on sale, for instance Hayai 2006, which is fully 200 pages thick!

17. Another concept similarly used in internet blogs and conversation is *omoiyari* (considering the feelings of others).

18. The high degree of standardization could be seen, for instance, before the advent of cash machines when waiting in a bank to be served; one was surrounded by tables and charts indicating the exact age for the successive steps to take in life and informing the onlooker how much money (or how high a loan) would be needed for every step - and, in effect, urging the customer not to lose face within the social fabric of workplace and neighbourhood respectively by not complying with the national norms.

19. Even an example for a rather conservative *kankonsōsai* manual (447 pages thick!) includes references to important changes in recent times and explicitly leaves it open whether people want to be bound by tradition or prefer to give precedence to saving costs and efforts (Ishii 2009).