

Remembering the Dead : Change in Protestant Christian Tradition through Contact with Japanese Cultural Tradition

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The purpose of this paper is to determine whether there is presumptive evidence that Protestant Christianity in Japan has been influenced by the ancestral rite tradition in such a way that one must take this influence into account in order to understand contemporary Japanese Protestantism in anthropological-sociological perspective.¹

That Japanese culture includes a deep-rooted ancestral cult tradition has long been established (Yanagita 1962, pp. 1-152; Aruga 1970, pp. 174-178; Hozumi 1912; Ooms 1967, 1976; Fujii 1974; Newell 1976; Plath 1964; Smith 1974, 1976; Takeda 1957, 1976; Tanaka 1978). Equally well established is the fact that Buddhism, on reaching Japan, underwent considerable modification because of its accommodation to this tradition (Watanabe 1958, pp. 102-120; Takeda 1957, pp. 214-244; Nakamura 1964, pp. 424-425). The

A paper presented in abbreviated form at the 14th Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions held at the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, 17-21 August 1980.

1. Japanese terms denoting post-funeral mortuary rites include *ireisai* (a Shinto ritual to comfort and console the spirits), *senzo kuyō* (a Buddhist ritual at which people offer prayers for the repose of one or more ancestors), *sozen sūkei* (to offer homage or respect to ancestors), *sozen saishi* (ancestral rites), etc. Probably the most generally used term is *sozen sūhai*. To translate this term as "ancestor worship," though linguistically correct, sometimes leads to misunderstanding because of the theological overtones that accompany the word "worship" in cultures largely informed by the Judeo-Christian tradition. In order to avoid such overtones I prefer to use milder terms such as "ancestral rites," "ancestor veneration," "remembering the dead," etc. Cf. Doerner 1977, p. 164; Offner 1979, pp. 1-6; Shibata 1979.

question arises, therefore, whether Japanese Christianity, like Christianity in other parts of the world, also shows evidence of influence from this tradition.²

To date, surprisingly little research has been done in this area. Studies dealing with Japanese Catholics tend to focus on the *kakure kirishitan* (e.g., Furuno 1959, 1973), though there is one study of a contemporary Catholic parish in Yokohama (Doerner 1977). Studies on the “indigenization” of Japanese Protestantism tend to focus on the question of how this form of Christianity has influenced Japanese society (as in Morioka 1970, pp. 251–283). Only rarely is the converse question posed (e.g., Morioka 1959). This is largely unexplored territory.

Method. To speak of “influence” from the ancestral rite tradition implies that Japanese Protestantism today differs from the Protestantism that arrived in Japan with the first missionaries. But any attempt to demonstrate difference runs into the difficulty that the earlier form can no longer be adequately recovered (cf. Malinowski 1945, chap. 3). This means that we must make do with a base-line depiction that, though not without empirical warrant, is to some extent conjectural.

Before attempting this base-line depiction, however, I propose to begin by describing Japanese mortuary rites as generally practiced today—and presumably, except for minor changes, a century ago as well. The description will be analytic, the terms of analysis being drawn from the theories of Hertz and van Gennep. This should give us some idea as to what kind of change, if any, to look for in Japanese Protestantism.

Theoretical orientation. Robert Hertz, in his 1907 essay “The collective representation of death,” focuses on the phenomenon of “double burial.” He finds particularly important the intermediate

2. For the influence of ancestral rites on Christianity in Africa, see Malinowski 1945.

period between provisional and final disposal of the corpse, demonstrating that there is “a kind of symmetry or parallelism between the condition of the body . . . and the condition of the soul” (1960, p. 45). ‘This symmetry is such that the soul can be ritually incorporated into the world of the dead only when society, as of the end of the mourning period, has completed its action on the body. The deceased’s integration into the world of the dead is correlated, then, to the survivors’ reintegration into the world of the living. Both forms of integration terminate a stage of liminality, a stage Hertz deems more important for understanding the values and institutions of the living than either the provisional or final ceremonies.

Arnold van Gennep, drawing in part on Hertz’s analysis, introduces his 1908 book on rites of passage by classifying them into “rites of separation, transition rites, and rites of incorporation” (1960, p. 11, italics omitted). When he considers death and mortuary rites, he observes:

On first considering funeral ceremonies, one expects rites of separation to be their most prominent component, in contrast to rites of transition and rites of incorporation A study of the data, however, reveals that the rites of separation are few in number and very simple, while the transition rites have a duration and complexity sometimes so great that they must be granted a sort of autonomy (1960, p. 146).

With this statement, van Gennep too directs our attention to the stage of liminality. His point is that after the initial rites of separation, the deceased and his or her surviving kin, especially close kin, constitute a group that exists in a marginal state between the world of the living and the world of the dead. They remain in that state until the deceased is incorporated into the one and the survivors reincorporated into the other—generally at the end of a ritual process that varies in length and complexity from culture to culture.

A methodological refinement. Against this background, we turn now to an analytical description of Japanese mortuary rites as generally practiced. To guide this part of the inquiry, we begin with the question: how does one become an “ancestor” in a Japanese household?

This form of the question, however, is deceptively simple. It assumes that the term “ancestor” is a unitary category—a dubious assumption (cf. Lebra 1976, pp. 222, 228). In its broadest sense the term *senzo* or “ancestor” applies to all the household dead, all who have “gone before.” Analytically, however, scholars distinguish between two main classes: the founding ancestor, and the subsequent body of ancestors. The second, in turn, embraces the long-departed dead, the recently dead, and those who die “abnormally,” that is, in infancy, childhood, or an unmarried state. Strictly speaking, the form of the question that should be considered here is: how does one who has died recently and normally come to be regarded as the founding ancestor of a household or as one with the household body of ancestors? As a matter of convenience, however, I propose to consider only the latter half of this question, namely, how does one who has died recently and normally become integrated into the household body of ancestors?³

The Japanese ie. To review what has been written about the Japanese *ie* or household as a systemic entity is not necessary here. It will suffice to say that the *ie* system, understood as a corporate unit

3. This inquiry will not, therefore, take up the ritual enshrinement of soldiers who die while serving “emperor and country,” the relationship of the household ancestors to the imperial ancestors, the subject of fictitious ancestors, the problem of suicide, or the problem of *muenbotoke* (people who die with no kin to remember them, or whose line dies out) and how living people guard against that fearful prospect. This limitation rules out consideration not only of Shinto mortuary rites but also of locally distinctive practices such as the dual grave system in Wakayama (Tanaka 1978, pp. i, iii, vii) and the exhumation and washing of bones in Okinawa (Glacken 1955, p. 248; Lebra 1966, pp. 200–201). The focus is on “normal” death and its rituals, which in form are mainly Buddhist (Bukkyō Bunka Kenkyūkai 1977, pp. 40–41).

of main and branch households that share ritual obligations to their ancestors and supportive obligations to each other, is generally regarded as *the* social institution that undergirds and requires the ancestral cult.

This system, relatively stable during the Edo period when social classes were largely fixed and population movement largely prohibited, has become increasingly unstable since the Meiji period (cf. Hozumi 1912, pp. 114, 178; Tamaki 1977). During the Meiji period, social classes were abolished, military conscription took great numbers of young men out of fixed familiar surroundings, and population mobility and urbanization increased. These changes were only partly counterbalanced by a legal system that gave a household head (usually an eldest son) complete rights over the household property and near-absolute authority over the household members, and by an educational system that took the *ie* system as a social fundament and added to it the ideology of the family-state governed in the name of an absolute emperor and his ancestors.

Since 1945, the educational system has dropped the absolute emperor/family-state ideology; the legal system has for the most part adopted the principle of equal property rights among all legitimate heirs;⁴ the proportion of the population engaged in agriculture, fishing, and the like has dwindled from about one-half to less than one-fifth, and until very recently people have been moving in large numbers into big cities for employment, living as *de facto* nuclear families in small apartments with neither kami altar nor buddha altar where ancestral rites might be performed—and with no grandparents to set an example for grandchildren. As a result, this basic social institution on which the ancestral cult rests, though by no means moribund, has become decreasingly influential.

4. This principle is compromised to some extent, however, by a Civil Code provision (Art. 897) which says: "The right to ownership of the family genealogy, ritual paraphernalia, and tomb . . . shall be inherited by the person responsible, according to the customs of society, for the observance of the rites for ancestors" (my translation; Japanese text in Takeda 1976, p. 189).

Nonetheless, it remains a force to be reckoned with, not least because it functions as a prototype to which Japanese people seem to turn almost instinctively when they develop a social organization (see Morioka 1962). It is primarily in relation to this institutional system that the question is raised as to how one who has died recently and normally comes to be incorporated into the body of ancestors.

Mortuary rites. Hertz, it will be recalled, sought to explicate the phenomenon of the double burial, mainly among the Dayaks of Borneo. It may seem surprising to apply the double burial idea to Japan, but I think I can show that there is good reason to do so. What follows is a brief, ideal-type description of the Japanese funeral and post-funeral rites, analyzed in accordance with van Gennep's three ritual stages.

The rites performed between death and cremation can be taken as corresponding to what van Gennep calls "rites of separation."⁵ Here one finds the first of the actions on the body, such as giving the dead person a last drop of water (*shini mizu*); washing the corpse, plugging all orifices, closing its eyes, and covering its face; laying it out head north and face west, dressed in white as if for pilgrimage (though black is increasingly common); and providing it with a bladed weapon as well as with food and drink. Actions that come under the heading of "setting the stage" include closing the kami altar; choosing the funeral day (being sure to avoid the day called *tomobiki*, "bring a friend"); contacting those who should be quickly informed and sending out other messages and announcements; arranging for the black-banded photograph, flowers, fruit, and other paraphernalia used in the wake and funeral (both of which usually take place in the home); and requesting a priest to chant the "pillow sutra," provide a posthumous Buddhist name on a temporary mortuary tablet, and officiate at the services. At the

5. Information on the rites between death and cremation is drawn primarily from the Bukkyō Bunka Kenkyūkai (1976, 1977) and from Inokuchi (1977).

funeral proper, after the sutra chanting, considerable time is allotted to representatives of groups with whom the deceased was associated so that they may eulogize him or her, often in direct address. Viewing of the body, if allowed at all, takes place through a window in the coffin that exposes only the face. In an apparent attempt to minimize the pollution of death by using a “throwaway” item, the coffin is nailed shut not with a hammer but with a stone, immediate family members and close kin each delivering a symbolic rap or two. During the procession to the hearse and crematorium, if the deceased was the head of the house, the mortuary tablet inscribed with the posthumous name is carried by his or her successor—a symbolic act of considerable importance (cf. Yonemura 1976, p. 178). Relatives carry the coffin to the house entrance, non-relatives to the hearse and into the crematorium. At the crematorium the priest chants a sutra as the coffin and corpse are consumed by the flames. When the cremation is finished, an attendant brings the ashes on a tray to a table. As the priest chants another sutra, the attendant, using chopsticks, picks out special pieces, such as the Adam’s apple (*shari* or *nodobotoke*), which the person in charge of the mortuary tablet receives with another pair of chopsticks and places into a special urn. (At no other time is it proper to transfer anything from one set of chopsticks directly to another.) The urn is then wrapped in white, carried by the tablet-bearer to the home, and formally installed, along with the mortuary tablet, in the buddha altar. In Hertz’s terms, this is the first, provisional “burial.” The rites from death to cremation take a comparatively short time—usually two, sometimes three, days.

Van Gennep’s liminal stage, the one marked by “rites of transition,” may usefully be thought of as applying in different ways to the living and newly dead members of the household. For both, the period between cremation and the forty-ninth day is clearly demarcated; for both this period is followed by another, less restrictive period; but whereas this post-forty-ninth day period lasts about one year for the living, it lasts about thirty-three years for the dead.

So far as the living are concerned, the period between cremation

and the forty-ninth day, the time when the pollution of death is strongest, may be called one of "primary mourning." The obligations and taboos of this period fall most heavily on the spouse and successor, less heavily on other family members and immediate kin. These obligations and taboos include the wearing of somber clothing, avoidance of meat, non-participation in public entertainments, and avoidance of the Shinto shrine and its festivals. This is also the time when messages of appreciation are sent to those who attended the wake and/or funeral, together with a gift in return for each money-gift received (or an announcement that all money-gifts are being turned over to an appropriate charity). If there is no family grave, this is the time to lease a lot and have a stone cut and ritually installed. The priest is called on to officiate at two rituals during this period: one on the seventh, the other on the forty-ninth day after death. At the conclusion of the forty-ninth day ritual, two "permanent" mortuary tablets are prepared: one for the Buddhist temple and one for the house. The urn of ashes is generally placed in the grave at this time. This corresponds to what Hertz calls the "final burial."

For the living, the forty-ninth day marks the lifting of mourning restrictions and a return to normal life. The "rite of reincorporation" is usually a meal. In fact, however, the spouse and/or successor, and sometimes the immediate family, continue to observe a few restrictions for approximately one year. For example, there will be no exchange of felicitations during the first New Year's after the death, and any prospective marriage or remarriage is usually postponed. This period, from the forty-ninth day to the first anniversary of the death, may be identified as one of "secondary mourning."

For the dead, this final burial can be seen as a "rite of incorporation" whereby the deceased is integrated into the realm of spirits. This does not mean, however, that he or she is now an "ancestor." There is more "ritual work" to be done. After the forty-ninth day, two sets of rituals come into play, one linear, the other cyclical.

The linear series centers in the *hōji* rites. These are held at the

temple, with a priest as officiant, on the first anniversary of the death and on the anniversaries of subsequent years that include two numbers traditionally valued in Buddhism, namely, three and seven (thus years 3, 7, 13, 17, 23, 27, and 33).⁶ On or near the death anniversaries of the intervening years are the *meinichi* rites. These are generally held in the home before the buddha altar. The appropriate mortuary tablet is placed in a central position, and incense is burned and prayers offered for his or her repose. Both, with the passage of time, tend to become pleasant, family reunions.

The cyclical rites are likewise of two kinds. On the one hand are the times when family members (or one representing all) visit the household grave. These times, called *higan*, bracket the spring and fall equinoxes. They are times for cleaning the gravesite, pruning its shrubbery, burning incense, and offering prayer. The brief rite is often followed by a picnic lunch. On the other hand are the times when the spirits of the dead visit the family. This takes place at midsummer during a four- or five-day period called *bon*. It is marked by such rites as the building of a welcoming fire (*mukaebi*), the erection of a temporary altar (*shōryōdana*) for the mortuary tablets and for gifts of fruit and vegetables, and a fire to see the spirits off (*okuribi* or, if lighted candles are floated on water, a *tōrō nagashi*) (Inokuchi 1977, pp. 67–69, 128, 205–215). This too is commonly a time for visiting the household grave.

During this thirty-three year period, the deceased has an individual mortuary tablet. It is kept in the household buddha altar (with a duplicate in the temple) and is central to the services held in honor of the person it represents. At the end of this time, it is either turned over to the temple or, after a brief service, burned. Individual identity disappears. The deceased melts into "the body

6. Why end with thirty-three? Actually, some go on to fifty or one hundred. Whatever the year, the common explanation is that by this time the deceased no longer lives in the memories of the living. From this point of view, the precise terminal number is unimportant. But insofar as thirty-three is used, it may have some connection, presently obscure, with the myth of Buddha's descent to earth from Trayastriṃśa, the heaven of the thirty-three.

of ancestors." This is the final ritual of incorporation.

In sum, the liminal process for close living survivors entails a forty-nine day period of major rituals and taboos followed by partial reincorporation into the mundane world and a one-year period of minor rituals and taboos followed by complete reincorporation. For the deceased the liminal process entails the same forty-nine day period of major rituals followed by partial incorporation into the ranks of the dead, then a thirty-three year period of linear and cyclical rites followed by complete incorporation into the status of "ancestor." Among these rites of separation, transition, and incorporation, the liminal rites occupy a place of special importance. If it is theoretically permissible to distinguish among "separation-rite cultures," "liminal-rite cultures," and "incorporation-rite cultures," Japan can be regarded as belonging to the cultures that emphasize liminal rites.

Western Protestantism and instant death. Protestant Christianity's first significant contact with Japanese culture can usefully be dated from 1859-60 when Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Reformed, and Baptist missionaries arrived from the United States.

In order to establish some kind of base-line from which change can be recognized, I shall make two suppositions: (1) that the early Japanese converts took as normative what they were taught by the first missionaries, and (2) that these missionaries in turn took for granted that the funeral rites and associated beliefs generally held in the United States as of the mid-nineteenth century were normative for the new churches.

Unfortunately, no detailed studies of deathways in the United States have yet become available (cf. Huntington and Metcalf 1979, pp. 186, 200-201), but one point suggests itself as worthy of note. It comes from France, but appears applicable to the United States. Robert Hertz writes:

In our own society the generally accepted opinion is that death occurs in one instant. The only purpose of the two or three days'

delay between the demise and the burial is to allow material preparations to be made and to summon relatives and friends. No interval separates the life ahead from the one that has just ceased: no sooner has the last breath been exhaled than the soul appears before its judge and prepares to reap the reward for its good deeds or to expiate its sins (1960, p. 28).

Actually, Hertz makes it a little easy for himself here. The idea of immediate translation into the next world finds support in the words attributed to Jesus: "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Lk. 23:43). The New Testament also holds, however, that the dead are "asleep" and will be resurrected on the last day (I Cor. 15:20-22). In this case incorporation into the next world is postponed. But in neither case is it necessary for the living to perform post-funeral rites in order to assure the dead that they are remembered or to effect their incorporation into the next world. In this sense Hertz is right when he says that "death occurs in one instant."

The Protestant Christians of the United States in the mid-nineteenth century, if not now, can be classified as belonging to a culture that emphasizes separation rites almost to the exclusion of rites of transition and incorporation. The dead, moreover, come from the nuclear family—linked to other families patrilineally, matrilineally, and affinally, to be sure, but not as an entity that tends to give rise to a corporation of households singly and jointly responsible to perform rituals on behalf of their ancestors.

Methodologically suggestive contrasts. The nineteenth century contact between Protestant Christianity and the Japanese ancestral cult took place, then, against the background of cultures that contrasted in two respects germane to this inquiry. The U.S. bearers of the new religion came from a culture that gave primacy to the *nuclear family* and to *short-term separation rites* for the family dead. The Japanese receivers of the new religion came from a culture that gave primacy to the *ie* system and to *long-term liminal rites* for the household dead.

These contrasts, in turn, give us some idea of where to look for changes in Protestant Christianity that may have resulted from contact with the Japanese ancestral cult tradition. They suggest that if such changes exist, we should expect to find them in relation to the *ie* system on the one hand, and in relation to the liminal rite custom on the other.

The first generation. From the supposition that the first Protestant missionaries took the mortuary customs of their native culture as normative for the new churches, it follows that they would have taught Japanese converts to abjure what they perceived as "idol worship." And from the supposition that the early Japanese converts took the teaching of the missionaries as normative, it follows that converts must have come into serious conflict with other people, sometimes in their own household and wider circle of linked households, sometimes in their communities, sometimes in relation to the national government (Abe 1978). On the evidence available, both inferences seem warranted.

Perhaps the most famous example of a Japanese Protestant who took the "idol worship" position seriously is Nijima Jō. Nijima smuggled himself out of Japan and went to the U.S. in 1864, returned in 1874, and in 1875 founded what is now Dōshisha University. Ordained in Boston in 1873, Nijima, on returning to Japan, visited his parents in Annaka and found them offering thanks for his safe return before the kami altar. "Explaining that it was wrong for human beings to worship as God things made of wood and stone, I promptly removed the kami altar, took it into the garden, and burned it" (cited in Morioka 1970, p. 106, my translation). Before leaving Annaka, he also wrote, at the request of an inquirer, an introduction to Christian faith in which he laid down two rules:

Believing with all your heart that in heaven and earth there is but one true God and that beside him the kami and buddhas are nothing, respect him, worship him, and pray to him.

It is the duty of descendants to respect their ancestors and uphold their honor, but to worship them or make them objects of devotion is wrong (cited in Morioka 1970, p. 106, my translation).

Niijima held fast to these principles all his life.

The first generation of Protestant Christians was enjoined to follow the position for which Niijima had become a spokesman (Cary 1976, vol. 2, pp. 145, 161–162, 198). Many disposed of their family's kami and buddha altars, either burning them or storing them in an outbuilding (Morioka 1970, p. 107).⁷ They refused to participate in Shinto or Buddhist rituals of any kind, knowing that this stand meant that except for family members who became Christian, they could not attend the funerals of their parents, brothers, or sisters. The general horror and revulsion inspired by this attitude and iconoclasm can only be imagined.

This is not to say that Christianity was regarded as totally opposed to what was valued in the new Japan. On the contrary, it enjoyed a certain prestige because of its association with the scientifically and technologically advanced West. Its Christmas, first celebrated as a Japanese church festival in 1874—complete with tree, carols, and Santa Claus—won immediate popularity. Its representatives put into practice a number of ideas that took root, ideas such as education for women, abolition of concubinage and legal prostitution, and to some extent even temperance. For a time Japanese Christians enjoyed the experience of being regarded as significant participants in the building of the new nation.

Protestant refusal to participate in the mortuary rites of other religions did not, however, insulate the Protestants against influence from mortuary rite customs divorced from their “original” religious matrix. The first Protestant funeral for which a sketchy

7. Note, however, that Protestants who retained the buddha altar and mortuary tablets appear to have found it impossible not to participate in Buddhist rites for the departed on the anniversaries of their deaths and at the time of *bon* (Morioka 1970, pp. 141–142).

description is available took place in March 1887.⁸ Professor Morioka describes it as follows:

The funeral was held at the deceased's home with the pastor as officiant and with members of the church participating in Bible reading and the singing of hymns. But going in and out from the kitchen, members of the linked households and of the neighborhood work crews dug the grave and made other arrangements in the way they had always done. In addition rites were held every seven days beginning with the seventh day and ending on the forty-ninth. Rites were also held on the death anniversaries and at the *bon* season, no longer in connection with the Buddhist temple or priest but in accordance with the customs generally practiced in a provincial district heavily influenced by the relationship with priest and temple (Morioka 1970, p. 142, my translation).

To what extent this practice of post-separation rites was general among Japanese Protestants cannot be determined, but Morioka's description gives clear indication of early influence from the ancestor worship tradition, particularly in the prolonging of mortuary rites.

The second generation. After about 1890, Japanese Protestantism seems to have taken on a somewhat different character. Its members no longer laid iconoclastic hands on the household altars (Morioka 1970, p. 107), and some doubtless participated in the mortuary rites of other religions—not to mention the national rites of the “non-religion,” State Shinto.

What caused this change is not clear, but it coincided with several things: a change in the Japanese Protestant constituency from former samurai to white-collar urbanites (Ikado 1961a, 1961b), public controversy between Japanese Protestant theologians (notably Ebina and Uemura), decline in church membership, and a

8. Until 1884 Christian funerals were illegal. Only Shinto and Buddhist priests could perform funerals.

gradual institutionalization of the government ideology concerning the emperor and his ancestors.

To trace, or even to specify, these and related developments historically is not the concern of this paper. The point of immediate importance is that from about 1890, Japanese Protestantism appears to have grown more accommodating than before.

The first generation, then, not only acknowledged the principle of non-compromise with "idol worship" but also, in many cases, put this principle into practice consistently and even aggressively. The second generation continued to acknowledge the principle, but apparently came to entertain doubts as to whether Christianity really required them to take so rigid a stand in relation to ritual remembrance of their ancestors.

The present generation: Post-funeral rites. We turn now to present-day Japanese Protestantism in order to explore the question of possible influence from the *ie* system and the custom of post-funeral liminal rites. For this part of the inquiry, I have relied partly on observation, partly on published information, and partly on 30-40 informants, most of whom live in the Tokyo-Yokohama area and belong to the Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan, known in English as the United Church of Christ in Japan. Given the general custom of forty-nine days of major rituals followed by incorporation into the pre-ancestral dead, then thirty-three years of linear and cyclical rites followed by incorporation into the body of ancestors, the expectation is that among Japanese Christians too there should be evidence for an extension of mortuary rites beyond the funeral.

The Protestant funeral described by Morioka showed that post-funeral rites existed as of 1887. Since then, the *ie* system has grown weaker; religious freedom has grown stronger; population mobility has led to attenuation of shrine and temple connections in the populace at large; and even among Buddhist families, the rites once held every seven days during the period of primary mourning are often abbreviated to two: one on the seventh, the other on the forty-ninth day (Hanayama 1975, pp. 185-187). Nearly

a century has passed since 1887. What about Japanese Christians today? Do they simply make their farewells at the funeral and grave, or do they engage in behavior that can be recognized as an extension of mortuary rites?

In order to answer this question, I shall consider three kinds of behavior: grave visits, memorial services, and actions relating to the mortuary tablet.

The role of the mortuary tablet in the Japanese ancestral cult tradition is central. In a sense it is the visible symbol of a spiritual presence. To it one daily offers food and drink and, as occasion affords, gifts that others make to the family (Smith 1974, pp. 84, 90-91; for a ridiculing critique of this custom, see Hashimoto 1962, pp. 10, 23; Obata 1978). That something so important in the ancestral cult should have no counterpart whatever in Japanese Protestantism is almost inconceivable. What to do about this tablet, or what to substitute for it, is a problem that can hardly be avoided.

One solution, chosen by a small number of informants of advanced years, is to maintain the buddha altar intact. This makes it possible to retain the tablets and remember the dead with daily food and periodic rituals. So long as this is done in the home, no problem of conscience seems to arise. The difficulty comes with the *hōji*, the rites held at the Buddhist temple with members from several linked households in attendance and with a priest as officiant. Of course even Protestants who maintain no buddha altar and no mortuary tablets occasionally participate in such rites; for the most part they regard their participation not so much a religious act as a family obligation. In this case the problem of conscience is minimal. But Protestants who maintain the mortuary tablets in the buddha altar, especially those in rural, face-to-face communities, can hardly avoid calling on the Buddhist priest to conduct the periodic *hōji* ceremonies. Failure to do so would elicit disapproval, perhaps even ostracism. On the other hand, through the very act of calling on the Buddhist priest to conduct these rites, these village Protestants are saying that in order to remember their

dead properly, they have to turn to an alternative religious institution. In principle Christianity rejects dual religious affiliation; in practice, however, a degree of dual affiliation becomes evident in this form of religious behavior. Those who maintain the mortuary tablets are involved, then, in certain necessary corollaries: the buddha altar, ceremonies at the Buddhist temple, and a de facto dual religious affiliation. How they themselves regard this behavior differs, of course, from person to person. Some find it painful. Others see in it a welcome complement to an overly narrow Christianity (thus the old man interviewed in Earhart 1980). Among the people I have consulted, however, most seem to find dual affiliation unpalatable, for few have chosen to maintain either the buddha altar or the traditional mortuary tablet.

The alternative solution appears to be the photograph. How many generations are thus covered and how general the practice is remains to be investigated, but some Japanese Protestants seem to treat a given photograph of a deceased family member much as people in a Buddhist family treat their mortuary tablets. They keep it in a visible location, treat it protectively, present before it gifts of fruit and vegetables that come to the family, and in all probability address themselves to the person it represents, not in prayer but in speech, uttered or unuttered.

With regard to grave visits, the information presently available to me suggests that Japanese Protestants not only visit their family graves but also time their visits to coincide with the spring and fall equinoxes and/or with the midsummer *bon* festival period.

As for memorial services, I am informed that it is by no means unusual for members of a Christian family to ask their pastor hold private services for a deceased family member, either at home or in the church, perhaps with a few close friends in attendance. The interesting thing is that these services, when not annual, seem to fall on or near the death anniversaries of the third, seventh, thirteenth, seventeenth, and subsequent years.⁹

9. Yamauchi, writing as a Christian pastor, recommends annual services on the

If, to the family-requested memorial services, one adds the collective memorial services held annually by the church, often at the time of *higan* or *bon*, it becomes evident that Japanese Protestantism, both familial and ecclesiastical, includes prolonged post-funeral mortuary rites, both linear and cyclical.

The present generation: Ie system influence. The institution that requires the ancestral cult is the *ie* or household system, and it has already been noted that this system serves as a prototype to which Japanese people seem to turn almost instinctively when setting up an organization. The question next to be considered, therefore, is whether Japanese Protestantism shows evidence of influence from the *ie* system.

For the purpose of considering this question, two forms of influence may be hypothesized. One is that of the main/branch household relationship, the other that of rites for the founding ancestor.

The simplest paradigm of household development is that of a married couple who, acquiring both property and progeny, bring into their house a bride for the eldest son and allot part of their wealth to help a second son build a house on family-owned land. In time the two households may be joined by a third, a non-consanguineal household set up for a devoted worker who spent many years serving the parents. In combination, the main house and the subsequently developed branch houses form a single corporate unit. The branch houses exist only because of the initial subsidy and continuing support of the main house; they are bound to it by ties of gratitude and affection, not to mention mutual support in

death anniversaries. He goes on to suggest that if the ashes of the deceased have not yet been interred, they and/or a photograph of the deceased be placed in a central position, together with flowers and candles, at the head of a table around which survivors and friends gather. After the pastor has read a passage from the Bible, given a brief talk, and led in prayer, those present, sharing tea and cakes, reminisce about the deceased (1973, pp. 176-177). Those familiar with Buddhist *hōji* will be struck by the parallels.

enterprises such as agriculture, fishing, and the like. The main house is the house of the parents or *oya*, and when the eldest son and his wife succeed them, they are known as the *oyakata*, the ones in the parental roles.

This main/branch relationship can also be found in Japanese Protestantism. When a church grows strong enough, it may decide to start a *dendōsho* or “preaching point.” Not all new churches start this way, to be sure. Some start because of the initiative of an individual Japanese Christian, lay or ordained; some because of the initiative of one or more missionaries; some because of the decision of a handful of people, already Christian but new to an area, to invite a pastor. But if a church formally decides to start a preaching point, it will allot part of its wealth and perhaps part of its human resources to this purpose. The initiating church is commonly spoken of as the *oya kyōkai* or “parent church,” and the two are bound by ties remarkably similar to those of main and branch households.

Moreover, just as main and branch households experience differing fortunes, such that the power of the main house may wane while that of the branch house waxes to such an extent that they reverse roles (Takeda 1957, pp. 37, 82–83; Yonemura 1976, pp. 189, 192), so main and branch churches likewise experience changing relationships. Probably the most common development is that a branch church becomes a *tanritsu kyōkai*, an “independent church” equal in status to the church that was once its parent.

If nothing more were involved in this pattern of church growth, there would be no particular reason to link it with the ancestral rite tradition. The *ie* system as a corporate unit of main and branch includes, more, however, than economic and structural ties. It also includes genealogical ties.

In the paradigm of household development just described, the initial couple may retire and turn management responsibilities over to their eldest son and his wife. But when the initial couple, particularly the man, dies, he becomes the founding ancestor of the

entire corporate unit.¹⁰ As such, he is made the object of periodic rites observed in common by each household in the corporation and is treated, functionally, as the chief guardian deity of the corporate entity (cf. Yonemura 1976, p. 180).

In the world of Japanese Christian institutions, a founder is commonly accorded a degree of ritual respect that has, so far as I know, no counterpart in United States Protestantism. A brief look at two types of institutions will make this point clear.

Among the churches that trace their origin to a specific individual, one can find several that hold, annually or at stated times, a memorial service on or near the death anniversary of the founder. Others, in commemorating the day on which the institution was established, consistently emphasize the immeasurable debt of gratitude owed to the founder.¹¹ On such occasions it is often the case that dependent, branch churches participate in these memorial rites. It is difficult *not* to see both in these observances and in the participation of dependent churches a continuation of the main/branch household prototype, including its requirement of a common funding ancestor.

Among the Protestant schools, this pattern is, if anything, even more pronounced. A particularly clear example is Dōshisha. Its founder, Niijima Jō, died January 23, 1890. His grave is located on a hill in Kyoto not far from the campus. To this day, a graveside service is held three times each year: once on the anniversary of his death, another on the day commemorating the founding of the school, and a third at the beginning of each school year so that entering students can be "introduced" to the founder.

It appears, therefore, that both structurally and ritually, con-

10. There may be a fictitious ancestor drawn from the world of myth or from the imperial lines as well, but that does not concern us here.

11. The former could be represented by Fujimichō Church, founded by Uemura Masahisa, and Shinanomachi Church, founded by Takakura Tokutarō, the latter by Reinanzaka Church, founded by Kozaki Hiromichi, and Denenchōfu Church, founded by Okada Gosaku.

temporary Japanese Protestantism receives important influences from the *ie* system.

Conclusion. With regard to the prolongation of post-funeral mortuary rites, reliance on a mortuary tablet or substitute, the main/branch relationship between churches, and the relatively strong emphasis on repeated rites for a recognized founder, Japanese Protestantism gives evidence of features that can reasonably be understood as consequences of its contact with the Japanese cultural tradition of ancestor veneration and the household system that makes it necessary.

This is not to say that Japanese Protestantism in its entirety can be comprehended from this perspective alone. The ancestral rite tradition, however important, is but one of several contending influences. Another, to mention only one, is the nationwide denominational structure as an organizational principle. In relation to this highly visible structural form, the *ie* system influence manifest in the churches lives an almost underground existence. The fact that not all churches honor their founders in the same way is probably to be explained by reference to these contending influences.

The problem with which this inquiry began, however, was to determine whether there is *presumptive* evidence for the existence of influence on Protestant Christianity in Japan from the ancestral cult tradition. I conclude that such evidence has been found, and that more detailed research is warranted.

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