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FUNERARY RITES IN JAPANESE AND OTHER ASIAN BUDDHIST SOCIETIES

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In any society, funeral rites are related not only to the religious aspirations of the dead but also to the religious commitment of his family or of the social group he belonged to. That is why funeral rites reveal certain aspects of the community of a population and why they form an important subject in cultural anthropology. The purpose of this article is to examine some aspects of funeral rites in Japan compared to those in other Asian Buddhist societies. In all of these societies, when death occurs in a family, Buddhism plays far more of an active role than it does for other important occasions in the lives of its followers. For example, Japanese as well as Sinhalese have different kinds of ceremonies for celebrating the birth of a child, attaining the age of puberty, becoming engaged to be married, etc., and many of the ritual elements in these ceremonies come from folk religion. Buddhism does not enter into these ceremonies and Buddhist monks have no roles to play in them. When there is a death in a Buddhist family, however, Buddhism is the main influence on the ceremonies. The participation of monks in the funeral service is indispensable. Of course, their role is not the same in every Buddhist society.

The other important point is the necessity of commemorating the dead ancestors. This aspect of the religiosity of Asian people completely depends upon Buddhist teachings mixed with popular customs. In this article, the author also tries to see the difference and similitude of some rituals in these societies concerning dead ancestors.

Key words: ANCESTRAL WORSHIP, JAPANESE BUDDHISM, CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY, FUNERAL RITES, MERIT TRANSFERRING.

The death of a person sets in motion a series of rites concerning the funeral. In such a ceremony the social persona of the deceased and the religion to which he adhered can be discovered. The relatives and friends can organise the funeral according to their likes or dislikes, but they cannot neglect completely the politico-religious convictions of the dead, especially when there is a last testament concerning final ceremonies. Certain people prefer to have a funeral strictly limited to close relatives. Some individuals ask in their last testament to give their body to medical experiments. Some religious leaders did not want a large ceremony. Some people thought that the remains of the dead were not so important. When Shinran (1173-1262) was asked where he should be buried he is said to have replied: "Throw my body into the Kamogawa river and let the fish feed on it." But he was cremated and his ashes buried partly at Higashi Otani and partly at Takata.

In every society, funeral rites are related not only to the religious aspirations of the deceased, but also, inevitably, to the religiosity of his or her family or the social group to which he or she had belonged. As Durkheim pointed out, even the expression of grief is not an individual matter but a duty imposed by the group.[1]

In all Far Eastern countries Buddhism is closely connected with the veneration paid to the dead. This aspect of social behaviour is particularly important in Japan where conducting

funerals became the main function of its religion. As Professor Tetsuo Yamaori has confessed, it has became a "funeral Buddhism", since performing rites for the dead has become the religion's main function in Japan.[2] So it is not an exaggeration to say that Buddhism still exists in contemporary Japan largely because it has continued to play a central role in ancestral rites. Several decades ago, Sir Charles Eliot wrote: "Some of the older Sects seem to be literally religions of the dead. For instance, it seemed to me when I was visiting the great temple of Tennoji at Osaka that the priests and the numerous worshippers were all engaged in intercessory or commemorative ceremonies on behalf of the departed".[3]

Each Buddhist sect in Japan has its own tradition concerning funeral rites and ancestor worship and ceremonies are held according to the doctrinal background of each sect. Every Buddhist country has its own way of organizing funeral ceremonies. Some customs are closely mixed with cultural elements from other countries, and some with a myriad of local variations.

In this paper I will explore the differences and similarities between Japan and other Asian Buddhist societies regarding funeral rites and ancestor worship. I hope that through such a comparative study, we can see more clearly the Japanese position.

This paper will focus on two aspects of the subject: (A) The role of the monks and priests in funerals; (B) The general tendency of helping the dead.

(A) Priests, Monks and Funerals

For the clergy of polytheistic religions, death is something very inauspicious and dirty. The dead body is treated as a ritually impure element, so the priest must keep away from it. For example, in traditions such as Shinto, priests do not have direct relations with death rituals.[4] Of course, Shinto has little to do with funerals and funerary rites may not be performed in Shinto shrines.[5] Even in Japanese mythology, Izanagi bathed in the sea[6] to purify himself after he had seen the corpse of Izanami. This notion of ritual impurity can be found in Hinduism as well. For example, according to the Hindu religious law books called *Dharma-sāstra,* death creates a serious ritual impurity.[7] Even hearing about a death can create a ritual pollution. If a priest visited a house where a death occurred, he could not directly participate in religious activities at his shrine without formally obtaining a ritual purification. For that he had to take a ritual bath, tread on cow-dung on his way home and use *pañca-gavya,* etc.

The question of ritual impurity concerning death is closely related to beliefs about supernatural beings. Japan has its Kami-s. Burma has its Nat-s, Cambodia and Thailand live with their Phi-s. Just as Japanese Buddhism co-exists with Shinto practices, Buddhism in every Theravāda country has to co-exist with polytheistic beliefs. For example, Ceylonese Buddhism co-exists with a *devāla* system. *Devāla* is a shrine dedicated to a god or several gods. Most of these gods such as Visnu (in Japan: Bishinu-ten), Skanda Kumāra (in Japan: Kumara-ten) came from Hinduism, but they were given a Buddhist and national identity.[8] These gods, however, did not learn from Buddhism how to tolerate death. So the notion of ritual impurity is valid in the *devāla* system. At least to keep up the prestige of their shrines, the priests maintain such notions with all possible exaggerations. So normally, in a village or in a town, when a death has occurred, the shrine of that area is immediately closed, and it is kept closed for at least two weeks. Some "serious" priests even want to close their shrines for three months or more. If a *devāla* priest participates in a funeral ceremony, he cannot go into his shrine for fifteen days. If a death

occurred in the family of a priest, he should not attend to his shrine for three months, etc. During the dates in which shrines are kept open, especially, Wednesdays and Saturdays, dead bodies are not transported. People believe that the gods travel in the air during these two days in order to attend to their shrines, so a dead body might cause pollution intolerable for these divine beings, and consequently they might become angry and cause various troubles![9]

Even though Hinduism considered death as a pollution, it couldn't ignore the necessity of its devotees to pay their final respect to a corpse religiously. So it prescribed different kinds of purificationary rituals called *samsakāra* for the dead body and for the benefit of the soul of the deceased and to obtain ritual purity. In India, such *samsakāras* are performed by a Brahmin priest or frequently, by the head of the family who plays the role of the priest. However, high caste rich people can obtain the services of Brahmin priests, and these are well paid for their services. In Ceylon, the *devāla* priests have nothing to do with *samsakāras* concerning death. When a death occurs they themselves go to a Buddhist temple and in this domain monks play the role of ritual specialists.[10]

Concerning ritual impurity, Christianity and Buddhism have more or less the same attitude. Neither of these religions treats death as ritually impure. Both religions have some compassion towards the dead.[11] Funeral services are held in Churches. The bodies are buried on Church premises. In Buddhism, the monks who participate in funeral services can go directly to their Vihāra[12] without any purificationary ritual. In Japan, the ashes are buried in temple grounds. Sometimes in Japanese temples, there are images of Amida (Amitābha alias Amitāyus) Buddha made out of bones and ashes mixed with cement. Statues of the Bodhisattva Kannon (Avalokitesvara) and the Bodhisattva Jizō (Ksitigarbha) can be seen in Japanese public cemeteries. In Cambodia and in Thailand, the dead bodies are brought to and kept in the temple hall until the cremation. In Thailand, the ashes are enshrined on a wall of the temple.

Whether death is ritually impure or not, for many religions the final ceremony is a moment of a transformation of something profane into something sacred: to transform something mortal into something immortal; to hand over the soul to its Creator. This aspect is very important, especially in the religions of resurrection. It is a common belief that eventual physical resurrection requires that the corpse remain ritually well kept.[13] To organize things correctly, a ritual specialist is necessary. In Christian societies the Church ministers assume this responsibility. Among Hindus, especially for high caste Hindus, there are Brahmin priests to perform the final ceremony with necessary *Veda mantras*. Even for the low caste Hindus, the water of Ganges comes to help. In Shintoism, in spite of the fact that death is dirty, the soul of the dead is believed to be a Kami. It would hardly be allowed that the Japanese Buddhist dead had an inferior status and they were therefore termed Buddha-s *(hotoke sama)*, the Buddha-s and the Kami-s, according to popular belief, being much the same. Like all else in this syncretic universe of buddhas and gods, the identifications and equivalences shift, merge, feed, and blur from one historical period to the next, from temple to temple, from shrine to shrine, and from region to region.[14] However, when a dead person is considered as a Buddha, every veneration becomes possible and consequently it has a place at the family altar called Butsudan (lit. altar for Buddha).[15] There are, however, several kinds of "hotoke". One's grandfather, father and son may be conceived as close relative hotoke; more remote kin are senzo, or "ancestral hotoke"; the Hotoke (with capital H) are Amida, Kannon, Shaka, Dainichi, and so forth.[16]

From the doctrinal point of view, for ancient Buddhism, birth and death are natural

phenomena, without any intervention of a Creator or of a supernatural power, or without any mystery. There is, however, the notion of rebirth. So for the Buddhist there is no magic in death but there is metaphysics and he cannot ignore the future "living conditions" of the dead. In order to arrange things for the next life, Buddhist monks are invited to perform the final ceremony. These monks have to play the role of ritual specialists. But their role is not the same in every Buddhist society. In Theravāda countries, bhikkhus (monks) are supposed to help lay people do meritorious actions in order to transfer those merits to the dead. In Japan, in Buddhist sects such as Jōdo or Jōdo-Shin, the responsibility of the monks is to conduct the dead to the Pure Land, through *nembutsu* recitations. In Tibetan Buddhism, Lamas pray to Bodhisattva-gods and ask them to guide the dead to a safe destination avoiding the valleys of suffering. In spite of the fact that Zen Buddhism in Japan exports its meditation practices to western countries, its monks can not escape from their duties towards dead lay followers. As mentioned in a recent work, surveys of Zen priests reveal that most monks stop practicing meditation as soon as they leave the monasteries at which they received their basic training. Once monks return to their local village temples, lay-oriented ceremonies, especially funeral services, occupy their energies to the total exclusion of their Zen art or Zen meditation. Statistics published by the Sōtō sect state that about 77 percent of Sōtō laymen visit their temples only for reasons connected with funerals and death.[17] Many Zen temples have cemeteries where the ashes of lay followers as well as of monks are buried.

In general, there is a large difference between a Buddhist funeral in Japan and in a Theravāda country where the ritual aspect of the ceremony is less elaborated by the monks and the commercial aspect is less exploited by funeral companies.[18] At this stage of discussion, it is useful to know how a funeral is celebrated in a Theravāda country. For example, let us see how such a ceremony takes place in Ceylon.

When somebody dies, with the approbation of all the members of the family, a date is fixed for the burial or for the cremation. Then, one or several close relatives of the dead go to the nearest temple, or to the temple where they used to visit frequently, to invite bhikkhus (monks) to come to their house in order to perform the funeral ceremony.[19] The superior monk of the temple accepts the invitation and, according to the wish of the lay people and considering the capacity of the family, decides upon the number of monks that will participate in the ceremony. If it was a rich family, the number of bhikkhus could be twenty-five, fifty or even one hundred. Here the economic condition of the family is considered, because the family must bear the transport expenses of the monks, especially of those who come from faraway temples.

Meanwhile, friends, neighbours and relatives of the dead render their services free in different kinds of work: the women prepare tea, receive female visitors, and cook food in a nearby house,[20] the men go to decorate the road (for the funeral cortege), to clean the premises, to prepare the graveyard, etc. A long white banner on which is written the canonical words *sabbe sankhārā anicchā* (All conditioned things are impermanent)[21] is hung horizontally between two trees over the road leading to the house. The same phrase is sometimes printed on large posters with a photograph of the dead and these posters are attached to the walls along the road and at junctions. Under the photograph is printed in large characters: "The person named so and so has passed away. May he (or she) attain *nibbāna*".[22]

If death had occurred in a hospital, the body is brought from the morgue to the house by a hearse, or even on the roof of an ordinary wagon.[23] The funeral ceremony is held in the open

yard in front of the house where the dead person lived. If it rains, a temporary tent is set up. The funeral ceremony never takes place inside a house.[24] Generally, it is held in the afternoon, rarely in the morning, but never at night; the corpse must be taken to the cemetery during the daytime. In front of the house chairs covered with a white cloth are prepared for the bhikkhus.[25] Somebody in the family goes to the temple to fetch the bhikkhus. When the bhikkhus have come and have sat down, they are first served soft drinks. Then the coffin is brought out from the house and it is put on the bearer in front of the monks. A new white cloth about several meters long is folded and put on the coffin. This cloth is called *paṃsukūla vattha,* or *mataka vattha* (lit. the cloth of the dead, or cloth to be given on behalf of the dead). Because of this cloth, the whole ceremony is called *"Paṃsukūlalaya"*. Later we will come to the significance of this cloth. The children, husband or wife, brothers, sisters and other close relatives of the dead sit on mats deployed on the ground in front of the monks. The other relatives, friends and neighbours gather around the close relatives.

To start the ceremony, traditionally the lay people must "take" the "three refuges"[26] and then the five precepts.[27] Then the family members of the dead take into their hands the cloth *(mataka vattha)* and recite the brief pāli formula: *imaṃ mataka-vatthaṃ bhikkhu-sanghassa dema.*[28] On behalf of the community of the bhikkhus, the oldest bhikkhu accepts the cloth. Then he keeps it in his hands or puts it on the table nearby, and all the bhikkhus start to recite the following stanza:

Aniccā vata sankhārā-uppādavaya-dhammino
uppajjitvā nirujjhanti-tesaṃ vūpasamo sukho[29]

The bhikkhus recite this stanza three times in monotone and serene voices.

The recitation of this stanza has two aims. The first is to recall the famous Buddhist doctrine: the theory of impermanence *(aniccatā).* It is a subject of meditation not only for those who recite the stanza but also for those who hear it. The second aim is to recall the funeral of the Buddha. According to the *Mahā-parinibbāna-sutta,*[30] this stanza is an exclamation made by Sakka (Skt. Sakra = Indra-chief of gods; in Japan, Taishaku-ten)[31] immediately after the *parinibbāna* (Skt. *parinirvāna*).[32] Recalling the *parinibbāna* (in Japanese *nehan*) of the Buddha, at this precise moment, is an act of pedagogical value: it seems that the spiritual councillors of Buddhism want to relativize things. That is to say, by recalling the funeral of the Buddha, they want indirectly to tell the audience: Look friends, the person most perfect for you is the Buddha and he has passed away. So what does this tell you about the death of your relative? All component things are impermanent".

After the recitation of this stanza, the act of transferring of merits takes place. This is a symbolic act for which simply a small vase of water and a cup kept on a plate are necessary. The close relatives of the dead take the water vase in his (or her) hands. While he (or she) pours water in the cup, everybody recites the Pāli formula: *idaṃ me ñātīnaṃ hotu, sukhitā hontu ñātayo.*[33] The water is poured until it overflows the cup. Just at this moment, the monks start to recite the following two stanzas:

Yathā vārivahā pūrā - paripurenti sāgaraṃ
evameva ito dinnaṃ - petānaṃ upakappatu[34]

Unname udakaṃ vaṭṭaṃ - yathā ninnaṃ pavattati
evameva ito dinnaṃ - petānaṃ upakappatu[35]

That is all for the transfer of merits. Then, a competent bhikkhu gives a short sermon which is limited to about fifteen minutes. He speaks about the impermanence of life, the danger of the cycle of rebirth *(samsāra),* the utility of meritorious actions, and the necessity of trying to attain *nibbāna* (Skt. *nirvāna*) as early as possible. He does not forget, however, to say a word about the virtue of the deceased. If the dead belonged to a rich family, the monk does not hesitate to praise the departed one at length. Every monk knows that the family will be happy with such praise and it will bring a lot of material support for the monastery, in the name of the dead!

After this sermon, one or two talks are delivered by relatives or friends. At the end of these speeches, the bhikkhus return to the monastery. The corpse is immediately taken to the cemetery to be buried or cremated.

That is how the funeral ceremony takes place in Ceylon. In other Theravāda countries such as Thailand and Cambodia, the principal features are the same, but there are some different elements. For example, in Cambodia, in Thailand and in Laos, while the corpse is kept at home, the monks come there several times a day to recite *abhidhamma.*[36] Sometimes the body is kept at a hall of a temple, and the funeral ceremony takes place there and only then is the corpse taken to the cemetery. In Thailand and in Cambodia, monks go with the funeral cortege to the cemetery. In Ceylon, the monks do not accompany the mortuary procession, except in the case of a funeral for a monk.

Thus we can see several major differences between Buddhist funerals in Theravāda society and in Japanese Buddhist society. In Theravāda funerals, no *saidan* is erected, no posthumous name is sought, no prayers are said, no *nembutsu* is recited, and no clergy plays the role of intermediary between the dead and high benevolent authority. Thus several questions can be raised: How far can the *paṃusukūlaya* be considered a Buddhist rite? Why do monks participate in a funeral? Does ancient Buddhism prescribe their participation in such a ceremony? Can lay people bury (or cremate) their dead without the help of monks?

First of all, to justify the monks' participation in a funeral, we can make reference to many canonical and post-canonical anecdotes where the Buddha himself and his principal disciples such as Ānanda, Sāriputta, etc., themselves visited dying persons.[37] Also, a very ancient story which is well known among Buddhists in Theravāda countries relates that the Buddha himself attended the funeral of a very beautiful prostitute called Sirimā at the city of Rājagaha (now, Rajgir at Bihar) and at that occasion he gave a sermon on the impermanence of corporal beauty.[38] Finally we can take into consideration the fact that the disciples Arahants and non-Arahants assisted in the funeral of the Buddha organized by the lay people as it is recorded in the *Mahā-Parinibbāna-sutta.*[39]

The second reason to justify the presence of the monks in funeral rites is the solidarity between Buddhist monasticism and lay people. In fact the essential characteristic of this relationship is the monk's duty to preach the doctrine *(dhamma dāna)* and the lay people's duty to support monks with material things *(āmisa dāna).* Lay society takes care of monks by giving food, clothing, etc. When a sad incident (such as a death) happens in a family, the monks come forward as spiritual advisors. In general, monks are not invited to participate in marriage ceremonies or in any other joyful moments of lay life,[40] but they are invited to participate in funeral ceremonies where a

mental consolation through Buddhist doctrine is necessary for lay people.

The third justification for the monks' participation in the funeral occasion is based on their proper spiritual welfare. Being members of an ascetic organization, monks should contemplate death *(marana-sati)* and impurity *(asubha-sati).*[41] According to the canonical texts, Buddha asked monks to contemplate these two aspect of life and such reflections were considered as a good means to suppress sensual desires and to attain a complete detachment vis-à-vis worldly things. To carry on the contemplation of these two matters, some monks went from time to time to a nearby cemetery or to a forest where dead bodies were abandoned.[42] Later, this custom was developed and some monks wanted to spend an entire night meditating in the cemetery. Such practices were later organized systematically and in Buddhist monasticism are known by the name *sosānikānga,* one of the thirteen ascetic practices (Pāli *dhutanga;* Skt. *dhutaguna*). The canonical texts such as *Mahā-satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*[43] explain how a monk should conduct his reflection on a corpse:

> "And further, O Bhikkhus, while a bhikkhu sees a dead body, one day old, two days, three days, swollen, blue and festering, thrown in to the cemetery, so he applies this perception to his own body thus: "Verily, my own body, too, is of the same nature; such will it become and will not escape it". Thus he lives observing the body according to the nature of the body. (...). And further, O Bhikkhus, while a bhikkhu sees a dead body thrown in to the cemetery, being eaten by crows, hawks, vultures, dogs, jackals or by different kinds of worms, so he applies this perception to his own body thus: "Verily, my own body, too, is of the same nature; such will it become and will not escape it". Thus he lives observing the body according to the nature of the body. (...).And further, O Bhikkhus, while a bhikkhu sees a dead body thrown in the cemetery reduced to a skeleton with some flesh and blood attached to it, held together by the tendons.... And further, O Bhikkhus, while a bhikkhu sees a dead body thrown in to the cemetery reduced to a skeleton blood-be-smeared and without flesh, held together by the tendons.... And further, O Bhikkhus, while a bhikkhu sees a dead body thrown on to the cemetery reduced to a skeleton without flesh (...).And further, O Bhikkhus, while a bhikkhu sees a dead body thrown on to the cemetery reduced to disconnected bones, scattered in all directions-here a bone of the hand, there a bone of the foot, a shin bone, a thigh bone, the pelvis, spine and skull. (...).And further, O Bhikkhus, while a bhikkhu sees a dead body thrown in to the cemetery reduced to bleached bones of conch-like colour. (...)And further, O Bhikkhus, while a bhikkhu sees a body dead body thrown in to the cemetery reduced to bones, more than a year, old lying in a heap. ...And further, O Bhikkhus, while a bhikkhu sees a dead body thrown on to the cemetery reduced to bones rotten and become dust.. so he applies this perception to his own body thus: "Verily, my own body, too, is of the same nature; such will it become and will not escape it". Thus he lives observing the nature of the body."

In this way, even without the invitation of lay people, Buddhist monks had the right to visit cemeteries in order to observe corpses as subject matter for their meditation. But, when such cemeteries in which dead bodies were abandored became less common, and when people started to bury or cremate dead bodies, monks did not easily find occasions to contemplate corpses. The

only solution was to pay a visit to a house where death had occurred and that could be done only with an invitation of the family. If and when the lay people were not Buddhists, the monks had little chance to visit the house. Knowing the religious necessity of the monks, the lay Buddhists, however, would invite them saying: "Come monks to our house, have a look, there is something useful for you to see in order to cultivate your contemplation of impurity". Providing such an occasion to monks was a duty of lay Buddhists. Going to such places was a duty of monks. That is why, even today, even the forest-dwelling monks do not hesitate to accept invitations to participate in funeral ceremonies, even though they do not like to participate in other religious ceremonies of lay people.[44]

One may ask why the monks are offered a cloth called *pamsukūla-vattha* at the funeral and what is the utility and meaning of such a cloth? To understand the significance of this cloth, it is necessary to go back to the very beginning of the organization of Buddhist monasticism. According to the *Vinaya-piṭaka,* during the first twenty years, the members of a new community wore only religious attire *(cīvara)* made of rags, and that robe was called *paṃsukūla-cīvara.* Two kinds of rags were used to make such a robe: some were pieces of cloth collected in burial-grounds, others were scraps of materials gathered in streets and near shops. We do not know where the first kind came from; perhaps they were the cloths corpses had been dressed in, or perhaps people threw them away in cemeteries especially for ascetics to gather. The *Vinaya-piṭaka* describes how travelling monks, in the first years of the Community, would collect rags in cemeteries which they chanced to find on their way. It is possible that people deliberately threw pieces of material there for that purpose.[45] We do not know the origin of the pieces of cloth that monks collected in streets and in front of shops either. Perhaps they were old and worn out, perhaps they were thrown away on purpose for the monks to use. Wearing a *paṃsukūla-cīvara* was an open challenge to the Brahmin ideology concerning ritual purity according to which such cloth was utterly inauspicious and harmful!

Twenty years after the beginning of the monastic community, an incident occurred which made it possible for monks to accept the robes and pieces of clothes given to them by lay people.[46] The monks, however, did not completely abandon their old custom of utilizing the *paṃsukūla-cīvara.* In spite of the fact that they received new clothes, some monks continued to wear robes prepared with the cloth collected from cemeteries or other places. It was not easy, however to collect clothes sufficient for many monks when their number increased, and consequently, lay people were encouraged to give clothes for monks.

It seems later, when funeral ceremonies took place in a much more organized way, the lay people thought perhaps that it would be appropriate for the occasion to give a cloth to the monks in the name of the dead. Such cloth could be used to make a robe called *paṃsukūla-cīvara.* The cloth offered at the funeral was called *mataka vattha* (lit. a cloth of the dead; a cloth given on behalf of the dead) or *paṃsukūla-vattha.* For lay people, giving such a cloth constituted a meritorious act, and for the monks, accepting such a cloth constituted not only a religious duty concerning the simplicity and ideal of renunciation, but also an occasion to return symbolically to the practice of old monks who wore the *paṃsukūla-cīvara.*[47]

(B) Helping the Dead

From the point of view of rebirth, death is not the final point of existence. Whether we agree

with that common belief or not, we have to take into consideration the socio-religious impact of such a notion. The funerals of Buddhist societies are completely based on the idea of continuation of existence of the dead.

Nobody knows where the dead have gone. As no communication is possible, helping the deceased is a crucial problem for living relatives. Even until the burial or cremation, the dead's silence is not only unbearable but also frightful. Sometimes the relatives might think that the dead may manifest at least in a dream. There are, however, good and bad dreams. In a dream, if the dead is presented in a happy mood, such a dream is interpreted as a good sign and *vice versa.*

Helping the dead is a three-fold necessity. On one hand, it is an emotional need mixed with love and respect as it is impossible to forget the departed one. Doing everything possible in the name of the dead gives an auto-satisfaction for the living. So it is a domestic duty. On the other hand, it is a religious duty based on the sense of gratitude and compassion. Finally, at least in some cases, it is a duty mixed with fear. If something careless occurred, the dead might get angry and might create trouble. So, he or she must be treated properly!

Throughout Japanese religious history, the problem was to appease the dead soul. The people believed that those who died angrily and in violent conditions would bring much trouble.[48] In this domain, Buddhism was very useful. For example, Goryo-e, a ceremony in honour of souls, is a Buddhist ritual to appease angry ghosts. Animism, which Buddhism made no attempt to eliminate, taught that the dead were able to avenge themselves and cause various catastrophes. In the Nara and Heian periods (710-794, 794-1185) monks and well-known ascetics were often asked to conduct rituals aimed at soothing the resentment of dead souls.

On the other hand, there was always the problem of wandering ghosts! One means of preventing the wandering sprits from harming the living is to perform a Segaki-e on their behalf. The word Segaki means "to give to the hungry ghosts", but in the sense that one gives to a beggar or that a wealthy person of rank dispenses largesse to the poor. However, the ceremony was held as a ritual, not as a meritorious action.[49]

Frequent references can be found that the Segaki-e ceremony was held after great fires, floods, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes, for it was feared that many victims of such disasters might not receive the proper rites, either because of the wiping out of whole families or because of the general confusion and disorder in the aftermath of the event. Such spirits would then become wandering ghosts, presenting great dangers to survivors. Today Segaki-e is generally regarded as an integral part of O-bon, although in theory Segaki-e is for quieting *oni* ("demons" — the *ki* of gaki) and O-bon is for the seven generations of ancestors.[50] The distinction is clearly lost on most Japanese today, who prepare two altars at O-bon, one for ancestral sprits and one for wandering ghosts.[51]

Before the arrival of Buddhism, it seems in Japan there were even human sacrifices for the benefit of the dead. As Sir Charles Eliot mentioned, an edict of 546 restricting the size of funerary monuments and forbidding cruel ceremonies like the sacrifice of men and horses at burials was doubtless due to Buddhist influence. The same edict also condemned the rule which required those who have been in contact with the dead to undergo rigorous purification, because it led to cruel consequences.[52]

Buddhists in every country attempt to help their dead in several ways. Transferring merits to the dead was the method prescribed in the ancient Buddhist teachings.[53] Even today, this method is very popular in Theravāda countries. We see in the program of funeral ceremonies many items

which are considered as meritorious actions such as taking the three refuges and the five precepts, offering the *paṃsukūla* cloth, hearing the doctrine, and meditating on impermanence. All these are done for the benefit of the dead.

Generally, the most important meritorious action is giving alms for monks and for poor people. On the seventh day after the death, an almsgiving ceremony takes place. For that monks are formally invited to the house and this almsgiving is called *mataka dāne* (lit. the alms for the benefit of the dead). The number of participating monks depends upon the capacity and generosity of the family. In this ceremony, the monks are given not only food, but also robes, medicines and other requisites, in the name of the deceased. Giving a set of "Eight Requisites" (Pāli. *aṭṭha parikkhāra;* Skt. *aṣṭha pariskāra*)[54] is considered very important, even indispensable. At the end of the ceremony, the merits are transferred to the dead by using the same symbolic method that we have seen in the *paṃsukūlaya* ceremony. Another almsgiving is held on the ninetieth day and this is a ceremony more organized than the seventh day one. This time the house is white-washed, the area is decorated, and the sad appearance has disappeared. Generally, seven, ten or fifteen monks are invited to accept food at the home. A rich family may even invite fifty or one hundred monks, and in such cases a chanting of *sūtras* is held starting from the previous night until dawn.[55] If the family is very rich, there is a large almsgiving ceremony to commemorate the first anniversary of the death. The aim of all these is to accumulate merits in order to transfer them to the dead.

At this stage, it is necessary to mention one word about merit transferring. Theravāda Buddhists admit that this "merit transferring" does not give the expected results always in the same way, and also they say in some cases, this transferring has no effect at all. Yet, it is always good to do it, because such actions based on loving kindness, compassion and gratitude towards the dead are useful to the person who does those good actions.[56] Whether the merits have been accepted by the dead or not, the intention of giving *(dāna cetanā)* merit is good *per se,* and consequently it is a meritorious act for the donor.

The transferred merits "arrive" to the dead only if he or she has been reborn in the community of ghosts called *peradattūpajīvī* (lit. those who live with what they were given).[57] The deceased who has been reborn in this ghosts' (Pāli. *peta;* Skt. *preta*) community is in an unsatisfied condition, and hopes thoroughly that his or her ancient relatives might give merits. If and when the merits are given, seeing it the ghost rejoices.[58] This delight (which is designated by the pāli word *anumodati*) itself allows the ghost to obtain a new birth in a more comfortable existence.[59]

Through such merit transferring, it is clear that Buddhism gave an ethical dimension to ancestral worship. Instead of animal sacrifices or other offerings done on the grave according to tribal customs, people who converted to Buddhism started to do meritorious acts on behalf of the dead at their houses, or in the temples or other suitable places.[60] A list of meritorious actions gradually developed. At the beginning, however, it focused on three domains: giving alms *(dāna),* conducting a virtuous life *(sīla)* and doing meditation *(bhāvanā).*

We know that in the early days of Buddhism in Japan, giving alms to monks and nuns and reciting *sūtras* and copying the canonical texts and distributing them were practised as meritorious acts for the benefit of the dead.[61] For example, in 702 the Empress Jitō died, and three days later her grandson Mommu Tennō on behalf of her soul gave vegetarian entertainments in the Four Great Temples of Nara (*Shoku Nihongi,* Ch. II, p. 25). This was repeated the second seventh day after her death and on the seventh seventh day, messengers were

sent to those four temples and to many other Buddhist sanctuaries, 33 in all, in order to arrange entertainments (*Shoku Nihongi,* Ch. Ⅲ, p. 26). In the same way, after Mommu Tennō's death in 707, the Empress Gemmei, his mother, on each of the seven seventh days, gave special services for his soul in the Four Great Temples of Nara (*Shoku Nihongi,* Ch Ⅲ, p. 46). In 735, when Prince Nittabe, one of Temmu Tennō's sons, died, the Emperor Shōmu by Imperial Ordinance fixed the constant rule that if an Imperial Prince died, a hundred priests had to be entertained on the seven seventh days after his death (*Shoku Nihongi,* Ch. XII, p. 200). A week after his father's death, in 781 the Emperor Kwammu, Konin Tennō's son, ordered that on the first seventh day sutras should be read in Seven Great Temples, and on the six further seventh days in all temples of the capital. Moreover on the 49th day, the monks and nuns of the kokubun-niji (the provincial monasteries and nunneries) in all provinces had to be entertained for the benefit of the deceased Emperor's soul (*Shoku Nihongi,* Ch. XXXVI, p. 671; Ch. XXXVII, p. 682).[62]

Almsgiving for the benefit of the dead is commonly practiced even today in all Theravāda countries. But there are some other customs existing in Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. The more remarkable practice in Thailand is to have a member of the family enter the monkhood for the benefit of the dead.

If there is no a close relative suitable or ready to enter the monastic life, then the relatives of the dead invite somebody from outside to become a monk on their behalf.[63] If nobody can be found, then the relatives ask a monk to lead a virtuous life for the benefit of the dead and they start to provide the necessary material support. Last year, when the Thai King's mother died, several of his young nephews became monks and many young people around the country also did the same for the benefit of the King's mother. In every Buddhist society, it is popularly believed that if somebody becomes a monk, his relatives will go to heaven.

In Cambodia, the eldest son of the dead temporarily becomes a monk and he goes in front of the funeral procession. He remains a monk for at least seven days.[64] If the dead had no son, then the eldest daughter shaves her head and becomes an *upasikā* to observe the eight precepts[65] for the benefit of the dead. She stays in that status for at least three months. The idea behind this is the common belief that living a virtuous life is a meritorious act and that such an act is highly beneficial for the dead.

This custom existed in Japanese history, too. This is illustrated in the account of the last illness of Emperor Yōmei when the son of Shiba Tatto became a monk for the sake of his dying sovereign (*Nihongi,* Ⅱ, p. 111). Many other examples are recorded in the *Nihongi.* In 614 one of the principal Ministers fell ill and a thousand men and women entered the Order for his sake. In 665 three hundred and thirty did the same on account of the sickness of Emperor Dowager, and in 682 one hundred and forty for the Crown Princess. Shortly afterwards three men became monks in the vain hope of saving the life of a comparatively unimportant official (*Nihongi,* Ⅱ, p. 375).[66]

We can see in this domain that Japanese Buddhism later invented some other methods according to which either the dying person ended his life as a monk or after his death he was given monastic status under a new religious name. In both cases the dead had a monastic funeral.[67]

Giving ordination for the deceased was very popular in Japan, especially in the Zen tradition.[68] The Zen funeral of the regent Hōjō Tokimune in 1284 at the hands of the Chinese Zen monk Wuxue Zuyuan alias Mugaku Sogen (1226-1286) is a prominent example of a layman's having

received monastic rites. Another detailed account of such a funeral was the cremation of Yoshihito (1361-1416), an imperial prince. On the evening after his death, his head was shaved and his body was washed and dressed in monastic robes. The corpse was then carried in a procession led by one hundred Zen monks and cremated in a monastic funeral while monks chanted the mystical formula dedicated to Amida Buddha. Koten Shuin, a prominent Zen monk, presented the final sermon and lit the cremation fire. As the fire burned, senior Zen masters led the monks in a series of scripture-chanting ceremonies.[69]

We can see the necessity of transforming the deceased into a new religious person in the well-known Japanese custom of giving a posthumous name. Perhaps by attribution of such a new name and new status, the soul of the dead is virtually and symbolically elevated and dignified and thus the dead would be worthy to enter a safe destination, for example the Pure Land.

Ancient Buddhism explains that the next birth takes place according to the last mental state of the dying person. So anybody who can master his mind is capable of arranging his final thoughts. On the other hand, the last moment depends upon how one maintained and cultivated the mind in day-to-day life. Cultivating the mind through following the doctrine is a matter of personal responsibility. According to the ancient doctrine, man himself is capable of becoming a superman, a Buddha, a Paccaka Buddha (Skt. Pratyeka Buddha) or an Arahant.[70] But certain Buddhist sects in India believed that man is such a miserable creature that he can do nothing for himself, and therefore they had to find some other solutions. This idea came to Japan through China. Thus in Japan, Amida devotion gained popularity from the middle of the eighth century onwards, especially within the context of worship for the salvation of the deceased. This is the notion of an eternal paradise into which the soul of the dead was conducted through the infinite mercy of the compassionate Amida Buddha.[71]

Even today, Jōdo Buddhism and Jōdo-Shin Buddhism promise rebirth in Western Paradise for their adherents.[72] Under such belief, doing merits or merit transferring is not necessary, but simply prayers for Amida Buddha in the name of the dead. According to Jōdo-Shin teachings, human beings cannot assist the souls of the departed. The purpose of all services for the dead is to express gratitude to Amida Buddha, who alone can deliver the soul into Pure Land. It does not mean that the Japanese mind completely rejects the karmic results of good and bad actions. However the notion is usually abstractly held, or may be phrased in such a way as to suggest that prayers efface previous bad *kamma*-s (Skt. *karman*). In particular, the venerable founder of Jōdo-Shin Buddhism maintained that even a person who has done many sinful acts could find salvation in the Pure Land if he recited *nembutsu* just once.[73]

As far as I can understand, the Japanese concept of rebirth is not the same as the other Buddhist societies. According to Theravāda beliefs, the dead may be born as a human being, or as a forest god or as a god of one of the heavens, or as a spirit, or as a hungry ghost, or even as an animal. That may happen according to his actions done while he (or she) was living and according to the mental state of the moment of death. But, in Japanese belief, at least in the doctrine of the main Japanese Buddhist schools, the dead may go to the Pure Land and from there directly to the definitive salvation. The notion of Pure Land however did not keep the Japanese mind from believing that the dead become spirits. Most of the O-bon ceremony is based on this idea.

According to common belief, the dead ancestor does not go so far as Western Paradise.[74] At least, he or she must visit home every year at O-bon! The dead come to earth from (or through)

graves, rivers, mountains, forests, and they return to their dwellings through same way. Before the end of the O-bon ceremony, at the moment of their departure, they are cordially invited to return next year. The other important point is the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the living and the dead. The ancestors are asked to look after the household, so one of the principal duties of the living is to look after the spirits of the dead.

A common belief in Japan is that one should maintain a certain contact with the dead. Meanwhile some Buddhist societies in South-East Asia try to cut short such a relationship. In this domain, there is a very remarkable custom among some Thais and Laotians: Just before the body is put in a coffin, the corpse is sprinkled with perfumed water or with sanctified water by Buddhist monks. Then the fingers of two hands of the corpse are joined together with a thread. The same thing is done to both feet. Then the members of the family put candles in the coffin and say: "The relationship between us is now disconnected. You are not any more my father, my uncle, etc. Do not persist in attachment to the place where you were and to those who were your relatives. Please go and join a place more pleasant where you can find felicity." This is an example to illustrate the need for getting rid of the dead. According to common belief, the dead might create trouble, they might bring to the ex-family many disasters and deaths. Somebody with much attachment to his family and, to his household things, might become a hungry ghost and might be harmful to the living.[75] This is very similar to the Japanese belief in hungry ghosts.

Before we come to the conclusion of this paper, let me make one final observation concerning the remains of the dead. In Japan, of course, the remains of the dead are highly venerated in the family altar and in temple cemeteries. The majority of Buddhists in Japan cremate their dead. So the ashes of their ancestors are available to venerate. One small quantity of these remains is kept in their family altar (at least for some time), and the rest they put in a jar and bury in the public or temple cemetery. In many cases the burial takes place at a family tomb. However, in remote village areas where crematoriums are not readily available, the bodies are not cremated but buried in the village cemetery. In such cases, only the memorial tablet of the dead is placed in the family altar. Contrary to Japan, in other countries there is no main or branch house system, nor double grave system.[76]

The custom of cremation in Japan started in the eighth century.[77] The first instance of cremation was the body of the monk Dōshō in 700. One year after, when the Empress died she was cremated, which must have seemed a strange and almost terrible innovation in imperial ceremony.[78] Even in the twelfth century, cremation was not indispensable. For example, at first, the body of Honen was buried. Only later was it cremated by his followers who built a tomb for the ashes.[79]

In Theravāda Buddhist countries, there is no family altar where the ashes can be kept and venerated. Of course, in Thailand or in Cambodia, the custom of keeping ashes or bones at home does not exist at all. This absence explains the double attitude towards the remains of a dead body: on the one hand a certain respect, on the other hand a fear.

In many regions in Thailand, after the cremation the ashes are dissolved in a river. Only a very small portion of the ashes is brought to the temple to enshrine in a suitable place. For example, we can see many temple walls where the ashes are enshrined and memorial slabs are fixed. Some times, the ashes are enshrined under a wall where an image of the Buddha is elevated. For example, in Bangkok, at Watt Mahatat (Mahādhātu Temple), there are a hundred such statues. The lower part of the long platform on which the statues are constructed is the place where the

ashes are enshrined, at the platform, just below each Buddha image. There are also some places to accommodate the portions of ashes eventually brought by other families. At the famous historic temple in Bangkok called Watt Saket (Golden Mount Temple), in the lower part of the temple premises, there are many places where ashes are enshrined on rocks, under trees, etc.

In Cambodia, only twenty percent of bodies are buried and burials are mainly among the Cambodians of Chinese origin. Eighty percent of funerals involve cremation. There is a curious custom influenced by local belief. The day after the cremation, the remains of the bones are collected. Then these bones are washed with coconut water and kept in a large banana leaf. When the banana leaf is turned, if the bones are dropped pointing towards the north, it means that the dead has been reborn in a happy place.

In Cambodia, too, the temple is the ideal place to keep the ashes.[80]

We cannot say that this custom is maintained without the encouragement of monks. Of course, it is evident that when the ashes are kept in a temple, the relatives are bound to that particular temple and they are interested in the material comfort of the monks and monthly or annually they pay a considerable sum of money in the name of the dead. Thus, keeping the ashes in the temple is a very good means of revenue for the monastery.

As we have mentioned earlier, in Ceylon comparatively few people cremate dead bodies.[81] In most cases the body is buried and there is simply a heap of earth on the spot where the body is buried.[82] But when a body is cremated, a tomb for the remains is erected in the public cemetery of the nearby town. If the family is rich with a land of many hectares, the ashes are enshrined in a tomb erected at a far corner of the land close to the road. On the tomb there is a memorial slab on which is carved not only the date of birth and death of the dead, but also the canonical expression *"aniccā vata sankhārā"* (surely, component things are impermanent) or *"sabbe sankārā anicchā"* (All component things are impermanent). No prayers or offerings take place at this tomb.

In cemeteries of main cities also there are such tombs. However, in Ceylon, the ashes or bones are never brought to a living house. Such elements are considered very inauspicious and harmful.[83] Even when a monk died, after the cremation, there will be a small tomb for the ashes at a far corner of the temple land, very far from all the religious buildings. Such tombs are never called *stūpa* or *cetiya,*[84] nor are they objects of offerings or any kind of special veneration.[85]

NOTES

1 Emile DURKHEIM, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* 1912, reprinted 1976, London.

2 Tetsuo YAMAORI, "Atheists by Default" in *Look Japan,* August, 1995, Vol. 41, p.10.

3 Sir Charles ELIOT, Japanese *Buddhism,* Edward Arnold & Co. London, 1935, p.185.

4 In some cases a Shinto priest could not take part in a matsuri for three months after the death of his father or mother. When a priest lost his father or mother, the period of pollution lasted three years, during which time his meals could not be cooked on the same fire or with the same utensils as the meals of other members of the household, and he lived either in a sepecial room used only in such emergencies or in a temporary hut built for the purpose alongside the house. See J. HERBERT, *Shinto at the Fountainhead of Japan,* George Allen & Unwin, London, 1967, pp. 76-77.

5 If people died by the roadside or were drowned, those who had been with them had to be purified (which was apparently an arduous ceremony), and hence even brothers would not help one another in such disasters. See Sir Charles ELIOT, *op cit.,* p. 207.

6 Of course, sea water (e.g. salt) is considered as a purificatory element in Shinto practices.

7 According to *Dharma-sāstra,* other occasions of impurity are childbirth and menstruation. Concerning ritual purity, the attitude

in Judaism is more or less the same: cf. Leviticus, 15: 19-28; Numbers 19: 11-22.

8 So these gods are not functionally Hindu gods but "Buddhist gods". The priests of their shrines are Buddhists. In the Ceylonese pantheon, some gods are identified as Bodhisattvas. For example, Visnu. Meanwhile, some Bodhisattvas appear as gods. For example, the Bodhisattva Maitreya (in Japan, Miroku) under the name Nātha is venerated. Some local gods such as Dedimunda are venerated because according to popular belief, they were servants of the Buddha while he was still living. See Mohan WIJAYARATNA, *Le culte des dieux chez les bouddhistes singhalais,* Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1987.

9 In rural areas death is considered as impure by popular belief. This aspect is very clearly seen in a purificatory ritual which takes place in such a place as a house where there is a funeral. Immediately after the body is removed from the home to the cemetary, a fire is kindled at the spot where the dead body had been. A pot is set on three stones where milk is boiled to overflowing. The aim of this ritual is dispersing inauspicious and impure elements created by the presence of a dead corpse. This custom of course has no relation with Theravāda Buddhism, which never prescribes this kind of purificatory rite. Although the funeral rites are mostly Buddhist in character, it should be noted that many beliefs and practices related to concerns with pollution are popular beliefs that came to the island with Hindu immigrants.

10 According to B.H. Chamberlain, in the late nineteenth century, even Shinto priests were given Buddhist funerals. See Basil Hall CHAMBERLAIN, *Things Japanese,* Tokyo, Shūeisha, 1983, 3rd revised edition, pp. 178-179.

11 However, the two religions have different points of view concerning the origin of death. For Christianity, it was caused by the original sin (or sin of the origins): e.g. the disobedience of Adam and Eve towards their Creator (Genesis: 17-19). But for Buddhism, death is a normal phenomenon and a consequence of birth. Everybody is bound to be born again and again and to die again and again until he (or she) has eliminated the three kinds of desires: (1) thirst for sense-pleasures *(Kāma-tanhā);* (2) thirst for existence and becoming *(bhave tanhā);* (3) thirst for non-existence (self annihilation, *vibhava-tanhā*)-*Samyutta-nikāya,* V, 420.

12 Vihāra: Image house of a temple.

13 Because of this reason, in Western societies, the profanation of a cemetery is considered as a grave offense and an insupportable insult and upset created for the dead. However, some Protestant Christians have practiced cremation for a long time. Now, there are some Catholics who also cremate their dead.

14 See Tetsuo YAMAORI, "Buddha-s and Kami-s: About the Syncretic Relationship between Shinto and Buddhism" in *Buddhisme et culture locales: Quelques cas de réciproque adaptations,* Actes du Colloque franco-japonais du septembre 1991, au College de France, (éd. par F. FUKUI & G. FUSSMAN), Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient, Paris, 1994, 179-198. In the language of Buddhists, however, the epithet Buddha is the most venerable term to use in order to show respect for somebody who is beloved. In Ceylon, sometimes the mother is called "the Buddha of the house" *(gedara budun).* In this case, the term Budun (Buddha) is employed as an epithet to a beloved and venerable person. The Canonical (Pāli) texts (e.g. *Anguttara-nikāya,* I, 132) sometimes indicate the parents under the epithet of Bramā (*Brahmā'ti mātāpitaro,* Lit. "The mother and father are Brahmās"). We read in the Japanese poem (of Motoori NORINAGA) entitled *Tamaboko Hyakushu* (1786) cited by Tsunetsugu MURAKA, *Studies in Shinto Thought* (translated by D.M.Brown and J.F.Araki), Tokyo 1964, p. 146:

Your father and mother are	*Chichihahawa*
The kami of your home.	*waga ie no kami*
Regard them as your kami	*waga kami to*
And serve them, oh children,	*kokoro tsukushite*
With heartfelt piety.	*itsuke hito no ko*

15 Kunio Yanagita rejects the claim that in the context of ancestor worship *hotoke* means Buddha. He attempts with much difficulty to show that the term originally was *hotoki,* a word referring to the vessel for food offerings made to the spirits of the dead. He points out that in Japanese the word Buddha is generally rendered *butsu,* and the word bodhisattva *bosatsu.* He suggests that because the same ritual vessel (hotoki) was used in making offerings to the Buddha as well as to the souls of the dead, both became known by the word for vessel, later transformed into hotoke and now misconstrued as the word for the Buddha. Kunio YANAGITA, *About Our Ancestors,* 1946, (Translated by Fanny Hagin Mayer and Yasuyo Ishiwara from Japanese: *Senzo no hanashi*), Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, 1870, pp. 107-110), cf. Robert J. SMITH, *Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan,* Stanford University Press, California, 1974, p. 53.

16 See Ronald P. DORE, *City Life in Japan: A Study of a Tokyo Ward,* University of California Press, Berkeley, 1958, p. 457.

17 Jan READER, "Zazenless Zen? The Position of Zazen in Institutional Zen Buddhism", *Japanese Religions,* 14, no. 3, (December 1986), pp. 7-27; William M. BODIFORD, "Zen in the Art of Funerals: Ritual Salvation in Japanese Buddhism" in *History of Religions,* vol. 32, no. 2, November 1992, p. 150.

18 Contrary to Japan, in these countries the service of a funeral company is limited to the sale of coffins and flower reeds. Sometimes the company provides a hearse to bring the body from the hospital to the home, or from home to the cemetery, but these hearses are very simple and without any decoration. For Japanese funeral cars, see: Shoichi INOUE & Shinobu MACHIDA, *Reikyū-sha,* Shyo-den-sha, Tokyo, 1992.

19 For such an invitation, only men go to the temple. The women do not take a leading role in a funeral. In village areas, the women never go with the coffin to the cemetery. The common belief is that the women can be attracted by evil spirits. Concerning many polluted occasions, the female body is regarded as a powerful and dangerous object, to be controlled and regulated. cf. J. KRISTEVA, *Powers of Horror,* Columbia University Press, New York, 1982.

20 The kitchen fire is not kindled until the body is at home. The food is prepared at another house nearby or in the open air. Of course, the food is very simple and vegetarian.

21 *Dhammapada.* v. 277; cf. *Dīgha-nikāya.* I, 17-170.

22 Attaining *nibbāna* (Skt. *nirvāna*) is the highest religious aim even for ordinary Theravāda Buddhists. Cf. *infra.*, p. 18, note 58.

23 People can buy a coffin from a funeral company near the hospital in order to bring the body home.

24 The funeral of a well-known person or a monk is held at the cemetery where many people can get together.

25 According to Buddhist custom, monks sit in seats destined for lay people only when those seats are covered with a white cloth.

26 Three refuges: *Buddha, Dhamma* (Doctrine) and *Sangha* (Community of the disciples-laymen and monks who attained one of the four stages of liberation). These three refuges are also called Three Treasures or Three Jewels (in Pali. *ratanattaya*; in Sanskrit, *tri-ratna*).

27 To take the "three refuges" and "five precepts" there are two formulas:

For the three refuges: *Buddhaṃ saranaṃ gacchāmi* (I take refuge in the Buddha); *Dhammaṃ saranaṃ gacchāmi* (I take refuge in the Dhamma); *Saṅghaṃ saranaṃ gacchāmi* (I take refuge in the Community of Disciples).

For the five precepts: 1. *Pānātipātā veramanī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi* (I agree to observe the precept to abstain from destroying life); 2. *Adinnādānā veramanī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi* (I agree to observe the precept to abstain from taking what is given); 3. *Kāmesumicchācārā veramanī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi* (I agree to observe the precept to abstain from illicit sexual actions) 4. *Musāvādā veramanī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi* (I agree to observe the precept to abstain from telling lies); 5. *Surāmeraya majjapamādaṭṭhānā veramanī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi* (I agree to observe the precept to abstain from liquor that causes intoxication and heedlessness).

When a monk recites in a high voice each element of these two formulas, the lay people repeat it. Every religious act in Theravāda countries is preceded by this repetition. This is considered a preliminary necessity of every religious act. Symbolically, taking "three refuges" means renewing one's religious status as a "Buddhist". The five precepts constitute the minimum requirement for the virtuous life of a lay Buddhist.

28 "We give this *mataka vattha* to the Community of bhikkhus".

29 "Surely, all component things are impermanent. Their nature is arising and dispersing. They are arising and dispersing. Their cessation is happiness".

30 *Dīgha-nikāya* II, 157; see Hajime NAKAMURA *Buddha Saigo no Tabi,* Iwanami Shoten, Tokyo, 1980, reprint, 1994, p. 160.

31 See Bernard Frank, 'Les deva de la tradition bouddhique et la société japonaise: l'exemple d'Indra/Taishaku-ten"in *Bouddhismes et sociétés asiatiques: Clergés, sociétéset pouvoirs,* Paris, 1990, pp. 61-74.

32 *Parinibbāna* (lit. complete blowing out) is the canonical term used for the "death" of the Buddha and Arahants. The word death (pāli. *marana*) is never used concerning the passing away of the Buddha or Arahants.

33 "May this merit go to my relative, and may my relative become happy".

34 "Just as the rivers fulfill the ocean, may the merits given here, be useful to the dead".

35 "Just as the rain water dropped in the high places, comes to the valley, may the merits given here, be useful for the dead".

36 Reciting *abhidhamma* means reciting only the first few lines of the each of the seven books of the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka.* It is a symbolical recitation. The monks do not have enough time to recite the whole *Abhidhamma-piṭaka* which contains more than 2000 pages. Theravāda Buddhists believe that the Buddha preached the *Abhidhamma* to gods of the Tusita heaven, especially to his mother.

37 *Majjhima-nikāya,* III, 258-263; *Samyutta-nikāya,* V, 176-177; *Anguttara-nikāya,* III, 295-298.

38 *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā.* III, 104-107; At the end, this anecdote says that the sermon of the Buddha was very useful for many people, especially for a monk who had secretly loved that prostitute.

39 Cf. *Mahā-Parinibbāna-sutta* (*Dīgha-nikāya,* II, 98-162).

40 In joyful moments or on occasions such as going to a job for the first time, seeing a monk is considered inauspicious by popular belief in Ceylon. Even a dream in which monks are present is described as a dangerous sign. The general belief is, if somebody had a such a dream, he (or she) would hear soon the death of a close relative or friend.

41 *Maranasati-sutta* in *Anguttara-nikāya* IV, 317-322; cf. Mohan WIJAYARATNA, "Les rites funeraires des bouddhistes singhalais" in *Buddhisme et culture locales: Quelques cas de réciproque adaptations,* Actes du Colloque franco-japonais du septembre 1991, au College de France éd. par F. FUKUI & G. FUSSMAN), Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient, Paris, 1994, pp. 69-84.

42 In old societies, even a forest area where dead bodies were abandoned or burned was called *susāna.*

43 *Majjhima-nikāya* I, 55-63; The *Visuddhimagga* of Buddhagosa (5th century) dedicated a whole chapter to explain how and under which conditions the reflection on impurity of the body should be carried out. *Visuddhimgga,* pp. 179-197.

44 In Ceylon, there are about 30,000 monks living in temples situated in towns or villages. But the monks who live in forest hermitages are not more than 300. In Thailand too, the forest-dwelling monks are comparatively very few.

45 The fact that monks used rags gathered in cemeteries did not mean that they wore dirty garments, or saw a special virtue in doing so. On the contrary, the *Vinaya-piṭaka* describes them washing the rags before using them.

46 *Vinaya-piṭaka,* I, 280. For the first twenty years of the existence of their community, Buddhist monks only wore religious attire made of rags. Then, following a suggestion made by a well-known physician, Jīvaka Kōmārabacca, the Buddha allowed the monks to accept robe-material and robes given by lay people. The Buddha himself started the practice by accepting an expensive piece of cloth from the doctor. See Mohan WIJAYARATNA, *Buddhist Monastic Life,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 32-55.

47 Even today, the religious attire of Buddhist monks in Theravāda countries is made out of pieces of clothes stitched together as it was in *Paṃsukūla-cīvara.* The kesa used by Japanese Buddhist monks is the symbolic representation of this ancient idea.

48 Among the fearful sprits in the Japanese world of supernatural beings, the most fearful are the vengeful gods (Goryo-shin, Tatari-gami). These spirits have long been the object of cults, which flourished from the eighth to the twelfth century, in particular. There were at least three systems of counter magic to avert the evils from these vengeful beings. See Richard M. DORSON, "Bridges Between Japanese and American Folklorists" in *Studies in Japanese Folklore* (Ed. Richard M. Dorson), Indiana University Press, 1963, p. 19; Ichirō HORI, "The Phenomenological Development of the Pure Land School in Japan" In *Japanese Association for Religious Studies and Japanese Organizing Committee of the Ninth International Congress for the History of Religions* (Ed. Religious Studies in Japan), Maruzen, Tokyo, 1959, pp. 148-149. As Professor Ichirō Hori mentioned elsewhere : originally, goryo were the malevolent spirits of noble persons who died in political intrigues. They were associated with disasters, epidemics, and wars through divination or necromancy by magicians or shamannesses. Later, the idea of goryo was gradually expanded through the reinterpretation that even an ordinary person could become a goryo or goryo-shin by their own will power, ardent wish on the verge of death, or accidental death under unusual circumstances. cf. *Folk Religion in Japan: Continuity and Change,* The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1983, p. 43.

49 It may be performed privately at an altar set up outside the dwelling under the eaves, or it may be held at a temple. After the altar is set up at a selected spot, offerings and a basin filled with holy water are placed on it. The priest sits facing east, that is, away from the Western Paradise. While he recites the sutras it is thought that the wandering spirits gather around the altar. When the ritual is formally observed, the five nyorai (Tathāgata) banners must be placed on the altar (one at each corner and one in the center), along with a tablet inscribed "Tablet for the Myriad Sprits of the Three Worlds" *(sangai banrei hi).*

50 *Bukkyo dai jiten* (Dictionary of Buddhism) 1960, vol. I, 2907-12; cited by Robert J. SMITH, *op.cit.,* p. 20.

51 Even today, according to popular belief in Japan, the spirit of the newly dead remains something of a threat to the living, at least until the first bon following the death. Often referred to as a "new hotoke" *(ni hotoke)* until sent away with all the other ancestors at the end of its first bon, the spirit of the newly dead retains some of the contamination of death that must be ritually cleansed. cf. Robert J. SMITH, *op. cit.* p. 41. Even the necessity of separating the dead body and the living is based on the fear of an eventual attraction of the dead towards old relatives. Especially, when someone died with much attachment to his family, such a person might become a hungry ghost and might be harmful to the living, so it is necessary to get rid of him. Cf. *infra.,* p. 22.

52 Sir Charles ELIOT, *op.cit.,* p. 207.

53 This custom is mentioned in the Canonical texts (Pāli) such as *Vimāna-vatthu* and *Peta-vatthu* (The sixth and seventh Books of the *Khuddaka-nikāya*). In the early days of Buddhism in Ceylon, these texts had a very great influence. For example, the chronicles of this country say that one of the first sermons of the Arahant Mahinda, the first Buddhist missionary monk who came in the third century B.C., was based on subjects taken from these two books, concerning dead relatives and merit transferring (*Dīpavaṃsa,* XII, v. 81; *Mahāvaṃsa,* XIV, v. 58). The first missionary monk thought that this kind of sermon would be very attractive to people who maintained the beliefs concerning their dead ancestors.

54 The Eight Requisites: 1. an outer robe called *sanghāti;* 2. an upper robe called *uttarāsangha;* 3. a lower robe called *antarāvāsaka;* 5. an alms-bowl ; 6. a razor [to shave the beard and head]; 7. a cloth belt; 8. a water filter made out of cloth. The Eight Requisites form the costume of Buddhist Theravāda monks. According to popular belief, this gift will be helpful not only to the dead but also to the donors, enabling them to become a monk [or a nun] in a future life in order to attain *nibbāna,* without

much difficulty, in the presence of a future Buddha.

55 In between these two almsgivings (seventh day and ninetieth day) the family organizes many meritorious activities in the name of the dead. They go to a nearby temple to offer flowers to a statue of the Buddha, and give food and cloths to poor people, and consider all these acts as meritorious. They commemorate the death day by sending food to the monks in the nearby temple on a monthly basis.

56 For the donors, the act of transferring merits itself is another meritorious act called *pattidāna.* In other words, because of this merit transferring, the merits of the donors do not diminish, but increase.

57 According to the doctrinal explanation, this state of spirits is a short period of time in which the deceased waits for rebirth in a more stable place to be born. Theravāda Buddhism does not attach much importance to the notion of *antarābhava,* according to which there is an intermediary state between death and rebirth of the departed. The *antarābhava* (in Japanese *Chūu*) is a notion greatly held by the Yogācāra School of Buddhism.

58 To sustain such a belief, for Theravāda Buddhists there are the texts such as *Petavatthu* and *Vimānavatthu* and also, the texts non Theravādin such as *Milinda-pañha* and a large quantity of anecdotes in ancient commentaries. See J.M. AGASSE, "Lee transfert de mérit dans le bouddhisme pāli classique" in *Annuaire de l'Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (V^e section),* Paris, 1978, pp. 311-332; R. F. GOMBRICH, *Precept and Practice. Traditional Buddhism in Rural Highland of Ceylon,* Oxford, 1971, pp. 243-244; H. BECHART, "Buddha-Field and Transfer Merit in a Theravāda Source", *Indo-Iranian Journal,* 35, 1992, pp. 95-108. See also, M. W. DE VISSER, *Ancient Buddhism in Japan: Sutras and Ceremonies in Use in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries A.D. and Their History in Later Times,* E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1935, pp. 58-60.

59 In the Commentary of *Petavatthu* there is the following anecdote: A female ghost (Pāli. *peti,* Skt. *pretī*) said to a monk: "I was a wife of an unhappy husband in that village; I have been jealous by nature and have done bad deeds. I am now in the *peta*-realm. Please, Venerable One, go to the house of my husband. He will give you alms. You must dedicate the merits to me. Thus I shall be released from this *peta* world. The monks, having heard her words, pitied her, full of mercy, and visited the house of her husband in order to obtain alms. He, having seen the monks, joyfully having taken their alms-bowl, let them sit down and caused them to eat plentiful delicious food. The monks, having told him what they heard, dedicated the merits to the *peti.* At the same moment she was freed from suffering and having the superb beauty of a goddess, showed herself to her husband at night". cf. *Paramatthadīpanī,* Pali Text Society, 1935, p. 35.

60 Each time when they transfer merits, they say implicitly: "May these merits be useful to the departed one to attain *nibbāna*". Attaining *nibbāna* is the most important religious goal of Theravāda Buddhists. However, they do not want to realize it very soon! Their immediate goal is to have a rebirth in a better place, for example, in a heaven. Some Buddhists think that it is difficult to attain while carrying on an ordinary life, and so they must do meritorious acts in order to obtain a much more favorable birth the next time. Meanwhile some other people hope to have rebirth in the Tusita heaven where Maitreya Bodhisattva is waiting. Actually they think that they might be born as human beings together with Maitreya Bodhisattva, thus they would be able obtain easily an occasion to hear the doctrine preached by Maitreya Buddha, and finally attain *nibbāna.* Monks are encouraging these kinds of hopes in lay people, and for that they encourage meritorious acts such as giving alms to the monks, repairing monasteries, etc. Of course, without these "meritorious acts" of the lay people the monasteries could not be maintained and monks could not exist. Not only lay people, but also many monks do meritorious acts such as living a virtuous life, meditating, preaching etc., in the hope of having a more comfortable next life, preferably in Tusita of Maitreya Bodhisattva. The hope of having a rebirth in a heaven is not a new phenomenon. According to all kinds of Buddhism-s, the ultimate goal of the teachings of the Buddha was to show the way to attain *nibbāna* (skt. *nirvāna*). That is to say to be free from the cycle of rebirth, *samsāra.* Early Buddhism demanded absolute renunciation and encouraged its followers (men and women) to attain the state of Arahant as early as possible. All important sermons of the Early Buddhist Canon emphasize the necessity to cultivate the mind in order to obtain a full detachment from *samsāra.* It does not mean that Buddhism completely rejected the common hope of rebirth in a heaven. It is accepted as second best. For example, we find in canonical texts, some sermons of the Buddha encouraging of doing meritorious acts in order to be reborn in one of the heavens. The message of this paradoxical attitude is very clear for the Buddhist. Of course the *summom bonum* is *nibbāna* which means the deliverance from the cycle of rebirth. If somebody is incapable of attaining that goal in this life, he must at least try to do meritorious acts. Because, with the results of meritorious acts, existence in the cycle of rebirth will be less uncomfortable!

61 Copying the texts, distributing them, preaching, etc. are considered as very important meritorious acts. This is emphasized in an old Canonical passage: *sabba dānaṃ dhamma dānaṃ jināti* (The giving of doctrine surpasses all other givings). The Emperor Asoka (268-233 B.C.) repeats this in one of his rock inscriptions.

62 Cf. M.W. DE VISSER, *op.cit.,* pp. 32-37; 68-70.

63 When a person becomes a monk through such invitation, the family of the dead is bound to organize all facilities of the religious life of this new monk.

64 In Ceylon such a practice does not exist.

65 Eight Precepts: Abstain from 1. killing living beings; 2. taking what is not given; 3. sexual relations; 4. telling lies; 5. drinking liquor that causes intoxication and heedlessness; 6. eating after noon; 7. dancing, singing music and unseemly shows, using garlands, perfumes and unguents and things which tend to beautify and adorn the person; 8. using high and luxurious seats and beds.

66 In the chronicle of the three months preceding the death of the Emperor Temmu there is a long catalogue of the good works to be done for his welfare. One of the important measures was seventy persons of pure conduct to be selected to renounce the lay life. First, eighty persons became monks and then a hundred others followed their example.

67 In Theravāda countries, there is not much difference between the funeral of lay person or of a monk. The only remarkable difference is the monk's funeral is attended by many lay people and many monks. The main items of the program are the same. In the Theravāda tradition, strictly speaking, a monk who has died is not a monk any more. The reason is according to *Vinaya* laws, by a monk's death his Higher Ordination *(upasampadā)* becomes null and void. However, conventionally his body is treated as the body of a monk with due respect. If he was a very virtuous person, the respect paid by lay people would be very high too. The *Vinaya-piṭaka* of the Theravāda does not give any special liturgy to monastic funerals. But even some other non Mahāyānist schools had a different approach concerning monks' funerals. See Gregory SCHOPEN, "On Avoiding Ghosts and Social Censure: Monastic Funerals in the Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya", in *Journal of Indian Philosophy,* no 20, (1992), pp. 1-39.

68 Cf. W.M. BODIFORD, *art.cit.,* p. 153.

69 *Ibid.* p. 154.

70 According to ancient Buddhism, men and women can become Arahants. See Mohan WIJARARATNA, *Les Moniales bouddhistes: naissance et développement du monachisme feminin,* Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1991, pp. 143-155.

71 On the other hand, statues of Jizō on the graves of children are common in Japanese cemetaries. Children in particular are looking for his compassionate assistance in crossing the river that bars their way to paradise. Jizō Bosatsu is the foremost protector of children and identified with those who have been aborted. He is known as migawari, one who suffers on behalf of others, one who can transform his shape infinitely to rescue those in dire straits.

72 Honen (1133-1212), the founder of Jōdo Buddhism, taught that a single sincere utterance of the *Namu amida butsu* was sufficient to secure the intercession of Amida Buddha on behalf of one's soul and deliver one into the Western Paradise. Shinran (1173-1263), the founder of Jōdo-Shin Buddhism, went even further in denying the necessity of both ascetic practices and the recitation of *Nembutsu.* According to him, salvation can be gained through faith alone.

73 According to Shinran, the essential thing was to say that prayer with full faith and confidence in the Buddha; that one such believing utterance is sufficient to secure birth in the Pure Land, and that all subsequent repetitions are to be regarded as simply expressions of joy and gratitude.

74 Herman OOMS, "The Religion of the Household: A Case Study of Ancestor Worship in Japan," *Contemporary Religion in Japan,* 8 (3-4), 1967, pp. 201-333. By the same author, *Japanese Ancestor Worship as the Religion of the Household,* Mouton, The Hague, 1974.

75 In such cases, they look for the help of shamans to draw the spirit of the dead. When the people want to send away a spirit peacefully, then they invite monks to recite *sūtras.*

76 This double grave system (a burial grave and a ritual grave) known as *ryō-bosei* exists in certain regions of Japan. Cf. Chōshū TAKEDA, *Susen sūhai* (Ancestor Worship), Heirakuji shoten, Kyoto, 1961, 102-105; Takayoshi MOGAMI, "The Double-Grave System" in *Studies in Japanese Folklore* (Ed. R.M. DORSON), Indiana University Press, Indiana, 1963.

77 See François MACE, *La mort et les funérailles dans le Japon ancien,* Publications orientalistes de France, 1986.

78 Sir Charles ELIOT, *op.cit.,* p. 209.

79 *Honen the Buddhist* Saint: *His Life and Teaching,* translated by Harper H. COATES and Ryugaku ISHIZUKA, Kyoto, 1925, pp. 684-687.

80 According to another tradition, the ashes of a king or a dignitary are dispersed in the forest. And every year there are commemorative ceremonies.

81 In Ceylon, the choice of burying or cremating depends on the economic situation of the family of the dead. A cremation requires lots of wood (several coconut trees are cut down) to prepare the fire heap, lots of labor to prepare the cremation ground, etc., so often it is too expensive for ordinary people. On the other hand, cremation in a gas crematorium is not so popular, and sometimes such a modern element is seen as disrespectful to the dead. However, gas crematoriums exist only in the capital city. So for ordinary people, burying their dead is the simplest solution.

82 Normally, in Ceylon, the village cemeteries are not well maintained. Most of the time a cemetery is a place abandoned and covered with trees. When there is a burial or a cremation to be done, the people come to clear out only the part of the cemetery that is necessary for the occasion.

83 Again in that belief we can see the influence of the *devāla* system. cf. *supra.*, p. 3.

84 In Theravāda countries, the two terms: *thūpa* (skt. *stūpa*) and *cetiya* (skt. *caitya*) are employed only to describe a construction that enshrined the relics of the Buddha or an Arahant, but never a tomb of a monk or a lay person. But in Japanese Buddhism, the two terms *stōba* and *tōba* derivated from sanskrit *stūpa* (Pāli. *thūpa*) are used to indicate a thin wood slat placed on the grave.

85 Keeping the ashes of lay people in the temple was never a custom in Ceylonese Buddhism. But the temples recently established by Ceylonese monks in European countries had to go out of their tradition because of heavy demands from Cambodian and Vietnamese Buddhists residing in these countries. This new trend illustrates that the monks cannot resist the temptations coming from the popular beliefs as well as from the necessity of donations.

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日本ならびにアジアのその他の仏教社会における葬式儀礼

モハン・ウィジャヤラトナ

要旨：どのような社会においても、葬式儀礼は、死者の宗教的希求のみならず、死者が帰属する家族または社会のグループの宗教上のコミットメントと関係している。宗教儀礼が、人間共同体の或る側面をあらわにするとともに、かつ文化人類学の重要な(研究) 対象となる所以も、ここにある。本論文の目的は、日本における葬式儀礼の若干の側面を、アジアのその他の仏教社会における葬式儀礼と比較・検討することにある。これらの全ての社会においては、家族内において死者が発生するとき、それ以外のことが発生する場合に比べて、仏教が果たす役割は、はるかに大きなものである。例えば、日本人は、セイロン島のシンハリーズ族と同様、子供の誕生日、思春期の到来、結婚等々を祝う時に、異なる種族の儀式を行なう。その際の儀式の構成要素は、民俗宗教に由来することが多い。これらの儀式において仏教も仏教僧侶も役割を演じることはない。ところが、仏教徒の家族の中で死者がでるばあいは、仏教は葬式儀礼において大きな役割を演ずるのである。葬式における僧侶の参加は、不可欠とされる。もちろん、葬式において僧侶が果たす役割は、同一のものではない。

もう一つ重要な点は、死者の祖先を祭る必要である。アジア人の宗教性のこの側面は仏教の教義と人々の習慣の混合如何に因る。本論文の中で、著者は、死者の祖先の供養の仕方にかんするアジア仏教における異同を明らかにしようとしている。