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**Change and continuity in a Japanese rite of passage: the case  
of Shichigosan**

**Zmena a kontinuita v japonskom prechodovom rituáli —  
Šičigosan**

**Disertační práce**

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## Contents

1. Outline of the thesis and terminology .....	11
1.1 Introduction.....	11
1.2 Terminology.....	15
1.3 General outline.....	17
2. Methodology and theoretical approaches.....	23
2.1 Methodology.....	23
2.2 Theories on ritual.....	28
2.3 Rites of passage.....	32
2.4 Ritual and change.....	34
2.4.1 Revival and reinvention of ritual.....	36
2.5 Historical approaches to the study of ritual.....	39
2.6 The study of consumption.....	41
2.6.1 Consumption and ritual.....	45
3. Japanese folklore studies and the ethnographic study of rituals .....	49
3.1 Japanese language terminology.....	49
3.2 Folklore and the study of ritual in Japan.....	52
3.3 The categorization of rites of passage.....	56
3.4 Rites of passage observed after birth.....	60
3.5 Rites of passage before the age of seven.....	70

3.6	Further themes in the interpretation of childhood rites.....	77
3.7	Coming of age rites.....	79
3.8	Wedding, <i>yakudoshi</i> and funeral rites.....	83
3.9	Conclusions.....	88
4.	Birth of the urban form of Shichigosan and the historical roots	
	of consumption patterns (1600-1945).....	92
4.1	Introduction.....	92
4.2	The birth of the urban pattern.....	93
4.3	The beginnings of consumption practices in Shichigosan.....	98
4.4	Origin of <i>chitoseame</i> and the commercialization of other festivities.....	103
4.5	Social change and the diffusion of Shichigosan pattern after	
	the Meiji Restoration.....	105
4.6	The evolution of Shichigosan reflected in newspaper	
	articles (1868-1945).....	108
4.7	Trends and fashion in Shichigosan wear .....	114
4.8	Reforming the celebration.....	117
4.9	Popularization and commercialization of Shichigosan.....	120
4.10	Conclusions.....	124
5.	Postwar development of Shichigosan celebration patterns.....	127
5.1	Introduction.....	127
5.2	Consumption in urban Japan.....	129

5.3	The study of ritual in the modern context of Japan.....	132
5.4	The development of Shichigosan pattern in the first decades after the war.....	139
5.5	Criticism and reform campaigns.....	142
5.6	The rise of ‘Shichigosan industry’ .....	145
5.7	Affirmation of the celebration pattern.....	151
5.8	Commodification of child-rearing .....	154
5.9	Diversification and individualization in celebration manners.....	160
5.10	The role of the media.....	166
5.11	Conclusion.....	169
6.	Social aspects of Shichigosan.....	174
6.1	Introduction.....	174
6.2	Birth of the ‘modern family’ in the interwar period.....	176
6.3	Women and family in postwar Japan.....	179
6.4	Views on children in the past and before the war.....	184
6.5	Changing views on children in postwar Japan.....	188
6.6	Growth of Shichigosan into a family ritual.....	190
6.7	The constitution of the family ideal through the celebration.....	195
6.8	Women’s role in the preparation of the celebration.....	199
6.9	The role of Shichigosan in the socialization and education of children.....	207
6.10	Changing patterns of transmission of ritual knowledge.....	211

6.11	Conclusions.....	217
7.	Symbolism in Shichigosan.....	220
7.1	Introduction.....	220
7.2	Historical examples of symbolism in childhood rites of passage.....	222
7.3	The notion of age transition.....	228
7.4	The idea of tradition in Japanese festive dress.....	232
7.5	The dress and its multiple meanings.....	239
7.6	Symbolism in dress patterns and colors.....	243
7.7	Other symbolic aspects of the Shichigosan celebration: <i>chitoseame</i> .....	245
7.8	Symbolism associated with numbers.....	247
7.9	<i>Goban no gi</i> and the festive menu.....	250
7.10	The emergence of photograph.....	252
7.11	Photo studios and the fragmentation of the ritual event.....	255
7.12	Memories, photograph and kinship relations.....	259
7.13	Conclusions.....	261
8.	The role of religion and of religious institutions in the development of Shichigosan.....	263
8.1	Introduction.....	263
8.2	Surveys on religious attitudes and observance rate of Shichigosan.....	265
8.3	Shichigosan and its connections to the <i>ujigami</i> belief.....	270
8.4	Religious institutions: two case studies.....	273

8.4.1 Case study I: Meiji Jingū.....	275
8.4.2 Case study II. Hie Jinja.....	280
8.5 Religious institutions as service providers.....	281
8.6 The multiple functions of religious institutions.....	286
8.7 Conclusions: Practical benefits and spiritual needs.....	289
9. Conclusion.....	293
Bibliography.....	297

# 1. OUTLINE OF THE THESIS AND TERMINOLOGY

## 1.1 Introduction

This thesis deals with a ritual observed today in midst of a dense consumer culture in the highly industrialized modern society of Japan. The ritual in exam is today known under the name of Shichigosan. The ritual has its predecessors in various ritual observances that were associated to certain ages seen as threshold in the child's life. The name of Shichigosan started to be used around the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Before this denomination would have become widespread, a number of different names were in use for these observances. These observances differed by regions not only in name, but also in their patterns. Shichigosan is commonly associated with three concrete rituals that in the past used to be observed separately, each of which was distinguished by a distinctive pattern and name. Today Shichigosan is observed by children of three, five and seven years of age. The name, Shichigosan, itself indicates these three ages and accordingly, it can be translated into English as Seven-Five-Three.<sup>1</sup>

The ritual in question, is today an extremely popular observance. An extremely large part of Japanese families with small children, observe and dedicate great care and time to its preparation. Even though exact data on observance rate are not available, partial data are offered by a number of surveys on the religious attitudes of the Japanese regularly conducted by governmental, academic and other private institutions. In these, Shichigosan appears among the four most popular observances of the Japanese, along New Year and O-Bon, the festivities when memorial rites for the deceased are held.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Today it is observed most commonly for three and seven years old girls, and five years old boys (at times also boys of three) (see Chapter III).

<sup>2</sup>The data of these surveys are discussed in details in Chapters VI and VIII.

The ritual has today a dense presence in the magazines, on the internet, in the advertisements of several business activities, in shop windows and shelves, on photographs, and in popular writings. Accordingly, it was first of all the high visibility of the celebration in present-day Japan, that caught my attention in the beginning. In spite of this popularity, no comprehensive study on this subject has been done so far. Nonetheless, there is a rich reservoir of folk patterns and beliefs associated to the rites standing on the origin of Shichigosan, and these have a rich literature in the Japanese folklore studies. On the other hand, studies dealing with the contemporary form of the ritual, with its meaning and role in present-day Japan, are extremely few.<sup>3</sup> An exception to this is the research done by Kenji Ishii<sup>4</sup> who, within his work focusing on the changes affecting the ritual culture of contemporary Japanese, has also addressed Shichigosan (Ishii 2009). While Ishii's work gives important hints on the factors that influenced the evolution of Shichigosan in the postwar decades in Japan, the study touches upon but on some of the relevant aspects. Moreover, giving the character of his research that embraces the entire ritual culture in Japan, it cannot provide an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon associated to Shichigosan. Recently, Yūko Taguchi has undertaken a research on contemporary forms of childhood rituals and part of this is dedicated to Shichigosan (Taguchi 2011). While the two mentioned studies are important, they focus on certain selected aspects of the ritual and also, they mainly consider the evolution of ritual pattern that occurred in the postwar period. Therefore, I think that a comprehensive research that would focus entirely on the practice of Shichigosan, taking into account its historical development as well as its modern social environment, is still missing. My thesis would like to fill in this gap at least partly. Also, I hope that with the present work, I will be able to draw the scholarly interest to this interesting phenomenon.

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<sup>3</sup> The lack of studies that would deal with Shichigosan was noticed already in 1979 by Mieko Takeuchi (Takeuchi 1979 quoted in Taguchi 2011, 123).

<sup>4</sup> In transcribing Japanese names, I follow the standard English usage: name and surname. Concerning Japanese terms and words, the transcription by Chinese characters is given at first appearance only. For English transcription of Japanese words I use the standard Hepburn system.

In the course of my work, Shichigosan unfolded as a shared platform on which basic social values, views on children and family life, and also individual perceptions emerge, are expressed and shaped at the same time. Thus, in this thesis, I try to interpret not only the reasons of the popularity of this observance, but more importantly, how its meaning in the modern Japanese urban context has been shaped through constant interaction between individual actors of the ritual (the family), actors of the marketplace and religious institutions. My main perspective is the perspective of the individual actor, in other words, of those individuals who observe the ritual, i.e. family members. The actor in my description is appearing not always strictly as an observer of a ritual, but also as a modern consumer. I attribute importance to the commercial aspects of the ritual and therefore, consumption practices as part of the preparation of the overall ritual experience, will be duly examined. On the other hand, I will pay attention to the institutions' role: the diverse commercial activities taking profit from the event; the media and the way it shapes views on ritual as well as on ritual pattern; religious institutions, shrines and temples, that actively join the marketplace in preparing the event in support of the individual observers. However, I would like to underline that my interests in these institutions will be always aimed to elucidate the meaning that Shichigosan represents today to the Japanese family. I regard the work and function of these institutions crucial for the creation of the ritual experience, though it is in the actors' hand that its meaning is created and unfolded.

A study of this kind can be undertaken from a number of different perspectives. First of all, I think that a due attention to the history of this ritual needs to be paid. Therefore, in the first part of my work, I will pay attention to the historical development of the ritual pattern and meaning. Any social form is always conditioned by socio-cultural factors of the given period and the pre-modern<sup>5</sup> patterns of Shichigosan were determined by the traditional, close-knit community life typical to pre-Meiji Japan (prior to 1868). These conditions slowly dissolved after modernization and large-scale industrialization hit Japan in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> -20<sup>th</sup> century. I will try to see how the historical forms of this ritual evolved and which were the main factors that exercised an impact on its

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<sup>5</sup>By the term 'pre-modern' I refer to the period prior the Meiji Restoration occurred in 1867-68, i.e. before modernization and industrialization would have affected Japan.

evolution. In the second part of the work, I will analyze diverse aspects of the contemporary form of the ritual. I will attempt an interpretation of the meaning of the observance, its role in contemporary Japanese society and of the reasons for its continuing popularity. In other terms, I will seek for those factors that help to legitimate the persistent relevance of this ritual in the life of the modern Japanese family. In order to do so, my examination will focus on several aspects: the changes that Japanese family and within it the figure of the child went through in the last century; the evolving impact of the commercial sector on the single elements of the ritual pattern; the media's contribution to the way the public perceives the ritual; the religious institutions' role in the popularization and legitimization of the ritual; and not lastly the symbolism inherent in the ritual and the way symbolic communication occurs within the ritual experience.

The disciplines that emerge relevant for a study of this type can be many. History, anthropology, folklore studies, religious studies, sociology, consumer studies, and social history all can prove to be informative and constructive. Whereas my study draws from all of these to a certain degree, the accent and the angle of observation will be determined by the topic of the single chapter. Thus, regarding ritual theory, approaches applied by anthropology will be combined with sociological perspectives in the study of consumption, as well as with more specific works from the field of consumer studies that treat the subject of ritual. In the chapter on religious aspects, the discipline of religious studies will be found useful for a better understanding of the problem in exam. The choice of the perspective to be applied was done with the scope to achieve the most detailed and thorough account of the phenomenon in question. In the following, first I would like to introduce briefly the English terminology (Japanese terminology is addressed in Chapter III). This will be followed by an overview of the chapters and the main topics these chapters deal with.

## **1.2 Terminology**

In my thesis I will use several terms for indicating Shichigosan: ritual, rite, celebration, ceremony, occasion, and observance. In the scholarly literature, the distinctions between these terms is neither fixed nor clearly defined, nor followed consistently. While the use of these terms can depend on the discipline and on the single author's approach, scholars of ritual often use these terms synonymously. General dictionaries define 'rite' as "a religious or other solemn ceremony or act" and 'ritual' as "a religious or solemn ceremony consisting of a series of actions performed according to a prescribed order".<sup>6</sup> Ritual is sometimes distinguished from rite by the ritual's referring to the code of ceremonies followed during the performance of rites, in other words, the prescribed order of a rite. Nevertheless, this difference is not used in scholarly literature, where the term ritual tends to be used more often, while rite is common in cases where standardized usage exists, such as the 'rites of passage'.<sup>7</sup> As for the terms of 'ceremony' and 'celebration', general dictionaries use these interchangeably, making use of one term to explain the other term. So for example, 'ceremony' and 'celebration' is adopted to define the meaning of the word 'occasion',<sup>8</sup> while 'ceremony' is referred to as the synonym to 'rite' and 'ritual'.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, in the scholarly literature, ceremony is sometimes identified with secular, non-magical ritual, whereas the word 'celebration' tends to be used with more frequency in modern contexts where it expresses the range of events that constitute a formal occasion. Max Gluckman, for example, defines 'ceremony' as the term "to cover any complex organization of human activity which is not specifically technical or recreational and which involves the use of modes of behavior which are expressive of social relationships" (Gluckman 1962, 22).<sup>10</sup> He further subdivides the category of 'ceremony' into 'ceremonial' and 'ritual', and says that 'ritual' would refer to mystical notions and the supernatural, while 'ceremonial' would refer to all that does not

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<sup>6</sup>The New Oxford Dictionary of English.

<sup>7</sup> The terms has been introduced by the Belgian/French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep to indicate rituals that mark major changes and transitions in an individual's or a group's life. The term and its usage is further explained in Chapter II.

<sup>8</sup>The New Oxford Dictionary of English.

<sup>9</sup>Webster's New World College Dictionary.

<sup>10</sup> As Gluckman further explains, he follows in this Evans-Pritchard's usage (Gluckman 1962, 22).

include these notions. However, as Gluckman himself says, these are solely suggestions and not a general rule followed in the works of other scholars.

The edited volume of Jeremy Boissevain includes several case-studies of ritual in modern contexts that use the term 'public celebration' to indicate rituals that are celebrated by a community in a public space, differentiating them so from family rituals which are characterized by the lack of tourism and by presence of outsiders (1992, 4-7). In another work on rituals in a modern context, Barbara Myerhoff uses the term 'nonce ritual' to indicate a ritual form typical to Western urban societies, distinguished by the presence of both sacred and secular parts as well as stable and improvised parts (1977, 200). The edited volume by Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff, addresses first of all public collective ceremonies called also 'secular rituals', 'collective ceremonial form/occasion' or 'secular ceremony', showing the variety of terms that are conventionally and interchangeably used by scholars of rituals (1977, 5).

Therefore, for reasons of comprehensibility, my usage of these terms will follow the conventional usage which means an interchangeable and synonymous use of the various terms indicating the ceremonial formal occasion that is ritual. On the other hand, it needs to be noted that in my work, the term of ritual could be more aptly used to refer to one particular phase of the whole celebrative occasion of modern Shichigosan, which is the part taking place in the shrine (or temple). I find this usage, though, problematic, since the shrine worship might be further narrowed down to two distinctive parts: the individual prayer done according to the common custom, and the more formal purification rite celebrated by the priest. While the first is open to all visitors, the latter is available solely to those who apply beforehand and pay the necessary fee. This part usually takes place in a closed room of the shrine. Since not all families celebrating Shichigosan decide to take part in this particular rite, I prefer not to adopt a differentiated use of these terms. Also because a strict and differentiated usage of various related terms could in some way indicate that this or that part of the Shichigosan observance is regarded more important compared to the other elements of the celebration. In my

view, all phases of the total ceremonial occasion of Shichigosan are equally important and significant for those who observe them, and accordingly for me who studies them.

### **1.3 General outline**

The ritual that constitutes the subject of my study makes part of a well-defined category, that of rites of passage. To this category belong rites that mark important thresholds in the life of an individual or of a community or group. The definition of this category as well as its broader theoretical frame is provided by the vast body of literature on ritual studies by scholars coming from disciplines of anthropology, sociology and religious studies.

A substantial part of Chapter II is dedicated to an overview of these and other related theories. In Chapter II, I also present the methodological approaches I adopted during my work.

At the analysis of Shichigosan, the decision to call in help more than one discipline is mainly given by the complexity of the examined phenomenon which does not permit to rely on one sole perspective. My intent was to study the ritual first of all as a contemporary social phenomenon, hence the traditional aspects and patterns of the ritual were of interest to me in so much as they contribute to the understanding of the contemporary phenomenon. Within the body of literature on rituals, the most helpful for my work were those studies that deal with rituals in the context of modern industrialized societies. Thus, for example, the contributions to the edited volume of Barbara Myerhoff and Sally Moore provide a useful approach as these represent research done on public ceremonies in modern European contexts. In the field of religious studies, Ronald Grimes studied diverse cases of rituals in the contemporary North American society. The author applies a comparative perspective that makes use of diverse case studies of rituals done by generations of scholars also in non-modern settings. Besides, research done by historians Elisabeth Pleck and by Eric L. Schmidt offer constructive insights with regards

to the importance of applying a historical perspective in relevant parts of my work. The two historians have done extensive research on family celebrations and consumer rites in North America. Another important body of literature that was helpful for my research comes from the field of consumer studies. The work done by Russell W. Belk et al provides important hints on the sacred dimensions of consumer behavior, and Dennis Rook applies general ritual theories on a special category of consumption practices that are highly ritualized or that stand alone as rituals.

Chapter III deals mainly with the ethnographic background of childhood rites of passage in Japan. This theme has a vast literature in Japan thanks to the diligent work of generations of Japanese folklorists who documented the rich reservoir of regional versions and customs related to ritual observances that existed in Japan. In this chapter I give an overview of the traditional cosmology that constitutes the legitimating context for these practices. It needs to be taken into account, however, that the rich documentation produced by Japanese folklore studies was based primarily on data collected in rural communities. Hence, the presented data inform to a much lesser extent on customs and patterns typical to pre-modern urban settings and on customs of upper social classes. Additionally, Chapter III presents a brief description of the development of the discipline of folklore studies in Japan, as well as a discussion of the relevant terminology in the Japanese language.

Whereas the link of Shichigosan to traditional ritual patterns represents an important element in the complex set of meanings attached to the ritual in present-day Japan, I found it important to make an attempt to find out what the examination of other than rural contexts could add to the understanding of the contemporary meaning of Shichigosan. Considering solely the existing body of literature coming from the discipline of Japanese folklore studies, might bring to too quick conclusions concerning the ‘authenticity’ and the role of the modern form of this ritual. Contemporary forms of old rituals might seem, in their pattern and function, too different as well as cut off from their ‘original’ forms described as such in their traditional rural environments. The gap between present and past forms thus might become too striking and almost impossible to abridge within an

interpretational framework. Therefore, in Chapter IV I focus on the historical condition of the development of the ritual form of Shichigosan during the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century in Edo, the old name of Tokyo, as it is here that the urban form of Shichigosan has its roots. The particular socio-economic conditions and the politics adopted by the Tokugawa shogunate brought about an unprecedented growth of town centers between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and together with this, the first mass-scale urbanization in Japan. The highly urbanized society of the capital gave rise to the ritual pattern, called today Shichigosan, that later, in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, gradually replaced the local versions of childhood rites of passage. Many of the characteristics that the ritual assumed in this particular historical period, remained salient features of its contemporary pattern. Thereby, I found it important to trace the socio-economic conditions of this period as it is this that defines the social reality of the ritual practice.

The second part of Chapter IV describes the evolution of Shichigosan ritual form and meaning from the end of the Tokugawa period (1868) to the end of World War II, focusing primarily on the Tokyo area. The time span of the analysis in Chapter IV is set at the end of World War II since the end of the war marks the start of an era when modern life-style gradually pushed out remaining local traditional customs and when the urban pattern of Shichigosan began to spread out massively from the capital to the rest of Japan.

The period after the Meiji Restoration in 1868 to the end of the war, represents the period during which the urban pattern of Shichigosan was affirmed in Tokyo, and the chapter follows this development through an analysis of newspaper articles that reported on the observance during this period. The number of articles, their date of appearance, their content will be examined. Also, in order to follow the path of the commercialization of the various aspects of the celebration, I took note of the advertisements of services and goods related to the celebration: the first appearance of adverts in newspapers, the changing number of adverts over the course of the years, the trends they indicate.

I continue to apply a chronological temporal frame also in Chapter V. This chapter follows the path of the development of ritual pattern in the postwar period until present days. This evolution is embedded in the context of the social and economic transformation of postwar Japanese society, hence adequate attention will be paid to the relevant features of this transformation. The diffusion of the urban pattern of Shichigosan throughout the country took place during the 1960s and 1970s, also due to the intense urbanization as well as standardization of life-style between urban and rural areas. The high speed economic growth gave rise to a diversification in the market place, new services, goods emerged and this affected also celebration patterns. The rise of service industry in the 1970s caused that new services were introduced also to the celebration of Shichigosan. Among them, the photographs, the rental of festive dress and assistance with dressing, the beauty service became standard parts of the Shichigosan packs offered by several commercial agents. The preparation of the celebration started to stretch over always longer period, beginning already two-three months prior to the official date of the observance, the 15<sup>th</sup> of November. The traditional date of the celebration itself started to be respected to a lesser degree as festive days and weekends in the month of November became the most targeted days. Newspaper and periodical articles help to follow these shifting trends in celebration pattern. The most recent period, the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is also increasingly reflected in electronic media, the internet and accordingly, webpages of agents of the marketplace, articles of news portals, comments recorded in various forums related to the celebration, provide useful information for my study.

Chapter VI focuses more specifically on the social aspects of the ritual. The role of various actors within the celebration, such as the single members of the family, the child, the relatives, will be analyzed. The changes that the Japanese family as institution went through in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, together with its underlying value system, are addressed here. I examine the figure of the mother as central to the organization of the observance. Similarly, attention will be paid to the figure of the child and in particular, to the changes that affected the view on children in the Japanese society. The historical

transformation of this view is outlined and put into connection with the shifts in the meanings attached to the Shichigosan ritual.

Chapter VII is dedicated to the issue of symbolism in ritual. The single elements building up the ritual experience are identified in order to examine the symbolic meanings associated to them. The festive dress and the changes in its trends and meaning are followed within a chronological frame. The symbolism of *chitoseame*, the traditional sweet given in gift on the occasion of the celebration, are addressed. The chapter analyzes also the rise of the notion of tradition in relation to the celebration. Other notions with symbolic meanings are also touched upon, among others the symbolism hidden in the numbers appearing in the celebration in the form of the ages of children, or associations evoked by age transition and age awareness within the Japanese cultural context.

The last thematic chapter (VIII) focuses on the role of religious institutions in the perpetuation and popularization of Shichigosan. The activities related to the organization of Shichigosan in two major shrines in Tokyo are here analyzed. I examine the texts these institutions use to inform their visitors on the meaning of the ritual and on the services they provide. Also, the observance is placed into a more general perspective referring to other traditional and new observances within the overall religious fabric of contemporary Japan.

Furthermore, I find it necessary to note that the topics of consumption constitute a recurrent theme in the course of my entire work. Shichigosan today is subject of intense commercialization and therefore, the interaction between actors/consumers and the marketplace is followed through an analysis of the media and advertisement material of the business sector involved in the organization of the celebration. A number of works deriving from consumer research and sociology of consumption are helpful in approaching this theme.

In the above outlined eight chapters, I attempt to trace the evolution of several factors that were playing part in constituting the meanings of the Shichigosan ritual over almost three centuries. While doing this, I take apart the constituting elements and aspects of the ritual and analyze them within their socio-economic and cultural contexts. Whereas I adopt diverse perspectives during the work, the most important factor for my analysis is the fact that I see Shichigosan first of all as a social practice embedded in the everyday life conditions of the society. Its contemporary pattern is conditioned by a number of factors, among which Japan's highly developed consumer culture plays an important role. The most salient features of this consumer culture necessarily emerge also within social forms associated with tradition, such as rituals. Rituals, as any other social phenomenon, in order to be able to fulfill needs of individuals, have to be integral part of the surrounding cultural environment. The examination of the single elements that build up the ritual experience should elucidate the process through which these elements receive legitimation within the celebration in the eyes of the observers. In my work, I hope to grasp not only what the ritual today means for the observers, but also to identify some of the main factors and reasons that contributed to the perpetuation of the ritual until present days, and that would account for its popularity among contemporary Japanese families.

## **2. METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL APPROACHES**

In the following, I endeavor to summon up the general theoretical approaches that I found most relevant for present study. The specific literature on researches on particular aspects as well as Japanese case-studies of rituals will be discussed in details in the next chapters. Before proceeding, however, I would like to start with an account of the methodology I applied at my work and of the challenges I encountered.

### **2.1 Methodology**

The methodology applied in this study has been mainly determined by the following factors: the multidisciplinary approach that a research of this kind necessitates, the limited number of works dealing with this theme, and the accessibility of data. As for the first factor, I attempted to identify the main theoretical fields that could be useful for my research. This part constitutes the theoretical preparation for my work. As I gradually had to face the diverse aspects of the phenomenon in exam, the literature I relied on and the theoretical perspectives I found useful, grew and underwent modifications with respect to the initial phase of my research.

The subject of contemporary forms of rites of passage in Japan is an understudied theme in the scholarly literature. The lack of a coherent body of literature on the theme was also the reason why I needed to turn to many diverse sources for data and information on the development of the ritual pattern and meaning in the course of its history. The necessity to rely on sources greatly differing from each other in character and approached me to follow a multidisciplinary perspective in my work. In the beginning, I made from the classical studies of the Japanese folklore research my departure point, the result of this

work is mainly summoned up in Chapter III. However, as folklore studies present these rites primarily in their rural and traditional contexts, I needed to complement this approach with a historical overview of the characteristics of the examined ritual in urban setting, both in the pre-Meiji past (prior 1868) and in modern times (after 1868). Thereby, I decided to use a historical perspective in the parts of my work that discussed early phases of the rise of urban version of the Shichigosan ritual pattern. Concerning more recent phases of this development, I turned to print media of the period (19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century) and undertook a survey of articles of major newspapers in order to follow the path of the growth of the ritual into a popular observance. For this scope, I relied on electronic databases provided by main newspapers that gave me access to materials coming from the very first issues covering the period from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century roughly to the end of 1960s. I describe the methodology applied in this part of my research in Chapter IV where I also discuss the results of this survey in detail. This part of data proved very useful since practically no research has been done on the urban development of the ritual during this particular period. To a limited extent, I also followed articles from the postwar decades mainly in periodicals. The examined period stretched roughly to the late 1990s. The most recent data I obtained partly from the online newspapers and their databases, online periodicals, and partly from printed versions of periodicals between 2008 and 2011. These were mainly periodicals targeting mothers of small children or fashion magazines including inserts on Shichigosan festive wear, such as for example COMO, COMO Shichigosan Special, Sesame, Akasugu Kids, special editions on etiquette related issues.

Regarding the postwar development of Shichigosan, I had to organize and analyze data deriving from a number of sources bearing different characters. In 2009 and 2010, I did two field trips to Japan to collect relevant data. During my fieldwork, I interviewed employees of institutions involved in the organization of Shichigosan. I spoke with priests and employees of two major shrines in Tokyo, the Meiji and the Hie shrine. These were guided interviews during which I obtained information about the historical development regarding the observance of Shichigosan in that particular institution, the

shifts in number of observers in the last three decades, the description of the purification ritual, details on the service packs provided by the institution to the observers, and the interpretation of the significance of Shichigosan by the interviewees. At the Meiji shrine, I had the possibility to speak also to a young researcher working at the shrine, who has done studies on certain aspects of the observance at this particular shrine. I also conducted interviews with employees of the two rental studios attached to the shrines, gathered information leaflets that are handed out to the customers and inquired about the time schedules applied by the studios in organizing their services related to the observance of Shichigosan. Apart from the two major shrines, I interviewed employees of two photo studios and two rental shop in Tokyo that serve customers planning the celebration of Shichigosan. Unstructured interviews were also done with families with first-hand experience of Shichigosan, as well as with families just planning the performance of the ritual. The interviews took place both on the two occasions of my visits to Japan, and abroad, with Japanese families living on a long-term basis outside Japan. The total number of these guided interviews with families was around fifteen. The major problem I encountered during the interviews, concerned the difficulty interviewees perceived at clarifying the meaning and significance of the ritual. While on the practical matters of the celebration the answers were quite precise and detailed, the interviewees found it rather hard to express verbally the significance of the observed ritual. This, however, has to do with the fact, as often argued in scholarly literature, that ritual resists interpretation. Its exact meaning needs not to be clear to the observers in order to fulfill its function. Also, the interpretation that scholars of ritual provide in their studies, must not necessarily coincide with the interpretation given by actors participating directly in a ritual experience. One of the main aims of my work was, therefore, to attempt an interpretation of the role of Shichigosan through both direct and indirect ways that could help me reduce the complexity of the task of investigating a phenomenon that resists objectification.

It needs to be underlined, therefore, that more than these interviews, the large amount of information that I was able to gather in the online and print media proved very helpful and useful. Also because contemporary Japanese observers often turn to forums provided by print and online media (child-rearing magazines, blogs, child-rearing sites, etc.) with

their opinions, inquiries and comments. Moreover, in Japan it is mainly the media that collect observers' views on the celebration and use them to inform about recent trends in celebration manners. Surveys undertaken by public and academic institutions, such as those on the religious consciousness of the Japanese, including observation rates regarding several rituals, often disregard Shichigosan or they include it into categories that group a number of observances. Thus, the only relevant statistic data on Shichigosan are those provided by surveys sponsored by commercial actors, among which mainly media, kimono professional schools, or child-rearing websites. The results of these surveys are often reported on the pages of the journals or websites. These reports often include personal accounts of mothers (sometimes grandmothers or other relatives) that describe in details the various problems that families encounter during the preparation of the celebration. On the internet, there are also sites where families share photos they took on the celebration, as well as numerous are the websites of rental, retail and photo studios which provide space for clients to share their experiences or to ask questions about practical issues concerning the celebration. Although, it was not possible for me to arrange data collected from online sources into the form of regular statistics due to the multiple and diverse themes and data, the reading of these accounts and blog inserts over an extended period provided me with a range of information and with the type of insights that would have been impossible to gather otherwise. The value of these comments is enhanced also by the fact that online blogs and other forums provide anonymity to the commentator and this assures a relatively uncensored view not restricted by the direct contact with an interviewer.

The period during which I gathered online data in the most active way extended from 2009 to 2011, partly also the first months of 2012. During this period, in order to complement the printed publicity material of the various commercial institutions involved in the celebration, I examined websites of photo studios, rental shops, clothing retail shops, restaurants, entertainment parks, hotels, travel agencies, and gift shops. The exact quantity of the examined websites would be difficult to assess. Though, rather than on data of statistical character, I focused on qualitative data. I tried to identify the latest

trends in services concerning the celebration of Shichigosan, the range of goods offered to customers for the celebration, the range of problems families face when organizing the celebration. While working on this, I found out that there is a conspicuous number of sites that deal in one way or another with Shichigosan. Apart from the already mentioned agents of the market, there exist numerous websites of general character, such as etiquette advice sites, sites that gather information on childrearing. The analysis of the content of many of these sites represent an important share in the data collection of my work. Also, homepages of major religious institutions (shrines and temples), even though to a differing extent, but treat the theme of Shichigosan and its various practical and less practical aspects. The large amount of websites handling the issues of the celebration and the range of commercial activities serving the celebration that I found browsing on the internet reaffirmed my opinion that Shichigosan is indeed a significant social phenomenon in present-day Japan.

Finally, it is necessary to delineate the problems I encountered during my work. First of all, as already partly mentioned, the necessity to broaden as much as possible the range and the variety of the sources from which useful data could be obtained, rendered difficult the organization and the systematization of these data and information. My decision to apply approaches informed by diverse disciplines was also due to the necessity to face this difficulty. The main research aims of my work are to understand the meaning and significance of Shichigosan in contemporary Japan, to elucidate which conditions worked at the background of its rising popularity over the last century, and to analyze the factors that render from Shichigosan a meaningful experience for the modern Japanese family.

The next challenge concerns the regional features of the ritual. The bulk of data on the historical development of ritual pattern and meaning are mainly urban in nature, centering around Tokyo (earlier called Edo). This also means that regarding the evolution of the ritual outside of Tokyo in earlier periods, I have only indirect data from folklore literature and from occasional newspaper articles mentioning the custom beyond the Tokyo area. Given the nature of data and my methodology, the access to sources from

different localities would have required a considerably longer period of study. During my work my access to the electronic database of newspapers was limited to those published in Tokyo since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even though the material obtained from these database is also conspicuous, I see a possible enriching of this survey by a future research which would focus on the data from regional sources. Nevertheless, since the contemporary pattern of Shichigosan, main subject of my research, is primarily the result of the evolution within the Tokyo urban area, I think that my approach enables to delineate the main traits of the historical development Shichigosan pattern over the last century.

## **2.2 Theories on ritual**

Ritual constitutes the subject of study of a number of scholarly disciplines and their theories often overlap. The different scholarly disciplines treat ritual from different perspectives and hence, the theories they present are defined by the angle of perspective adopted by the given discipline. Here I will present a concise account of the main theoretical approaches to the study of ritual with special attention to those perspectives that provide the base for understanding the kind of problem that I am engaged with the most.

First of all, it can be useful to note that ritual is relatively a recent concept and as such, it does not possess a persistent, coherent structure (Bell 1992). Moreover, it has been also argued that “[...] the domain of ritual resists efforts to theorize about and define it” (De Coppet 1992, 9). Scholars studying rituals on the field often face the problem that the observers themselves are rarely able to express and grasp in words the sense of the ritual they perform. The difficulty of definition is given by the complexity of ritual as social practice.<sup>11</sup> The diverse layers of meanings associated to a given ritual can be only

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<sup>11</sup> See more on the difficulties related to the objectification of ritual in Goody 1977.

captured partly and indirectly by a careful observation of the different aspects and dimensions of ritual practice. Nevertheless, several working definitions of ritual have been proposed in order to explain the function of ritual, what it does and how it does in the society.<sup>12</sup> It can be stated that ritual is a complex type of behavior which usually has a stable purpose, more or less rigid form, uses symbols or symbolic mode of communication, hence it usually alludes to more than it says (Moore and Myerhoff 1977a). Ritual reconfirms and also shapes cultural ideas, it reinforces social ties, it can reorganize as well as create them.

The origin of the scholarship on ritual coincides with the origin of the scholarly interest on religion and its origins. Without describing in details the beginnings of the development of this scholarship, which is nicely exposed in Catherine Bell's book on ritual (Bell 2009, 1-22), I will summon up only the principal theoretical streams that represent these. The first period of ritual studies was engaged in debates on the role of rite in determining the origins and meaning of religion, labeled also myth and ritual school. Scholars such as Edward B. Tylor, James Frazer, and Edward E. Evans-Pritchard looked at rituals in traditional societies where daily life was narrowly tied to religion and the sacred, and thus, scholars associated rituals in these communities first of all with religion and magic. Ritual in these studies emerged first of all for its function to enact and express religious ideas. Ritual was thus interpreted as an expression of religious concepts of the examined group and hence, the study of ritual served to elucidate the ideas that the group held about the realm of spirits and that of humans (Bell 2009).

The French sociologist, Emile Durkheim, in his seminal work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, emphasized the social function of ritual looking at it as a practice that reflects social relationships (Durkheim 1995). Durkheim was most interested in the social organization of the society and hence, his interpretation of religion and of ritual was majorly informed by this perspective. He pointed out that ritual has an integrative and adhesive function, in other words, he saw the main contribution of ritual in its faculty to reinforce the attachment of the individual to its social reality. Ritual is necessary for the

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<sup>12</sup> For a detailed discussion of ritual theories and for a history of the study of ritual see Catherine Bell's two important works, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (1992) and *Ritual. Perspectives and Dimensions* (2009).

individual to be able to conduct social living. It regenerates values and bonds embodied by a social group and as such, it serves to transmit, reaffirm, and renew these ideas. The periodical enactment of rituals keep social ties vital and strengthen solidarity within group (Mitchell 2006, 490). Durkheim's sociological approach was developed further by A. R. Radcliff-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski, who each placed accent on differing aspects of ritual. While Radcliff-Brown focused on its unifying function, Malinowski emphasized the emotional involvement of actors performing ritual and ritual's function in alleviating the anxiety and distress in human life (Bell 1992).

Successive scholars assigned new characteristics to rituals. Mircea Eliade, the renowned historian of religion, placed emphasizes on the cosmological dimension of ritual. He primarily regarded rituals as re-enactments of sacred prototypes (Eliade 1963). The British anthropologist, Max Gluckman added the theme of social conflict to the interpretation of ritual. He saw the importance of ritual in its capacity to help release tensions that exist in society and thus restore social equilibrium (Gluckman 1962). Gluckman also addressed the notion of ritualization and examined the reasons of high degree of ritualization in traditional (or 'tribal') societies. He argued that in pre-industrial societies, social relations tend to serve manifold purposes, from social to economic and spiritual. The role of rituals, and in particular of rites of passage (discussed below), he saw in their function to segregate the different roles that people simultaneously fulfill in small groups, which otherwise could be confounded (ibid, 28-31). Gluckman also pointed out that in these societies, uncertainties concerned all spheres of life, be it nature, offspring, disease or change of any other character. These "become intricately involved in social relations themselves" and tend to be ritualized (ibid, 33). Accordingly, Gluckman regarded rites of passage incompatible with the structure of modern urban life where the differentiation or segregation of roles is more complete and taking place in a secular way. Initiations in modern society (apprenticeship, wedding, first communion) were interpreted by Gluckman as ceremonies that did not affect in a mystical way the well-being of the initials, and thus, they are not considered 'ritual' in the author's definition. Ultimately, Gluckman underlined the importance of understanding ritual for its social function rather than putting accent on its function in relation to emotional needs (ibid, 47).

The symbolic action within ritual was interpreted by the social anthropologist, Victor Turner (Turner 1969). In his seminal work, *The Ritual Process*, Turner interpreted ritual as 'social drama', emphasizing thus not the structure of the ritual, but seeing it as a process. The dynamic character of the ritual process assures a continuous interaction of ritual with its social reality. Turner interpreted social dramas as agents that promote social development, and within this, ritual is playing out a two-fold function: on one hand, it has the task to preserve social order; on the other hand, it sustains dynamism within the society.

The discussion whether myth or ritual came first, was enriched in the 1950s and 1960s by Levi-Strauss who introduced a new approach to ritual theory. This approach privileged words over action, or, in different terms, myth over ritual. Myth is regarded by Levi-Strauss, as the highest form of communication, and ritual as a form for expressing myth (Bell 2009, 42-3). In 1970, Mary Douglas's work, *Natural Symbols*, exercised a major impact on the study of ritual (2003). Douglas wished to develop Durkheim's approach to religion, so that it could apply to so called traditional and modern societies, as well. When defining symbols and symbolic systems present at ritual, Douglas underlined that each symbolic system develops autonomously according to its own rules. Thus cultural environments and social structures add important variations to these systems. Douglas added to the theory on ritual the notion of 'grid and group'. Grid is identified as the symbolic system and order in society, whereas group represents pressures coming from the tightly knit community life with strong binding power. Ritual is explained as strengthening both grid and group, and as such, it exercises a constraining effect on social behavior. In brief, Douglas understood ritual as a form of communication and symbolic action which express the social reality of the community performing the ritual.

In recent decades, ritual theory has been enriched by several other perspectives which made the study of ritual truly interdisciplinary. As it would be impossible to give an extensive overview of all these works within the boundaries of this work, I would like to proceed with presenting those theories and approaches that I find more specifically relevant to my subject. The first of the discussed theories is connected to the name of

Arnold van Gennep who introduced the term of 'rites of passage' into the scholarly literature dealing with rituals.

### **2.3 Rites of passage**

Conventionally, in the definition adopted by the Japanese folklore literature, Shichigosan belongs to the category of rites of passage. The category of rites of passage was first described as such by the French scholar, Arnold van Gennep, in his seminal work published in 1909, *The Rites of Passage*. He was concerned with the internal organization of rituals and by analyzing a big number of examples of rituals from different cultures, he recognized that a common structure is discernible in rituals that derive from many disparate social realities (van Gennep 1960). He identified rituals that mark important turning points, called also thresholds, in the life of an individual or of a group and introduced the term of 'rites of passage' to label them. These thresholds are perceived as moments of crisis, when a move from one life stage to another takes place, or when a status change is foreseen. The role of rites of passage should be thus to help overcome these critical phases and to accompany and safeguard the individual who goes through a transition of a certain kind. Critical junctures marked commonly with the observance of rites of passage are, for example, pregnancy, birth of a child, wedding, death. Van Gennep pointed out that physical change alone, does often not acknowledge a new social position to the individual (ibid, 60-68). It is through rituals that the child upon birth is incorporated into the group and become, thus, a 'complete' or 'full-fledged' member of the community. In a similar way, the return of the mother after childbirth into the society does not occur on a physical level only, but it also needs to be marked on the social level. Van Gennep, thus, distinguished between social and physical integration, social and physical puberty, social and physical parenthood and so on. As the individual moves from one status to another, from one age group to another, rites of passage serve to incorporate members of the society in its various subgroups.

In this perspective, van Gennep places emphasis on the politico-legal and social aspects of ritual rather than on its magic-religious aspects. Rituals assist in the task of elaborating and appropriating change and transformation, they contribute to reducing risks and negative effects that crisis, and in general change, poses to the society. This aspect of rites of passage that points to the cultural dimension of transition, was discussed later by several scholars. Martha N. Fried and Morton H. Fried underlined the symbolic aspects of transition (1980). The authors cite examples from different cultural contexts when, for example, physical birth is followed by a social or symbolic birth during which the new member is admitted into family as well as into the society. In traditional China, for example, the validation of birth took place a month after the actual delivery. In case the infant died during that time, or was put to death, it was not considered a human being but an evil spirit whose infiltration had been successfully frustrated (ibid, 263).

Concerning the structure of rites of passage, van Gennep worked out a 'sequential method' that placed the interpretation of ritual to its immediate context. He recognized a three-stage sequence, common to all rites of passage, constituted by separation, transition, and incorporation. The first phase, identified as separation, indicates a physical detachment of the actor from normal life before proceeding to a new life stage or new status. The second phase, called also transition, is an intermediate stage, marking the incorporation of the actor into its new status that finally occurs during the third phase. Van Gennep's theory was criticized by Gluckman who pointed out that van Gennep's theory, while being an important addition to the theory of ritual, failed to fully develop implications inherent in the outlined concept (Gluckman 1962, 7). Gluckman saw the main contribution of van Gennep in the analysis of the mechanism of rites of passage and not in his findings concerning the role of rites of passage in dealing with social relationships. Van Gennep's theory was later developed by Victor Turner, a social anthropologist, who elaborated van Gennep's three-sequence theory focusing in particular on the intermediate stage, which he called liminal phase (Turner 1969). Turner drew attention to the liminal and transcendental aspects of this stage and broadened the applicability of van Gennep's theory to modern societies, too. Turner discerned key stages in the process of ritual, namely the breach of norms, crisis, remedial procedures and the restoration of social peace. Rituals thus serve to assure that change would be

integrated and accommodated. For Turner ritual was first of all an important device to sustain and regenerate communities.

The association of rites of passage to crisis has been emphasized by Gunter Berghaus (1988). He argued that rites function as ordering devices and as such, they serve to maintain a balanced state of social relations that are subject to changes. Transitions can concern not only the individual life cycle, but also changes of seasons or of demographic balance. The concept of rites of passage has been applied to many different areas of human life by scholars coming from a number of several disciplines. James Bossard and E. Stoker Boll, in their *The Sociology of Child Development*, analyzed the subject in relation to the child's development (1960). Changes in the early part of the life cycle can imply transfer from one world of childhood to another. These changes often involve the whole habitual interaction system of the individual, and therefore, they are perceived as crisis. The rites, that are in general associated with the social development of the individual, are essential to restore equilibrium during these transitions. With regard to the single phases of childhood and the nature of rituals observed at given moments, the authors pointed out that rituals marking the transfer from infant to child, tend to be very simple in character and, in their scope of observation, limited to the family circle. In comparison, ceremonial rites marking the transfer from childhood to the adolescent stage, are much more frequent.

## **2.4Ritual and change**

Classical studies on ritual were mostly done, as already mentioned above, in so-called 'traditional' societies characterized by comparatively high degree of communal life, strong shared traditions, and religious ideas underlying people's cosmology (Bell 2009, 210-212). Apart from creating a direct link between ritual and tradition, these studies

conveyed the message that ritual belongs to the religious context. Later, approaches have focused on separating religious rituals from secular rituals and the notion of sacred has been gradually separated from the religious.<sup>13</sup> Others, for example Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff argued that the category of sacred can find applicability in secular societies too, as “[R]ituals are not either sacred or secular.” (Myerhoff 1977, 200, see also Moore and Myerhoff 1977a).

Since first ethnographic analyses of rituals were based on materials observed in societies with oral traditions, their realities could seem as unchanged and timeless. Accordingly, ritual itself was often perceived as part of a timeless tradition and the significance of change and its effect on ritual has been greatly underplayed. John D. Kelly and Martha Kaplan in their account on the history of ritual studies point out that the turn of scholars of ritual from the understanding of ritual as the ahistorical response of some societies to change, toward a theory of ritual as part of history-making in the society, was a gradual process (Kelly and Kaplan 1990, 139). Indeed, ritual as any other social practice, is embedded in its social reality and as such, it is subject to change. Therefore, when studying rituals, it is necessary to apply a broader perspective and to pay adequate attention to the changes in their social reality as products of different historical moments.

Whereas rituals tend to resist change in a more effective way than other social forms and customs, significant and long-lasting transformations in the social realities and circumstances, sooner or later will imply a change not only upon a particular ritual practice but also on the wider ritual culture of the given community. The allegedly unchanging nature of ritual has been contested by several scholars of ritual. Theodore W. Jennings described ritual as adaptive, varying in space and changing in time (1982, 126). Change can bring about the complete disappearance of the ritual if the given ritual proves not to be capable to respond to the altered expectations and requirements of the society. The ritual pattern can not only become obsolete, but it can also be replaced by a new, changed pattern that will emerge as more suitable to the changed needs of the observers. The change can occur not only in the ritual form but also in its role or in the meaning associated to it.

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<sup>13</sup> See more on these approaches Kapferer 1977.

Concerning change in ritual, Michael Stausberg underlines that whereas ritual needs to be adaptive in space and time, caution is required when judging these changes as controversial opinions can easily emerge (2004). Moreover, the issue of change in ritual is a major subject of debate of not only scholarly research. Religious organizations, too, are much concerned with the appropriate ways to adapt “traditions of worship to shifting social and spiritual realities” (Bell 2007, 210). In present-day Japan, for example, the presence of consumer culture and commercialized elements within celebration modes of certain rituals, tends to be interpreted as the evidence of the decline of ritual culture, or more precisely, as the evidence of the loss of the authenticity of observed rituals. Indeed, adherence to tradition and an unchanging pattern and meaning is still often regarded the principal legitimating force of the authenticity of a ritual.

However, rituals that adapt to changed social realities are not necessarily less authentic. Stausberg, for example, describes a case of ritual change among the Parsi-Zoroastrian in India, where, like in other societies, modernization and secularization has brought about a large-scale de-ritualization and secularization of everyday life. Though, the ritual in exam has not become obsolete; it ‘merely’ changed its sphere and the modes of interaction between ritual specialists and observers, restructuring thus the organization mode of the ritual (Stausberg 2004). The way change exercises an impact on the form and significance of ritual, recently represents a major theme in the scholarship on ritual.

#### **2.4.1 Revival and reinvention of ritual**

In recent decades, some important works on rituals in highly modern and complex societies have been produced. These works, mostly undertaken in urban contexts, call attention to a significant phenomenon observable in highly industrialized and urbanized societies, namely the revival of ritualism (Berghaus 1998, Grimes 2002). The abandonment of traditional lifestyle as an effect of modernization and industrialization

processes, has been accompanied in the beginning by a large scale de-ritualization. Whereas theories of secularization predicted the decline of religion and together with this the weakening of ritual practice, later, opponents of the secularization theory sustained the opposite. Recent studies suggest that, at least regarding ritual practice, individual and communities not always turn away from ritual. Only rituals go through a change, in an ongoing process, of their character and form (Bell 2009, 198-202). As Bell puts it, “while secular societies *do* experience a shift in traditional patterns of religious life, it is not at all obvious that religion or ritual declines.” (ibid, 202).

The contributions included in the volume edited by Moore and Myerhoff, *Secular Ritual*, present several case studies that analyze the socio-cultural conditions in which collective rituals work in industrialized societies (Moore and Myerhoff 1977a). These studies show that rituals can not only perpetuate traditions, as argued by classical ritual studies, but they can be also used to lend the image of ‘tradition’ (to “traditionalize”, using the editors’ term) to events and practices that lack this quality (Moore and Myerhoff 1977b, 7). The case studies provide several examples of revived or invented ‘public ceremonies’. Another edited volume by Jeremy Boissevain, *Revitalizing European Rituals*, presents nine case studies of renewed or revitalized rituals from contemporary European contexts (Boissevain 1992a). These studies have been proposed by the editor as complementing the seminal volume by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger from 1983. The contributions included in the collection of Hobsbawm and Ranger revealed that numerous rituals considered traditional by the observers, are in effect recently ‘invented traditions’ and serve as instruments for legitimating the power of a variety of agents in the political and social sphere. These studies thereby point to an often hidden aspect of rituals. Contributions to the volume of Boissevain complement this finding by a discussion of the underlying reasons for the revival of rituals. The author identifies the decade of 1970s as the period when a renewed interest for rituals emerged in Europe. While underlining that reasons for the revitalization of a ritual are always complex and multiple, one of the most important factors is seen by the author in the changed social reality of individuals and groups (Boissevain 1992a). Rapid socio-economic changes have not only dissolved traditionally organized communities, but they also have rendered life conditions more unpredictable, insecure and often alienated. Consequently, Boissevain sees revitalization

of rituals as a response to the isolation that individuals face in modern age (Boissevain 1992c, 147). Other factors influencing this development in ritual culture can be linked also to local tradition and local identity, economic reasons, or changing popular interests. Moreover, tourism, migration as well as democratization are recognized as facilitating the renewal of a ritual, too (ibid, 148).

Also, the studies included in Boissevain's volume show that religious elements might become underplayed in rituals observed in contemporary contexts. Religion can become instrumental to the performance of rituals. Another salient feature of the rituals studied by Boissevain is to be found in their ludic aspects. In the author's view, ludic aspects are receiving a growing importance in the ritual experience in contemporary society also because play and ludic elements, providing space for display, can enhance the ritual experience as well as contribute to the affirmation of the individual's or group's identity (Boissevain 1992c, 151).

As for the modalities of revival, Boissevain defines four different modes of revitalization process (Boissevain 1992b, 6-14):

revival/reanimation – rituals that had been dormant but later retaken

restored/resurrected – abandoned but restored rituals

retraditionalized – for traditional rites restructured and made more authentic

folklorizing – performing rite in out of context setting

The phenomenon of ritualization and/or revival of rituals in modern social contexts, have since become a much discussed issue in scholarly literature.<sup>14</sup> In North American context, Ronald L. Grimes deals with the theme of reinvention and invention in ritual as well as ritualization. Grimes argues against the close association of rituals with religious institutions and says that rituals may effectively work beyond religious institutions, and this does not need to lessen their meaning and effect (2002). Rituals in modern societies

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<sup>14</sup> For a list of works see Grimes 2002.

are often invented according to the needs of the given group of persons or of the concrete occasion. The potentiality of ritual is illustrated by research in contemporary contexts where the distinction between religious and non-religious, profane or secular, is not always applicable or useful. Grimes's *Deeply into the Bone*, brings numerous examples of efforts to invent or renew rituals in such contexts. The author also addresses the difficulties that arise when rituals need to be invented in social realities that lack effective rituals, such as most of Western societies, for example.

## **2.5 Historical approaches to the study of ritual**

Historians too engage with rituals in contemporary contexts. The change of ritual forms and the impact of consumerism on their development in Western social contexts are the subjects of two works discussing family rituals in North America.<sup>15</sup> The works by two historians, Elizabeth Pleck and Leigh Eric Schmidt, apply a historical approach that can be very useful in understanding some of the implications that evolving patterns of consumption have had on the development of ritual forms and meanings. Elizabeth Pleck's study follows the rise of family celebrations in North America and examines their evolution in the course of the last three centuries (2000). The author individuates the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as the period when family rituals gradually became centered around consumerism and display of status, social standing, and wealth. With the growth of the middle class in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, family rituals evolved out of carnival communal festivities and moved out from the streets into the homes of middle-class families. These new forms of celebrations were distinguished by a commercial and sentimental style. Pleck labels the phenomenon the "rise of the sentimentalized occasion" and argues that the beginning of the fusion of religious piety, familialism, and consumption can be dated into this particular period (ibid, 1-5). The author sees in consumerism, along with religiosity and popular culture, one of the forces that have significantly shaped family

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<sup>15</sup> Among the analyzed rituals we find Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter and several other rites of passage.

rituals in North America. Pleck underlines that the escalation of lavish family feasts cannot be simply explained as solely driven by the market. As mass production rendered luxury items available to a growing number of Americans, abundance and luxury came to be seen as symbols of family happiness. Luxury goods, gifts and lavish feasts became seen as requisites for the creation of ritual experiences that centered around the celebration of family life (ibid, 54-58). Spending for gifts, food and drink are provided by the market but at the same time, they express not only abundance for the observers but also provide them with status. Goods and services are consciously used by consumers while the marketplace contributes to the escalation of consumption. Pleck also points to the importance of recognizing that there exist a multitude of processes of change in rituals (ibid, 13). In different historical moments ritual can serve diverse scopes: it can serve to preserve a tradition while a group is adjusting to new ways of life; it can be the vehicle of ethnic identity; it can promote group solidarity or serve as a display of middle-class life-style, among others.

The second study by Leigh Eric Schmidt defines the marketplace as an important arena of holiday preparation and observance (1995). The study examines the evolving relationship between commerce and celebration over the history, providing case studies of rituals from the American festive calendar (New Year's, St. Valentine's Day, Christmas, Eastern). The author places the beginning of the evolvement of the world of consumption into the late 18<sup>th</sup> century England and in his work he follows the changing relation between rituals and the marketplace in a historical perspective. In the author's term, consumption represents a democratic world where luxury, fashion, combined with self-fulfillment "subverted the fixedness of hierarchy" (ibid,33). On the other hand, the shaping of rituals within the sphere of marketplace is viewed first of all as an expression of cultural creativity, a dynamic interplay of cultural production, and consumption. Schmidt also argues that the fact that festivities provide rhythm to the calendar year facilitates their utilization by actors of the market which use festivities and holidays as occasions for modern merchandizing, also because of the possibility to introduce new elements to these festivities in the form of minor common rites (such as for example the custom of greeting card exchange).

My work will address extensively the issue of change in ritual. Shichigosan is a relatively new phenomenon, owing its name and pattern to the particular historical conditions of the urban society in 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century Edo, old name of the capital, Tokyo. The ritual has, however, roots in rites observed during the early childhood in different social classes since the past. The present study will examine the social and economic infrastructure that contained once and contains today the ritual. In particular, it will address the changes that affected this infrastructure over the last two centuries. The account of this evolution will, hopefully, show how change effectively affects ritual pattern and meaning, in other words, how actors cope with transformations of diverse nature in their social reality and how these transformations penetrate ritual texture. Whereas change becomes absorbed by ritual, new interpretations of the notion of tradition emerge and these partake then in the legitimation of the ritual. Also, changing aspects and permanent (or seemingly permanent) elements interact within the ritual, and at the same time they again and again recreate the necessary balance between them.

## **2.6 The study of consumption**

The above described works bring attention to an important aspect of my study, namely the role and meaning of consumption in ritual practice. The analysis of the socio-cultural context to which Shichigosan owes its name and some of its salient contemporary characteristics, points to the need to include an approach that would take into account consumption and commercialization as significant aspects of the ritual in question. One of the most important factors that shaped Shichigosan ritual between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century is the emerging consumer culture in the big cities of Japan. The intense urbanization and the relative political and economic stability of this period produced a highly developed urban culture in Japan that showed, in this early period, the

characteristics of a developing consumer society (Francks 2009). Today, consumption practices are inherent part of the Shichigosan experience, therefore, the links between ritual theories and consumption need to be addressed here. The body of literature focusing specifically on the Japanese context will be introduced in Chapter IV.

The course of the development of consumer culture has its own peculiarities in every culture as it is embedded in the economic and social conditions of that particular culture. However, consumption together with commodification are regarded as the social forces that, in the course of the last two centuries, contributed majorly to the shaping of modern societies. Despite of this, consumption as an individual research topic, appeared on the agenda of social science scholars, economists, anthropologists, and sociologists, only quite recently. Consumption has long been seen, especially under the influence of Marxist theories, as practices and choices forced and imposed by economic systems. While economists traditionally focused on production and its mechanism, starting from the 1970s economic anthropologists turned their attention to the other side of economic activity, that of consumption. Since then, consumption practices and patterns are exercising a growing appeal on the research agenda of scholars of diverse disciplines in the social sciences. Moreover, in recent decades, the interest for the relation between the notion of consumption and ritual has significantly grown in several disciplines.

Historically, Thorstein Veblen was among the first scholars who have reflected on consumption and its social implications (Veblen 1899 in Trigg 2001, 1-3). In the center of Veblen's interest was the emerging class of new rich in 19<sup>th</sup> century England. He depicted some of the behavioral characteristics of this class which he defined a leisure class. Veblen was the first to theorize the relation between individuals' preferences and their social position, and introduced the term 'conspicuous consumption' into the terminology of social sciences. Whereas the main focus of Veblen's study was the upper class, hints were made on the application to other strata, as well. In the 1970s, a number of social science works emerged on the issue and a systematic research on consumption initiated. The types of exchange from the viewpoint of the relation between actors, were analyzed by Marshall Sahlins (1972). He argued that consumption practices need to be

placed into and interpreted within their particular cultural context. Sahlins also underlined the importance of the function of consumption in defining human needs. Consumption was interpreted as a means by which social classifications can be expressed and reproduced (Carrier 2002, 218-221). In 1979, Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood published their work, *The World of Goods*, in which the authors presented their critical view of theories that paid attention solely to the economically rational aspects of consumption practices (1984). The authors pointed to the multilayered role of consumption and proposed to see it as a creative mode of action. They also stressed that consumption possesses the faculty to represent values shared by individuals or groups. The objects can be attributed major or minor importance by the consumer.

The sociological analysis offered by Pierre Bourdieu added another important aspect to the theories on consumption. His work on taste analyzed data coming from different social classes in the 1970s France. He drew a relation between the possessions of individuals and the social space these individuals occupy within society (1984). Bourdieu's approach has important connection to Veblen's which has been also noted in the literature (Trigg 2001). Veblen argued for the emulation of higher social classes by lower classes as one of the major forces of consumption and pointed out that a durable correspondence exists between given sets of objects and social position. Whereas, Bourdieu stressed the importance of the process in which recurrent decision makings occur in order to create distinctive styles which help the consumer to take positions in the field of social relationships (Collredo-Mansfeld 2005, 215-6). The key term for Bourdieu is 'distinction', which is defined as an opposition between those choices of objects and tastes which are dictated by necessity, and those which are free. He regarded this type of distinction as decisive in the perpetuation of difference between rich and poor, dismissing the primary importance of differences that are generated culturally.

Recently, scholars think of consumption as a social practice through which individuals express the notion of the self and acquire personal satisfaction, adding so a psychological dimension to consumption. Indeed, consumption has its non-rational and ethical contents, too. Rational motives together with hedonistic motivations and individual desires work behind consumption choices. GrantMcCracken emphasizes the problem of change in

relation to cultural categories (1986). He views consumer goods as important agents of change and continuity, arguing that in times of change, the symbolic role of commodities can be used to mitigate the disruptive effects of cultural disorder. Daniel Miller looks at consumption through its objects that offer an opportunity to individuals for self-expression and self-realization (1987). His theory demonstrates how goods produced by an impersonal mode of industrial mass production are appropriated and personalized by consumers. Thus the necessity of a dialectical process of communication between production agents and consumer arises, where in a continuing interaction, producers, retailers and marketers adjust their products and modes of marketing and communication to the needs and preferences of the consumer.

The influential work by the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*, added a new perspective to the study of objects and consumption (1986). Status of goods, defined through their 'social biographies', can change after being involved in the process of social exchange within and between cultures (Appadurai 2006, 113-5). Appadurai argues that objects, through the act of consumption, become involved in a world of fantasy and it is through this and through the emotion of nostalgia that contemporary consumers find pleasure in consumption. Thus Appadurai emphasizes the emotional aspects of consumption. Its inherent ephemeral and transient character, enjoyed by consumers, can be recognized in many aspects of consumption, starting from the rapid change of fashion and trends, short lifetime of products, seasonal character of commodities and customs, and the eternal search for novelty.

In recent years, the attention of social science scholars has turned towards the processes that connect patterns of consumption to other social phenomena, such as globalization of markets, poverty, power relations, and differences between rich and poor countries. Comparative approaches in diverse cultural contexts have been also receiving a growing attention (Goy-Yamamoto 2004). Consumption studied as process of action, interaction, and choice, its symbolic layers and discourses become viewed as embedded in a complex social and economic contexts. The most recent trends in consumption studies focus on the ways in which people attach meaning to the objects they consume. However, as Carrier

points out, it is important to take into account that objects often come already with meanings that can significantly affect the consumer (Carrier 2005, 128).

### **2.6.1 Consumption and ritual**

Consumption practices constitute today an inseparable element of Shichigosan and accordingly, a thorough interpretation of the significance and role of consumption within the celebration will be essential to my study. Accordingly, the issue of consumption and its link to the contemporary meaning and function of the ritual will be a recurrent theme throughout my work.

Many of the above introduced works include important notions regarding the relation between consumption and ritual experience. Veblen's notion of conspicuous consumption has been used to describe acts of ritual destruction, such as forms of potlatch among Native Americans of North America, where the specifics of the local economy made necessary a redistribution and even destruction of resources (Kingsolver 2002, 445). This kind of redistribution took place on ritual occasions, such as for example weddings or funerals. Through excessive gift-giving, the donor showed off his wealth and consequently reaffirmed his social position. Conspicuous consumption together with ritual destruction of accumulated wealth have been also interpreted as attempts to replace the impersonality of commodification process with disdain for material possession (Luetchford 2005, 400-401). The relation between consumption and commodity in ritual and gift-exchange, that often constitutes an important part of ceremonial occasions, has also constituted a subject of analysis in the literature.

While classical anthropological research focused on consumption in rituals mainly in non-industrialized societies, recent studies demonstrate the relevance of this analytical framework also in industrial societies. A clear connection has been recognized between determinate goods, levels of consumption, and social class of individuals. As already

mentioned, the study by Douglas and Isherwood has drawn attention to the 'cultural' aspect of goods (1984). Goods possess the faculty to distinguish the rank of particular events since the quality of goods utilized for the creation of a ritual experience distinguishes festive, extraordinary occasion from the ordinary, 'low frequency' events. The sole fact that these goods, or services are used only rarely at ritual occasions, highlight the extraordinary character of the event. Objects involved in the ritual experience, such as food and drink, decoration items, clothing, accessories represent thus 'high rank' products and mark in this way the special importance of the event (ibid, 127). These goods used during rituals, called also ritual artifacts, communicate specific meanings loaded with symbolism to the observers. Appadurai further develops this notion when he links rites of passage to consumption and to the periodicity of accumulation and distribution. As an important case he mentions Christmas gift-giving where the coordination of accumulation and distribution of goods are in direct relation with the successful outcome of the event (Appadurai 2006, 97-98).

Works from the field of consumer studies and marketing research, and in particular from the field of consumer behavior research, have contributed most significantly to a further understanding of consumption practices concerning rituals in modern social contexts. Consumer behavior scholars study both ritualized activities (for example grooming), and ceremonial occasions (Christmas or graduation ceremonies). The main object of their study is the consumer and it is from this perspective that the meaning associated to consumption, concerning ritual experience, is analyzed. Dennis W. Rook's study on grooming proposes an approach that attributes significance to the ritualized and symbolic aspects of consumption (1985). Consumer research looks at rituals as 'marketplace products', and accordingly Rook analyzes market forces for their capacity to exercise an impact on rituals. In this respect, the 'vitality' of rituals is also addressed, as rituals "like most marketplace products are subject to life cycle forces" (ibid, 255). Furthermore, Rook argues that the division of ritual experience into 'sacred' and 'less sacred' is not always constructive and proposes an approach that would look at ritual experience in its complexity as a whole social act. "[A] broader view of ritual recognizes that ritual

activities function in nonreligious contexts and that mystical elements are present in nonreligious situation.” (Rook 1985, 254). Indeed, human experience continues to rely on the use of symbols also in modern society in order to express and reaffirm social ideals and personal values. Rituals dramatically and symbolically portray the strivings of individuals for social status, maturity, sexual identity (ibid).

The dichotomy of sacred and profane has been used in the extensive research conducted by Russell W. Belk et al on the sacred dimension of consumption (Belk et al 1989). The authors analyzed the processes by which consumers understand particular aspects of consumption as set apart, extraordinary, and sacred. For the scope, the authors implemented conventional scholarly theories on religion. They reject Weberian separation of science and nature and see consumption in contemporary society as a vehicle for experiencing the boundaries between sacred and profane. In the authors’ view, these boundaries are strategically manipulated by the consumer. Belk et al calls also attention to the phenomenon in contemporary societies of the ongoing secularization of religious rituals, once belonging to the domain of the sacred. The authors argue that this phenomenon is opening the way for the sacralization of secular spheres of life, like for example science, or nationalistic movements and symbols. In modern societies, places such as department stores, become ‘public cathedrals’ of consumer culture, stages of extravagant display, and as such, they evoke feelings of sacredness and desires for luxury and consumption in consumers (ibid, 8-10). The analytical framework which Belk et al propose for the study of the domains of sacred consumption, is constituted by the definition of six major categories, place, time, tangible and intangible things, persons, experiences which represent the contexts in which authors examine sacred aspects of consumption. The authors also discuss the question of the commodification of rituals which is often seen by social commentators as somehow contaminating the ‘authentic’ value and essence of these occasions. Numerous examples for this can be found also in Japan where the pervasive character of market economy is seen as undermining the ‘true’ meaning of rituals.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>See Ishii 2009.

Belk et al argue, and demonstrate through concrete examples, that rituals are effectively used by consumers to distinguish between sacred and profane. Thus, for example, rituals and festivities, which occur cyclically during the calendar year (Christmas, Thanksgiving) and during the life-cycle (weddings, graduations, birthdays) help to experience the sacredness of 'time' distinguished from the ordinary and profane time. This notion bears resemblance to the dual concept of *hare* and *ke*, categories adopted by the Japanese folklore literature to explain the significance of traditional seasonal festivities in the life of agricultural communities.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>This theme is further explained in Chapter III.

### 3. JAPANESE FOLKLORE STUDIES AND THE ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF RITUALS

Whereas the main aim of my study is the analyses of the historical development and the interpretation of the function and meaning attached to the contemporary pattern of Shichigosan celebration, I find it important to examine the broader interpretational framework of Japanese rites of passage as presented in the literature of Japanese folklore studies. The subgroup that is of main interest for my study is the group comprising rites of passage observed during early childhood, though, adequate attention will be paid to the other categories of rituals, too. Before proceeding, however, I would like to introduce some issues on relevant terminology in Japanese language.

#### 3.1 Japanese language terminology

The terms for indicating ‘ritual’, ‘rite’ or ‘ceremony’ are equally if not more numerous in the Japanese language compared to the English language. Similarly to English, in Japanese language too, not always exists a clear distinction in meaning. Besides, the usage of the terms often overlaps in scholarly literature as well as popular writings. The English term ‘ritual’ is usually translated into Japanese as *girei* 儀礼 but there is a range of other terms that can be used synonymously for indicating the same meaning: *gishiki* 儀式, *sairei* 祭礼, *shūgi* 祝儀<sup>18</sup> In addition, several other words can appear in compound words. For example, the word *gyōji* 行事 is commonly used to indicate festive occasions in both modern contexts and specific cases. Though, the compound of *nenchū gyōji* 年中行事 is usually translated as ‘seasonal festivals’, it includes observances that are conventionally categorized by the Japanese folklore literature under ritual (Suzuki 1999, 510). The terms

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<sup>18</sup> The Chinese characters of Japanese terms is introduced only at their first appearance in the text.

*iwai* 祝<sup>い</sup>, *shikiten* 式典 or the word *shiki* 式 in compounds, can be also used to indicate a celebration, ritual or ceremony. The word *shiki*, *iwai* or *rei* 礼 may be added to singular names of concrete celebrations such as for example *seijinshiki* 成人式 (coming-of-age ceremony), *obi-iwai* 帯祝 (pregnancy rite), *konrei* 婚禮 (wedding ceremony). Moreover, Kunio Yanagida (1875-1962),<sup>19</sup> the founder of folklore studies in Japan, dedicated an entire work, *Nihon no matsuri* (Festivals of Japan), to rites and festivities that he interpreted as the cornerstones of the Japanese folk belief (1942).<sup>20</sup> These were, in Yanagida's view, the true manifestations of the cultural and spiritual identity of the Japanese nation.<sup>21</sup> Here he adopted the terms of *matsuri* 祭り, referring to the indigenous rites of Japan, and *sairei* by which Yanagida indicated those large-scale festivals that grew out from small religious rites performed in the past by a small group of worshippers but which, with time became gay events available to all (Suzuki 1999, 682, Yanagida 1993).<sup>22</sup> In contemporary common language usage, however, *matsuri* is used more for public festivals, and less for celebrations connected to the individual or the family. Yanagida also adopted an etymological stance when he put the word *matsuri* in connection with the verb *formatsurou* which can be written as 服<sup>ふ</sup> or 順<sup>ふ</sup>.<sup>23</sup> In old Japanese, these verbs were used to say 'serve', 'wait upon' or 'follow' the orders of someone in a higher position (lord etc.), or 'dedicate/offer' something important to someone placed above us. Accordingly, Yanagida argued that the indigenous rites were originally intended as service or sacrifice offered to the *kami* 神 (Shintodeities). He implied by this that the practice of shrine worship (called also shrine visit, *mairu* 参<sup>ま</sup>) was

<sup>19</sup> The characters used for Yanagida's name are sometimes read as Yanagita. Examples for both transcription modes can be found in the English language literature.

<sup>20</sup> The order of Japanese personal names follows the standard English usage, i.e. first name followed by surname.

<sup>21</sup> The work comprises a series of lectures given by Yanagida at the Tokyo University in 1941. It has to be noted, that this work of Yanagida is, at the same time, regarded as a classic in the so-called *nihonjinron* school (theories on the Japanese identity) which, though receiving critical comments from abroad as well as native scholarship, has still an appeal in Japan. The term *nihonjinron* refers to a vast range of texts focusing on the uniqueness of Japan, its culture and its people. These works, by stressing the unique characteristics of the Japanese culture, tend to point to the cultural and social homogeneity of Japan's people, echoing thus nationalist views and standpoints.

<sup>22</sup> On this subject see also Yamashita 1993, 171.

<sup>23</sup> The word with the sound *matsuru* has numerous ways of writing, among which the three 祀<sup>まつ</sup>, 祭<sup>まつ</sup>, 奉<sup>まつ</sup> る, are probably of the same etymological origin.

performed originally as a form of waiting upon the deities venerated in a shrine or in a sacred place. The shrine visit was a time in confinement for a limited period of time within the shrine for the scope to perform a ritual there (Yanagita 1993).

Again, van Gennep's term, 'rites of passage', can be translated into Japanese by a number of words. The literal translation of the term is *tsūka girei* 通過儀礼, though the term *jinsei girei* 人生儀礼 is also often adopted. *Jinsei girei* means precisely 'life-cycle rituals' and there exist several views among Japanese folklore scholars as for the distinction between the two terms. There are views that translation of 'rites of passage' as *tsūka girei* is limitative for the case of Japanese rituals, because the inclusion of several traditional observance into this category may become problematic. Examples of such observances are those connected to the growth of the child, to the belief in unlucky years (*yakudoshi* 厄年), or the series of funeral or memorial rites (Shintani 1999, 887).<sup>24</sup> Since it is thought that the notion of afterlife inherent in the traditional cosmology of the Japanese is not entirely contained in the term of 'rite of passage', a number of Japanese scholars of rituals prefers to use the term of 'life-cycle ritual' (*jinsei girei*) (Shintani 1999, Onozawa 1999, 118-119). This category of rites is subdivided further into three groups which embrace all phases through which human soul was believed to proceed in its progression from earthly life to the other world and again to the earth.

It has to be noted here, however, that the terminology used by the Japanese folklore studies is often problematic also because it applies no clear division between ritual and custom. Under the heading of *san'iku girei* 産育儀礼, literally 'childrearing rites', the Japanese literature normally lists traditional customs and rituals with no clear difference between the two. Iwamoto argues that in this way, terms and concepts blend together and their use becomes incoherent and unsystematic (Iwamoto 2008, 272). Although a more precise definition of the related terms would be necessary, this kind of critical approach is not commonly applied within the discipline in Japan.

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<sup>24</sup>See below for more details.

### 3.2 Folklore and the study of rituals in Japan

The three rituals comprised in Shichigosan make part of two categories of rituals in the Japanese folklore literature. One is the group of rites known as *san'iku gyōji* 産育行事, lit. 'rites related to child-rearing'. The second category is generally interpreted as life-cycle rites, or rites of passage, known respectively as *jinsei girei* 人生義礼 and *tsūka girei* 通過義礼. Japanese folklore scholarship pays much attention to these rites and the researcher, wishing to investigate to this subject, has an extremely rich material at his or her hand. Though, given the character of folklore studies in general, it is important to note that this body of literature grew out from the study of material and non-material culture of a specific segment of population that inhabited the vast Japanese countryside. This means that most of this material reflects the life-style and life-view of the lower stratum of the society. Keeping this in mind, though, it is of utmost importance to turn to this body of literature when studying childhood rites of passages in Japan, since it provides the most comprehensive analyses of the meaning and function of rites of passage as observed in the traditional Japanese society. In this chapter, therefore, I will give a general overview of this literature, and of the interpretations that Japanese folklore scholars offer on the subject. A particular attention will be given to the three age rites that contributed to the birth of the celebration which is today known as Shichigosan. The main bibliographical source of this chapter will consist of the already mentioned vast body of Japanese folklore literature. Other sources, such as historical materials, specifically those which shed light onto the customs of other than lower classes, will be discussed in the next chapter.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an increasing number of intellectuals turned their attention to the material and non-verbal culture of the Japanese rural population. They started to collect data and material on the lives of people living in villages and rural areas. The first generation of folklorists was led by Kunio Yanagida, who is regarded the founder of the

discipline in Japan. The period when the discipline of folklore studies<sup>25</sup> was established in Japan, coincided with similar trends occurring in the Western world at that time, in particular in Germany, France, and England.<sup>26</sup> In Japan, the socio-political turn as the consequence of the Meiji Restoration in 1868, brought about a myriad of changes in the life of the Japanese, in both urban and rural areas. During the decades of intense industrialization and modernization much of the local diversity was sacrificed and this quick vanishing of traditional life-style, of centuries-long customs has attracted an increasing interest towards traditional customs.

The data collected by the first pioneers of the discipline informed first of all on customs and manners typical to the lower stratum of the Japanese society, underplaying so a number of important aspects. These were for example the fact that the Japanese rural society was much more differentiated than it might appear from these studies.<sup>27</sup> Customs and beliefs tend to be presented in these works as embedded in a timeless reality where change was rarely accounted for.<sup>28</sup> The focus on rural communities resulted in overlooking the diversity embedded in the social reality. In a similar way, the interrelation of customs and rituals and the modernization of rural society remained a neglected area of analysis. On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Japanese folklorists produced a vast body of literature dealing with

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<sup>25</sup> In the Japanese language, the word *minzokugaku* has two different meanings indicated by two different writing modes, though pronounced in the same way: the word indicating Folklore Studies (Volkskunde) is written as 民俗学, while the discipline of Ethnology (Völkerkunde) is written as 民族学. The difference is expressed by the second character of the two compounds: in the first case *zoku*, stands for ‘customs’, in the latter case for ‘family/race’.

<sup>26</sup> The birth of this new discipline was closely tied to the general search for the definition of national identity, as it was the case of Germany where the discipline called Volkskunde was established. In England too, the capitalist system brought about a quick vanishing of traditions and together with this an awakening of an interest for traditions and old customs occurred. Moreover, in Japan, the historical moment of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the building of national identity was at stake, stirred a growing interest for the study of national cultural traditions.

<sup>27</sup> It is important to note also, that the Japanese village has never been completely homogenous with no social stratification. The second half of the Tokugawa period (1603-1867) saw the rise of a rural elite thanks to the diversification in economic production, which often was the result of the increasing demands for consumer goods in urban cities of the period (Francks 2009). The socially stratified rural communities necessarily brought about diversification also regarding customs like ritual observances and celebration modes.

<sup>28</sup> For a critical view on Japanese folklore research see Schnell and Hashimoto 2003.

folk culture. Yanagida and his disciples mapped the until then little known area of rural society. The gathered material was placed into an interpretative framework which was informed by the worldview that characterized traditional village communities.

Yanagida exposed his views on the cosmology underlying Japanese belief system and within it ritual practice in his work, *Senzo no Hanashi* (1946). He regarded human soul as part of a continuant process reaching from birth to death and to a subsequent rebirth. The soul that occupies the physical body during its life in this world becomes part of the divine realm after the death of the physical body. In a subsequent phase it is from here that the soul arrives again into earthly life. For Yanagida, this view found its concrete expression in the *ie* household system of Japan. Yanagida regarded the continuity of the household members as an entity including the present generation, the unborn and deceased family members, as well. The human soul was thus supposed to arrive to the earthly world from the all-encompassing realm of deities made up of all souls destined to be reborn one day. In the same line of thought, rituals observed at *Obon* (festival for the ancestors) or at New Year were interpreted as important occasions when members of the *ie* meet and interact with the souls of the departed members during the limited period of the duration of the festivities. Similarly, the funeral and memorial rites, though having received the influence of Buddhism, were thought to mark the single stages of the process through which the departing soul makes its journey to the realm of the ancestors. During the prolonged memorial rites, that continue to be observed several years after the death, the soul of the deceased becomes purified, it gradually loses its individuality and becomes one of the myriads of *kami*.

This belief is explained as providing the base for many different folk practices. Thus for example, the central figure of the cult of the mountain deity, *yama no kami* 山の神 has been identified with the deity of ancestors whose task was to exercise protection over the life of the village. This complex belief system constituted an all-embracing concept involving nature, afterworld and human world and was called with the term *reikon shinkō* 靈魂信仰 (Suzuki 1998, Inoguchi 1978, 1-3). Yanagida's theoretical approach to ancestral belief has been further developed by subsequent generations of Japanese

folklorists. Suzuki notes that Yanagida's theoretical approaches profoundly influenced the later systematization of Japanese rites of passage (Suzuki 1998, 206).

Hirofumi Tsuboi is one those scholars who applied Yanagida's theory to explain the role of rites of passages in Japanese culture (Tsuboi 1995). The interpretation of rites of passage has been contained in a circular map that illustrates the progress of the soul through four phases. The first stage corresponds to the phase of the maturing of the human soul (*seijinka* 成人化) and stretches from birth to wedding. The second phase is called the period of maturity (*seijinki* 成人期) of which end is marked by death. The third stage (*soreika* 祖靈化, lit. becoming an ancestral soul) finishes with the completion of the 33<sup>rd</sup> memorial rite. Lastly, the fourth phase (*soreiki* 祖靈期, lit. the period of being an ancestral soul) terminates with the birth of the soul into human existence (Onozawa 1999). According to this scheme, the soul that inhabits human body, needs time to settle firmly into its physical shell after birth. This does not occur all of sudden, but through an intricate process accompanied by frequent ritual observances and other magical customs. In the period stretching from birth to death, the wedding marks the borderline that divides the first phase of growth from the stage of maturity or adulthood. This may explain why the period of childhood in Japan was believed to be insecure and instable, in contrast to the period of adulthood during which the soul was thought to enjoy a relative stability. A similar division is discernible in the period that follows death. The stage starting after death, during which the soul of the deceased leaves the physical body, was believed to lack stability and firmness. This stage corresponds to the third stage in the cycle. The cycle is completed by the fourth stage during which the soul again reaches stability and enter the realm of divinities. This view organized in a cyclic pattern is sometimes called in the literature *junkanteki seimeikan* 循環的生命觀 'circular or cyclic life-view' (Itabashi 2007, 290).

In brief, according to the above described worldview, rites of passage served to accompany the individual, respectively the soul, through this complete circle. Simultaneously, these rites provided a certain degree of rhythm and this concept finds a parallel in another group of rites, that of seasonal rites, called *nenchūgyōji* 年中行事. Seasonal rites comprise all festivities observed yearly in the same period of the year,

and that were connected to change of seasons as well as to single phases of the agricultural production. In a way *nenchūgyōji* were giving rhythm to the community's life during the calendar year, so rites of passage provided rhythm to the life of the individual. The four stages of the cycle of the progression of the soul, together with the accompanying rites of passages, find so their correspondence in the changes of nature, in particular in the division of four seasons. These interrelated worlds are called by Suzuki the 'small universe (or cosmos)' and the 'great universe', respectively the world of humans and the world of the immense nature (Suzuki 1998, 207). The two worlds are in a continuous interaction and they mutually influence one another.

### **3.3 The categorization of rites of passage**

The exact origin of most rites of passage in Japan are obscure. Seasonal festivals, the so called *nenchūgyōji*, for example are thought to have arrived with much probability with the intense Chinese cultural wave in the 5-6<sup>th</sup> centuries. In those centuries many new customs arriving from the Asian continent, together with the associated belief system, found their way into the ritual culture of the imperial court and many of its elements were then adopted later by the lower classes. However, while some theories say that certain rites of passage observed during childhood became common among countryside folk only by the end of the Tokugawa period (1603-1867) (Ōtō 1968, 247, Tsurufuji 2002, 78), the diffusion of related customs and rituals in the rural Japanese society demonstrate that similar rites were an inherent part of the belief system typical to these communities since earlier times. The difficulty to track down the existence and the exact form of these rites of passage is given also by the fact that the culture of village folk or more generally of lower classes in Japan started to be thoroughly documented only around the end of the

19<sup>th</sup> century, thanks to the pioneer work of Kunio Yanagida and his disciples.<sup>29</sup> Prior to their works customs of common folk, in particular those living in rural areas, found only occasional and indirect expression in written documents. Historical records reflecting the culture and life of upper class society mention age-related customs and rites observed among court noble families already in the Nara (710–794) and Heian (794–1185) periods.

Japanese folklore studies literature classifies rites and festivals into three distinct categories:

1. Seasonal (annual) festivals and rituals (*nenjū gyōji* 年中行事)<sup>30</sup>
2. Agriculture-related rituals (*nōkō girei* 農耕義礼)
3. Rites of passage or life-cycle rituals (*tsūka girei* 通過義礼, *jinsei girei* 人生義礼)

The first category is made up by those festivities that were, and some of them are still today, observed in regular intervals during the year.<sup>31</sup> They had a firm pattern and were performed in the same periods of the year. The regularly held festivals not only gave a certain rhythm to the life of the village community, but also marked the line that divided the busy, active periods from the passive periods of rest and of festivities. In this regard, Japanese scholars stress the importance of the concept of *hare* and *ke* (Akata 1979).

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<sup>29</sup>Yanagida's work has had a strong impact not only on the growth of the Folklore Studies in Japan, but also more broadly, on the intellectual world of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Japan. He is regarded as the scholar who 'discovered' the existence of the common folk (*jōmin* 常民), the vast population of rural Japan, for the official history of the country. Besides Yanagida, the two scholars remembered as co-founders of the discipline of folklore studies in Japan are Shinobu Orikuchi (1887–1953), and Keizō Shibusawa (1896–1963).

<sup>30</sup>Pronounced also as *nenchū gyōji*.

<sup>31</sup>*Nenchū gyōji* are probably of Chinese origin where they used to be tightly connected to agricultural and religious festivals. Their introduction to Japan took place around the Nara and Heian periods when they were adopted first by the imperial court and later they became diffused throughout all social classes. In the course of the time, these observances acquired a specific pattern and meaning under the influence of the Japanese belief system.

*Hare* is a quality associated to the restful periods during which work was not allowed and during which rituals and festivals were celebrated. It is sometimes interpreted as the positive energy without which the community could not live a productive and successful existence during the year. *Ke* is thought to indicate the state when vital energies of the community were gradually consumed in the busy periods of work and everyday life. When the positive spiritual energy of *hare* became used up, a polluting quality of *ke* accumulated, thereby the community found itself regularly in need of renewal. One way to renew this consumed energy were the celebration of festivals such as *nenjū gyōji*, as occasions lending the entire community moments of gaiety and were occasions of spiritual renewal. Well-known examples of festivals belonging to this category (without citing a complete list) are the New Year's festivities in January, the girls' festival in March (*hina matsuri* 雛祭)<sup>32</sup>, the boys' festival in May (*tango no sekku* 端午の節句), the Star festival called *tanabata* (七夕), the Obon 盆 the festival to honor the dead and ancestor in July-August.<sup>33</sup>

Rites observed with the scope to obtain better crop and in general, to safeguard the agricultural production of the community belong to the category of agriculture rituals (*nōkō girei*). In the past Japan was a prevalently agricultural society and a complex universe of beliefs connected to the agricultural activity existed since ancient days. Agricultural production consisted mainly of rice cultivation and upland farming, and accordingly rituals are divided in two groups: the first comprising rituals connected to the cycle of rice-growing, and the second devoted to upland farming. Supernatural beings worshipped in these rites were associated with the particular agricultural production that the given community was involved with. In case of rice-cultivation these were chiefly the god of the water (*mizu no kami* 水の神), the deities of the fields (*ta no kami* 田の神). In places where upland farming (*hatasaku* 畑作) was conducted the venerated gods were

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<sup>32</sup> Called also *momo no sekku* 桃の節句. While the two festivities are today neatly divided, *hina matsuri* observed by girls, *tango no sekku* by boys, in the past probably no such division was common, as originally they were not observances connected to children (Ōtō, 1968, 174-175).

<sup>33</sup> Some of them are observed also today, even if in altered forms and meanings. In the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a wide range of ethnographic studies has been produced on the subject of *nenjū gyōji*. Among others see Tarō Wakamori's *Nenchū gyōji* (1957), Yanagita's *Nenchū gyōji oboegaki* (1969), Tsuneichi Miyamoto's *Minkan reki* (1970).

those governing over the land or fields (*ta no kami*) or the god of the mountain (*yama no kami* 山の神). The principal role of the big number and variety of taboos, prohibitions, ritual observances customs was to safeguard and secure good crop and harvest and to express gratitude for the successful harvest. The immense variety of folk customs and rituals associated to the agricultural production would be difficult to summarize here. They constitute the subject of a vast literature on this theme in the Japanese Folklore Studies.<sup>34</sup>

The third category of rituals, representing the main subject of present work, are life cycle rituals (*jinsei girei*). Rituals observed to mark important events and turn-points in the life of the individual, of a group or of the whole community exist in every culture worldwide. In Japan, they were integral part of the traditional cosmology which as a whole provided sense to life and order to the surrounding world. The complex system of rituals and related customs provided individuals with a sense of security and affirmation that life was proceeding in the right direction and that everyone was assigned a defined place in this world. Therefore, it is important to see which were the principal concepts and ideas underlying these observances. Rites of this category are generally further subdivided into five groups:<sup>35</sup>

1. rituals observed during pregnancy and during early childhood
2. coming of age rites
3. wedding rituals
4. rituals marking good luck and bad luck years, age rites
5. funeral rites

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<sup>34</sup>See for instance Juro Ono *Nōkō girei no kenkyū* (1970), Mikiharu Itō *Inasaku-Girei no Kenkyū* (1974).

<sup>35</sup> See also Yagi 2001a.

### 3.4 Rites of passage observed after birth

A systematical study of rites observed during childhood, and in general on the subject of childhood in the traditional society, was undertaken first by Yanagida around the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Yanagida 1935, 1949). Starting from the 1920s and 1930s, Yanagida with his disciples carried out nationwide surveys focusing on childbirth and childrearing practices. A study group called Kyōdokai was established with the aim to gather data from informants born at the turn of the century on childhood issues (Hara and Minagawa 1996, 12-17). In the 1940s, Kiyoko Segawa and Yuki Ōtō contributed greatly to the study of customs and rituals connected to childbirth and childrearing.<sup>36</sup> While Segawa examined in particular taboos and other restrictions related to pollution around childbirth and childhood, Ōtō produced the first comprehensive work on customs related to childhood in his *Jiyarai* (Ōtō 1968). In this work, Ōtō summoned up materials that dealt with childrearing customs in the past, starting from the earliest from the Tokugawa period (1603–1867), the *Fūzoku toijōtō*<sup>37</sup> 風俗問答 written by Hirokata Yashiro, to the anthropological and folklore journals in Meiji (1868–1912) and Taisho (1912–1926) periods, such as the *Jinruigaku Zasshi*<sup>38</sup> 人類学雑誌, *Fūzoku Gahō*<sup>39</sup> 風俗画報, *Kyōdo Kenkyū*<sup>40</sup> 郷土研究, *Minzoku to Rekishi*<sup>41</sup> 民族之歴史 and others (Ōtō 1968, 12).

In the postwar period, a number of folklorists started to deal with rites of passage, among them, rites observed during the years of childhood. Tsuneichi Miyamoto, an important figure of the postwar Japanese folklore studies, was a disciple of Yanagida. He had a great interest in childhood and childrearing folk customs and his most important works were published in the first decades after WWII.<sup>42</sup> Later Noboru Miyata and Tōru Yagi

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<sup>36</sup> For a detailed overview of works on custom of childhood and childrearing issues see Kami 1989.

<sup>37</sup> Document on manners and customs.

<sup>38</sup> Anthropology Journal.

<sup>39</sup> Journal of Customs.

<sup>40</sup> Folk Research.

<sup>41</sup> Folklore and History.

<sup>42</sup> Among others *Nihon no Kodomotachi* (1957), *Mura no wakamonotachi* (1963).

dealt extensively with rites of passage.<sup>43</sup> From the younger generation, Yoshiharu Iijima wrote extensively on the history of child in the Japanese society and his work, *Kodomo no Minzokugaku* (1991) is an important contribution to the field.<sup>44</sup> Apart from the ethnographic stance, in his works he also applies a historical and anthropological approach. I will return to discuss his works in further detail below.

In the postwar decades, a big number of studies on taboos and ritual restrictions surrounding childbirth have been published.<sup>45</sup> The very first years of the child's life have been traditionally distinguished by a high occurrence of rites, taboos and magical practices. Closer to birth more frequent in number were the observed rites. The first rituals connected to the birth of the child started already during the first months of the pregnancy; they concerned both the life of the to-be-mother and of the baby. Once the pregnancy had been confirmed, the 'pregnancy celebration' (*ninshin iwai* 妊辰祝) was performed. The pattern and name of this observance varied by region and local custom. In the prefecture of Nagasaki, where it was called *neburumai*, relatives and close friends were invited and treated to a banquet at the occasion. In other prefectures, the family of the pregnant woman received fresh fish and rice cakes (*mochi* 餅) in gift from relatives. The banquet and gifts all indicated the auspicious character of the event and were part of the general wish for a safe pregnancy and birth and for the healthy growth of the embryo.

In the fifth month of the pregnancy, when fetal movements became tangible, the 'obi rite' was held (*obi iwai* 帯祝). The ceremony was usually held on the day of the dog since dogs were believed to deliver with ease. In many places it was also the moment when the pregnancy was turned public. On this day, prayers for easy childbirth were said and an *obi*, usually blessed in the local shrine or temple, was given to the mother-to-be. *Obi* was traditionally associated with auspiciousness and women used to wrap themselves in this long piece of cloth until the baby was born. Symbolically, it also indicated that the woman entered a period of a non-everyday reality, a preparative phase directed towards

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<sup>43</sup>Miyata 2007a, 2007b, Yagi 2001a. See also Miyata's *Kankonsōsai*(1999).

<sup>44</sup> See also Iijima 1987.

<sup>45</sup> For a detailed list of authors and their works see Ishizuka 1978, 120-122.

the moment of the childbirth (Suzuki 1998, 208). The custom of wearing a special *obi* during the pregnancy has not completely disappeared. A festive piece of *obi* can be today taken to a shrine to have it blessed there and then sent in gift to the pregnant woman by her mother or mother-in-law. There are shrines known for safeguarding childbirth where these particular *obi* can be purchased. Moreover, today a modern, rational explanation has been attached to the custom. *Obi* is often recommended by health care personal because of its allegedly positive effects it can have on the growing belly: it provides physical support as well as protection (Hendry 1989).

In brief, a big variety of customs and beliefs connected to pregnancy existed in the past in Japan and these varied greatly by region and community. The beliefs included also a number of taboos and restrictions regarding acts and things to be avoided for the pregnant women in order to assure a safe and easy birth, and the birth of a healthy baby. Since the state of the baby or of its soul were believed to be unstable at this phase, actions and things that could endanger its state, were to be avoided (Kuraishi 2000, 13-12).

The birth of the child initiated a series of rituals and implementation of taboos that accompanied the growth of the child during the first months and years of its life (Ishizuka 1978, 122-126).<sup>46</sup> Birth itself was surrounded by several magical practices rooted in the complex belief system associated with human life and soul. As already mentioned above, the soul of the baby was believed to have arrived from the realm of *kami* and in the initial stage its attachment to the human body was loosen and lacking firmness. The soul needed time to settle firmly in its physical body and in order to do so, it had to go through a series of rites during which protection and assistance of divinities were sought for. Also, birth was believed to bring about ritual contamination, first of all to the mother, but in a limited degree to the infant, too (Inoguchi 1959). Pollution affected not only the mother and child but often the whole sphere of the household and sometimes the entire community in which the birth took place. In many places of Japan, birthing huts (*ubukoya*産小屋) were built within or outside the village and women were supposed to bring their children to the world, and to spend the first days after the delivery, in these

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<sup>46</sup> For examples of local variations of birth related rites and customs in the prefecture of Nagano see Kuraishi 1983.

huts. Even in places where this custom did not exist, houses usually hosted a separate room for childbirth (Ishizuka 1978, 126-128). Moreover, according to a widespread custom, the food of mothers after childbirth was prepared on a separate fireplace, not the one used by the rest of the family. In Shinto belief, childbirth and death were among those occurrences of human life that brought heavy ritual pollution on the involved actors. Both events of human existence implied an important transition in the state of the soul (Okada 1984, pp.11-12). Indeed, there exist a parallel between taboos related to childbirth and those observed at bereavement. There were also places where childbirth was believed to cause heavier pollution, and consequently, restriction were even more severe (Ishizuka 1978, 131).

The belief linked to birthing huts and the concept of impurity (*kegare*穢れ) brought about childbirth received much attention from Japanese folklorists.<sup>47</sup> Michiko Sasaki, for example, notes that birthing huts should be considered as places where the two worlds, the other world and this world, encountered (Sasaki 1984, 40). Accordingly, rather than causing impurity, birth should be interpreted first of all as an act during which a new soul (*reikon*靈魂) comes to this world. The series of rites starting after the birth of the baby began usually with the ‘birth celebration’ (*shussan iwai* 出産祝い) which often was a small banquet held in the family circle (Suzuki 1998, 210). Relatives and close friends brought *mochi*, fresh fish, red rice or beans to the house of the mother as a contribution to her recovering from the strains of the delivery. On the third day, the rite called *mikka iwai*三日祝い (‘third day rite’) was held. At this occasion, the midwife (*toriage baba* 取上げ婆)<sup>48</sup> usually made the first ritual bath to the newborn baby and dressed it into a special cloth called *ubugi*産着 (birth dress) which was sent in gift by maternal grandparents. It was also believed that on this day the *ubugami*<sup>49</sup>産神, the deity watching over the delivery, left the place of the delivery. In some places, during a rite called *kamitachi iwai* 神たち祝い (‘god parting rite’), the deity was thanked for its protection. These rites were also occasions for a banquet to which close relatives were invited. The

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<sup>47</sup> For a structural analysis of the concept of impurity (*kegare*) with regard to the custom of birthing huts see Kawate 1986.

<sup>48</sup> There were many different names used for midwife, such as *sanba* 産婆, *toriage uba* 取上げ乳母, etc.

<sup>49</sup> Other names used for this divinity are for example *ubusunagami* 産土神, *okamasama*, *kawayagami* 廁神 *hōkigami* 帚神. More on this subject see in Kuraishi 2000, Miyata 1983, Kamada et al 1990.

communal feast was an important part of the rituals and it served also to give a social recognition to the new member of the family (Ōtō 1968, 18-19).

With the seventh day after birth, the most stressful period for mother and baby was believed to end and a rite called *oschichiya* お七夜 was held on this occasion. In some places this rite was called ‘name-giving rite’ (*nazuke* 名付け or *meimei* 命名) which indicates that the newborn received its name on this occasion. There existed many ritual ways to choose the appropriate name for the infant, too (Akata 1979). In numerous places of Japan there was a custom to place pebbles on the festive tray on the occasions of the above described observances. A rich symbolism is associated to these pebbles in Japanese folk belief. Among others it was believed to contain the spirit of *ubusunagami*, the deity which guarded over birth and which therefore had the power to exercise protection over the child (Shintani 1986, 25-40). The pebble also symbolized the soul that was given to the child and the act of placing it close to the child was believed to help the soul to settle in its body (Suzuki 1998, 208).<sup>50</sup>

The moment when mother and child left the house (or birthing hut) for the first time after birth, was accompanied by a big number of ritual acts. It was believed that by leaving the place where mother and child enjoyed the protection of the birthing deity, they both exposed themselves to danger and evil forces. Therefore, several protecting rites needed to be observed at this occasion. For example, the mother with her child had to make a brief visit to several places around the house where she made prayers to deities guarding over the wellbeing of the household, such as the god of the well (*idogami* 井神), of the fire (*hi no kami* 火の神), of the water (*mizu no kami* 水の神), or of the toilet (*kawayagami* 廁神) (Ōtō 1968, 149).

One of the main scopes of all these rites was to welcome the newborn baby into the world of humans and to give support to its admission into the human world. Another important theme was the purification of the mother and child that were considered impure due to

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<sup>50</sup> On the link between *ubugami* and the symbolism of stone, see the study of Noriko Nagata ‘*Ubugami shinkō ni okeru ishi* (The stone in the *ubugami* belief)’ *Josei to Keiken* Vol. 8. (1984).

the Shinto concept according to which blood and other bodily fluids produced ritual contamination and impurity. Blood had negative connotations also in the Buddhist belief which is thought to have reinforced the Shinto concept of impurity coming from contact with blood. With regard to the impurity associated with women in Japanese culture, Mieko Kawate points out that the concept of impurity tied to the feminine has not been an integral element of popular belief of Japan. The concept of impurity in ancient Shinto, as described in an ancient document, the Engishiki<sup>51</sup> (延喜式) (10<sup>th</sup> century), was originally linked to the contact with blood. Accordingly, women were regarded as being in the state of impurity solely at the moments that involved pollution by blood, in particular at menstruation and childbirth.<sup>52</sup> This concept was later amplified along the strengthening influence of Buddhism in Japan and by the centralized legal system and hierarchical social structure in the 11<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>53</sup> With the gradual deteriorating social position of women, the concept of impurity began to be associated generally with womanhood, in other words, it was rendered an ideology.

In popular customs, however, the clearing period (called *ubuyaaki*産屋明<sup>54</sup>) were seen as important parts of the restrictions associated to the ritual pollution of mother and child. The duration of this period differed greatly from region to region, but as a rule it can be said that for the mother it was longer than for the child. In some places fathers and other direct members of the household were also affected by pollution and for example had to refrain from work or from activities such as hunting in the first days following the birth of the child. Impurity necessitated ritual purification and until this was not done, mother and child were not allowed to approach sacred places such as shrines or participate in Shinto rituals, in addition mothers were not allowed to participate in the everyday

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<sup>51</sup>Engishiki, a document from the 10th century, a collection of laws and customs, including also the first liturgical texts of Shinto.

<sup>52</sup> A contrasting view is discussed by Teigo Yoshida who quotes the historian Shigeo Okada noting that pollution of childbirth was present already in the pre-Buddhist written documents such as the Nihonshoki and Kojiki (Okada 1982, 331-4 in Yoshida 1994, 60).

<sup>53</sup> Noboru Miyata *Kami no minzokushi* (1979) in Kawate 1986, 142.

<sup>54</sup>Numerous local versions of the word *ubuyaaki* had been in use in the past depending on the region and dialect.

activities for a while (Yoshida 1994).<sup>55</sup> Purification occurred gradually over an extended period of time during which mother and child were confined into the house (or birthing hut). This period commonly lasted between twenty-one to thirty-one days after childbirth, depending also on the gender of the child. In many places girls were believed to need a longer period of purification (Sofue 1965). The clearing period for mothers took even longer, 75 days had to pass before the mother was allowed to fully return to all activities of her life, including visits to shrines and sacred places (Rōshō Denshō1983).

As a sign of the end of the clearing period (*imiake* 忌明け), the child was taken to the shrine of the local *ujigami* 氏神, the patron deity of the community. At this first visit, called also *miyamairi* 宮参り, the baby was ritually presented to the guardian deity whose admission and protection was sought and prayed for during the ritual. Indicating this function, in some places the ritual was also called *ujiko hairi* 氏子入り, lit. admission of shrine parishioner. The form or date of the observance varied greatly from one region to the other, or sometimes even from one village to the other village. There existed a number of words to call the rite, giving also an indication of the meaning that the local community most closely associated to the rite. In Okayama prefecture, for example, the first shrine visit of the baby used to be called *imiake mairi* 忌明け参り which literally means ‘taboo-clearing shrine visit’ (Tsurufuji 2002).

The importance of establishing a relation between the deity and the newborn is also reflected in the belief according to which the baby received its soul from the deity on the occasion of its first shrine visit to the patron deity.<sup>56</sup> There were places where the deity on the occasion of the first shrine visit was identified with *ubusunagami*, the deity watching over the birth. Some theories put in this belief into connection with the idea that originally *ubusunagami* (or *ubugami*) was thought to be *ujigami*, the patron deity of the clan and thus, the association of the first shrine visit with *ujiko-iri*, ‘the admission of parishioner’, was a later development of this belief (Rōshō Denshō1983, 47). On the other hand, Origuchi argues that children until the age of seven were believed to be under

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<sup>55</sup> Teigo Yoshida offers an interesting account in English language on the variety of customs connected to childbirth and feminine pollution and on the view that sees pollution and divine aspects of women as interchangeable concepts (Yoshida 1994).

<sup>56</sup> For example in the Chūgoku region (Rōshō Denshō1983, 47; see also Ishizuka 1978).

the protection, or in the sphere of control of *ubugami* and not under that of *ujigami*, i.e. the tutelary deity of the community.<sup>57</sup>

There are a number of other customs connected to the *miyamairi* ritual. In the prefecture of Shizuoka, it was a custom to go to the gate of the shrine (*torii*鳥居), and not beyond, at the occasion of the ritual, and here to turn one's back to the shrine. Folklorists explain this custom with the belief that on the day of the first shrine visit the impurity was believed to be not completely cleared off (Rōshō Denshō 1983, 46). The most common custom was to bring gifts that were then offered to the *kamisama* (the venerated deity). These gifts could be offered also to the household gods on the small Shinto altars (*kamidana*神棚) situated inside the family's home (Tsurufuji 2002, 45). The offerings mostly consisted of auspicious food, such as *sekihan*赤飯 (red rice) or *mochi*餅 (rice cakes). These items were also distributed to relatives and neighbors as return gifts for those received on earlier occasions, for example on the occasion of *obi iwai* or *oshichiya*. In other places maternal grandparents were invited for a family feast after the *miyamairi* ritual. *Miyamairi* was also often the first occasion to formally introduce the baby to the inhabitants of the hamlet. Thus, it had the important function of social recognition given by the local community to its new member. On these occasions, attention was also paid to the dress of the baby. In some cases it was a white robe, whereas white was to symbolize purity.<sup>58</sup> Boys were often wrapped in a crested kimono (*montsuki*紋付), girls in a silk crape kimono (*chirimen*縮緬). On the back of the dress sometimes a protective amulet was hung (or sewed in) which was supposed to protect the baby until it reached 4 or 5 years of age (Tsurufuji 2002, 49). The baby's outfit was usually gift received from maternal grandparents. Ōtō notes that there was a strong link between the dress and the healthy growth of the baby (Ōtō 1968, 107). There were places where children of weak physical conditions were dressed into a special kimono called *hyakuhagi no kimono*百はぎのきもの (lit. kimono made of one hundred pieces). Old kimono used earlier

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<sup>57</sup>Origuchi Zenshū Vol.15 in Ōtō 1983, 17.

<sup>58</sup> See also Kunio Yanagida *Saniku-Shūzoku Goi* (1935), Tsuneichi Miyamoto *Kakyō no Ku. Aijō wa Kodomo to tomo ni* (1967), Kiyoko Segawa *San'iku* (1958), Joy Hendry 1989, Inoguchi 1978.

by one of the parents was also often transformed into a piece used for the newborn as it was thought to protect the child from malign forces. In the prefecture of Iwate the child was not dressed in a new kimono before its first birthday (ibid).<sup>59</sup>

Another widespread custom linked to the first shrine visit ritual was making the baby cry in front of the shrine. The explanation for this was that the deity needed to be woken up in order to take sight of its new parishioner. In some places, it was customarily for local shrines to issue a parishioner card called *ujikofuda* 氏子札, which was also a formal acknowledgment of the new member's admission. This custom became popular in particular after 1868 upon the political reorganization of the role of religious institutions in the country.

Apart from the already mentioned ones, a number of other rites were observed during the first year of the child's life. So for example, the rite called *kuizome* 食い初め, lit. the first eating, was to mark the period when the baby started to take its first solid food, practically the beginning of the weaning period. During the observance a ritual consumption of solid food took place when the baby was symbolically offered pieces of auspicious food. The celebration took place around the 100<sup>th</sup>, the 199<sup>th</sup> or 120<sup>th</sup> day after birth, with numerous local variations in form and date.<sup>60</sup> There were places where this rite coincided with the termination of the purification period for mothers. The rite symbolically contained the family's wish that the child might spend a life without ever experiencing hunger. Accordingly, auspicious food was prepared for the occasion which was then presented on a ceremonial tray called *ozen* お膳. The baby was dressed in a festive kimono and offered food with the help of chopsticks used for this occasion only.

At the first birthday of the baby another ritual was observed to mark the time when the baby starts to walk. It was called *hatsutanjō*, 初誕生 lit. 'first birthday'. In the past the celebration of individual birthdays was not common. According to the traditional age

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<sup>59</sup>See more on this issue in Chapter VII.

<sup>60</sup> The ritual, after decades of absence in the postwar decades, has reappeared again and enjoys a slowly growing popularity among Japanese families in recent years. It is often combined with the ritual of first shrine visit (*miyamairi*) (see more on this subject in Chapter VI).

counting system, in Japan, all persons added a year to their actual age on the first day of the first month of the year. This counting method is known as *kazoetoshi* 数え年 in contrast to the modern age counting which is called *mannenreki* 万年暦. Regarding the *hatsutanjō* ritual, it was believed that children that started to walk alone early, as an adult would leave the family house. Therefore, early walking was not seen as auspicious and in many places it was a custom to prepare a *mochi* (rice cake) of an unusually big size and to bind it on the back of the toddler. If the baby fell under the weight of the cake, it was interpreted as a good sign. Another widely practiced custom was to place a number of objects before the baby on this occasion. These objects had some relation to professions (for example abacus, hair-pen, farming instruments, needles). The object picked up by the baby was believed to indicate its future talents and profession (Sofue 1965). Festive meals were usually part of these rites and close relatives were invited to celebrate together.

The first seasonal festivities, known as *hatsusekku* 初節句, received also particular attention in the lives of young children. *Sekku* 節句 belong to the category of seasonal festivals observed during the year and were believed to be occasions when evil forces had to be driven away from the houses and its inhabitants. The first times when the child participated in these ritual occasions, were regarded with particular attention in many places of Japan. So were the first New Year's festivities when children received several traditional toys in gift, usually from maternal grandparents (or close relatives).<sup>61</sup> Ōtō notes that ritual attention was paid especially to families to which first son, i.e. the future heir was born in the previous year (Ōtō 1968, 174). There were places where special tasks and responsibilities were assigned to these families during the New Year's festivities in the community.

The *sekku* that today is most often celebrated in this regard are the rituals connected to children, namely *hina matsuri* and *tango no sekku* when children receive their first set of traditional items that are put on display on the occasion of these festivities, such as *ashina* dolls or samurai warrior arms. In the past, these were usually sent by maternal grandparents.

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<sup>61</sup> Boys commonly received a bow, and girls a battledore.

The role of maternal grandparents emerge repeatedly as important in many rituals of childhood. The bride left her family upon marriage to move into the household of the husband and to become a member of this household. Thus ties with the maternal household needed to be perpetuated and regularly affirmed and this occurred also ritually, in the form of gift-giving on ritual occasion connected to the grandchildren.

### **3.5 Rites of passage before the age of seven**

While it can be said that the first year in the child's life was a period with an elevated number of rites of passage, the following six year, too, were notable for the frequency with which rituals followed each other. Also, the rites observed during this period are those that are most closely associated with modern Shichigosan.

The age of seven was regarded as an important threshold in the life of the child; it marked the end of infancy and the admission of the child into the social life of the local community. There are ancient law documents that mention ages of three, seven, ten (sometimes also twelve and sixteen) as important thresholds in the lives of children also from a legal point of view (Sakurai 1938, also Yamaji 2005). Rites observed around these ages were probably seen as part of the social recognition in the complex system of social ranks present in the life of the imperial court. The origin of these particular ages is, however, unclear. The significance that was attributed to the age of seven is not unique to Japan solely. The French historian, Philippe Aries notes that early childhood in Europe was considered in Middle Ages as ending around seven, for example. In Middle Ages of England and France, at seven boys left the care of their immediate family and entered school and the adult world (Aries 1962, 353). In Japan, the view received probably also an influence from China especially due to the belief system based on the working of the two principles of yin and yang. This had important implications also regarding numbers and the meanings associated to them. The yin and yang belief entered Japan from the

Asian continent and its popularity started to grow during the Heian period. Yasui argues that this belief might have affected the choice of ages connected to several rites of passage observed in Japan (Yasui 2000).<sup>62</sup>

The particular significance that is associated to the age of seven and generally to the period reaching until seven years of age, is reflected in numerous proverbs and sayings in the Japanese language, such as for example ‘until seven the child belongs to the *kami*’ (Yagi 2001b, 24-25).<sup>63</sup> The age of seven was seen as an important threshold in the life of the child. It truly separated the infancy and early childhood from the period that lead to adulthood. The passage was conventionally marked ritually but there were also regions where children under seven were called with a special term, differing by gender. Children having passed the age of seven were called in some places *mura no ko* 村の子, i.e. child of the village, indicating thus that the child stepped out from the exclusivity of the family sphere and became seen as a member of the community (Himeda 1983, 53).<sup>64</sup>

Beliefs and rituals connected to this period of the child’s life have attracted much scholarly attention within folklore studies in Japan. Most theories acknowledge that at the base of this phenomenon there is the special position that Japanese traditional society attributed to small children.<sup>65</sup> As already mentioned above, the traditional worldview saw the soul of human being as part of a greater cosmos that included this as well as the other world, human as well as supernatural beings (Itabashi 2007, 288-291). Accordingly, immediately after birth children were believed to belong more to the realm of *kami*, from which they just arrived, than to the human world (Iijima 1991, 42-73). The ties to the earthly world needed to be tighten and rituals observed during this period are interpreted to have the function to affirm the bonds of the soul to the world of humans. The view that children were perceived as beings close to the realm of gods, is reflected also in customs when small children were given roles during Shinto rituals, acting as a sort of

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<sup>62</sup> See Chapter VII for a more detailed discussion of the connections between yin and yang principles and age celebrations.

<sup>63</sup> *Nanasai made wa kami no ko* 七歳までは神の子.

<sup>64</sup> For young persons who passed through one of the coming-of-age rites between thirteen and sixteen years of age, the term *ichininmae* 一人前 (lit. ‘one whole portion of an adult person’).

<sup>65</sup> See among others works of Ōtō 1968, Iijima 1987, 1991, Ishii 2009, Kuraishi et al 2000.

intermediary between the two worlds (Suzuki 1998, 211). The three ages of the Shichigosan, three, five and seven, were particularly significant. Children of these ages were seen as representing the will of *kami*<sup>66</sup> and used as medium for divinatory practices (Miyata 2007a, 33-38). Children-medium were beautifully dressed and painted for these occasions. In present days too, at *matsuri* (festivals) processions children are often assigned important parts.

The high number of rituals observed during the first seven years of the child's life is therefore interpreted by Japanese scholars as part of the community's effort to strengthen the link of the child's soul to the human world in order to prevent that this returns to the other world. Behind these beliefs is allegedly the natural fear of parents for the health and life of the infant. Especially in rural areas of pre-Meiji Japan, mortality of infants was high and this rate lowered significantly after children reached seven (Hara and Minagawa 1996). According to a study made on population change in the last decades of the Tokugawa period, about 25 % of small children were lost before five (Hayama 2010, 186).

The child's physical wellbeing until it reached the age of seven was perceived extremely vulnerable and thus in need of support of supernatural powers. In this regard, Iijima underlines that the related beliefs and customs mirrored the view that perceived children as 'incomplete beings' which indicates the liminal aspect of the figure of the child (Iijima 1987, S41). In other words, children up to the age of seven were believed to be in an in-between state, between two worlds. The frequent ritual observances around the birth and during the early childhood had the role to transform children's 'incomplete' beings into 'complete' earthly beings, indicating a process, in Iijima's definition, through which the liminality of the child comes to be gradually incorporated into the society (Iijima 1991, 63).

Another widespread custom that shows the different perception of children under seven is connected to the funeral offered to children who died under seven. In many areas of

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<sup>66</sup>*Shin'i no daibensha* 神意の代弁者.

Japan, children who died before reaching the age of seven, respectively before having observed the rite of passage at the age of seven, were not offered a proper funeral ceremony.<sup>67</sup> Tōru Sakurai provides proof of the existence of this custom from a number of historical documents prior to the Kamakura period (1185-1333) (Sakurai 1938, 121-122). Japanese folklorists argue that this was because it was believed that for children's soul it was easy to return to the other world from which, subsequently, it could reborn almost immediately (Hara and Minagawa 1996, 14). With regard, a critical note was expressed by Masao Shiono on the uncritical use of this concept in the scholarly literature. The link between the common saying 'under seven among the gods' and the belief about the immediate rebirth of children upon early death was allegedly made first by Kunio Yanagida. Later Tarō Wakamori overtook this theory and it started to live its own life in the writings of Japanese folklorists (Shiono 1988 in Itabashi 2007, 262).

It remains true, however, that folklore studies literature lists numerous examples of customs when burial of small children occurred in places different from the usual ones, such as under the floor of the family home, at road crossings, outside the village or into rivers (Itabashi 2007, 257-261). The funeral rites offered to the souls of these children were also different from the regular ones; they were much simpler. Ōtō adds that this custom was supported also by the fact that formal registration of children upon birth into the official population registration (*ninbetsuchō*<sup>68</sup> 人別帳, later *koseki* 戸籍), was often delayed (Ōtō 1968, 242).<sup>69</sup> Ōtō also notes that the registration of the child occurred often at the Shichigosan ages, three, five or seven when one of the rites of passage had been performed.<sup>70</sup> This custom that was diffused throughout Japan still in the Meiji period, made later the assessment of infant mortality very problematic as many children, died as infants, never appeared in the official registers. Also, it was common to give the name of the deceased infant to a child born later to the family.

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<sup>67</sup> See a further discussion of the theme in Iijima 1991, Suzuki 1998, Kuraishi et al. 2000.

<sup>68</sup> *Ninbetsuchō* was called the official population register based on the regular (every six years) surveys conducted by the Tokugawa government. In the Meiji period the register was renamed to *koseki*. Its unit is still the household where the family members are registered under the name of the head of the family.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted from a pre-Meiji survey in Ōtō 1968, 242.

<sup>70</sup> Rites of passage associated with a particular age were sometimes called age rites, *toshi iwai* 年祝い.

There exists a big variation in name and form of rituals observed during the period reaching until the age of seven, varying by region. As a common pattern, the observances entailed a visible change in clothing style or hair cut. The change in dress style was a common and distinct sign of change in status or passage in life-cycle. Around the age of two or three the rite called *kamioki* 髪置 (also *kamitate* 髪たて) was celebrated.<sup>71</sup> Today, as part of the Shichigosan celebration, it is observed only for girls (with some exception depending on local custom), but in the past it used to be celebrated for both, male and female children. The ritual originally marked the beginning of hair growing as children's head used to be shaved before this age.<sup>72</sup> There was no rule as for the date of the celebration; there were places where it was observed at New Year, in other places the occasion of major festivals of the local tutelary deity were used to mark the date of the observance. There were places where a special head cover was placed on the head of the child, called *shiraga* 白髪 (white hair). It was made of white silk and symbolized old people's grey hair and longevity (Ishizuka 1978, 48). The *kamioki* ritual was sometimes followed by another ritual marking the first trimming of the child's hair which was now allowed to grow in length. This ritual was called *fukasogi* 深曾木 (or *kamisogi* 髪削ぎ) and took place usually around the age of four or five.<sup>73</sup> The date and modality of the observance depended much on local customs.

The ritual of *hamakagi*<sup>74</sup> 袴義 which is the second rite comprised in contemporary Shichigosan, was commonly observed around three or five years of age but there were places where it was celebrated at seven years of age (for example in Yamagata prefecture) (Hashiura et al. 2008, 529). During the Tokugawa period, it was mostly popular among samurai families who adopted the custom from the court noble etiquette

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<sup>71</sup> Many other denominations exist varying by region and local dialect

<sup>72</sup> It was believed that evil forces entered the child through its head causing illness, misfortune. In order to prevent this, small children's heads were usually shaved.

<sup>73</sup> Kagiwada notes that *fukasogi* was common among noble families where hair of female children was usually not shaved and therefore, the rite marked the first trimming of hair (Kagiwada 1981, 124).

<sup>74</sup> It was also called *chakko* 着袴.

during the Kamakura period (Suzuki 2000, 62). *Hakama* was called the traditional Japanese trousers worn in the Heian period both by female and male; later it became the regular wear of the samurai. In the Heian period, the *hakamagi* was probably a rite observed in the imperial court when it was celebrated for male and male children alike, but in the samurai etiquette it became an exclusive rite of the samurai sons.<sup>75</sup>

The seventh year ritual, *obitoki* 帯解き is today observed as the last rite of Shichigosan at the age of seven, but in the past the age of its celebration showed much local variation.<sup>76</sup> During this rite, a kimono called *mittsumi* 三つ身, worn usually until the age of three-four, was changed into *yottsumi* 四つ身 (a small size kimono used until ten years of age) (see also Chapter VII). Small children's dress was commonly tied with a simple cord (called *himo* 紐) and not with the regular sash (*obi* 帯). The wearing of the *yottsumi* kimono indicated that the simple cord was dropped and the child's dress was tied with a proper *obi*. *Obi* was seen as symbol of adulthood and it was also associated with auspiciousness. According to popular belief diffused in some regions in Japan, the *obi* was also believed to prevent the soul from running away from the child's body. The *obi* was usually sent as gift to the child by maternal grandparents. Gifts could include other items as well, such as the festive dress of girls (*nagasode* 長袖 kimono with long sleeves), *zōri* 草履 (wooden Japanese sandals), and other accessories.

A big number of local terms existed to indicate the *kamioki* rite that demonstrates its diffusion throughout the country. Denominations such as *obinaoshi* (*obi* adjusting), *himo-otoshi* or *himo-toki* (drop off the cord), *obi-musubi* (tying of *obi*), all referred to the act of dropping the *himo* cord to be replaced by the regular sash. There were also places where instead of this rite, girls received their first *fundoshi* 褌, a loincloth worn by adult women. This was part of the sexual education of girls, and usually was observed at a later age as it indicated the beginning of the sexual maturity of the girl. However, in some places the rite was celebrated earlier, at the age of seven, underlining so the importance of this

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<sup>75</sup>Eiga Monogatari, a historical document from the 11<sup>th</sup> century, mentions the observance of *hakamagi* for an imperial princess of three years of age. The rite took place in the fourth month of the lunar calendar (quoted in Suzuki 2000, 62).

<sup>76</sup>For a list of local variations of childhood rites of passage and related customs divided by prefectures see Hashiura et al. 2008, 529-537).

threshold. Usually an aunt, or another female relative brought a loincloth as a present to the girl. Sexual education was commonly delegated to close relatives rather than to the child's own parents.

Also, it was common to delegate particular roles to children during the year in which they turned seven. In the south of Kyushu, at New Year, on the seventh day of the first month, children who turned seven carried around a special tray in seven houses of the neighborhood in order to collect a dish based on rice, called *zōsui*<sup>77</sup> 雑炊. The collected meal was then consumed in group by all children (Miyata 2007b, 60-61). In the prefecture of Kagoshima, children wearing festive dresses consumed the soup while walking, as it was believed that it would bring good luck and help to keep away illnesses (Ishizuka 1978, 50-51). This custom was also seen as the first formal social intercourse undertaken by the child, hence a step towards its social integration.

The above described rites often entailed a visit in the shrine of the tutelary deity of the community, where protection and recognition was sought for from the *ujigami* (the guardian deity). On the way home, the child usually visited relatives and neighbors and brought food and small gifts to them. The celebration was sometimes completed by a feast at home, usually consisting of auspicious dishes such as *sekihan* (red rice), *mochi* (rice cake) and fish. Red rice and sake was also offered to the gods guarding over the house in the household Shinto altar. In some places it was the community that assumed the role of organizing a feast. For example in Izu, communal festivities called *toshiiwai* 年祝 (age celebration) were held on 15<sup>th</sup> of November for children of five and seven. These banquets were prepared jointly by families and the entire hamlet was invited to them (Ōtō 1968).

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<sup>77</sup>A type of rice porridge.

### 3.6 Further themes in the interpretation of childhood rites

Rites observed during the first years of the child's life often served multiple purposes. The spiritual integration of the child was equally important as its social integration. Generally speaking, the observed rites all aimed at preparing the child to enter another important phase in its life, the phase that would guide it towards physical and social maturity. There were seen as a further step towards the complete affirmation of the child's *ichininmae* (一人前) status, in other words, towards complete maturity. A further important aspect was the acknowledgment of the parishioner (*ujiko* 氏子) by the local deity (as in the case of the above discussed first shrine visit, *miyamairi*). Indeed, in many places the rites observed around the age of six-seven were called *ujiko-iri* 氏子入り, lit. admission of the parishioner. There were places where the child received a card on this occasion, called *ujikofuda* 氏子札 from the *ujigami* shrine which bore the name of the child (Suzuki 2000, 62). The child was symbolically placed under the protection of the *ujigami*, at the same time its status as a new member of the community was further reinforced. Origuchi argued in this regard, that the first shrine visit ritual, the *miyamairi* became diffused among common folk only after mid-Tokugawa period and therefore, the ritual that marked originally the admission of the child as a new parishioner was not the first shrine visit but the rite performed at the age of seven (Origuchi Zenshū 15, 80 quoted in Ōtō 1983, 16). However, as Ōtō notes, the diffusion of the *miyamairi* ritual throughout Japan seems to contradict this theory (1983, 16-17).

By the completion of the rite at seven, the child also obtained the right to participate actively in Shinto rituals. In hamlets where *miyaza* 宮座 associations<sup>78</sup> were active, the child's name came to be registered in the *miyazachō* (the name register of the *miyaza*) (Ōtō 1968, 244-247).

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<sup>78</sup>*Miyaza* were hamlet associations that had the responsibility to take care of the villages' religious festivals and shrine rituals. They were made up by the heads of the important families of the communities.

Another theme that comes into view at the interpretation of the meaning of the above listed age rites is based on the belief concerning the division between fortunate and unfortunate years, known also as *yakudoshi* 厄年 (discussed below). There were regions where the ages in which childhood rites were observed, were simply considered as unlucky years (*yakudoshi*) when the child was particularly vulnerable to misfortune, illnesses and other evil influences. Hence, an increased awareness and attention was required. In some areas of the Kōchi prefecture, the rite observed at seven was called *yakunuki* 厄ぬき, lit. a rite to prevent *yaku* (danger, misfortune) which indicates a clear association with the notion of *yakudoshi* (Ishizuka 1978, 52-53).

The concept of purification and ritual contamination has also its place in the interpretational framework. In case of girls, age rites were generally observed more times than in case of boys. Female life was thought to be accompanied with an increased degree of pollution due to contact with blood during menstruation and later childbirth. Women were more exposed to pollution than male and thereby were believed to be in need of more complex purification practices (Suzuki 2000, 63).<sup>79</sup> The same explanation was given in some areas for the longer duration of the purification period after birth in case of female infants. In some areas, girls could be taken to their first shrine visit (*miyamairi*) only after 32 or more days while in case of boys the period was usually shorter. On the other hand, there were places where severe purification rituals were observed in case of male children, in particular first born male children. In Ibaraki prefecture a ritual called *oshōjin* or *godachi* was still observed in the 1920s-1930s (Suzuki 2000, 64). The eldest son, when reaching five years of age, had to undergo a purification ritual (*misogi harae* 禊祓) that lasted seven days. During these days, the only member of the family who was allowed to assist and to take care of the child, was his father or uncle. The child's food was prepared on a separate fireplace (not the one used for preparing the meal of the family), and the child was put to sleep on a separate straw mat. During the seven days of ritual seclusion the child had to visit a place near the river, defined as sacred space by the village, and while chanting and bathing in the river he scattered around rice. The purification procedure involved powerful symbols such as rice (standing for

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<sup>79</sup>See also Segawa 1963.

prosperity) and water (ritual purity) through which the future position of the first born son both in the family and in the community was to be acknowledged and ritually reinforced.

### 3.7 Coming of age rites

At the age of seven, the period of infancy came definitely to its end and the rite observed around this age was the last in the series of the early childhood celebrations. As mentioned above, the age of seven was perceived as a threshold in the child's life, surpassing which would separate the child definitely from the world of the gods. After this period the child's physical conditions were also perceived as improved. It was also a threshold which marked the start of a preparation period of which scope was to transform the child into a full-fledged adult. Girls started to learn the basic techniques of housekeeping, to participate in household task such as child sitting, cooking, cleaning, knitting etc. Boys learned labor on fields and other works necessitated by the agricultural life. This period of learning usually lasted until 13 years of age. There were places where the child of eight years old was called *yattsuotona* 八つ大人 lit. 'eight adult' or 'one eight of an adult', indicating that the eight years old child was not perceived as a child any more but closer to an adult (Ishizuka 1978, 53).

At the age of seven, children for the first time were removed from the direct supervision of their caretakers, be them parents or other relatives. The child was formally admitted into the *kodomo-gumi* 子供組, the age group that included all children of the community between the ages of seven and fourteen years. These age groups were active in many traditional rural communities in pre-Meiji Japan (before 1868).<sup>80</sup> The different age groups were assigned different tasks and responsibilities in the village life.<sup>81</sup> *Kodomo-gumi* was made up by the youngest members of the hamlet and participation in its activities were

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<sup>80</sup> An English language account of these age groups and their place in the social structure of rural communities see Fukutake 1972, 96-116.

<sup>81</sup> On the activities of age groups in Japanese villages see also Iwata 1999.

considered important for the child's education. Here it received the kind of group training that could not be transmitted within the family. The children group was assigned tasks during village festivals, it took part in minor community labors and as such it transmitted important skills for the life in the community.

In the Kansai region, the rite of passage called *jūsanmairi* 十三参り was widespread and it is still popular in present days. It is celebrated at the age of thirteen and it has Buddhist origins (Naoe 1994). It is based on the belief related to Bodhisattva Kokūzō 虚空蔵 who is one of thirteen deities of the Japanese Buddhist Shingon Sect.<sup>82</sup> It is venerated as the Bodhisattva of wisdom and memory and the most famous and popular temple to visit on this occasion is Kyoto's Sagahōrinji (法輪寺). The traditional date of the observance is the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the fourth lunar month when boys and girls dressed in their festive kimono, visit a temple with their families to pray for good fortune and wisdom.<sup>83</sup> The rite makes part of the coming-of-age rites observed throughout Japan around the puberty. These rites were usually observed around the age of fifteen in case of boys, and thirteen in case of girls. The completion of the coming of age rite indicated that the young person was ready to participate in the adult life of the community, contribute fully to its livelihood, and was ready for marriage.

The coming of age rites, similarly to the above described rites of passage, often distinguished themselves by a symbolic act, for example the arrangement of a different haircut, introduction of a different dress style, or some kind of physical trial which the young person was exposed to. Initiation ceremonies were widespread in particular for boys when young males were made to show their strength and physical ability (Suzuki 1998, 213). In the Tsugaru region (prefecture of Aomori) boys had to climb the sacred mount of Iwaki, the region's symbol, and pray in the shrine on the top of the mount (Hirayama 1994). The trial symbolized rebirth which received expression also in the custom of changing the person's name.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> The cult and the associated rite are said to grow in popularity in the latter half of the 18th century (Kamei 2000, 103).

<sup>83</sup> See also Noboru Miyata *Kankonsōsai* (1999).

<sup>84</sup> See also Tarō Wakamori *Wakamonogumi no kanyū to dattai* (1965), Tokuzō Ōmachi *Seinenshiki* (1969), Kiyoko Segawa *Wakamono to musume wo meguru minzoku* (1973).

It was also common to ask a respectable older person to act as a guarantor for the young person on the occasion of the coming of age rite (Ōmachi 1976, 140-142). The custom to invite a respectable person to act as a guarantor for the rites of passage of the child was widespread in Japan. There were places where the guarantor was invited to one of the first rites after birth, in particular for the name-giving ritual. But in some places it was common also in the cases of the subsequent rites, such as the *kamioki* or *hakamagi* rite. The guarantor was practically an adopted parent (*karioya* 仮親), or in other words, social parent and as such he or she was expected to provide protection and assistance to the child during his/her life (Inoguchi 1959, 206-208). There were several types of social parent. *Toriage oya* 取上げ親 was called the midwife who assisted the mother at birth and later accompanied the child during its several childhood rites (mentioned above).<sup>85</sup> With regard to puberty rites, Hōri underlines that the social father or the social parents had a strong role in the future adult life of the candidate which could reveal to be more influential in the public life than his real parents were. The guarantor was often asked to act as the go-between at marriages (Hōri 1968).<sup>86</sup>

There were several denominations to call the guarantor. The widespread *eboshioya* 烏帽子親 came from the custom of *genpuku* 元服 rite popular among the warrior class in the feudal period. This coming of age rite has allegedly a Chinese origin; it is already mentioned in *Nihon Shoki*, a historical document compiled in the 8<sup>th</sup> century (Ōmachi 1976, 131-138) The rite became popular after the 8<sup>th</sup> century as a coming of age ritual for sons of families belonging to the upper social class. It centered around a garment called *kanmuri* 冠 or *eboshi* 烏帽子, a head cover, which was ceremonially placed on the head of the person as a sign of adulthood.<sup>87</sup> *Eboshioya* was the person who was assisted the actor during the ritual. The equivalent of this rite in lower class families was the *fundoshi-iwai* 褌祝 or *hekoiwai* へこ祝い. *Fundoshi* or *heko* was called the loincloth that was given to the young person as a sign of maturity. There were places where girls

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<sup>85</sup> In many places the midwife continued to keep a significant role during the first seven years of the child's life. It was also believed that children until seven were under her direct protection (Miyata 2007b, 59-60).

<sup>86</sup> See Tokuzō Ōmachi *Konrei* (1962), Jirō Kamishima *Nihonjin no Kekkōkan* (1969), Tsuo Emori *Nihon no Kon'in: Sono Rekishi to Minzoku* (1976).

<sup>87</sup> The rite was also called *eboshi-shiki* 烏帽子式 (Nakai 2000, 116).

received on the same occasion an underwear garment called *koshimaki*腰巻 (Takeda 1994). Another coming of age rite for girls was the *kamiage*髪上げ rite at which marked the moment from which girls could wear their hair in an adult fashion.<sup>88</sup> In hamlets where age groups were active, the coming of age rites also entailed a move from the *kodomo-gumi* to the next age group, the *wakamono-gumi*若者組み, youth group, or *musume-gumi*娘組み, the age group for girls (Amano 1980, 43-51, also Fukutake 1972, 103).

The majority of these coming of age rites did not survive the modernization of the Japanese society and a new public ritual has overtaken their role after the end of the WWII. The celebration called *seijinshiki*成人式 has been established in 1946 by the town council of Warabi, a town in the prefecture of Saitama and from here it spread throughout the country. In 1948, the 15th of January, which in the traditional festivity calendar was the central day of *koshōgatsu*<sup>89</sup>小正月 (small New Year), was defined by law an official holiday, *Seijin no hi*成人の日 (Adult's day') (Nakai 2000, 16).<sup>90</sup> The celebration is today commonly organized by the municipalities and all young residents, that reached the age of majority (twenty years) over the past year, are invited to it.<sup>91</sup> A distinguishing feature of the celebration is the wear of the young girls dressed for the occasion in the Japanese traditional kimono for young unmarried women, the *furisode*<sup>92</sup>振袖

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<sup>88</sup> A number of other coming of age rites existed in the past. One of these are for example the ritual of teeth blackening (*kanetsuke*, called also *ohaguro* お歯黒). The custom of teeth blackening was widespread in the past in noble court families women blackened their teeth, later in the 12th-13th centuries, it became diffused also among men. From the 13th century the black teeth became a sign of maturity for unmarried girls and it was practiced starting from the age of nine. In the Edo period nearly all married women practiced the custom. It remained popular until the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Kamei 2000, 102, see also Sugawara 2007, 230-233).

<sup>89</sup> Traditional New Year festivities taking place between the 14th and 16th of January.

<sup>90</sup> Since 2000, the official day is the second Monday in January.

<sup>91</sup> In recent years, the observance has attracted much attention both from the media and scholars because of the high occurrence of events that disturb the official programs. Young male adults interrupting the public program with disrespectfulness, improper behavior were reported in news. This development has been put into connection with more complex social phenomena such as changes in the value scale of the young for example. The excessive commercialization, high sums spent on the ceremonial robes, is also often target of critical comments.

<sup>92</sup> A festive kimono with long sleeves used in the past in the period until the observation of one of the coming of age rites (*genpuku*).

### 3.8 Wedding, *yakudoshi* and funeral rites

Though the coming of age rite was an important step towards complete maturity, the young adult was not considered completely mature unless it established his/her own household upon marriage. Marriage was the ultimate rite of passage that attributed full-fledged adulthood to the person in the eyes of the society. This view partly continues to exercise its impact in contemporary society as well, even though in a lesser degree. Folk customs connected to the wedding rite has a rich literature both in Japanese and English languages and therefore, I will not dedicate here too much space and attention to the theme.<sup>93</sup> Before the modernization that affected local customs too, wedding rites were usually composed of a series of rites and ritual acts that made up a rather complicate procedure. These rites emphasized the traditional view that considered the wedding first of all as the bond between two households rather than between two individuals. The wedding ritual changed greatly when in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, along with major socio-economic transformation taking place in the country, a Shinto shrine ritual replaced the complex system of traditional wedding rites. It grew out from a particular event which occurred in 1900. That year a Shinto wedding ceremony was created appositely for the imperial wedding of the Taisho prince in order to provide a wedding event that would be closer in form and appearance to the European royal weddings (Shida 1999, Ishii 2005). After this event the popularity of the Shinto shrine wedding ceremony slowly rose until the 1950s, when it completely replaced the traditional customs.

The adult phase of the life-cycle had traditionally a lower number of observed rites of passage, compared to childhood and puberty periods or to the old age. As already mentioned above, this is explained by Japanese folklorists contained in the framework of

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<sup>93</sup>See among others Minami, R. *Konrei-shiki to kekkon no kokoro* (1953), Takamura, I. *Nihon Kon'in shi* (1963), JoyHendry (1981), Walter Edwards (1989), Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni (1997), Kenji Ishii (2005).

the traditional worldview that saw human life as part of a cyclic process through which the human soul gradually proceeded over a number of steps and phases. The state of the soul was thus perceived as unstable and insecure in the particular phases before and after the two important turning points, birth and death that explains the high frequency of rites during these periods (Itabashi 2007, 263-290).<sup>94</sup> Though, there are a few rites that were observed during adulthood, too. These are the rites that are associated to certain ages considered as *yakudoshi*厄年 which literally means ‘unfortunate years’. The belief linked to the ‘unfortunate years’ appears already in the classic literature of the Heian period (for example in *Genji Monogatari*), but the ages believed as unlucky differed considerably in different historical periods (Ishii 2009, 181). Even in present days, there is no clear consent over the ages, but usually it is the 25<sup>th</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> year for men, and the 19<sup>th</sup> and 33<sup>rd</sup> year for women.<sup>95</sup> Among these, the 42<sup>nd</sup> year for men and the 33<sup>rd</sup> for women are thought to be the most critical ages. Similarly to the past, also today it is believed that around these ages, one’s probability to encounter difficulties, troubles, illness in its everyday life is bigger. In order to avoid negative events, the person can observe several rituals praying for divine protection. The rituals, for which one can apply in the shrine (purification ritual, called also *yakubarai*厄祓い), can be accompanied with trips to distant and famous shrines which is believed to strengthen the effectiveness of the act. The observance enjoys a growing popularity in recent decades and most religious institutions provide information on these dates and make it visible on external boards (Taguchi 2008). The observance involves also the purchase of amulets which on the other hand constitutes a significant contribution to the shrine’s or temple’s finances.

Although, there are not many studies taking *yakudoshi* for their main subject, it is thought that the development of the custom of *yakudoshi* has probably received the influence of the Chinese philosophy of yin and yang concepts and other esoteric teachings widespread in pre-Meiji Japan (Ishii 2009, 181-183).<sup>96</sup> On the other hand, Yanagida offered another

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<sup>94</sup> See also Suzuki 1998 and Inoguchi 1978.

<sup>95</sup> The year preceding and following the concrete *yakudoshi* is also believed to represent a risky period, even though to a lesser degree than the central year does.

<sup>96</sup> In English language see contributions of David Lewis (*Years of Calamity: Yakudoshi* observances in urban Japan (1998) and Edward Norbeck’s *Yakudoshi: A Japanese complex of supernaturalistic beliefs* (1955).

theory which focuses on the word of *yaku* (Taguchi 2008, 82-84). Accordingly, in his interpretation the word *yaku* was originally not written with the character of 厄 but with the character of 役 that has the same sound but different meaning. While the first Chinese character means evil or misfortune, the latter stands for role, task. According to Yanagida's theory, at these particular ages persons were believed to have special tasks when celebrating a Shinto ritual. Indeed, there were places where persons of *yakudoshiage* were assigned special tasks for that year at the local shrines which could include helping out with various tasks during rites or around the shrine. Though this theory was later criticized.

The next age that is marked with an observance is 61, called *kanreki* 還暦. Its meaning comes from the Chinese cycles of zodiac, the *eto* 干支 calendar. The 61th year in an individual's life is the first year when the cycle comes to its end and the zodiac sign, in which s/he was born, returns (Suzuki 1998, 218-219). The celebration thus involves the notion of rebirth emerging also in other coming of age rites in Japan. On the other hand, this rite was also considered as marking the beginning of the period during which preparation for the approaching next stage in the soul's cycle, death and the entrance into the other world initiated. There are several other rites during old age that were traditionally observed according to local customs. *Kanreki* was followed by *koki* 古稀 at the age of 70, *kiju* 喜寿 at the age of 77, 米寿 at the age of 88, and sometimes, at 99 the celebration called *hakuju* 白寿.

The funeral rites are formally based on the Buddhist ritual etiquette but they bear distinctive signs of the Japanese traditional cosmology too (Inoguchi 1978). Upon death, the soul leaves the physical body and it steps on the path that leads it towards becoming part of the realm of spirits and ancestor souls, and ultimately, of the world of *kami*. In simple terms, the main aim of funeral rites that continue up to 33 years after death, was to send the soul safely away from the world of humans. Funeral rites were also integral part of the ancestral cult inherent in the *ie* household system, in which the veneration of ancestors was among the most important duties of the living generation. The complex

series of funeral rites, both in traditional and modern contexts, has a rich literature both in Japanese and Western scholarship.<sup>97</sup>

Several examples from the folklore studies literature demonstrate that concepts underlying the two important events of human life, birth and death, were connected in the traditional cosmology. This parallel feature is reflected in particular in funeral rites and rites connected to birth and early childhood. Whereas in the case of childhood rites, the auspicious observances aimed at ‘drawing’ the child’s soul from the other world to this world, and at strengthening its bonds to the human community, the funeral and memorial rites focused on sending the leaving soul away from the human world. Simultaneously, both categories of rites were seen also as purification rituals; impurity, caused in the first case by birth and in the second case by death, needed to be swept away and cleared off. Itabashi notes that the two periods, the one following the birth and the other preceding death (after *kanreki*), were phases when the soul was believed to be in a state lacking stability and thus, in need of support (Itabashi 2007, 189-190).<sup>98</sup> The beliefs and taboos that connected the two event in human life are numerous even though often controversial.<sup>99</sup> Just to mention a few, it was believed that if a pregnant woman was given *mochi* (rice cake) left from a funeral, it could help delivery. On the other hand, pregnant women were not advised to participate in a funeral or to enter the room where the body of the person was placed. It was explained by a concern for the soul of the baby that might be drawn away by the presence of another soul. The conditions of the soul of the baby was still believed to be unsafe at this time, and any situation that could negatively affect this condition was to be avoided.

Another interesting aspect is the parallel that can be noticed between rites after birth and rites after death (Akata 1979, 93). The intervals that the observation of these two groups

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<sup>97</sup> For a discussion of funeral rites in English language see Robert Smith *Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan* (1974), Stefansson Halldor ‘On structural duality in Japanese conception of death’ (1995), Hikaru Suzuki *The Price of Death: The Funeral Industry in Contemporary Japan* (2001).

<sup>98</sup> See also Graph 12 illustrating graphically the process of the progress of the soul (Itabashi 2007, 290).

<sup>99</sup> For a list of these observances and beliefs see Shintani 1986.

of rites follow, are remarkably similar.<sup>100</sup> *Shussan iwai, mikka iwai, shichiya, miyamiari* or *kuizome*, to mention only a few, have their corresponding rites in the series of rituals observed for the soul of the deceased. The memorial rites show a regularity similar to the infant and early childhood rites. While there are local differences as for the year when these are held, the numbers of Shichigosan (3, 5, and 7) and some of the *yakudoshi* ages (25 and 33) are also very close to the years in which memorial rites are held for the deceased. Akata brings the example of Shichigosan and the memorial rites observed on the sixth, fourth and second anniversaries of death. In Japanese, one number is added to the number of the year in which the given memorial rite is held, since the rite observed upon death is also included in the number indicating the anniversary. Accordingly, the above listed three anniversaries are called *shichi-go-san kaiki* 七五三回忌 (seventh-fifth-third memorial rite) (Akata 1979, 93). Hendry points out that the parallel as well as distinction between the two groups of rites observed during these two periods is also found in the symbolism associated to them (Hendry 2005, 160-161). The symbolism is present in the food served on the different occasions, in gifts presented, in the wrapping of these gifts, in colors and so on.

The connection between the first childhood rites and the rites celebrated at old age is also noted by Yuki Ōtō (1991). Ōtō divides the early childhood phase and the old age into three periods which are designed to form a circular view of life. The first infant period, stretching from birth to the first of the Shichigosan rites, the *kamioki* at three, corresponds to the last of the old age phases, that start with the rite celebrated at 88 or at 99 (*hakuju* 白寿) and terminates with the end of life. The middle phase ends in early development with the five year's rite (*hakamagi*) and in old age with the rite observed at 77 or 80 (*kiju* 喜寿). The third ends with the seventh year rite (*obitoki* or *kodomo no iwai*, using the term adopted by Ōtō) and in old starts at 61 with *kanreki* 還暦 and ends at 70 with *koki* 古稀. Ōtō draws a connection between the physical state of the individuals in respective phases and identifies the earliest infant phase with the last phase of old age concerning the level of vital force and strength.

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<sup>100</sup> For a detailed list of these parallel rites following birth and death see Akata 1979, 93, Table 1.

### 3.9 Conclusions

The most important role of the above introduced rites of passage, as described by the Japanese folklore studies literature, was to provide support to and to accompany the individual during its life cycle. The rites served also for the surrounding community to acknowledge the passage and to integrate the new member into the community. The underlying worldview of these customs is to be found in the belief based on the continuity of the human soul in a circular process, leading from the realm of human world to the other world and then back again into the earthly life. Accordingly, the physical body was seen as distinguished from the soul or spirit, and it was believed that the soul does not vanish with the death of the body. The entire course of life with its subsequent phases were viewed as inherent part of a continuing process through which every individual proceeded gradually from birth to death and from death to a new rebirth. The notion of continuity was important and rites of passage underlined this notion in various ways. Rites of passage were conceived to accompany and acknowledge the single phases of this continuing process like the single steps in a circle. All steps were needed to be accomplished in order to be able to proceed in a harmonious way in life which started over again at each rebirth.

The second most important factor that influenced the pattern of rites of passage, in particular those observed during childhood, was the social reality which constituted the context for the ritual practice. In the traditional community life it was thought that to grow a child, the forces of its immediate family were not sufficient. Forces, physical and spiritual, of many other persons were needed to grow a child into a valuable person (Ōtō 1990). The whole community was regarded as responsible for this process and the thresholds or turning points of this process were duly marked. Thereby, the social importance of these observances cannot be underestimated. This difference between the contemporary context, when it is the single family that assumes the main responsibility for the rearing of its offspring, and the context given by traditional village communities

social reality is regarded by Japanese scholars as one of the most important differences between traditional and modern child-rearing practices and childhood rituals (Tsuboi 1995).

Childhood rites of passage have been the subject of study of Japanese folklorists since the establishment of the discipline of folklore studies at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The above described patterns and quoted examples of rites show the richness of customs that were distinguished by a rich local variety, regarding the meanings attached to them, the names and patterns of observance. Different regions and also single communities preserved their own customs and rites and the aspects which single local patterns highlighted, differed from place to place. Nevertheless, there is a number of main lines along which the principal themes regarding the meaning and role of the childhood rites can be drawn. These are:

1. marking the passage related to age; beliefs with links to *yakudoshi*
2. request of divine protection and guidance
3. religious affiliation
3. social integration into the community and into the wider human world
4. affirmation of kinship bonds
5. ritual purification

These themes are fundamental for the understanding of the interpretational frame of traditional rites of passage in Japan, even though the implications they exercise on the contemporary meaning of rituals still observed in present day Japan might be limited. On the other hand, it needs to be noted that, while the body of literature of folklore studies in Japan is extremely rich and informative, certain aspects of research have been continuously underplayed by these works. First of all, an adequate attention paid to the

historical context and to the way in which socio-cultural conditions of a given period might have influenced the examined ritual and custom, emerges only rarely in the works of Japanese folklorists.<sup>101</sup> The so called ‘timeless reality’ is often the context into which these accounts of folk customs are situated. Similarly, the factor of social class belonging and its link to the pattern of ritual culture typical to the given social group has been also neglected in the Japanese folklore studies.<sup>102</sup> Iwamoto applies a critical approach to this body of literature and argues that the class differences, as well as household differences, were not sufficiently examined yet with regards to rites and customs (Iwamoto 2008). As an example, he quotes surveys that were conducted in the 1950s over a prolonged period of time in rural communities where he found out that the three rituals of the infancy, *miyamairi*, *kuizome* and *hatsusekku* were originally mostly popular among the land-owner families (ibid, 274). The custom to observe them spread to peasant families (small holders before the war) only after 1950. He puts this change into connection with the changes in property relations brought about by the land reform between 1947-50 which had as an effect the gradual lessening of social class differences. Unfortunately, no other research into this issue has been done since then and thus no further conclusions can be drawn with regard.

I strongly agree with Iwamoto and think that in the study of contemporary forms of rites of passage, it is indeed necessary to apply a historical perspective. Furthermore, the above discussed characteristics and meanings embedded in the traditional worldview of the Japanese rural communities, while being necessary, in importance there are secondary in the understanding of the contemporary observances. The historical approach can help in detecting the existing continuities with past forms and meanings of contemporary rituals. The majority of rites of passage, in particular the regional variations, observed in

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<sup>101</sup> On critical views see also Schnell and Hashimoto 2003.

<sup>102</sup> Though, it must be acknowledged that Yanagida, while being the first to view Japanese festivals and rituals as manifestation and true preserves of the past of Japan, did not deny that “[...] if the world changes and the conditions of life become different then even a ceremony as important as a *matsuri* must also undergo changes” (Yanagida 1993, 189). It can be said also that he was aware of the fact that many aspects and forms of the festivals and rituals, as observed in his own times (turn of the century), were the results of recent, rather than past developments.

the rural pre-Meiji society, have been lost as a result of the modernization processes over the last 150 years. A few of these continue to be observed in small communities often as an attraction for tourists. Puberty and coming of age rites have almost completely disappeared and been replaced by a nationwide celebration known as *seijinshiki*, organized by governmental offices throughout the country since 1946. Still other rites, preserved until present days, have been vested with new meanings amidst the changed living conditions of modern Japanese. Shichigosan is an example of a rite that stems from ancient customs but that today is fully integrated into the texture of contemporary Japanese society. In this chapter, I gave an outline of the ethnographic interpretations of the traditional rites that are associated with Shichigosan and about which data were collected mostly in the rural context of the Japanese countryside. In the following chapter, I will attempt to look at the data that derive from a different setting, that of the urban context during a period stretching from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the interwar period of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **4. BIRTH OF THE URBAN FORM OF SHICHIGOSAN AND THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF CONSUMPTION PRACTICES IN ITS PATTERN (1600-1945)**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The main aim of this chapter is to describe the historical circumstances that gave birth to the celebration pattern known today as Shichigosan. The description of childhood rites and their local variations that constituted the main subject of the previous chapter were mainly based on data collected in rural settings by several generations of folklorists. Though, they inform on the interpretational background of the rites associated to the contemporary ritual form known under the name Shichigosan, the evolution of the pattern of Shichigosan represents in many regards a distinctive path at least since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. When trying to understand the reasons of the popularity of the Shichigosan custom today, as well as to interpret both the phenomenon and the meaning that it represents for the families, it is necessary to turn to the historical beginnings of the rise of the urban society in Japan and in this way, to follow the development of the ritual pattern within this context. Searching solely for connections of the contemporary ritual form with rural patterns as described extensively in folklore material, would easily bring to a misinterpretation of the meaning and form of the contemporary Shichigosan pattern and to an underplaying of the importance that the celebration has in contemporary Japan. I will refer in this chapter and later also to ‘urban pattern’ of Shichigosan to differentiate it from the so far discussed rural pattern, subject of folklore research.

The birth of Shichigosan urban pattern is the result of a development in a well defined area, that of Edo (old name of Tokyo), during a particular period, the Tokugawa era (1603-1867). It emerged as a product of the socio-political transformation that occurred in this period, and as such it acquired a pattern that was inspired by the socio-cultural context of the epoch. Indeed, urbanization was among the most significant processes that

exercised an influence on the development of Shichigosan in the period in exam. Moreover, one of the salient feature of Shichigosan in modern times, i.e. the presence of consumption practices, has its roots in the Tokugawa period, too. In the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, this feature has gradually grown to become an inherent element of the modern ritualform. The commercialization regarding Shichigosan and the consumption associated to it, have been the target of frequent attacks by social commentators and scholars. Thus, in this chapter I will attempt to analyze the circumstances that gave historically an input to the increase in importance of this element in the celebration. Furthermore, the chapter will examine the social and historical backgrounds of those processes which contributed to the subsequent diffusion of the urban pattern throughout Japan. The temporal borderline for the analysis is set by the end of the Second World War, i.e. the year of 1945.

## 4.2 The birth of the urban pattern

Age-related celebrations, rites of passage, were diffused in the pre-Meiji Japan. Nevertheless, as the examples provided in the previous chapter demonstrate, there existed an immensely rich variation in patterns, denominations, as well as in dates of observation. This variation and lack of standardization did not concern age rites only but also other rituals. Lindsey notes that the patterns of wedding rites were also “[...] flux, likely variegated with locality and class, [...]” in periods earlier than the Tokugawa era (Lindsey 2007, 51). Ritual practice varied not only by region and historical period but also by social class belonging. The development of the ‘middle rite’ of the three Shichigosan rites, *hakamagi* (lit. the rite of *hakama*) provides an example of a rite that in different historical periods was appropriated by different social classes. *Hakamagi* was with much probability popular among high ranking court noble families already in the 11<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> century. Descriptions of age rites emerge in several annals of upper social class

families from this and later periods.<sup>103</sup> Sakurai argues that the ages of three, seven, ten and twelve were regarded as thresholds by ancient law system (*ritsuryō*) in the Nara period (710–794).<sup>104</sup> In the document called *Ryō no Shūge* 令集解 (9<sup>th</sup> century), that provides explanatory notes on these laws, the two ages of three and seven appear as age limits for a number of regulations (Sakurai 1938, 121).<sup>105</sup> Another historical document from the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the *Eiga Monogatari* 栄華物語 includes a comment on the *hakamagi* of an imperial princess of three years of age, observed in the fourth month of the lunar calendar (Suzuki 2000, 62, also Sakurai 1938, 122).<sup>106</sup> The Heian period novel, the *Genji Monogatari* 源氏物語 describes the *hakamagi* rite observed by the then three years old hero, Hikaru Genji.<sup>107</sup> *Hakama*, at this time, was a garment worn by both women and men, but later it became a typical garment of the formal wardrobe of samurai. A historical pattern typical to the aristocracy has been preserved until today by the ceremonial etiquette of the imperial house.<sup>108</sup> With the gradual rise of the political power and social status of the warrior class, high ranking samurai families started emulate and adopt customs and etiquette manners of the imperial court (Tsuboi 1976, 166-170).<sup>109</sup> The *hakamagi* soon started to be observed by samurai families with the difference that it became more common for male children, as part of the series of coming of age rites guiding the child towards adulthood. In the hierarchical value system of the warrior class, sons were attributed a higher position than daughters, and this placed a particular emphasis to the need to receive recognition of this status by the wider society (Sasama 2001, 102). Indeed, the rite served also to acknowledge – and publicly demonstrate – the social

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<sup>103</sup> One example is the record written by the Yamashina family (山科家礼記, 言国卿記) which mentions several celebrations of age rites of their offspring in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (quoted in Sugawara 2007, 229, see also Sugawara 2000, 47-51).

<sup>104</sup> The principal collection of law was the *Yōrō Ritsuryō* 養老律令, called also *Yōrōryō* 養老令 (see also Yamaji 2005).

<sup>105</sup> The document quoted by Sakurai is the ninth volume of *Ryō no Shūge* compiled during the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>106</sup> For a list of other historical documents mentioning childhood age related rituals observed among noble and samurai families, see Tsuboi 1976.

<sup>107</sup> *Genji Monogatari*, Part 1 ‘Kiritsubo’ (源氏物語 第一帖桐壺卷), quoted in Kagiwada 1981, 124.

<sup>108</sup> See for example the most recent celebration of this kind in 2006, the celebration of the *hakamagi* rite of the then five years old princess Aiko.

<sup>109</sup> The school of the *Ogasawara* (小笠原流) whose members or several generations were the official ceremonial masters of the shogunate, preserved some of these customs in an almost unchanging form until present. These also include ritual forms typical to the samurai etiquette. The school continues its activities also in present days; its regular public demonstrations of single rituals are performed according the old etiquette (see more on this issue in Chapter VII).

standing of the samurai son and, through it, of the family. The child was dressed in his first formal crested kimono combined with *hakama*, called also *kamishimo* 袴, and it received his first set of weapons as part of the adult samurai wear.

Dress code and hair style were an important external mark of the individual's social position both in the imperial court and samurai etiquette (Tanida and Koike 1989). The aspects of age rites that highlighted the affirmation, demonstration, and perpetuation of social standing acquired a central role in particular in social groups that belonged to the upper class, aristocratic and samurai. In these patterns, for example, the figure of the guarantor received an accent. The guarantor was the person that ritually assisted the child during the rite and acted as a symbolic tutor. The guarantor was always a respectable person of a social standing equal or preferably higher one that to which the family of the child belonged (Tsuboi 1976, 166-167).<sup>110</sup> Also, it was common to invite several other members of the wider family and other non-relative but respectable acquaintance to the celebration of the ritual as their participation assured the desired social recognition (Sugawara 2007, 232).

With regard, Ichiyū Ōtomo notes that different social groups gave always their own imprint to the rites, be them seasonal rites, the so called *nenchū gyōji*, or life-cycle rites (*jinsei girei*) (Ōtomo 2000, 53).<sup>111</sup> In the samurai society, the celebration of the seasonal festivities entailed most often a formal visit to the shogun when, in the form of a formal audience, the vassals presented their seasonal greetings and gifts to the lord. The condition for these visits was, however, that the vassal completed his first official audience at the shogun's palace. This took place usually in the period between ten and fifteen years of age after the completion of the coming-of-age rite, called *genpuku* (Ōtomo 2000, 55). Accordingly, in samurai society, the different ritual observances, be them seasonal festivities, rites of passage, or the formal audiences and rituals at the shogun's palace, were closely linked and their function and role was interdependent.

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<sup>110</sup> For concrete examples of these rites observed among high standing families in the period between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century, see also Sugawara (2000, 2007). On the role of social parent or guarantor in rural age celebrations see Chapter III.

<sup>111</sup> Regarding the terminological differences between life-cycle rituals and rites of passage in the Japanese context and a discussion of seasonal festivities see Chapter III.

In a similar way, the socio-economic context of the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century, the period when the particular urban culture developed with its center in Edo, the Tokugawa capital, gave a peculiar imprint to the childhood rites observed by the townsmen of the period. The three age rituals (*kamioki*, *hakamagi*, *obitoki*), that had been so far observed separately and with great local differences in date and pattern of celebration, were gradually united and later also given a common name, Shichigosan. The word indicated the three ages in which the rites were usually observed, seven, five and three. The date of the celebration settled to the 15<sup>th</sup> of the eleventh lunar month, which was believed to be an auspicious date according to folk beliefs. The eleventh month, called also *shimotsuki* 霜月 was the period when various festivities were celebrated throughout the country, among them festivities connected to the harvest (*shūkakusai* 収穫祭 called also *shimotsuki matsuri* 霜月祭). The fifteenth day was believed to be, according to the old calendar system, a *kishuku niche* 鬼宿日, lit. the day when the devil stays at home, thereby seen as a fortunate day. As such it was highly suitable for celebrations of any kind. The pattern that the celebration acquired during this period in the capital of Edo, remained in its basic lines unchanged up to our days. It was this pattern that later, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century spread to other regions of Japan.

According to a popular tale, the first ‘true’ Shichigosan took place in the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The story, that is today often reproduced in various media, popular as well as scholarly texts, says that it was the celebration of the five (or three) years old son of the then fifth Tokugawa shogun, Tsunayoshi.<sup>112</sup> The celebration in question was probably the *hakamagi* and the year of the event is said to be the year of 1685.<sup>113</sup> Another version says that it was the third shogun, Iemitsu to organize the celebration and that the year of the celebration was around 1650. Both tales however agree that the child for whom the ritual was offered, was of poor health as an infant, and therefore, his father, the shogun, out of a gratitude and joy over the growth of his son, decided to organize a particularly splendid celebration. Part of which was a formal visit of the shogun’s family to the Hie shrine (Hie Jinja 日枝神社) which was enshrining the Tokugawa clan’s guardian gods. Hie shrine became the *ujigami* (tutelary) shrine of the Tokugawa clan and of the new capital of Edo

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<sup>112</sup> See also Nakae 2007, 54-58 and Ishii 2009, 142.

<sup>113</sup> According to other versions the celebration was the *kamioki* rite.

after Ieyasu, the founder of the Tokugawa dynasty, decided to make from Edo the political center of the Tokugawa shogunate. The shrine was situated within the shogun's castle territory at that time, but after its destruction by fire around 1607, its site was moved and the shrine was rebuilt outside the castle territory. The new seat of the shrine (today in Akasaka district of Tokyo), compared to the previous location, was in a public space, and thus much more accessible to the commoners living in the town. Considering this fact, it can be thought that the ceremonious procession of the shogun's family to the shrine on the occasion of the child's *hakamagi* celebration, probably attracted a considerable attention from the town people. Today the shrine of Hie claims with considerable pride the right of the site (and birthplace) of the first Shichigosan observance. This claim has recently become an important part of the marketing strategy of the shrine in its effort to attract more visitors for Shichigosan. Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Hie shrine, along with others, such as for example the Kanda shrine, figured among the most popular shrines in the town of Edo for Shichigosan worship. It continues to be popular, although there are other, more popular shrines in Tokyo in our days, such as the Meiji Jingū 明治神宮.

It is thought that the celebration of the three age rites (*kamioki*, *hakamagi*, *obitoki*) in the pattern as described in the case of the shogun, grew in popularity among commoners of Edo. This is not to say that prior to this event the three age rites would have been not observed at all in Edo. With much probability, they were but they lacked the uniformity, in form, date and name. The pattern that became popular among commoners resembled in big lines the celebration of the shogun's family: the child dressed in sumptuous festive clothes was accompanied by servants and/or family members to a popular shrine in town where prayers for the child's longevity and future prosperity were recited. The shrine visit was usually followed by a festive meal for invited relatives and friends. Whereas this pattern resembled some versions of rural age celebration, there were new elements to it. Also, the so far scattered patterns became united in form.

There are several factors that supported this particular evolution. One concerns the growth of Edo, as the capital of the country, and the structure of its population in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century. Edo was established as the capital of the newly founded Tokugawa

shogunate in 1603, and as such it became the center of administration and commerce of the country. From a political perspective, this act served to further distance the state power from the old ruling class, the imperial house and aristocracy, residing in the old capital of Kyoto. As a consequence of this decision and of the subsequent political line adopted by the Tokugawa, the new capital witnessed an unprecedented demographic growth in the 17-18<sup>th</sup> centuries; it soon grew into one of the largest cities of the world (over million inhabitants) (Kornhauser 1976, 65-71). The urbanization during the Tokugawa period reached unprecedented degrees for that period and Japan found itself among the most intensely urbanized countries in the world. The development did not regard solely Edo, but also the other two centers of the country, Osaka and Kyoto, whose populations approached those of London and Paris at that time (Francks 2009, 12). Thousands of persons from near and distant regions of Japan migrated to Edo that offered work and a wide range of opportunities. People arrived from their native communities with their local customs that often were very divergent in pattern and date of observance. The heterogeneity of the population as well as of its customs produced the rise of a need for more uniformity in many aspects of life. Celebration patterns were not an exception. The living conditions of rural village communities led a life quite segregated from the surrounding world, helped the preservation of local versions of celebrations and customs. Whereas, the urban pattern of life required a higher degree of standardization. Thus, Shichigosan probably born out of a need to create a uniform and simplified ritual pattern that would unite the heterogeneity of childhood rites of passage observed between the ages of two and seven in the various regions of Japan.

### **4.3 The beginnings of consumption practices in Shichigosan**

The peculiar socio-economic conditions that were crystallized in particular in Edo, gave birth not only to a unified celebration pattern of Shichigosan, but also to other phenomena pertinent to contemporary Japanese society. Japan since the economic boom

in the 1960s, has been commonly described as a consumer-oriented society. This development of consumerism and the related urbanization, however, as Penelope Francks points out, has its roots in the Tokugawa period, more precisely in the urban context of the emerging towns and cities of the period (Francks 2009, 11-19). Therefore, the examination of the diffusion of the urban pattern and the development of its salient traits, need to be analyzed within this perspective.

With the political changes implied by the Tokugawa government, merchants emerged as a new class on the social scale of the epoch with an growing economic power in their hands (Sýkora 2005). Their economic power was, however, not accompanied by political power or appropriate social standing. The merchant class was ideologically placed at the bottom of the official social hierarchy of the shogunate. This peculiar situation exercised a significant impact on its culture and shaped its customs and manners. The always more prosperous merchant class felt the need to render visible the means that were available to its members. Conspicuous consumption, goods and services that used to be consumed before only by elite classes (court noble and high standing samurai), in the 18<sup>th</sup> century found its way to wealthy merchants and craftsmen. In this period of relative peace and political stability, steady economic growth resulted in rising living standards in cities and in a lesser degree in rural areas (Gordon 2009, 2-28). Fashion and an emphasis on external appearance acquired an increasing importance for this particular segment of urban population (Akiyama 1992).

There are only few historical documents that would illustrate the evolution of Shichigosan ritual pattern in the capital of Edo. Descriptions of the most popular customs and festivities during the year appeared for example in writings called *saijiki* 歳時記 which were a sort of glossaries, diaries on popular customs, rituals and festivals. A document from 1713, called *Kokkei Zatsudan* 滑稽雑談 (a collection of funny stories from the life of Edo), provides a detailed description of the *kamioki* rite, though does not yet refer to it by the word ‘shichigosan’ (Kagiwada 1981, 122). The document refers also about the rising popularity of *kamioki* among commoners in the town. An almanac from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century called *Tōtosaijiki* 東都歳時記 includes Shichigosan

already among the popular observances of *chōnin* 町人 (townsmen) in Edo.<sup>114</sup> The document describes it as a lively celebration and mentions the name of the most popular shrines for the observance. It also includes a note that it became common to buy a new dress for the child for the occasion. In general, it gives a picture of the celebration that in big lines is very similar to the pattern diffused in present days. The document also includes a reference to an older document, Edo Sunago 江戸砂子 which includes a description of the celebration of *kamioki* in 1732.<sup>115</sup>

An important source of information on the changes in the ritual pattern in Edo is offered by a popular genre of the epoch, the so called *senryū* 川柳<sup>116</sup> This short form of poetry was beloved by *chōnin* as it often treated human nature in a satiric, ironic or humorous vein. Though the authors of most of these poems is unknown, the best ones were periodically collected and published.<sup>117</sup> Some of them illustrate quite precisely the growing popularity of Shichigosan among inhabitants of Edo. So for example a poem from a collection around 1772-1780, includes already the term ‘shichigosan’: ‘Rare Shichigosan, the fifteenth day’ (七五三とは珍しい十五日).<sup>118</sup> The word *mezurashii* 珍しい in the poem, that can indicate both ‘rare’ or ‘novelty and ‘newness’ probably refers to the fact that the denomination of Shichigosan was already in use but it was still considered by many as a novelty. Another *senryū* from the same period uses still the single names of the two age rituals: ‘*Hakamagi* for the samurai, *obitoki* for the town’ (袴着は武家帯解は町). This poem indicates that in Edo period *hakamagi* was more associated with the samurai etiquette and *obitoki* with the *chōnin*. At the same time, it speaks also about the

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<sup>114</sup>*Chōnin*, lit. townsmen, is a collective denomination use to call urban commoners of the epoch which comprised artisans and merchants, i.e. the non-samurai population residing in towns.

<sup>115</sup> Tōtosaijiki (1838), quoted in Kagiwada 1981, 123.

<sup>116</sup>*Senryū* is a three-line unrhymed Japanese poem structurally similar to a *haiku* from which it developed in mid-18th century in Edo. Unlike *haiku*, it is not tied by strict rules, for example by the compulsory use of seasonal keywords (*kigo* 季語). The poet’s name was often unknown and the poems usually spread among the folk by word of mouth (Satō 1992). *Senryū*-writing is popular in present days too. See for example modern *senryū* on the subject of Shichigosan by Tsumio Awasaka (2005).

<sup>117</sup> For other *senryū* reflecting everyday life of townsmen in Edo see for example Satō 1992.

<sup>118</sup> The poems quoted in the article derive from various collections of *senryū* that were regularly published during the Tokugawa period. The cited poem is mentioned by Nakae (2007, 54-55). For other examples of *senryū* see also Kagiwada (1981) and Hanasaki (1997).

popularity that the *obitoki* rite attained among townsmen. Another poem, ‘*Hakamagi* is the first step towards the five principles’ (袴着は五つの道のふみはじめ), tells about the significance that *hakamagi* represented for the ethical education of samurai sons.<sup>119</sup> The importance of the age of five is here underlined by linking it to the five Confucian virtues that stood at the base of samurai philosophy: benevolence, justice, courtesy, wisdom and sincerity (*jingireichishin* 仁義礼知信). The following poem demonstrates that *obitoki* was already associated mainly to girls and that it was perceived as a threshold in the life of a girl: ‘*Obitoki*, and girls start to get hold over men’ (帯解は男を尻に敷きはじめ) (Hanasaki 1997, 187).<sup>120</sup> By accomplishing the *obitoki* ritual girls were seen as little women capable to use their wits over men. The age of seven and the rite that marked it was thus seen as an important step in the female maturing.

The next poem points to the financial burden that the celebration often placed on the families: ‘A hard (painful) thing: *obi* and *hakama* together make 13 *ryō*’ (痛いこと帯と袴で十三両) (Nakae 2007, 66). Although to estimate the exact value of *ryō* would be difficult, the amount was a fairly high sum and only families with considerable wealth could afford to spend so much.<sup>121</sup> The poem thus also points to the emergence of a sumptuous pattern of celebration, at least among those families which could afford and which in this way desired to express their financial wellbeing.

Another source of information on the Shichigosan pattern of the epoch are the illustrations known *asukiyoe* which were woodblock prints extremely popular in the Tokugawa period. Some of these depict children celebrating the ritual heading to the shrine, accompanied by their families and servants. One such picture from the collection of Hiroshige Utagawa<sup>122</sup> from the end of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, shows a family observing

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<sup>119</sup> Kagiwada notes that as a result of restrictions issued by sumptuary laws in the Tenpō era (1830- 1844), the samurai class probably abandoned for a while the custom of observing this rite (Kagiwada 1981, 123).

<sup>120</sup> The poem comes from a collection of *senryū* called *Yanagidaru* (柳多留) compiled in the year of 1765.

<sup>121</sup> The exact value of one *ryō* is difficult to estimate as its value changed due to the shifts of supply of gold and silver on the market at that time. Rates fluctuated daily reflecting market conditions, too. In 1858, the exchange rate between US Dollar and *ryō* was set at 1\$ equivalent of 0,75 *ryō*. Another example of a poem with the same meaning is: *Obi* and *hakama* together at the retail shop for twelve *ryō* (帯と袴で呉服屋へ十二両) (from the *Yanagidaru* collection, quoted in Hanasaki 1997, 189).

<sup>122</sup> Utagawa Hiroshige (歌川広重, 1797-1858) was a well-known *ukiyo-e* artist in the Tokugawa period. Among his most famous works are the “Fifty three views of Tōkaidō” 東海道五十三次.

Shichigosan: a little boy in *hakama*, and his sister in a sumptuous kimono.<sup>123</sup> The family is accompanied by servants, whereas the little girl is carried on a man's shoulder. The custom to carry girls on the shoulder by one of the servants on the way to the shrine for Shichigosan worship became popular among rich townsmen in the Tokugawa period (Inagaki 1992, 77). It is thought that this was because it was feared that the sumptuous kimono worn by the girls for this occasion might be soiled by walking. The kimono used for the occasion in case of seven years old girls, was usually a piece of a regular adult size dress with long sleeves, hence normally too long for a seven years old child. By walking, the festive and often very expensive dress would become easily dirty and to prevent this, little girls were often carried on the shoulders of servants. There was also a custom to hire a fireman for the occasion. The custom was quite common as another *senryū* of the epoch says: 'At *obitoki*, only half of a man is walking' (帯解は半分人が着て歩き). The poem visually illustrates the sight of a child and the kimono that hangs down and conceals nearly half of the figure of the adult person. The term 'shichigosan' appears also in the title of a colored woodblock print, 'Elegant Shichigosan' (風流七五三) from around 1772-80 (Hanasaki 1997, 187).

The new festive dress as the principal external attribute of the celebration, grew in importance in the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This also suggested the future direction of the development of the ritual pattern over the next two centuries. *Tōtosaijiki* (see above) that listed Shichigosan among the regular festivities of Edo town people, portrayed the celebration as an occasion which ask for a new dress and which is normally followed by a feast with invited guests. The celebration manner became lavish and this is also demonstrated by the fact that sumptuary laws were issued to limit the excessive spending and display during the celebration (Yanagida 1957, 266).<sup>124</sup> The emergence of the dress as a central element of the celebration can be explained as owing to two factors. On one hand, the change in external appearance of the child had always been an important external sign of the passage regarding age transition and/or social position. *Kamioki* rite implied a change in hair style, and *hakamagi* and *obitoki* focused on the change in dress

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<sup>123</sup> From the *ukiyoe* collection of Utagawa called *Meisho Edo Hyakkei* (名所江戸百景) reproduced in Nakae 2007, 65.

<sup>124</sup> Although Yanagida does not mention the exact year in which this particular law was issued, the issuing of the mentioned sumptuary laws fall into the period of reforms of Tenpō, ie. between 1830 – 1844.

style. On the other hand, it must not be neglected that the dress as such possessed a very significant place in the value system and in the social life of Edo townsmen. In the second half of the Tokugawa period, the financial conditions of the merchant urban class improved enormously. At the same time, given the conditions set by the Tokugawa politics, this advancement in economic terms was not coupled with a possibility of advancement on the social scale. As a consequence, merchants soon developed alternative methods to show off their growing economic wealth (Shively 1964). They compensated the lack of social standing with a display of economic assets, i.e. goods, clothing, accessories. The urban class was creating a distinctive culture of its own and a particular kind of aesthetic appreciation became central to it. Economic standing was put on display in the form of fashionable clothing and accessories, of conspicuous consumption of food and drink (Francks 2009, 31-34). An almost excessive attention to personal external appearance combined with conspicuous fashion awareness became typical for this urban culture.<sup>125</sup> The trend was backed up by the developments in the industry and technology. Improved technologies made it possible to produce a wider variety of colors, patterns and materials of textiles utilized for making clothing, and these gradually became accessible not only to elite, as it used to be in the past, but to a broader segment of the population, as well.

#### 4.4 Origin of *chitoseame* and the commercialization of other festivities

The Tokugawa period gave also birth to one of the symbols of the celebration that distinguishes it even in our days. The long shaped white candy, known as *chitoseame* 千歳飴 was invented by candy merchants in this period. The author of popular stories (*gesaku* 戯作), Ryūtei Tanehiko (1783 -1842), mentions in his work called *Sukikaeshi*

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<sup>125</sup> The well-known writer of the Tokugawa period, Saikaku Ihara (1642-1693), in his writings often complained about the changed manners of townsmen and about the fact that they indulged in spending and appropriated accessories and dresses used conventionally by the upper classes. See for example Saikaku's *Nihon Eitai Gura* (日本永代蔵), translated into English as *The Japanese Storehouse* (1959).

(還魂紙料, 1825) the story of a candy seller of Asakusa (Edo) who, according to the legend, around the Genroku period (1688-1703) introduced a special kind of candy and called it *chitoseame*.<sup>126</sup> Candy (*ame*) was a type of sweet typical for *chōnin* and they were often sold during festivals in the vicinities of popular shrines and temples. The candy-seller wished to offer something special for families that were visiting the shrine for celebrating the age rites of their children, something that would indicate the auspiciousness of the occasion and that would embrace the augural wishes of the families. Accordingly, the long narrow shape of *chitoseame* was created to symbolize longevity, and its color, pure white, to stand for auspiciousness and purity, values traditionally attributed to the color of white in Japanese culture.<sup>127</sup> The name of the candy, as it became known, *chitoseame*,<sup>128</sup> lit. thousand years sweet, was indicative too. The word entails meanings associated with longevity, health, central themes of the ritual. This particular candy was created appositely for the celebration and it was sold only on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the eleventh month, the date of the observance. Even today it is normally sold in the period of the celebration solely which today stretches from October to the end of November.

The fact that merchants came out with a novelty, a specialty for the occasion, indicates also the rising popularity of the observance at that time. It can be presumed that there must have been sufficient numbers of families observing the rite in Edo in order to incentive merchants to invent a specific type of candy for the occasion. Also, interestingly, the period into which this legend is dated coincides with the legend about the Hie shrine procession of Tsunayoshi's son. Today the legend on the origins of *chitoseame* is often reproduced in the media and by candy companies involved in the production or/and sale of the festive sweet.

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<sup>126</sup> The document mentions the name of the candy seller: Shichibee 七兵衛. Genroku 元禄 was called the period between 1688 and 1704. It is regarded the peak of the Tokugawa reign. The political power of the Tokugawa house was affirmed and an economic boom and the rise of the monetary economy and improvement in the technologies in manufacture and agriculture brought about the blooming of arts and urban life in this period.

<sup>127</sup> White is the symbol of purity in Shinto tradition.

<sup>128</sup> There are several other readings and writings of the name of the candy. Though, they all indicate 'longevity': *sennen ame* 千年飴, *senzai ame* 千歳飴, *jumyōtō* 寿命糖.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the commercialization of several other festivities in big towns. Seasonal festivals and shrine/temple festivals were usually accompanied by fairs, where food, drink and other items were sold. Festivals also represented important occasions for demonstrating the wealth of the ever more powerful merchant class. Here fashionable kimonos and accessories were worn and could put on display, consumption of food and drink took place. Shrine and temple festivals became occasions for purchasing amulets and souvenirs, too. Festivities became soon utilized by merchants as occasions to sell their items or raise their sales. The yearly markets around Edobashi, situated in the center of Edo, were offering a variety of decorations for the festivities of New Year's, seasonal food, as well as accessories for Shichigosan (Francks 2009, 26,38). Other traditional children festivals have received the impact of the rising commercialism, as well (Ishii 2009, 64-74). In mid-Tokugawa period multi-scaled *hina* doll displays became popular as a sign of the rising economic wealth of the *chōnin*. In the fifth month, when the *hina* celebration was held, a flourishing trade of *hina* dolls took place (Nishiyama 1975, 482).<sup>129</sup> Francks notes that this kind of induction of children into the consumer culture occurred in Japan much earlier than it did in the Western part of the world (Francks 2009, 39).<sup>130</sup>

#### **4.5 Social change and the diffusion of Shichigosan pattern after the Meiji Restoration (1868)**

The urban culture that developed its distinctive features in the Tokugawa period, continued to be shaped by the economic and political changes following the Meiji Restoration in 1868. It was during the Meiji period that urban way of life, until then flourishing mainly in principal towns of the country, started to exercise a stronger impact

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<sup>129</sup> Traders soon recognized that setting a seasonal trend in the style of *hina* dolls helps to increase sale figures (Dunn 1969, 167-168).

<sup>130</sup> On the way consumer culture altered children's celebrations in 20<sup>th</sup> century North America, see Pleck 2000, 141-161.

on the lives of people living in rural areas of Japan. Due to new forms of dissemination of information, such as the media, dailies, magazines, printed books, and to improved transportation infrastructures, new customs and lifestyle, information about the latest trends and fashion, spread more easily throughout the country. It was the start of a process that would later result in an overall unification of lifestyle in Japan. Urbanization and industrialization in towns and suburbs brought about an intense migration from rural places to the towns and this contributed to the overall change that gradually occurred in household structures both in rural and urban settings. The way of life in rural communities, that so far had received the impact of urban culture only to a limited extent, began to change, first slowly, later in an ever speeding rhythm. The transformation of the economic bases of village communities and the reforms issued by the Meiji government caused the loosening of traditional way of life relying for centuries on agriculture and on a close-knit life pattern (Tipton 2008, 58). Market economy that started to penetrate into villages already around the end of the Tokugawa period, has further contributed to the loosening of traditional ties existing within village communities. On the other hand, the old customs that started to fade away, opened up free space for the gradual adoption of new customs.

The evolution of Shichigosan during the Meiji epoch reflected the above outlined changes. In Tokyo and the surrounding area, where Shichigosan was already an established custom, its popularity grew further. The form of observance was firmly settled as it emerges in the descriptions of the epoch's publications. Yukichi Inoue for example, in his writing on life in Tokyo, described Shichigosan as a celebration observed on the 15<sup>th</sup> of November with the scope to "invoke the God's blessing upon the child" (Inoue 1911, 229). The author added also that in reality the celebration was an occasion for dressing up children and for showing off the wealth of the family through the child.

The diffusion of the ritual's urban pattern into more distant regions of Japan did not start before the 1930s. While reports on the observance regularly appeared in Tokyo dailies already at the turn of the century, there were only sporadic reports on the observance in

dailies of Osaka and Kobe.<sup>131</sup> Also, the name of Shichigosan was not yet used outside of Tokyo. Nevertheless, sumptuous patterns of celebration were noted outside of city of Tokyo, too. Etsusaburō Shiochi quotes examples from around 1870 of showy and gaudy ways in celebrating the *obitoki* rite of merchants daughters in the town of Warabi (Saitama prefecture) (Shiochi 1986, 62). Here children's festive dress was often ordered appositely from famous and expensive kimono shops in Tokyo. A number of diverse local patterns of age celebrations continued to be observed in other areas of Japan, though due to the general changes in the social structure of the Japanese village and in its economic activity, in many places the local variations of these celebrations gradually faded away. Age celebrations had been often connected in rural communities to the activity of the so called age groups (in this specific case the children's group, *kodomogumi*; see Chapter III), but during the Meiji period these groups lost their legitimation and some of their functions were overtaken by the state and educational institutions. Though the data constituting the base for the first ethnographic studies on age celebrations had been collected in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the interwar period in many places of Japan rituals were not observed in a way they used to be only a few decades earlier.

During the Meiji period, due to the development of print media technology, newspapers and periodicals started to exercise a growing impact on the everyday life of the Japanese. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, major dailies such as Yomiuri, Mainichi and Asahi reached a relatively wide readership. In 1924, Mainichi and Asahi both had a circulation over a million; periodicals, too, became mass circulation publications (Gordon 2007). Print media mirrored principally urban life style and the rural population began soon to identify itself with it. The media contributed significantly to the gradual blurring of regional and urban differences. Moreover, with the growing advertisement industry, newspapers were soon discovered by the commercial sector. In 1920s, retail shops and department stores began to commission the advertisements of their products and services in principal newspapers.

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<sup>131</sup> See for example articles mentioning the observance in the Osaka edition of Asahi Shinbun (1930, November 16) or Mainichi Shinbun of Kobe (1938, November 16).

It would be rather hard to tackle in an accurate way the process in which rural local variations of age celebrations came to be replaced by the Edo urban version called Shichigosan. Regional patterns of age celebrations had persisted for long in certain parts of rural Japan, in particular in the isolated communities. On the other hand, local versions of Shichigosan inspired by old customs typical to the community exist in present days, too. Nevertheless, local variations of these age rites even if still observed in the given locality, cannot be defined as representative and indicative for the postwar development of Shichigosan. Therefore, I think that for the scopes of this work, which is to understand the contemporary meaning of the popular pattern of this childhood ritual, it is more helpful to turn to the examination of the ritual pattern and its changes within the urban context. It was this context that gave a clear imprint to the celebration pattern of present days.

#### **4.6 The evolution of Shichigosan reflected in newspaper articles (1879 -1945)**

What follows here is an account of the main changes in patterns of observance of Shichigosan in Tokyo as reflected in media articles during the 1868–1945 span of time. Other than media sources for the description of the ritual during this period are scarce, and therefore I focused on newspapers of the Tokyo area in order to tackle the evolution of the celebration pattern in this period of time. My survey is based mainly on the two most widely read dailies of the period, Yomiuri Shinbun and Asahi Shinbun. Yomiuri started to be published in 1874, while Asahi a few years later in 1879.<sup>132</sup> Both soon acquired an important readership not only in Tokyo but also in other parts of Japan. Reflecting the urban society and its life style, these dailies exercised a strong impact on shaping everyday life of people throughout the country. In my survey I examined all articles with the subject of Shichigosan, including advertisements that during the period under exam appeared in the two dailies. The examined articles include: commentaries

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<sup>132</sup> Asahi Shinbun started to be published in Osaka in 1879, its Tokyo edition was started a few years later.

related to issues such as advices on practical matters, choice of an adequate festive cloth, preparation of the festive meal; articles explaining the origins of the custom; reports on the observance appearing mostly on the day following the official date of celebration; other writings with more general commentaries. Regarding advertisements, apart from their content, I also noted the frequency and date of appearance of these adverts. Regarding the content of articles, I paid attention to the changing tendencies in the commentaries that reported on the observance. The topics chosen by journalists, together with the gradually increasing number of advertisements, depict the evolution of the popularity and pattern of celebration during this period. The overall picture obtained by this survey I placed against Japan's social and economic background of that epoch with the scope to gain an understanding of those forces that contributed to the shaping of the ritual in the period stretching from Meiji Restoration to the end of World War II.

Photos featuring families and children at Shichigosan as illustrations accompanying articles, rose in number during the 1920s and 1930s as the result of the development of the photographic technology. Accordingly, the survey has been complemented with an exam of photos published in the Mainichi in the period between 1929 – 1943 . A total number of 22 photos and accompanying commentaries were examined.

The total number of articles, photos and advertisements that appeared in the two dailies in the examined period change as following:

**Yomiuri Shinbun (1874 –1943)<sup>133</sup>**

1879	first article on Shichigosan
1885, 1887, 1889 –1900	1 article per year
1901 – 1910	3-4 articles per year
1910 – 1926	4-5 articles per year
1927 – 1943	3-4 articles per year

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<sup>133</sup> During the last two years of the war no article on Shichigosan had been published.

### **Asahi Shinbun (1879 – 1943)**

1889	first article on Shichigosan
1890 – 1889	sporadically one article per year
1900 – 1927	3-6 articles per year
1927 – 1943	2-3 articles per year

### **Advertisements in Yomiuri**

1922	first advertisement on Shichigosan
1927 – 1932	8-10 adverts per year
1934 – 1936	16-19 adverts per year

### **Advertisements in Asahi**

1910	first advertisement
1910 – 1912	1-2 adverts per year
1912 – 1919	3-4 adverts per year
1920 – 1930	6-10 adverts per year

The very first article that mentions the celebration of Shichigosan appears in Yomiuri Shinbun on the 15<sup>th</sup> of November, 1879. The article speaks about the obligation of fathers to provide for the new festive dress of the child. This indicates that the acquisition of the new dress was thought to be part of the celebration. On the other hand, it also indicates

that fathers were those who were regarded the principal providers of the expenses of the celebration, particularly those of the child's kimono, which partly contrasts the ethnographic findings according to which the festive dress of the child was commonly sent as a gift by maternal grandparents (see Chapter III). After 1888, the Yomiuri published at least one article per year with the subject of Shichigosan. Most articles from these years dealt with the details of the shrine worship as part of the Shichigosan celebration. The articles usually list shrines in the town that represent the most popular sites for the Shichigosan shrine visit. Shrines that are most often mentioned, are: Hie shrine (日枝神社), Kanda shrine (神田明神), Meiji shrine (明治神宮), and the shrine of Suitengū (水天宮)<sup>134</sup>, all popular shrines of Tokyo at that time. Another frequent theme that emerges in these early years, regards manufacture laboratories and retail shops that were involved in the producing and selling of children's formal attire. In the Meiji period, before the establishment of major department stores, the festive dress for Shichigosan was usually ordered from sewing studios. Articles in newspapers often commented on the busy period when dresses for Shichigosan were prepared. Studios only with difficulties were able to satisfy all orders and therefore often long working hours were kept. In an article from 1882 (Yomiuri, November 15), the journalists spoke with surprise about the high number of Shichigosan orders and commented on the fact that apparently the economic recession in the country did not affect this sector. Several articles reported also on Tokyo's traditional end of year market where customarily Shichigosan accessories were sold since the Tokugawa period.<sup>135</sup> Also, journalists often went personally to assess the popularity of Shichigosan to popular shrines of Tokyo. On the day of the celebration, 15<sup>th</sup> of November, they counted families turning up for the ritual and registered changes in latest trends in festive wear style, which were then duly commented in the articles. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of November of 1885, according to an article in Yomiuri, 467 families in the shrine of Hie and 529 families in Meiji shrine participated in the formal Shinto purification rite offered by the shrine to Shichigosan observers (Yomiuri 1885, November 18). The purification rite is usually available in Shinto shrines with resident priests on request. However, as it happens also today, not all families visiting the shrine

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<sup>134</sup> The deity venerated at Suitengū is known as the protector of safe birth.

<sup>135</sup> End of year markets were popular in the Tokugawa period and Shichigosan accessories were sold there among other items related to festivities and celebrations (see also Chapter III).

at Shichigosan asked for this rite. According to the usual and widely accepted practice, the simple shrine visit combined with an individual prayer was performed by most of them instead of the formal purification ceremony. This fact emerged often as a critic uttered by journalists who saw in this fact a decrease in the religiosity of shrine visitors (see below). Hence, returning to the actual number of visitors counted in the above mentioned two shrines, it can be presumed that the actual number of Shichigosan visitors was most likely significantly higher than the number based on the quantity of applications for the formal rite. Indeed, another article from 1909 speaks about 5000 families in Kanda and 3000 in Hie (Yomiuri 1909, November 15). While these numbers indicate the degree of popularity of Shichigosan in Tokyo, they do not assess the total rate of participation since they focus on selected shrines only, without taking into consideration other minor, less popular shrines in the town. Nevertheless, they provide a general picture of the average rate of participation in Tokyo over the period.

The fact that journalists' attention was almost exclusively caught by major popular shrines, tells also about the then already affirmed tendency in Tokyo to give preference to famous shrines when observing Shichigosan. This also implies that the role of *ujigami* (tutelary deity) connection was underplayed already at this time, at least in Tokyo. Folklore studies closely associate childhood rites of passage with the *ujigami* belief and with the notion of the child's integration into the *ujiko* (parishioner) community (see Chapter III). However, considering that articles from the examined period almost exclusively focus on popular shrines, and the fact that the theme of *ujigami* rarely emerges in the articles, it can be argued that the *ujigami* belief was not typically incorporated into the interpretational frame of the urban pattern of Shichigosan. Nonetheless, the missing link of the modern pattern of Shichigosan is not only interpreted by Japanese religious and folklore scholars as a discrepancy (or discontinuity) between the contemporary and previous or 'traditional' patterns, but also as a sign that contemporary pattern of Shichigosan has 'lost' its 'true' and 'authentic' meaning (Ishii 2009, 142-151).<sup>136</sup> However, from the examination of newspaper articles it becomes apparent that in Tokyo, already in the first

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<sup>136</sup>The presence of *ujigami* belief appears also among the indicators of religiosity in scholarly surveys in Japan. In a recent survey on the religious consciousness in contemporary Japan, *ujigami* belief was listed among the possible indicators of the religious commitment of modern Japanese (Kokugakuin 2006). The results of the survey however demonstrated that *ujigami* belief has little relevance in the lives of the most of the Japanese (see a discussion of this subject in Chapter VIII).

decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the selection of the shrine to visit on the day of Shichigosan was based on ‘profane’ considerations rather than on considerations regarding the given family’s *ujiko* belonging. While the *ujigami* belief might have continued to have its importance in rural areas, urban Tokyoite families tended to prefer centrally located ‘famous’ shrines. Popular shrines of the town were crowded with families on the day of Shichigosan. Families probably felt that the shrine to visit on the day of Shichigosan needed to be appropriate to the elevated status of the event. The most popular shrines were mostly centrally located which, apart from being practical, also assured public visibility to the family. The external and showy features of the celebration, characteristics evolved in the Edo urban context over the 18<sup>th</sup> century, continued to be pertinent.

Whereas articles until around 1910 were principally referring on shrine visits and clothing manufactory, after 1910 they began to include more details on the preparative activities regarding the celebration. Comments on food appropriate for the occasion, on prices of dresses but also advices on the ways to adapt used dress appeared as frequent themes. This development needs to be placed against the background of the general socio-economic conditions. The turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century marked the beginning of industrial mass production; goods were becoming available for a wider sphere of population. The first stores, such as for example the Mitsukoshi department, were established, most of them evolving from the famous dry stores of the Tokugawa period (Tipton 2008, 58). Department stores soon took an important role in the forming of the urban life style in Japan.<sup>137</sup> Latest trends in fashion, new technological innovations regarding housework were all displayed in department stores. Especially in big towns such as Tokyo and Osaka, they were widely seen as symbols of the modern life style. Also, department stores soon recognized the potential of advertisements and began to use spaces available in newspapers and magazines to commission their adverts. Their advertisements did not appear only in newspapers but also on color posters. Famous stores, among them Mitsukoshi, Daimaru, Matsuya issued posters advertising

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<sup>137</sup> On the role of department stores in the social life of the Japanese see among others the studies of Creighton 1992 and Francks 2009.

Shichigosan children dress.<sup>138</sup> Advertising industry witnessed a rapid growth in the early decades of the century. First advertisements targeting Shichigosan families appeared in the Asahi in 1910 and in the Yomiuri in 1922, but even prior to this, articles often commented on the commercial aspects of the celebration, for example reporting on the sales of the festive dress. In the 1920s, the number of advertisements targeting Shichigosan families grew and in a short period, it reached 8-10 adverts a year, and in 1930s in Yomiuri, 16-18 adverts a year.

#### **4.7 Trends and fashion in Shichigosan wear**

Long before the rise of the advertising industry, textile industry had been already benefitting from the celebration of Shichigosan. Before the advertisement industry would have been able to influence its development, the emphasis of the celebration on dress served as a good sale occasion for the textile industry and retail shops at least since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, industrialization and new technologies brought about significant changes in the everyday lives of the Japanese. Living standards rose and goods manufactured in mass production mode became cheaper (Tipton 2008, 52-54). The purchase of a new festive dress was becoming available to a growing number of families which on the other hand, stirred the desire of acquisition. The two decades of the 1920s and 1930s are sometimes described as the beginning of the hedonistic consumption in Japan, which means that consumption started to practiced not only for fulfilling needs but also for pleasure and enjoyment (Clammer 1997). The growth of the advertising industry had further fueled this development. The most famous retail shops started to commission advertisements of the Shichigosan festive dress, both for the child and the mother, in newspapers. Also, they launched special Shichigosan

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<sup>138</sup> The earliest example of advertisement poster on Shichigosan in the Advertising Museum of Tokyo comes from 1928.

sales of festive outfits and accessories, and these sales were advertised well ahead the official date of the celebration.

After 1910, articles commenting on the latest fashion and trend in Shichigosan outfits increased significantly. The newly established department stores disseminated information about fashion and trends and this occurred also concerning Shichigosan festive dress. Advertisements and print media helped to increase customers' sensitivity to latest trends. Articles regularly reported on the actual fashion in Shichigosan dress style for the year. Shichigosan dress in this period meant principally the Japanese kimono, though, the impact of Western culture on the clothing of the Japanese was growing. Indeed, the Western style dress soon emerged in Shichigosan fashion, too. Journalists keenly reported on the different proportion of children dressed in the Japanese traditional costume and of those who wore the modern Western attire for the celebration. The advancement of the westernization of the Japanese clothing attracted much attention in those years, not only with regard to Shichigosan, but more generally to the everyday wear.<sup>139</sup> While men in cities adopted the Westerns style suit already around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (it was also supported by the official Meiji politics propagating modernization), changes in women's clothing was slower and more gradual. In the interwar period, particularly on festive occasions, women were still expected to represent the 'traditional' side which resulted in a gendered division concerning festive wear. Accordingly, in case of boys the Western style in Shichigosan dress was more preferred in case of boys than it was in case of girls. The popularity of Western style Shichigosan dress for male children, usually consisting of a formal suit, was growing in the 1920s and in 1932, the journalist of Yomiuri counted 537 boys in Western style outfit and 133 boys in Japanese traditional dress on Shichigosan in the shrine of Kanda (Yomiuri 1932, November 16). In case of older girls (six-seven years old), for example, the proportion between the two styles was 166 to 506. Articles sometimes promoted the Western dress as more suitable for little, three-five years old children, since it was viewed as more practical and easy to wear compared to the Japanese kimono. Also, in these years when the Western style cloth was still a rarity and novelty in children's everyday wear,

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<sup>139</sup> See for example Ogi (1970, 156) and Kon Wajirō (quoted in Francks 2009, 129).

Shichigosan was sometimes seen also as a rare occasion to dress the child into the curious Western attire, as an article from 1929 notes (Yomiuri 1929, November 15). Interestingly, today the exact reverse of this view is emphasized when magazines and childrearing web sites describe Shichigosan as an important and unique occasion for children to try on the traditional Japanese garments that nowadays became a rarity (see also Chapter VII).

In the interwar years, the word *ryūkō* 流行 (fashion, trend) appears already regularly in articles on Shichigosan, both in relation to Western and Japanese style. Trends continue to be tracked by journalists in popular shrines of Tokyo. In 1927, an article in Asahi (November 15) distinguishes two styles of Shichigosan outfits: the classic style (*kotenshiki* 古典式) and the modern style (*modanzu shiki* モダンズ式). The article also stresses that the choice between the two styles should be up to parents' preference. Moreover, distinction is also made between *yamanote* 山の手 and *shitamachi* 下町 style. The two terms indicate two districts of Tokyo and the terms were used to refer to the two distinct life styles attributed to the inhabitants of these districts. The difference is the result of the different histories of the two areas. *Shitamachi* (lit. downtown) is called the old merchant quarter of central and eastern Tokyo viewed by town people as more old-fashioned. *Yamanote* (lit. foothills) had been formed as the main residential area of the *daimyō* (feudal lords) and their families in the Tokugawa period (Tipton 2008, 9). Later in Meiji era, this area was inhabited by state officials, i.e. the upper social classes, and today it comprises the residential areas of Tokyo, inhabited by white-collar *sarariiman* サラリーマン (company employees). Whereas *Yamanote* has been traditionally considered by the Japanese as more 'modern' and 'rational', the *Shitamachi* was believed to be more akin to traditions, sticking more to the traditional way of thinking and life style (Bestor 1989). The two denominations were used by the journalist to indicate the difference between the two dress styles used for the celebration. *Yamanote* families were described as preferring the Western attire (mainly encountered in the two principal shrines of the area, Hie and Meiji) since they represent the modern lifestyle, and *shitamachi* families which like to preserve the traditional style, preferred the traditional Japanese garments for their children (observed in the shrines of Kanda and Fukagawa).

Around the end of the 1920s, Westerns style dress became so popular that the weakened interests caused a drop in the prices of the Japanese kimono (Yomiuri 1929, October 25). Western style dress started to be also promoted as the appropriate outfit for Shichigosan by certain civil groups' which propagated saving campaigns supported also by the official government policy during the interwar period. These campaigns, aimed at discouraging excessive consumption among the population, considered the Japanese festive dress as a sign of conspicuous consumption.

#### **4.8 Reforming the celebration**

Critical voices targeting diverse aspects of Shichigosan emerged time by time during its history. The turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by strengthening efforts of social reformers who tried to reform childrearing practices as part of their strategy to create a new ideology of modern family (see also Chapter VI). Mark A. Jones notes that the ideal of the modern family was used as a means of achieving social upward mobility at this time and child and mother were central to this ideal (Jones 2010). Leading the reforms was, at the beginning, the established elite who used print media to promote their ideas and views. Their writings appeared in the periodicals of the epoch, such as *Fujin no tomo* or *Fujin Sekai* with women as their target readers. The placing of the moral above the material was typical to this ideology at least until the late 1910s. One target of these reforms was the child-rearing model and family life and as part of this, celebrations of childhood needed to be changed if the ideal of 'modern' family life was to be achieved. Psychologists, social commentators leading this movement called for shift in accent also concerning the celebration of Shichigosan (ibid, 60-64).<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> See for example comments in *Fujin no tomo* 6.7 (July 1912) or *Fujin Sekai* 8.13 (November 1913) quoted in Jones 2010, 160-161, also in Notes 122, 123, 124.

Furthermore, the political environment of the interwar period exercised its impact on the tone of articles, too. With the rise of consumption levels among the population, the Japanese government preparing its industry for the war, initiated campaigns to control consumption levels, especially of goods that were not considered as necessary for everyday needs. Several civil groups (housewife association etc.) participated in these campaigns and organized activities to ‘teach’ citizens to rationalize their expenditures (Francks 2009, 138, Mertz 2004, 26-32). Articles criticizing lavish modes of celebrations started to appear with higher frequency around 1924-25. The critiques were mainly inspired by the official policy of saving, since celebrations in general were among those ‘meaningless’ activities which encouraged consumption of goods that were not seen as indispensable. On the other hand, these critical comments alluded to the view that excessive consumption in celebrations somehow undermined the authentic meaning and role of these events. This kind of disapproval targeting consumption in relation to celebrations, were not unique to Japan. In the Western context, too, the practice of excessive use of goods, buying and spending at celebrations was often criticized. Pleck and Schmidt in their studies on the history of American festivities, list numerous examples from the history of critical attacks on celebration patterns (Schmidt 1995, Pleck 2000). The attacks often echoed the view that consumption was threatening the ‘authenticity’ and ‘soulfulness’ of the celebration, or in other words, profaning the sacred meaning of the ceremonial occasions (Pleck 2000, 17-18, 174-176). There are known also historical examples of critiques aiming at celebration modes. For example in 17<sup>th</sup> century England, Oliver Cromwell (1559–1658) in an attempt to put an end to the exuberant celebrations that took place each time at Christmas, outlawed decorations, singing, drinking, and eating mince pies. Also in Japan, there were examples of attempts to limit excessive or consumption at all, see for example the practice of issuing sumptuary laws by the Tokugawa government.<sup>141</sup> By issuing similar laws, the shogunate’s scope was to put a limit to consumption and to prevent lower classes from emulating the samurai class in their manners and etiquette. In a similar vein, in the early 1910s social commentators in Japan began to call for more modesty in Shichigosan

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<sup>141</sup> For examples on sumptuary regulations in Japan and in other cultural contexts, see the study of Donald H. Shively (1964).

celebration and for the need to reform it. The reform movements intensified in the 1920s with the economic recession and in particular after the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923 (Mertzel 2004). In 1925, an article in Yomiuri informed about a course organized by a housewife association (associated to the Asakusa temple) that among its goals had to educate women on proper ways to celebrate Shichigosan, it means without going to excessive spending (Yomiuri 1925, October 14).<sup>142</sup> Six hundred fifty women participated in the course and the topics that were addressed during the course touched upon appropriate make-up or suitable clothing.

Authors of critical voices often commented on the financial difficulties that the celebration of Shichigosan represented for families. The most heavy expense imposed by the celebration was the purchase of the child's festive attire. Indeed, not all families could afford as the big number of articles describing methods to transform used dresses to festive outfits, reveals it. An article from 1924, called the celebration of Shichigosan the 'war of dress' (*hareki no sensō*) (Yomiuri 1924, November 9). This expression pointed in an ironic way to the battle among celebrating families for providing the child with the most stunning dress. Nevertheless, this and similar comments appeared side by side with articles informing on the actual fashion and with advertisements publicizing famous kimono stores. Another criticized aspect was the alleged 'loss of traditions'. These voices called for the need to reform the 'traditional custom' of Shichigosan. They bitterly noted that the celebration had become a mere show, something that served solely to demonstrate one's financial means to neighbors and relatives. The comments accused celebrating families that they 'moved out' the child from the center of the celebration and thus ruined the 'original' and 'true' meaning of the celebration. Reformists invited persons to change their modes of celebrating and to turn away from lavish celebration manners. A modest celebration mode was judged as the only appropriate pattern, that would focus exclusively on the child and would in this way create a pleasant and memorable moment for the family. Elaborate meals were to be avoided and the 'foolish' custom to spend money on gifts to neighbors and on dress eliminated. As one commentator put it: "What is more important, the kimono or the child?" (Yomiuri 1929,

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<sup>142</sup>On the official ideology that accused Japanese women as chiefly responsible for excessive consumption and hence for the economic recession, see the research by Mark Mertzel (2004).

November 15). This kind of comments had, however, little to do with an alleged effort to return to traditional patterns of celebration as the only appropriate ones. Jones argues, as already described above, that criticism was part of the ideology that tried to create a new child-center world and accordingly, to put the child into the center of family life and of celebration modes (Jones 2010, 160-161). Shichigosan was even accused to represent aristocratic manners and therefore incompatible with the modern ideal of Japanese family. Modern scientific principles were also used in support of this ideology. So for example, the expensive festive dress was said to restrict children in free movement and therefore, it was harmful to their health.<sup>143</sup> In a similar line of thought, the use of the formal sash (*obi*) which served to fasten the kimono of the seven years old girls, was said to be a potential source of danger since it could hurt the fragile body of a young child. Reformist also criticized the custom of offering the ceremonial sake to children during the shrine purification ritual. Whereas today it is not common to offer the ceremonial sake to children during the rite, earlier it was a standard element of the purification rite (Inoue 1911).

#### **4.9 Popularization and commercialization of Shichigosan**

The critical voices and reforming attempts do not seem to have substantially influenced the direction of the development of the Shichigosan pattern. The growing number of articles on Shichigosan in the examined newspapers prove the increasing degree of the popularity of the observance. From the end of the 1910s, articles were becoming more informative, giving substantial advices for the preparation of the celebration. The coverage of the event raised to 5-6 articles per year in the *Yomiuri* in the 1920s. The number of advertisements focusing on items used in the celebration, grew as well. Besides, the publishing of adverts on the pages of dailies started to shift to always earlier data, well ahead of the actual date of the celebration (November 15<sup>th</sup>). The first

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<sup>143</sup>Fujin sekai 8.13 (November 1913) quoted in Jones 2010, 161.

advertisements started to appear as soon as October, in the early 1930s already in the month of September. The notion of the preparative period, i.e. the period preceding the actual day of the shrine visit and celebration, as necessary for a satisfying ritual experience, began to fold out in this period. Later in the postwar decades, this period became to be thought of as much important as the celebration itself. Nowadays, a thorough and timely preparation is believed to be a condition for the successful outcome of Shichigosan.

Between 1920 and 1930, a new topic emerged in the articles on Shichigosan. While until the early 1920s little or none reference to the history of the ritual was made, after 1925, the number of writings dealing with the origins of the Shichigosan custom, suddenly grew. This fact indicates that by this time Shichigosan started to be perceived as an age-old tradition with roots in the distant past; as such it was presumed that its origins had been long forgotten by common people. Indeed, with much probability, the knowledge of the meaning and origins of the celebration had been lost from the popular memory by this time, therefore journalists found it necessary to present the historical interpretations of the ritual. After 1925, at least one article per year appeared in the examined dailies with this subject.

In the meantime, popularity of Shichigosan was gradually rising. In 1936, an Asahi article reported on Christian churches in Tokyo that introduced a new ritual among its religious rites addressing children, as an equivalent to Shichigosan(Asahi 1936, November 15). The Christian Church, lacking a strong base among the Japanese, with this act probably aimed to attract more followers. On the other hand, this kind of decision from the Christian Church in Tokyo was also telling about the extent of the popularity of Shichigosan among Tokyoite families. Church representatives probably were of the opinion that failing to offer a ritual equivalent to Shichigosan, could not only to discourage new to-be believers, but at the same time it could also incentive the old believers to turn to their native religious institutions for the celebration of this particular childhood rite of passage. Together with the popularization of the celebration, the commercialization of some of its aspects took on speed, as well. Among other factors, this was fueled also by department stores which tried to attract more customers. For this

reason, famous department stores started to set up thematic exhibitions, among them also on childrearing items. These exhibitions were important platforms which enabled the education of the public into the material culture of modernity. One of the first exhibitions of the kind was organized in 1090 by Mitsukoshi and was followed by various others in the following years. Jones notes that the fact that Mitsukoshi chose childhood for its theme indicates the importance that was attributed to the figure of the child within the notion of modernity (Jones 2010). Children's exhibitions set up by Mitsukoshi regularly in the subsequent years were extremely successful in attracting a big interest from customers and Jones argues that these exhibitions were Mitsukoshi's most lavish attempt "to solidify its place as an institution able to sway the public imagination and to influence the daily lives of Tokyo urbanites" (Jones 2010, 97). However, Jones underlines that the material culture served as a vehicle to introduce to wider public a new science of childhood sustained by social reformers. The example of Mitsukoshi was followed by other stores across Japan. The exhibitions focused on a wide range of themes around childhood, including goods such as clothes, toys, magazines, furniture. On these occasion, child experts, psychologists, pediatricians, and reformers were invited to hold lectures on modern childrearing practices. The issue of traditional rituals appeared among the themes treated by these exhibitions, too. In 1916, the Mitsukoshi exhibition represented child's life divided into periods marked by seven important moments: birth, first seasonal festival (*hatsu sekku*), kindergarten, the celebrations of Shichigosan, entrance into elementary school, the creation of child's own room, school athletic meetings (ibid, 80-85). Each moment and corresponding phase was illustrated by the display of a range of goods that were appropriate to it. In brief, these exhibitions can be seen as first examples of modern marketing which combines display of material culture with other more or less connected issues, such as for example scientific approaches, thematic associations and so on.

Generally speaking, child and childhood were starting to acquire a growing importance for the marketplace in the interwar years. This would be later, in the postwar decades, backed up by the growing affluence of the Japanese families. Advertisement industry was gradually growing in the interwar years, as well. The 1930s also marked the emergence of a new technology, the photographing. Photographic devices, both for personal and

professional use, made their appearance on the market. Advertisements of studios targeting families planning the Shichigosan ritual, began to appear in newspapers as soon as 1937. The most innovative photo studios were offering ‘complex’ Shichigosan services, which comprised the photographic service combined with beauty salon and dress assistance, establishing so a pattern that would become diffused throughout the country later. A further diffusion of the use of the services offered by these studios was interrupted by the war, but later, in the 1960s and 1970s, photographs and services provided by professional studios have become a crucial part of the celebration.

At this point, it is important to underline that changes in the celebration pattern of Shichigosan were evolving along similar lines of change that were occurring in another life cycle ritual, namely the Japanese wedding ceremony. In the period in exam, wedding was undergoing an overall change concerning its form. It was moving out from the realm of the private space of the household into the public space.<sup>144</sup> The imperial wedding organized for the Taisho prince and his wife in 1900, marked the beginning of the process through which the Shinto shrine ritual became an inherent part of the Japanese wedding ceremony. Certain traits of resemblance between the celebration patterns of Shichigosan and of the wedding ceremony was also noted in the print media of the epoch. Parallels between the two rituals were often drawn by journalists. Also, advertisements on festive dresses and accessories and on photo services often addressed simultaneously both rituals, wedding and Shichigosan. The approaching war, however, interrupted many of the processes giving their imprint to celebration manners of the time. The political atmosphere in the country reflecting the strengthening of the pro-war campaigns in all spheres of everyday life, was also detectable in photos featuring Shichigosan families. Photos of families visiting the Yasukuni shrine<sup>145</sup> for Shichigosan and little boys dressed as soldiers appeared always more often in the newspapers (for example Yomiuri 1937, November 15). Prior to 1937, children dressed in military uniforms appeared only

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<sup>144</sup> For a detailed description in English language of this process and for a general history of the wedding celebration in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, see Hendry 1981, Edwards 1989, Smith 1994, Goldstein-Gidoni 1997, also Shida 1999. For a Japanese language account see, among others, Ishii2005.

<sup>145</sup> Yasukuni shrine (*Yasukuni jinja* 靖国神社) bears its name since 1879. The shrine was chosen by the Meiji emperor as one of the State Shinto national shrines where Japan’s wars’ dead would be commemorated. After 1945, the shrine became famous for enshrining the souls of soldiers who lost their lives in the Pacific war.

occasionally. During the years of the war, when almost no article on Shichigosan appeared in the examined newspapers, time by time photos were published on children dressed in Japanese military uniforms for Shichigosan in settings with a clearly pro-war tone: with the Japanese flag in the background, or in front of the Yasukuni shrine. Between the years 1941 and 1943, all articles on Shichigosan included references to the war. Parents dressing their children in civilian guard uniforms, in military uniforms received praise of journalists for their patriotism. On the day of Shichigosan, in the precincts of the popular shrines, sales of war time bonds took place using the event as an occasion to promote patriotism among the population. Girls commonly wore for the celebration nurse dress or loose work trousers (*monpe*), which were special outfits used in wartime. The media praised also those who dressed their children for the celebration into plain street clothes as a sign of respecting the war time politics of saving.

#### 4.10 Conclusions

Historical documents bring evidence of age rituals since at least the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century. In the past, ritual patterns differed greatly according to the social standing of the families, they were an inherent constituting part of the identity of the given social group (Ōtomo 2000). Accordingly, the meaning of the ritual and the role attached to it varied by social group and by historical period. In the feudal period when the warrior class seized power, these rituals were firmly inserted into the fairly complex and rigid social status system of the samurai society. The *hakamagi* rite was observed as an important recognition of the samurai son's status. It was one of those rites that accompanied the samurai son on his way to become a full-fledged individual, at the same time vassal of the shogun. This aspect of the rite had been significantly underplayed in the interpretation by the *chōnin*, as their social standing and social life conditions were very different from those of the samurai. Shichigosan as it is known today, was a product of the *chōnin* culture of the old capital of Edo, flourishing between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The need for

the unification and standardization of the various childhood rites of passage arose as a necessity from the multitude of customs and celebration patterns that people moving to the capital from diverse regions of Japan brought with. With time, the united ritual pattern was vested with all the characteristics that distinguished *chōnin* culture at this period: emphasis on display of assets, aesthetic appreciation, fashion awareness. Merchant forms of celebrations, in general placed more stress on display of the economic status. It was through the economic means that social status came to be expressed by merchants, “money allowed merchants to purchase their own sense of status and worth in spite of their officially low standing” (Lindsey 2007, 54). The shrine visit, accompanied by the procession of family members, and when possible, servants, became a stable part of the Shichigosan event in the *chōnin* version, also because it provided occasion for a public display. The shrine to be visited was soon not the family’s *ujigami* shrine but a famous shrine in the town. Edo’s popular and centrally located shrines became the sites for the Shichigosan shrine worship. These places enabled a showing off where the *hare* (i.e. festive) clothing of the child and of the members of the household could be put on view. The flourishing urban merchant society of Edo town gave it its peculiar imprint to the celebration, and the form that came into being had spread in subsequent centuries to other regions too. In brief, Shichigosan had the potential to become a popular event because it offered sufficient space for the expression of the multitude aspects of the newly emerged urban culture. And while the ritual continued to embody multiple layers of meanings entailing also ancient beliefs related to views on human soul, more ‘profane’ aspects emerged as important in the formation of a distinctive urban pattern of the celebration as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century; the period when the foundations of a highly elaborate consumer culture had been laid down in the Japanese society.

During the Meiji and Taisho periods, the pattern of the celebration was further affirmed in Tokyo and its adjacent areas. The growth of industries, the access to goods by a wider segment of population, the development of advertising industry contributed to the popularization as well as the commercialization of the ritual. The salient features, emerged as inherent parts of the urban pattern in the Tokugawa period, continued to characterize the celebration also in the decades after the Meiji Restoration. The urban pattern of Shichigosan demonstrated itself as complying with the modern urban way of

life. That this was not true merely to Tokyoite people is shown by the fact that it was this pattern that in the postwar decades started to push out or replace local variations of childhood age rites throughout the country. While until the World War II, the Shichigosan pattern was still enjoying popularity mainly in Tokyo, two decades later its diffusion proceeded to a great degree. This development and its context will be the theme of the next chapter.

## 5. POSTWAR DEVELOPMENT OF SHICHIGOSAN CELEBRATION PATTERNS

### 5.1 Introduction

The processes of social transformation initiated in the prewar period and interrupted by the Second World War have restarted soon after the end of the war. In the 1950s and 1960s, Japan completed its transformation from an agricultural society to an overwhelmingly urbanized one. Urban culture spread to all regions of Japan and became seen as a model to follow. In the immediate years after the war, the economic take off was slow, though after 1955, due to positive internal and foreign circumstances of political and economic character, the economic growth took an unprecedented speed. The trends initiated in the decades prior to the war defined the direction of development of the postwar decades. The standards of living were steadily raising and due to industrialization and urbanization of rural areas, lifestyle of urban centers was spreading quickly throughout the country. The dissemination of new trends and lifestyle was fervently supported and disseminated throughout the country by the mass media which was a prevalently urban-dominated media (Clammer 1997, 7). In the course of the 1960s, the print media was joined by the television. The prerequisites of a modern lifestyle became seen as something desirable as well as attainable not only in towns but also in rural areas. The possession of a items, such as a washing machine or a television set, was becoming the indicator of the 'modern way of life' (Vogel 1963). The 1960s marked also the era when Japanese capitalism entered the stage of mass consumption, from a so far production-oriented economy gradually transforming into consumer capitalism. Penelope Francks argues in her work on the history of consumption in Japan that this quick transformation was possible also because consumption was playing an important role in Japan's economy since two centuries already (Francks 2009). The particular socio-political and economic setting of the Tokugawa era, laying down the bases of a

consumption-based culture, has significantly contributed to the readiness with which postwar Japanese society adopted the principles of a consumer-oriented economy and of mass consumption culture.

In this chapter I draw the map of development of the celebration pattern of Shichigosan from the postwar period until present days. The history of Shichigosan and its changes in the postwar period follows closely the course of the social development that postwar Japanese urban society had been going through. It is closely connected to the rise of phenomena such as urbanization, mass consumption, consumerism.<sup>146</sup> The postwar decades are the decades which mark the period when Shichigosan is becoming a truly nationwide ritual, hence the general socio-cultural as well as economic conditions of this period will be taken into exam. By the beginning of the 1970s, the ritual's name, form and date has been settled and diffused from Tokyo to the rest of Japan. This pattern replaced the surviving local forms or took the place of the already vanished local customs. During this process, Shichigosan's ritual pattern has been enriched by new elements as value system of Japanese, particularly family values were transforming. Also, consumption became a salient feature of the celebration and accordingly, I examine the commercial aspects of the celebration and the changes these went through. On one hand, I wish to describe the main trajectories along which commercialization and consumption affected the celebration pattern. On the other hand, I will try to elucidate the ways in which these aspects became part of the process in which ritual's meaning is being constructed in the eyes of the actors, i.e. the observers.

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<sup>146</sup> The phenomenon of 'consumerism' is interpreted as a distilled form of consumption in which the act of consumption itself is rendered an experience (Moeran and Skov 1993). It is described as pervading the entire society and as such, comparable to culture.

## 5.2 Consumption in urban Japan

In Chapter II, I have already introduced the general theory on ritual and consumption. Here I focus on studies specifically done on Japan and within this, on studies that I found most relevant to my analysis. The scholarly work discussed here comes mainly from the Western scholarship on Japan. The issue of consumption, in particular in relation to ritual, has received less attention from the native Japanese scholarship. Some examples for existing research I introduce below.

It has been argued that consumption plays an important role in the understanding of the modern Japanese society. The beginning of studies on consumption culture in Japan coincides with the beginning of studies on urban culture and society in modern postwar Japan. Ronald P. Dore's work, *City Life in Japan*, has remained seminal in this field, as its author was the first Western scholar who conducted an extensive survey on the urban context in postwar Japan (Dore 1958). This sociological work, conducted in the 1950s among the inhabitants of a Tokyo urban ward, found evident signs of a shaping consumer culture. Dore described patterns of conspicuous consumption in the everyday life of the families and individuated goods of whose possession represented a symbolic meaning for the individuals. Electric devices such as refrigerators or electric fans, for example, were perceived by most families as signs of economic status by the time of the survey. In the 1950s, with the proceeding urbanization and high speed economic growth described also as an economic miracle, consumer goods and in particular the capability to participate in consumption were becoming main indicators of the 'middle class' status. In 1958, Ezra Vogel studied the 'middle class' lifestyle in a Tokyo neighborhood and described the principle lines along which the middle class status in the 1960s was defined in Japan (Vogel 1963). In his definition the model for the middle class was provided by families of *sarariiman* (salary man), white collar employees of big companies. The lifestyle typical to these families was partly determined by the absence of husbands in the family life. *Sarariiman* typically spent long working hours in the company and then additional hours on commuting. They consequently were not able to participate actively in the life of the family and the housewife became the principal manager of the family. It was the wife

who kept control of the family budget and organized the everyday life of household and children. This pattern has soon become the typical pattern first of middle class urban families and later of rural families, too. By the end of the 1950s, seventy per cent of the Japanese considered themselves belonging to the middle class (Tipton 2008, 179). Thanks to the high speed economic growth and to the rising incomes, this middle class life style was increasingly identified with a consumer life style. The general indicators of consumption expenditure per person were continuously growing and Japan entered soon the era of mass consumption (Francks 2009, 159).<sup>147</sup> Francks pointed out that the domestic consumer market contributed to Japan's unprecedented economic growth as well as stimulated production and investments of Japanese firms (ibid, 146-176).

A comprehensive sociological analysis of consumer culture in Japan has been made by John Clammer as part of his study on contemporary urban society (Clammer 1997). He argues that consumption is vital for understanding modern Japan and hence there is a need for a thorough analysis of consumer behavior patterns. The author describes Japan as a heavily urbanized culture where consumption constitutes "a way of life" and the "dominating principle of everyday life" (Clammer 1997, 2-3). Among the most significant principles that define consumption behavior in Japan, Clammer individuates the issue of status competition. While the hierarchically organized institutions and their ranking in a vertical order is indeed typical to Japan, postwar Japanese society has been long described as a homogenous one with no clearly defined classes. In this regard Clammer argues that social equality in Japan is only an ideology and that consumption is a vehicle enabling individuals to express status competition. Status competition "[...] is pursued largely through accumulation of cultural capital and through acquisition, display and exchange of things" (ibid, 6). Another important characteristics of consumption culture in Japan is its gendered nature. Clammers underlines the division between symbolic power and real power that men and women in Japan hold. As already argued, the division of labor in Japanese families and the system of long working hours combined with commuting give Japanese women the control over the budget of the family, including issues of childrearing and household management. This fact counterbalances

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<sup>147</sup> For detailed data on real per capita consumption expenditure see Francks 2009, Appendix Table 2 and 4.

the lower status that Japanese women hold in the public sphere and, at the same time, it results in a gendered nature of consumption in Japan. Also, Clammer argues that in Japan, relationships, friendships and interpersonal interaction can be created along lines of consumption. Networks and communities are often developed by consuming together and by sharing consumer information. Here the role of the media needs to be underlined as magazines and advertisements are those that majorly disseminate consumer information. As an ultimate characteristics of consumption, Clammer points to its role not to fulfill real needs merely, but also to satisfy emotional needs, desires, emphasizing thus the playful aspects of consumption.

A wide-ranging account of the historical development of consumption in Japan has been given by Penelope Francks in her work, *The Japanese Consumer* (2009). The study depicts the historical and social conditions that stood at the birth of consumer culture in Japan. It follows its development through four centuries, starting from the Tokugawa period until present. The author argues that some of consumption attitudes that characterize consumer culture in contemporary Japan have roots in times preceding the introduction of modern industrial production and well before the arrival of the influence of the Western lifestyle to Japan. Already in the Tokugawa period, goods were used as an expression of status. Style and a highly developed taste for fashion emerged as a distinctive feature of urban culture. This occurred in spite of several attempts from the Tokugawa government to put limits to excesses in consumption or to prevent undesired consumption. The Japanese consumer thus comes forward from this particular historical period as fully prepared to adapt himself to the new conditions of the industrial mode of production that developed after the Meiji Restoration (1868). The 'pre-existed' tastes and practices have continued to greatly influence the development of industrial growth, mass production, and ultimately mass consumption in modern times. Francks argues that this long history of consumption in Japan explains in part the distinctive characteristics of the contemporary Japanese consumer, such as intense fashion awareness, refined taste, strong concern for the appropriateness of goods to status and situation (Francks 2009, 222).

The essays included in the edited volume of Skov and Moeran (1995a), address consumption in contemporary context and analyze the gendered aspects of consumption

in Japan. The included studies focus on the role that Japanese women play in consumer culture. Their role, while being often ambivalent, is almost always crucial as, in their position as managers of the family budget, women are closely connected to the marketplace (Skov and Moeran 1995b). The contributions of the edited volume examines this phenomenon from the perspective of the media and underlines the interactive nature of the relationship between women and media in Japan.

### **5.3 The study of ritual in the modern context of Japan**

The issue of consumption in relation to rituals has been not a frequent theme in the scholarly literature on rituals in Japan. Scholars of ritual have long focused on traditional forms and settings, both in Japanese and Western scholarship. Although, it must be acknowledged that these too are significant contributions to the study of ritual in the Japanese society, there is a need to enrich this angle of analysis with the perspective that research of ritual in urban contexts can offer. In an early study from the 1960s, David Plath reflected on the cultural meanings that were associated to a newly adopted festivity, the Christmas (Plath 1963). Plath applied a comparative approach and compared Christmas in the American and in the Japanese culture. He found out that there was an important difference between which aspects of the celebration were stressed by the Americans and which by the Japanese. In the American culture, Christmas is first of all about material well-being, a value that became the symbol of the American way of life. The American see in the figure of Santa Claus, a gift-bringer whose import reaches beyond the world of children and domestic affection. It is a symbol of abundance of material goods closely associated to an optimistic view of life, which Plath, referring to Barnett, call the optimistic secular faith.<sup>148</sup> On the other hand, in Japan a different image of Santa Claus and Christmas prevailed in the 1960s. Santa Claus and Christmas were not seen first of all as symbols of the new affluence that the postwar economic growth

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<sup>148</sup> Barnett *The American Christmas: A Study in National Culture* (1954), quoted in Plath 1963, 315.

brought about. Instead, in Plath's interpretation, the popular custom of Christmas was seen as a way to cope with modernity, with increasing consumerism and industrialism. For symbols of the newly acquired affluence the Japanese, rather than to the symbolism of Christmas, reached to historical and legendary sources from the mythological past of Japan, the so called Age of Gods. Plath quotes examples from the Japanese media which referred to the period of the economic upsurge of the middle 1950s, as to *Jimmu būmu* (神武ブーム) (Plath 1963, 315-316).<sup>149</sup> Jimmu was the legendary first Japanese emperor. In a similar vein, the 1960s were known as the 'Rock-door prosperity' (*iwato keiki* 岩戸景気), referring to the mythological story of the feast offered by gods to Amaterasu Ōmikami, the Sun Goddess, to attract her attention and lure her out from the cave. The Three Imperial Treasures, the sword, the mirror, and the jewel of the Imperial regalia (*sanshuno jingi* 三種の神器) were instead used as counterparts of the three consumer durables: car, refrigerator, and cooler.<sup>150</sup> In Plath's interpretation Christmas in Japan represented in the 1960s democratic values expressed in the gift giving customs related to Christmas. Unlike the New Year's unilateral gift-giving practice (*otoshidama* お年玉), when solely the older members of the family give gifts to the young members, at Christmas the Japanese tended to follow the rule of reciprocity (Plath 1963, 314). In other words, Plath argues that Christmas in Japan became popular also because it represented modernity in the eyes of the Japanese and the democratic ideal that started to be valued in postwar Japan.

Since the 1980s, several ethnographic accounts of concrete cases of rituals in modern Japan have been produced. These studies almost all inevitably touch upon themes of the impact of commercialization and consumerism on the development of rituals in postwar Japanese society. An analysis of the Japanese weddingis provided by Walter Edwards (1989) and Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni (1997).<sup>151</sup> Walter Edwards undertook field research in a Japanese wedding parlour in the beginning of the 1980s. His account deals with several aspects of the creative work that professional wedding organizers perform with aim to create a meaningful ritual for their clients. The growth of the commercial wedding industry between 1950 and 1960 transformed the relatively simply wedding ceremony

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<sup>149</sup> Another word for the same phenomenon was *Jimmu keiki* (神武景気), lit. Jimmu prosperity.

<sup>150</sup> In other interpretations the three items were: television, washing machine and refrigerator.

<sup>151</sup> For a detailed account of marriage and the wedding ceremony in a rural community (in Kyushu) in postwar Japan, see Joy Hendry's *Marriage in Changing Japan* (1981).

into a highly elaborate and sumptuous event.<sup>152</sup> While the author focuses on the understanding of the social and cultural values and aspects reflected in the ritual (at that time overwhelmingly Shinto style ritual combined with an elaborate reception), some important insights of the commercial aspects are offered, as well. In Edwards' study, the customer emerges as an actor involved in an intense and dialectic interaction with the ritual specialists, i.e. the providers of the wedding services. This interaction becomes visible particularly at the introduction of new innovative elements into the program of the event of the wedding ritual and reception. The successful adoption of these new elements depends directly upon a positive response from the side of the customers, which again is informed by the customer's value system and expectations.

Another recent study on the wedding business in Japan has been done by Goldstein-Gidoni in the 1990s. The author, like Edwards, conducted an ethnographic survey in a town wedding parlour (Goldstein-Gidoni 1997). Examining the production of the ceremonial occasion from the side of the producers, the author focuses on the process through which the bride is 'produced' and 'packaged', placing this particular cultural production into the realm of the 'invention of traditions' as part of the construction of the Japanese self in the consumer market. Consumption here is defined as consumption of both culture and meaning. Customers purchase not solely services, but "buy images and representations" as well (ibid, 153).<sup>153</sup> Both authors, Edwards and Goldstein-Gidoni, provide important insights into the most significant and profitable ceremonial occasion in contemporary Japan. Since the development of Shichigosan as a ceremonial occasion, shows notable similarities with that of wedding, the general features that characterized the growth of the ceremonial industry in Japan will be discussed below.

Urban funeral practices have been studied by Hikaru Suzuki who presents an interesting account on the funeral industry in Japan based on a fieldwork conducted in a funeral parlour (2001).<sup>154</sup> The professionalization of customs that used to be the responsibility of

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<sup>152</sup> In 1982 the cost of an average wedding arrived at around 2,000,000 Yen (the rate of exchange in that period being \$1=Yen 240) without the cost of betrothal gifts and honeymoon (Edwards 1989, 49).

<sup>153</sup> The author interprets images and representations in terms of Baudrillard's definition of signs and symbols (Baudrillard 1981 quoted in Goldstein-Gidoni 1997, 153).

<sup>154</sup> On memorial services and funeral customs see also Robert Smith's *Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan* (1974).

the household and the community to which it belonged, has affected funeral ceremonies in a similar way as it affected the wedding. The author argues that this development has important implications regarding the concept of death in the Japanese worldview. Additionally, the contribution of Hirochika Nakamaki in the collection of the edited volume of van Bremen and Martinez gives an interesting account on modern memorial rites performed by the Japanese companies (Nakamaki 1995).

Consumption with regards to contemporary rituals has been discussed by Japanese scholars to a rather limited extent. The rich literature produced by folklore studies in Japan on rituals and seasonal festivities pays little attention to the recent changes in this field apart from few works. A collection of studies on the effects of the high speed economic growth on family life in Japan, includes a survey undertaken in 1983 on the observance rate of a number of rituals and festivities among mothers of small children (kindergarten and elementary school age) in a Tokyo neighborhood (Sadamura 2005).<sup>155</sup> This survey showed that the four most popular observances were New Year (100%), children's birthday (99%), Christmas (99,5%) and Shichigosan (88,5%) (ibid, 231). The study pointed out that observances that center on children and that involve a home based party were among the most popular. Another survey in the 1980s has been made by Tadahiko Kuraishi on changes that affected customs, lifestyle and social practices within urban contexts (Kuraishi 1990). The author investigated the everyday conduct of households in a housing apartment complex (*danchi* 団地) in Nagano prefecture. The results of this survey demonstrates that many of the life-cycle rituals and seasonal festivities have faded away due to a number of factors, among others due to the restricted living space available in apartments and the geographical distance from the natal household. First to fade away were rites connected to the agricultural production mode. Concerning rites of passage, the survey found out that rites with highest degrees of observance are those of childhood. Nevertheless, Kuraishi notes that these, too, have become uniform in pattern. The rich variation that characterized these rituals in the past, disappeared (ibid, 128). Shichigosan observance rate was over 50% among residents and with this it belonged to the most popular ones, surpassed only by *miyamairi* ( 57,6%)

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<sup>155</sup> The target group of the survey was a group of 200 women, all mothers of children between the age of 2 and 10.

(ibid, 179-182).<sup>156</sup> The typical life style characterizing families living in these urban housing complexes, is defined by husbands spending most of their day outside, working and commuting, and by women and children who spend most of their daily lives within the restricted space of their homes and the neighborhood. Kuraishi argues that the fact that husbands are on the productive side and women and children on the consuming side, makes from women the principal actors of consumption. Decisions over the daily running of household, of childrearing and education, falls to women and it is their preferences and desires that represent the main motivating force for most of consumption that takes place in the family (ibid, 180-182). In the author's words, these housing apartment complexes have been transformed into "worlds of consumption" (消費の世界) where women's participation in a competitive consumption of clothing, furnishing, childrearing becomes central (ibid, 182).

The most comprehensive research on the changes that occurred in the ritual culture of the Japanese during the postwar period has been done by Kenji Ishii, religious studies scholar (2005, 2009). The volume *Nihonjin no ichinen to issō* (The year-cycle and life-cycle of the Japanese, 2009), gives a general description of all popular seasonal festivities and life-cycle ceremonies celebrated today in Japan. Ishii sees these festivities as the most significant platform where religious attitudes of contemporary Japanese people becomes visible (Ishii 2009, 184-185). Among the discussed rituals Ishii also includes the imported ones, such as Christmas and Valentine's Day. Whereas commercialization is identified by the author among the significant forces that have contributed to the general change of ritual culture, the overall socio-economic transformation occurred in Japan in postwar decades is seen as the strongest driving force behind this change. The interpretations of the Japanese festive calendar provided by this work uses Japanese folklore literature as departing point. Ishii then follows briefly the recent history of each discussed festivity up to present days. Ishii underlines that the vast social transformation, brought about by the economic high speed growth, caused the break-down of the majority of social patterns that constituted the base of the Japanese society until the

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<sup>156</sup> Observation rate of residents regarding children celebrations: Shichigosan 50,5% , *hinamatsuri* 36,4%, *tango no sekku* 38,1%, *shichiya* 30,8%, *miyamairi* 57,6%, *kuizome* 33,4%, *hatsutanjō* 51,2% (Kuraishi 1990, 179).

end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Festivities and rituals, which had been firmly embedded in the communal lifestyle and shared worldview, hold the power to unite the community. On the other hand, the community was able to enforce its customs on all its members. With the weakening of this power, rituals and customs started to lack the binding power, and thus, the author argues, lost their original meaning (ibid, 190-203). Modern ritual forms, such as the coming-of-age ritual (*seijinshiki*), Shichigosan or *miyamairi* are interpreted by the author as lacking this power of implementation. Accordingly, *seijinshiki* holds no power to affirm a real adulthood upon the actors and Shichigosan and *miyamairi* have become mere occasions of the affirmation of the family happiness. Ishii sees the modern individual abandoned to himself in his effort to find a meaning for the rituals s/he performs. The actors of the marketplace are the only to offer a help in this when they suggest multiple interpretations to the consumer. Seasonal festivities are viewed by the author as providing stages of surplus consumption in a highly consumer society. In the traditional agricultural communities these festivities represented the *hare* moments in the lives of their members. They offered occasions for a renewal of the community's vital energies and for experiencing the extraordinary time during the year's cycle. The connecting link between the past role and present role of seasonal festivities, the author argues, that they provide an opportunity to experience the notion of *hare*: seasonal festivities figure as modern versions of *hare* occasions, they divide the year by means of their exploitation by the marketplace. They are used to give rhythm to the commercial calendar and mark the periods of sale battles (ibid, 205). In general terms, Ishii views consumption and its effect on the ritual culture in negative light, although he acknowledges that festivities and rituals evolve along changes in the society. Also, seasonal festivities and life cycle rituals are interpreted as being part of the religious traditions. Consequently, the contemporary forms, wrapped into the world of consumption and information, are viewed by the author as having lost their authentic meaning (ibid, 205, 211).

A distinct category in ritual studies is represented by the research done on public or communal festivals in Japan, called commonly *matsuri* (祭). In the last two decades some important works were done on this theme. Whereas my work focuses on a different category of ritual, i.e. rituals that are connected to the life-cycle of the individual, studies

on communal festivities in modern settings give also important insights of the transformation that modernization and accompanying phenomena, such as commercialization and urbanization, have been producing in the examined context. Theodore C. Bestor made research on local community building in a neighborhood in Tokyo and found out that the local festival has a vital function for the life of the community (Bestor 1989). It plays a role in the process through which the community builds up its identity. The organization and performance of the annual Shinto procession significantly contributes to the reinforcement of the communal spirit of the neighborhood. Another study on urban community is based on a fieldwork conducted by Jennifer Robertson in the 1980s in a suburban city, a bed-town of the Tokyo metropolitan area (Robertson 1991). In this description the local public festival is used by the community to define itself and its boundaries. The study touches upon the issue of the interpretation of traditions that provides the framework for the dialectic of two categories of residents, natives and newcomers. The annual communal festival emerges as one of the platforms where this dialectic is pursued. The festival thereby is used instrumentally in particular by native residents at moments when the so called newcomers are given only a limited access to the organization affairs regarding the festival. A comprehensive account on the meaning and social function of public festivals is provided by Michael Ashkenazi in his work on *matsuri* (Ashkenazi 1993). The case study is provided by a festival in a town in Akita prefecture. The author addresses the process of ongoing change in *matsuri* as well as issues of continuity and change that affect communal festivals in general. Whereas the festival studied by Ashkenazi has been influenced only to a minimal extent by tourism in the time of his fieldwork, the festival that is the object of Scott Schnell's work represents a case when local authorities promote the festival with the scope to draw tourists to the area (Schnell 1999). *The Rousing Drum* offers an analysis of a Shinto shrine festival in a small town in central Japan. The author demonstrates the way the festival, its pattern and significance, changed over the time and grew from a local event into a popular spectacle promoted by town planners to bolster local economy. The festival is a powerful means in the hand of the local political authorities, as well as an important source of local identity for the residents. Schnell underlines that the adaptable qualities of the ritual enabled the preservation of its continuity over periods of change.

Several studies on *matsuri* in postwar Japan point to the multiple functions that public festivals hold today in Japan. On one hand, they contribute in a significant way to the reinforcement of the communal spirit of local communities. On the other hand, they represent platforms where a variety of forces of different nature, ranging from interests by local political authorities to economic interests by actors of the marketplace, meet and interact, molding thus the complex layers of meanings attributed to the event.

#### **5.4 The development of Shichigosan pattern in the first decades after the war**

After a somewhat long introduction of the existing body of literature on relevant issues such as consumer culture and ritual in modern context, I proceed to the description of the evolution of Shichigosan pattern during the period following the end of the World War II. The very first articles on Shichigosan in dailies that appeared in the immediate years following the end of the war, celebrated the return of peace in the country. After the gloomy war-years, the mere sight of children dressed in their best for Shichigosan were perceived as a clear sign of the return to normality. During the last two years of the war, newspapers did not report at all on the observance. However, in November of 1945, just a couple of months after Japan's capitulation, the Mainichi published several photos that featured American soldiers holding hands of Japanese children dressed up for the celebration. Comments to the photos had a gay tone and overjoyed the fact that at this very first post-war Shichigosan "even American soldiers are smiling" (Mainichi Tokyo, 1945, November 15). Actually, in 1945, only few families could observe the ritual. During the last period of the war, a big part of the population of Tokyo had been evacuated, moreover, moving freely around the town was rendered difficult by the missing urban transport services. For the next few years, photos featuring the scene of American soldiers in the company of Japanese children in Shichigosan outfit, continued to appear in the newspapers. Clearly, these images were also used by editors as part of the campaign to generate positive feelings among the population towards the occupying

forces. Also, American military uniforms became trendy as Shichigosan wear among boys for a while.

Nonetheless, the immediate years after the end of the war were first of all years of economic hardship. Many children still continued to wear common everyday clothes for the celebration, and sometimes even the special Shichigosan candy, *chitoseame*, was replaced by sweet potatoes (Kiyomizu 2005). Though, the number of Shichigosan celebrants was slowly rising; in 1948 there were 30 000 families visiting the shrine of Kanda to pray for Shichigosan, a number that for the first time since the war exceeded the prewar peak. The growing number of observers was interpreted by journalists as a clear sign that things in Japan were returning to their regular working (Mainichi Tokyo 1949, November 16). The word ‘peace’ appeared frequently in the articles during these years. Images of families and children dressed up in gay clothes for Shichigosan, promenading in town and in shrines, stood as symbols for a long desired peace as well as for the well-being of a nation that had gone through hard times, as a journalist put it (Yomiuri Tokyo 1950, November 15).

Shichigosan in 1952 was celebrated as the first ‘independent Shichigosan’, marking the end of the Allie Forces’ Occupation in Japan (Mainichi Tokyo 1952, November 15). By 1950, the economic situation of families has improved, living conditions were slowly reaching higher standards. Together with growing consumption expenditures for goods and housing, the Japanese started to spend more on leisure, education and child-care. In 1951, Ronald Dore’s analyses of the expenditure of families living in a Tokyo ward showed that even families with low income tended to spend a considerable sum on children (Dore 1951). Dore identified the sphere of child-care as the sphere of life that is “most pervaded by the competitive desire to ‘keep up with the Jones’s” (ibid, 62). The desires of the families to provide for their children in the same way as the other does represented a considerable burden for each family’s budgets in the neighborhood. Festive occasions, among them Shichigosan, became excellent occasions to express parental indulgence. Between 1950–1960, with the significant improvement in the families’ economic situation, the number of those who desired as well as could afford lavish modes of celebrations, was slowly but steadily rising.

Simultaneously, critical comments targeting the excessiveness in the celebration modes appeared in the media. The often opposing feelings that Shichigosan evoked were perceivable also in jokes that newspapers occasionally published on the subject. An ironic joke, taking the disguise of an ‘opinion poll’, remarked popular attitudes towards Shichigosan in the following way: ‘It’s futile, isn’t it.....50%, anyhow.....50%’ (無駄じゃ...50%。でもね...50%)(Yomiuri, 1952, November 10). In spite of the ironic voices, in the Tokyo area the popularity of the celebration was steadily rising. Elevated numbers of families were reported from the two most popular shrines of Tokyo, the shrines of Kanda and Meiji. In 1953, the reporter counted in the Meiji shrine during the morning hours only more than 2 000 families. The same year, Kanda reached a peak of number of visitors in its postwar history, 35 000 families.<sup>157</sup> In 1959, the number of visitors in the Meiji shrine arrived at 10000. New, sumptuous ways of celebration emerged, as well. In 1953, a Yomiuri journalist lamented the row of luxury cars in front of the main gate of Meiji shrine. The journalist compared it to the custom when in Edo fathers, or hired servants, carried children on their shoulders to the shrine (Yomiuri Tokyo, 1953, November 16).<sup>158</sup> To stress the parallel between these two images, a comic short poem was included in the article: ‘Riding to the gods’ at Shichigosan (神前へ車で参る七五三). The word *kuruma*, in the text written as 車, indicates ‘car’ in the Japanese language, but it also alludes to the word *kataguruma* which means to carry someone on one’s shoulders. Although during the early 1950s, wealthy families only possessed cars, going to the shrine by car for Shichigosan became soon a fashion. Families that did not own a car often hired one for the occasion.<sup>159</sup> Another criticized issue addressed the vanity of mothers who, according to the critics, often used the celebration as a display of their own assets. One joke for example reproduced a brief conversation between a child and mother: ‘Child: Mom, why can’t I celebrate Shichigosan this year? Mother: Because your father is not willing to buy a new dress for me.’ (Yomiuri 1956, November 15).

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<sup>157</sup> These are only approximate numbers assessed by the journalists during a limited duration of observation.

<sup>158</sup> See also Chapter III.

<sup>159</sup> In the 1960s, cars became more widely available. The year of 1966 was the first year of the so called ‘My Car Era’ when number of cars exceeded 10 million in Japan.

## 5.5 Criticism and reform campaigns

Critical voices addressing modes of celebration did not disappear with the end of the war. In the immediate postwar years, these voices often pointed to the differences that existed between 'fortunate' children, i.e. children who were offered a Shichigosan celebration by their own families, and 'less fortunate' children from poor families or orphans of the war who had no possibility to celebrate or to spend for Shichigosan. In 1954, the central organization of Shinto shrines (*Shintō Honchō* 神社本庁) asked shrines to reflect on the 'original' underlying principle of the Shichigosan celebration. They encouraged shrines throughout the country to organize celebrations for the less fortunate children, orphans and the poor (Newsletter of Jinja Honchō 1959, November 29). As a result, a few shrines in Kobe, Fukuoka and Miyagi prefectures set up communal Shichigosan celebrations. On these occasions a reception with meal, games and gifts were offered to children. The beneficial activities for orphan and poor children continued for a while but this pattern of celebration has not become diffused in a long term.

Similarly to the years prior to the war, when the economic crisis of the 1920s hit the country (see Chapter IV), in the years of the postwar economic hardship, practical advices on low-cost celebration modes appeared with frequency in the media. Furthermore, Shichigosan was not the only ritual to be criticized because of excessive expenditure. Critics often also targeted the wedding ceremony for similar reasons. In the case of Shichigosan, the festive dress of the child continued to represent the most costly item, this was followed by the festive attire of the mother. In 1953, a festive *furisode* (long-sleeved kimono) for a seven years old girl, was advertised at 15 000 Yen, but it could reach also 25 000 Yen. For comparison, in 1952, the average income of an

employee in a town was around 20 000 Yen.<sup>160</sup> Critics often pointed to the futility of these purchases. As a journalist bitterly noted “parents, by dressing their children in sumptuous festive dresses, show that their sole aim is to show off” (Yomiuri 1953, November 15). The expensive festive dress was affordable only for families in good economic situation, leaving the poorer incapable to line up. Articles often commented on the fact that differences of economic status were rendered visible at first sight when looking at the outfits of the family members. Shichigosan was labeled the ‘contest of clothing’ (服のコンクール), and social critics called for ‘renewal’ in the celebration of Shichigosan. Not unlike to prewar years, spending was seen by these commentators as a sort of devaluation of the ‘true’ value and meaning of Shichigosan. Nevertheless, for most families the celebration was not an occasion when frugality had to be sought for.

Occasionally, newspapers reported on communal Shichigosan celebrations, taking place mostly in rural areas. A reportage in 1961, described a communal celebration of seven years old children in a rural community in the prefecture of Saitama (Yomiuri, 1961, November 16). The celebration took place in the local school and the initiative received very positive comments from the journalist. The community introduced this form of celebration two years earlier as an effort to preserve old local traditions. In the past, according to the local custom the age celebration at seven was offered to first born sons and daughters only, giving thus importance to the social position attributed to first born children. Nevertheless, in 1959, when the celebration was reintroduced, all seven years old children were invited to the communal celebration, regardless position of birth. Younger children, however, were not included. The article pointed out that by including all seven years old children into the celebration, the authorities of the community wished to show that they understood the ‘call of the times’ and the need of more democratic views. The case of Saitama is also a good illustration of the pattern in which regional local customs were giving gradually way to new forms of celebrations. The communal celebration introduced by this rural community can be also regarded as a step towards the standardization of the Shichigosan celebration pattern. Due to changes in the society, the traditional local pattern giving emphasis to the status of the first born children in the

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<sup>160</sup>Source in [www.shouwashi.com](http://www.shouwashi.com), accessed 2011, May 24.

social structure of the family and community, was gradually altered. The new pattern introduced by the local authorities gave expression to the changing trends and requirements. At this stage, the pattern represented still a halfway phase. The celebration included all seven years old children, but kept the communal form of celebration. Although I do not possess concrete data on this case, with much probability it can be assumed that in the following decades the communal mode would have been gradually replaced by more individualistic modes.

However, at the time of the reportage the example given by this community was positively commented also by the promoters of the so called New Life Movement (*Shinseikatsu Undō* 新生活運動). The Movement was initiated in 1955 by Housewives associations (*Fujinkai* 婦人会) in collaboration with Youth Organizations (*Seinendan* 青年団). Their main scope was to contribute with their work to the reconstruction of the country after the war. Among their efforts was the rationalization and simplification of the traditional ceremonial etiquette. Traditional celebration manners were judged as time and cost consuming and hence, not adequate to the requirements of the time. They, for example, disapproved of the often intricate customs of the traditional wedding celebration. The promoters called for the creation of new and altered celebration patterns that would save time and money as a sign of modernization and economization. Though, discourses regarding Shichigosan often contained controversial messages. On one hand, excessive spending was condemned and renewal was encouraged. On the other hand, promoters also called for ‘bringing back tradition’ to the celebration in order to transform it again into a ‘meaningful’ ritual. In their interpretation, ‘traditional’ signified that sumptuous consumption and display was to be excluded. The promoters came out also with their own proposals for new patterns. They for example advocated communal celebrations as an effective mode to underplay those aspects of the ritual that centered around spending and display. However, it is important to underline that the efforts of the New Life Movement have been fueled more by rational and economic considerations, and much less by a true quest for traditions.

In the same period, along the effort towards the ‘rationalization’ of the Shichigosan celebration, there were also efforts to establish the 15<sup>th</sup> of November as national

children's holiday. However, finally another festival, the Boys' Festival (*tango no sekku*) was preferred for the purpose. At last, communal celebrations as ritual form did not become popular and diffused. Shichigosan was affirmed principally as a ritual to be observed in the family circle. In spite of the efforts to eliminate consumption from the ritual and to rationalize and economize the celebration's pattern, the Shichigosan continued to evolve first of all in compliance with the actors', ie. families' changing value orientations and needs.

## **5.6 The rise of 'Shichigosan industry'**

During the two decades of 1950s and 1960s, the advertising industry was steadily growing and this was perceivable also in the growing number of commercial advertisements related to the celebration of Shichigosan. Advertisements on Shichigosan re-appeared in newspapers soon after the end of the war. In 1948, there were 14 Shichigosan ads in *Yomiuri*, and the number was continuously rising afterwards. A new subject emerged in the form of ads on *chitoseame*. While before the war advertisement on *chitoseame* only occasionally showed up in the dailies, after 1948 its commercialization took off quickly. The bulk of advertisements, however, continued to target the festive dress. After the difficult years of the war and the immediate postwar period when children at Shichigosan were mostly seen in common everyday clothes or military uniforms, around the end of the 1950s, children's clothes started to gain on quality and gayness ( Kiyomizu 2005). The newly acquired availability of financial means in the hands of the average Japanese family was reflected also in the marketing strategies of the department stores. Department stores continued to act as messengers of modernity, a role adopted in the decades of the prewar period. News on novelties, desirable life styles, new commodities were disseminated by these commercial centers which acted also as leisure centers and educators in consumption (Francks 2009, 160). Famous department stores such as Mitsukoshi, displayed mannequins dressed in the latest models of Shichigosan

festive wear. The first fashion show with children models introducing the latest trend in festive ‘shrine visit’ clothes, of both Japanese and Western styles, were set up as soon as 1953. The show was installed one month prior the actual date of the celebration. The trend to launch the promotional campaigns in always earlier periods initiated already in the interwar decades and now it continued to move the start of the promotion campaigns to ever earlier data. Today, campaigns start already in May and June, i.e. 5 – 6 months prior to the date of the actual event. In the 1950s, the dresses on display in Mitsukoshi were still beyond the reach of most families, but the shows and models were available to be watched and to generate desires. Parents were encouraged to envisage their children in these sumptuous outfits. The promotional campaigns, apart from showing the latest trends in the ceremonial fashion, also taught mothers about the appropriate dress code. In this period, the Japanese and Western style seemed to be equally trendy, but in the early 1960s there were already signs that the Japanese kimono would witness a big revival in the following years.

Around the end of the 1950s, a new branch of industry stepped in and joined the market around Shichigosan. The toy industry started to claim its share and from 1961 on, the number of advertisements offering a variety of toys as a present for Shichigosan, was slowly growing. Several companies offered gifts to kindergartens for Shichigosan. Though, on the long run, the toy industry apparently failed to establish itself on this market. Toys as gifts have not become an integral element of the celebration. Today toys may be given to children as gift for the celebration, but it mostly remains optional. Shrines sometimes include smaller toy items in the Shichigosan set offered to children that participate in their purification rite.

In spite of the efforts of the New Life Movement, the ideals of frugality, modesty, and rationalization did not influence the manner in which families wished to celebrate. On the contrary, surrounded in the condition of an always raising quality of life, as a result of the economic miracle, the Japanese started to find virtue in consumption.<sup>161</sup> Trends in Shichigosan dress style began to imitate fashion in adult clothing. High-quality materials emerged and famous retail shops commissioned orders of Shichigosan dress collections

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<sup>161</sup> Popular slogan of the times: Consumption is a virtue (消費は美德).

from kimono designers.<sup>162</sup> Trend setters always more influenced fashionable kimono styles for the year. Historical drama television serials of the 1960s, such as the ‘Heike Monogatari’, rendered historical– often extravagant –designs fashionable, and brought about a popularity of luxurious and pompous dresses. Little girls’ dressed into *jūnihitoe* 十二単 (a ceremonial dress of the Heian period court ladies) or into miniature wedding dresses, boys into formal suits or tuxedo were often seen in shrines while celebrating their Shichigosan (Kiyomizu 2005).

The celebration of Shichigosan has always involved a festive meal for family members and relatives. The meal was usually consumed in the private sphere of the family house, but from the late 1960s, going out to some of the many available restaurants was starting to become a popular custom. The custom of eating out has been part of the urban culture since the Tokugawa period but in years of the economic bubble it grew into a leisure activity affordable to all Japanese both in urban and rural areas. Changes in housing conditions contributed to the diffusion of the practice, too. In past, the dimensions of family dwellings were usually more suitable to host ceremonial meals with numerous invited guests. The modern housing conditions with limitations on space, particularly in urban areas, rendered problematic the arrangement of the festive meal for more persons within the family home and this fueled the popularity of relying on restaurant. Moreover, grand hotels soon recognized the potentiality hidden in ceremonial occasions, too. In cities big hotels discovered ceremonial occasions such as weddings as a source of income already in the interwar period. Around 1964, numerous luxurious hotels were built for the occasion of the Olympic Games in Tokyo, and after the end of the Games, these hotels sought after new occasions to raise their gains and profit. Ceremonial occasions were already established as an opportunity for commercial exploitation, as a big part of weddings in towns were organized in grand hotels by this time. Now it was the turn of Shichigosan to be ‘discovered’, and indeed, the number of hotels that were coming out with special courses offered for the celebration of Shichigosan, slowly grew.

During the 1970s, the festive Shichigosan dress continued to remain in the center of attention of journalists writing on the celebration. Articles commented on latest trends,

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<sup>162</sup> For example from Toki Kiyomizu, a renowned designer of kimono.

fashion, and new patterns. Professional female schools with interests in the textile and wear industry, conducted surveys on the shifting trends in popular styles. In 1977, results of one of these surveys were published in the weekly of Yomiuri (Shūkan Yomiuri 1977, December 3). The survey, undertaken by a not named professional kimono school, targeted families observing Shichigosan in November of 1977. 250 mothers were asked questions related mostly to their children's dress, its style, price, and the source of acquisition. According to the results of the questionnaire, the majority of families (60%) purchased a new dress for the occasion, which, compared to presentdays when dresses are usually rented out, can be considered high. It also indicates that in 1977, the number of rental studios providing Shichigosan dresses was probably still low. Services offered for the celebration were not yet developed to the degree it is today. A relatively high number of interviewed mothers bought a new dress for herself, too. Regarding popular styles, the most popular was the Japanese traditional style (76% of all children, 88% of mothers). According to the survey, 17% of families spent between 100 000 and 150 000 Yen for the festive dress, and 23% spent over 200 000 Yen. Income levels have considerably risen by this time, but still, this sum constituted a fairly high expense for most families (in 1977 a town employee earned around 280 000 Yen). The expenses of the festive meal, photo, and other items, excluding the dress, moved around 45 000 Yen. In average, the sum that the interviewed families spent on Shichigosan in 1977, moved around 173 000 Yen. The authors of the survey inquired also about the provenience of the finances. Answers showed that fathers were principally those who paid for the celebration in most of the cases. The report underlined that although fathers often viewed the celebration in a rather negative way, they usually “did their best”.<sup>163</sup> The journalist who commented the results, concluded that Shichigosan was a trying event for the families (“a trial”, to use the journalist's own term). Nonetheless, the article ended with encouraging words: “Fathers, please make your best!” (お父さん、元気出してね).

The sums that Japanese families were willing to sacrifice for the event was gradually growing in the years of the 1970s. Dresses have become more expensive, and mothers often complained in their letters to the newspapers about the financial burden that the

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<sup>163</sup>消極的だが、協力する (I am negative but I make an effort/I make my best).

celebration represented for their households' budget. As one mother expressed, after the birth of the child Shichigosan was the first really expensive event in the family's life (Shūkan Gendai 1980, November 20). In spite of this fact, according to Kyoto's oldest traditional textile association (京都織物卸商組合), in spite of the high cost exclusive high-quality dresses continued to be popular (ibid). Kimono for a seven years old girl cost around 200 000 Yen, and including all necessary accessories (sash, handbag, etc.) the sum could easily arrive at 300 000 Yen. In 1980, major department stores in Osaka and Tokyo reached a peak in their sales of Shichigosan-related items. Shop managers confirmed that even luxurious kimono for 4-500 000 Yen found their customers. In the department store of Daimaru in Tokyo, the gains from the Shichigosan sale arrived at 100 million Yen in total, which was by two third more than the sale figures of the previous year (ibid). Other department stores were expecting a 70% increase for that year, as well. The increase was explained partly by the rise in prices and partly by the fact that in 1980, children of the baby boom generation reached Shichigosan age. In 1973, the birth rate arrived to its last peak in the postwar history of Japan. After which the number of births started to decline slowly but steadily. In 1980, children born between 1973-4 were six-seven years old (allowing tolerance for the difference between the traditional and modern way of age counting).<sup>164</sup> The number of children who turned five or three in 1980, was already lower than the number of those born in 1973.<sup>165</sup> According to the data, in 1980 there were approximately three million children in Shichigosan-age, and it was assessed that an average of 50% of this number actually observed the ritual (ibid). The estimation was done by the renowned ceremonial etiquette specialist, Yaeko Shiotsuki, who was regarded an acclaimed specialist of ceremonial etiquette and was the author of several manuals on the theme.<sup>166</sup> Unfortunately, in lack of other national opinion polls on Shichigosan observation rate, there is no possibility to check her estimation. Though, the popularity of the celebration is confirmed by the interest of the market and by the fact that

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<sup>164</sup> See more on age-counting in Japan Chapter VII.

<sup>165</sup> There were one million girls born in 1974, and they reached the age of six-seven in 1980. The five years old age group counted 980 000 boys in 1980, and 850 000 of three years old girls (statistics of the Ministry of Health 厚生省人口動態調査) (Shūkan Gendai 1980, November 20).

<sup>166</sup> Yaeko Shiotsuki (塩月弥栄子) comes from the 14th generation of the famous masters of tea ceremony, Urasen-ke (裏千家). She is the author of an etiquette manual that continued to be a bestseller in Japan for many years after its first publication in 1952 (Kankonsōsai Nyūmon 冠婚葬祭入門). It has been republished numerous times since then.

in 1980, the involved industries and commercial activities apparently showed much effort to ride the wave of the last baby boom generation and to squeeze out the most from the occasion.

In order to compete for the attention of the families, advertising campaigns were often launched already in May and June. The sale battle concentrated in particular on the seven-years-old girls' segment. Partly, this was because the festive outfit of older girls was most complex, and hence most expensive among Shichigosan outfits. The 50-60% of all Shichigosan-related purchases fell on the kimono of six-seven years old girls (an estimation of several store managers in Tokyo and Osaka (Shūkan Gendai 1980, November 20). The trend is typical to the present situation, too. Also, girls of this age are already old enough to exercise their own influence on the choice of the dress. Girls of this age are often actively involved in the decision-making process concerning the several details of the celebration, and thereby marketing strategies often target this age segment.

In the 1970s, the share of sweet industry was also increasing. After Christmas, Valentine, and Hina (Doll Festival), the month of November was the fourth busiest period for candy sellers. The earnings coming from the sale of *chitoseame*, the traditional sweet of Shichigosan, represented an important source of income for the sector. Funiya, which with a 50 % of market share was among the most important sweet sellers in Japan at the time, claimed an income of 2-300 million Yen from the sale of *chitoseame*. Including the trade of cakes and other sweets bought for the celebration (consumed and distributed among relatives and friends), the total income reached 30 hundred million Yen in the entire sweet industry (Shūkan Gendai 1980, November 20).

The popularity of the services of professional photo studios was increasing in this period, too. A television serial called 'The photo studio of Nacchan' (ナッチャンの写真館 broadcast by NHK in 1980 for a period of six months), enhanced greatly the popularity of professional photo studios.<sup>167</sup> Visiting a photo studio for a ceremonial photo of the child dressed in Shichigosan outfit became seen as trendy. November was the month in the year when photo studios all around the country were making their highest profits. The

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<sup>167</sup> The serial was based on a true story of a family which established one of the oldest photo studios in the country.

income during this month often balanced red sales figures of the rest of the year.<sup>168</sup> In the end of the 1970s, in order to attract more clients studios started to collaborate with popular shrines and special packs combining services of shrines and photo studios were set up for the first time.

## 5.7 Affirmation of the celebration pattern

By mid-1970s, the diffusion of the standardized pattern of Shichigosan celebration has reached all regions of Japan. Shichigosan has become a stable part of the domestic festive calendar of the Japanese families. In 1977, the Hakubi Kyoto Kimono Professional School undertook a survey on the custom of Shichigosan in Kyoto, and its results were published in the weekly of *Shūkan Meisei* (週刊明星1977, November 20). The survey found out that 42% of the interviewed families with Shichigosan-age children did observe the ritual. Considering that Shichigosan did not belong to the customs traditional to the Kyoto area, this rate of observation can be considered as fairly high.<sup>169</sup> Though, a small number of interviewed mothers (15%) claimed that they did not know the custom. As for the pattern of celebration, the described mode reminded in big lines the Tokyo pattern. The sums single families spent on the celebration were comparable to the results of the survey mentioned above, conducted in Tokyo in 1977 (*Shūkan Yomiuri*, 1977, December 3). In Kyoto, expenditure ranged from 100 000 to 200 000 Yen, making up for an average of 170 000 Yen. A nearly identical sum was spent by Tokyoite families. In Kyoto, too, the majority of children were dressed in Japanese style and 60% of all families purchased a new dress for the child. The only significant difference between Tokyoite and Kyotoite families can be found in the prevailing preference for kimono among Kyotoite mothers. In Kyoto, 88% of mothers wore the traditional Japanese kimono for the celebration, a

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<sup>168</sup> Information by the Japanese Association of Photograph Culture, quoted in *Shūkan Gendai* (1980, November 11).

<sup>169</sup> The traditional childhood rite of passage typical to the Kansai region was *jūsanmairi*, a rite observed at 13 years of age (see Chapter III).

proportion significantly higher than in other areas of Japan.<sup>170</sup> This preference can be explained by the more tradition-kin spirit of Kyoto residents. The article commenting on the survey mentioned, in a critical tone, the showy character of the celebration and the fact that commercialization affected heavily the ritual.

It was on the turn of 1970s and 1980s that the popularity of Shichigosan has become ultimately affirmed. Advertising campaigns, new services offered by department stores and photo studios undoubtedly fueled this process as well as contributed to an ‘escalation’ of celebration manners. Terms such as fashion-izing (ファッション化), Shichigosan-boom, Shichigosan-fever, emerging frequently in the epoch’s print media, illustrate that social commentators themselves were aware of this development. Families often willing to spend exorbitant sums were described by the media as foolish, silly or vain. Nevertheless, the overwhelming part of Japanese families seemed to back up the popularization of Shichigosan. Moreover, the fact that an increasing number of families was opting for the more convenient ‘Shichigosan sets’ seems to contradict the view that families did not show concern for the costs. The majority of Japanese families chose rational spending and left the luxurious modes to the mighty and wealthy ones.

On the other hand, the commercial service sector came out with ever more elaborate and attractive products. The decade of the 1970s was the period during which service industry began to claim an important share from the national economy. According to Marilyn Ivy, it was closely linked to the trend that saw culture as something to be received passively, i.e. in the form of services (Ivy 1993, 252). This was the generation that was often called by the media, the generation of packaged services. From the beginning of the 1980s, all major departments were installing special corners for the exhibition of Shichigosan outfits. Advertisements and campaigns in the media that addressed families with children have become even more intense. Shichigosan sets, comprising more products for a convenient price, were gaining popularity because of convenience and contained price. The service sector was soon joined by luxury hotels. The Tokyo Grand Hotel’s Shichigosan special plan for a price of 35 000 Yen included the fee of a rented Japanese

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<sup>170</sup> For comparison, in 1960, 74% of motherswore kimono in Gifu and Aichi areas. In 1988, the rate fell to 33% (Sano et al 1990).

or Western style festive dress, the cost of the purification rite in a shrine, photo service, small gift items for children (crayons for example), and the assistance in dressing up. The plan had an extreme success and the most targeted Sundays around the 15<sup>th</sup> of November were quickly sold out. The emergence of Shichigosan sets was probably also a response to a trend that saw an unprecedented rise of prices of Shichigosan outfits around the turn of the 1970s and 1980s. The convenient packages offered services which were affordable to most families, who on the other hand were happy to be able to celebrate in an appropriate way but without the necessity of supersized spending. It could be argued that the availability of packaged services fueled the celebration's further popularization.

At this point, another phenomenon connected to Shichigosan needs to be mentioned and this is the phenomenon connected to the so called Shichigosan-receptions (shichigosan hirōen 七五三披露宴). This mode is typical to a restricted area in Japan, mostly concentrating around the two prefectures of Chiba and Saitama. Starting from the 1970s, the mass media's attention was attracted by the oversized parties taking place at the occasion of Shichigosan in these prefectures. It seems that here traditionally the seven or five year's age ritual was observed in the form of a big feast to which big numbers of relatives and acquaintances were invited. The celebration normally used to be held only for the future heir, resp. the first-born child of the family and thereby, the peculiarities of the local social structure – presence of big land-owners – had probably gave rise to this socially significant custom. Though, while up to the 1960s, these events took place in the common hall of the community and food was mainly prepared by female members of the wider kinship, in 1970s it became fashionable to organize it in a hotel and rely on the services of the indoor restaurant. The costs of these receptions moves between 100-150 thousand Yen, but can reach also 200 thousand.<sup>171</sup> Half of this, however, returns from gifts in form of cash from invited guests. The event is said to serve to formally introduce the future heir to the members of the community. Peculiarly, children, apart from the celebrated child, are not invited at all to the event. The custom continues even in present

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<sup>171</sup> For a meticulous description of this trend see for example the article published in 1991 in the periodical Mainichi Graph (毎日グラフ, 1991 December). The event is compared here to a wedding reception.

days.<sup>172</sup> The reception often hosts around 100 invited guests. It bears resemblance to a wedding reception in that similar mini-rites, such as for example the candle service, change of dress, music, or the custom to ask an older couple to assist the child during the event, make part of the event. The invitation needs to be paid back and thereby, the continuation of the custom is assured.

### **5.8 Commodification of child-rearing**

The development of the market around Shichigosan has been evolving in close connection to another phenomenon, the rise of the market centered around the child. Expenditure levels of goods and services related to childrearing rose most intensely in the second half of the 1970s. This was the period when a specific children-oriented market was born. The decline of birth rate during the 1980s has undoubtedly enhanced this trend. The impact of the falling number of births started to be perceived in the Japanese society during this decade. Together with a decrease in birth rate, the age of couples at the birth of their first child began to rise, as well. Though, the most powerful impact was exercised by the improving living-standards of the average Japanese family which brought growing affluence to ordinary persons, and resulted in a consumer lifestyle that was soon appropriated by average Japanese families. This “has helped transform the children’s market into one of the most lucrative” (Creighton 1994, 78). In the course of nearly twenty years, between 1981 and 1999, average annual expenditure on a child within the

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<sup>172</sup> The description of this phenomenon comes partly from personal communication, partly from media sources. The concrete case about which my informant referred to me, took place in November 2010 in Chiba. The informant is the eldest son of a family residing in the native community and it was the strong request of grandparents that a similarly big celebration might take place for the informant’s first born daughter, at the time seven years old. All this occurred in spite of the fact that the immediate family of the informant (himself with his two children) was not residing any more in the community but spent years abroad. The reception eventually took place with the grandparents as main organizers.

family has doubled, growing from 164 000 Yen to 378 000 Yen.<sup>173</sup> Whereas, in the same period birth rate fell from 0,89 (in 1981) to 0.54 (in 1999). Regarding recent developments in children oriented market, Millie Creighton points out that entertainment services focusing on children often take on the vest of educational agents. This forms of ‘edutainment’ aim at exercising an even more powerful effect on children and parents by combining entertainment with education . The author argues that the edutainment sector thus contributes significantly to the socialization of children into consumer behavior.

The 1990’s were also the decade when the generation of the so called *shinjinrui* 新人類 reached an age when its members started to establish families of their own. The word *shinjinrui* (lit. new human breed) was adopted to depict the generation of those Japanese that already grew up in the years of bubble economy, hence embraced in affluence. This generation developed a value orientation very different from the one typical to the generation of their parents from whom ‘work-holism’ and self-sacrifice was expected. A more relaxed attitude towards work and an increased leisure consciousness was typical to the generation of *shinjinrui* (Goy-Yamamoto 2004, 274). Consumption playing an important role in the life-style of *shinjinrui*, emotional attachment to famous brands, an increased value placed on leisure activities coupled with individualism marked most visibly this life-style. Achieving the age of establishing their own families between 1990s and 2000s, they started to indulge their own children into the same well-being to which themselves were used.

Financial availability of families was readily exploited by the market which, on the other hand, fueled desire to consume. The number of magazines and services linked to childrearing augmented enormously. By 2000s, magazines have become the main source of information on childrearing issues for women. The enormous impact of these magazines, in the recent decade joined by the internet, has been affirmed by a survey in the early 2000s undertaken among a group of young mothers, all members of a childrearing circle (Shintani et al. 2003). The results of this survey demonstrate that childrearing magazines are widely read and consulted by mothers who often have no

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<sup>173</sup> General Affair Department, Sōmuchō, Survey on household economy (総務庁「家計調査」) in [www.sumitomotrust.co.jp](http://www.sumitomotrust.co.jp) (accessed 2011, October 10).

other person in their environment to whom they could turn for advice. The decreased number of children per family and the restricted contacts within a wider kinship sphere signify that mothers have little occasion to gain experience in childcare activities and have limited access to indirect experience through observing examples of others within the wider family circle (typical to extended households). Thereby, most women turn first of all to magazines in need of advice and information. Magazines, on the other hand, shape greatly mothers' views and practices, including those related to celebrations concerning children and/or the family. Another interesting outcome of the survey regards the difference of observation rates between the young and older generation of mothers. Authors of the study found out that the generation of the interviewed mothers, compared to the generation of grandmothers (also subject of interviews), observe significantly more rituals for their children. A number of traditional childhood rites which have been almost completely became obsolete in the postwar decades indeed witness a revival in the recent two decades. The authors of the study explain this phenomenon with the impact that childrearing magazines exercise on their readers. The promotion, direct or indirect, of children rituals is a frequently emerging theme in childrearing and fashion magazines, and this, as the authors of the survey argue, stimulates interest for them. The phenomenon was labeled by the authors the "commodification of childrearing" (*ikuji no shōhika* 育児の商品化), and is interpreted as the primary reason for the renewed interest in traditional rites (Shintani et al. 2003, 30).<sup>174</sup>

Services and goods associated to the celebration of Shichigosan have, in the last two decades, become even more professional and popular. Today a number of institutions, commercial as well as religious, provide service packages for families planning the ritual. Photo studios, department stores, hotels, rental shops, major shrines and temples promote their own Shichigosan sets. Information leaflets often arrive directly to the homes of families with small children. Magazines addressing the segment of young mothers edit special numbers providing a wide range of information concerning practical matters around the celebration. The proliferation of these services can be explained by diverse factors. First, there is an increased competitiveness of the market due to the lower number

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<sup>174</sup> See further discussion of this survey and its findings in Chapter VII.

of children in the society. With falling birth rate the market needs to compete for less children. Department stores and retail shops selling festive outfits launch their Shichigosan sale already in July and August. Although the demand for sumptuous dresses is continuing, recently famous brands have becoming popular and outfits of famous designers (often with extravagant styles) witness a growing interest. The prices range from the most expensive outfit for 780 000 Yen to a simple kimono costing 30 000 Yen. Including accessories, the total cost for a sumptuous festive traditional outfit can arrive at 1 500 000 Yen. The ‘gorgeous Shichigosan’ (豪華七五三), a term appearing frequently in the media, points to an escalating process when always more extravagant and pompous manners become trendy. Resembling the interwar and postwar years, media articles, when commenting on these phenomena, at times mingle ironic tone with encouragement. Parents that indulge their children are labeled for example ‘doting parents’ (*oyabaka* 親馬鹿). At other times, parental conduct is justified by journalists when they describe Shichigosan as unique and a once-in-lifetime occasion (DIME 2005, November 17). Special Shichigosan sets, called ‘*oyabaka* Shichigosan’ (indulging Shichigosan), are introduced on the pages of the magazines to stir interests on the side of those families which seek extraordinary experience. These can be sets provided by photo studios that offer a special ambience, for example by reproducing a real professional setting when models are photographed. Here children can imagine themselves as and feel like a movie star or like a famous model from the world of fashion. Special sets can as well include trips abroad or overnight stays in hotels and spa centers for the time of the celebration. In recent years, it has become popular to celebrate Shichigosan abroad (Shūkan Shinchō 2005, September 8). Several travel agencies provide Shichigosan-trips to Honolulu. Here families have the possibility to observe the shrine ritual in one of the local Shinto shrines. The managers of one of these agencies explained the demand for these options by the growing availability of financial means in the hands of the parents, in particular in families with an only-child. In 2005, in Kinki area, during the two months of October and November, nearly every day there were families who left for Shichigosan trip to Hawaii. The price of the tour moves around 325 000 Yen for a family (two adults plus one child), and it comprises all main requisites of the celebration: shrine purification rite, rental fee

of dress, *chitoseame*.<sup>175</sup> Hawaii is seen as an ideal place for organizing ceremonies such as Shichigosan also because it is beloved by the Japanese couples willing to celebrate their wedding abroad.<sup>176</sup> Several factors contribute to it. First of all it is the availability of two Shinto shrines with a Japanese-speaking staff. Added by the experience of organizing ceremonial occasions such as weddings since the 1990s, Japanese tourist agencies feel at ease to offer the place as an ideal spot for the Shichigosan celebration.<sup>177</sup> The Hawaii option is chosen in particular by families which desire a non-everyday, extraordinary experience. An article that provides a long and detailed list of all tourist agencies that offer 'Hawaii Shichigosan', added also an ironic comment at the end of the article: "Times will arrive when we will go abroad to eat sushi, too" (Shūkan Shinchō 2005, September 8).

Whereas there are families demanding and enjoying these extravagancies, the majority of Japanese families opt for the standard Shichigosan package, first of all, out of convenience. Surveys that childrearing magazines regularly conduct among their readers, offer quite an exact picture of the most recent developments in expenditure for the celebration. COMO is one of those magazines that in the recent years regularly undertake opinion polls among its readers. The results of these surveys are published then on the pages of the magazine. The questionnaires are usually filled in by mothers of children that observed the ritual in the previous year. According to the results of the COMO survey published in 2006, the average expense that families spent on the event in 2005, remained under 100 000 Yen (COMO 2006, September). From an examination of data deriving from surveys in the following years, the number of those families which spent more than this, fell from 26% in 2005, to 18% in 2008 (Como 2009, September). Typically, families usually plan to spend much less than they actually do in the end. In the 2009 COMO survey, 62% of families declared to have planned to spend for the celebration not more than 50 000 Yen; in reality only half of them was successful in sticking to the planned budget. Apart from the cost of the festive dress, it is the photo

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<sup>175</sup> The data refer to 2005.

<sup>176</sup> The number of Japanese couples choosing a foreign country for their wedding ceremony started to grow after 1992. Since then, Hawaii figures among the most popular places (Watabe Wedding S.p.a. on [www.knt.co.jp](http://www.knt.co.jp), accessed 2011, May 20).

<sup>177</sup> The information was obtained from an interview with a tourist agency manager that appeared on [www.knt.co.jp](http://www.knt.co.jp) (accessed on 2011, May 20).

service that figures as the most expensive element of the event. In recent years, major studios are offering their own assortment of festive outfits, usually available for the photo service only and not for taking away.<sup>178</sup> The assortment of outfits is usually rich and include diverse styles, ranging from luxurious Japanese style to princess-like Western outfits and anime character costumes. These of course represent an enormous attraction to children. Since photo studios usually allow children to try on a number of different dresses for free of charge, the quantity of photographs easily increases. Even though only photos selected at the end for developing will be charged for in the end, parents lured by the sight of several cute photos of their children usually decide to purchase a higher number of photos than initially they intended to do. Mothers cheerfully confess on the pages of magazine that they could not resist and since it is an ‘once-in-a-life experience’, they have spent much more than initially intended.

Regarding the festive meal following shrine visit, there is a shift detectable from the COMO surveys. While until the 2000s, it was common to consume the festive meal in a restaurant, in 2005 34% of families consumed this feast in their private homes or in grandparents’ homes. Only 44% of families opted for a restaurant. Though, consuming the festive meal in the family’s home does not necessarily mean that the festive menu will be fully prepared at home. Catering services that deliver selected menus directly to the home on request have increased in recent years. On the other hand, the privacy that a family home assures has its clear advantages. It offers comfort and a relaxed atmosphere for an unlimited time. In case of restaurant meals, too, private rooms have always been preferred for the Shichigosan meal out of concern for the young age of children.

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<sup>178</sup>Contrary to this, rental studios rent out Shichigosan dresses for more days.

## 5.9 Diversification and individualization in celebration manners

The latest developments in Shichigosan celebration patterns could be best characterized by the term ‘diversification’. New types of services and goods continue to be invented by market actors in order to satisfy clients’ needs. The business sector centering around Shichigosan has been recently joined by entertainment parks. Amusement parks, such as the Disneyland or the Sanrio Puroland, offer now their own Shichigosan programs. During the peak days of the celebration in November, famous personalities known from the media and popular anime characters are staged to welcome children arriving there to celebrate their Shichigosan. The parks thus efficiently capitalize on the popularity that surrounds the world of celebs. Children are photographed with famous personalities, such as Hello Kitty, Cinnamon, My Melody, who wear kimono or *hakama* in order to harmonize with children dressed in festive Japanese outfit. ‘Promptness’ and ‘convenience’ are the keywords that emerge with frequency in the texts of the advertisements of these facilities. Contrary to the professional photo studios where a Shichigosan session can take several hours long, in amusement parks there is a set limit for the duration of the photo session. It is not allowed to exceed eight minutes including the time required for the change of dress. Considering that a photo session in a standard photo studio can take up to three-four hours long, the eight minutes limit set by these facilities is extremely contained. Since to put on a traditional Japanese dress requires assistance as well as considerable time, the kimono provided by the amusement parks are simple and made in a way that renders it easy and quick to wear (‘one-touch’ method), without the need of external assistance. This ‘entertainment’ version of Shichigosan celebration clearly places accent on amusement and play, with little reference to the notion of tradition and almost no association to religion. The celebration serves only as a pretext to visit the park and to offer the child a day full of entertainment. Families preferring these programs are often those which leave the choice of the place and manner of celebration to their children. “We asked my daughter what she wants to do for Shichigosan, and her desire was to go to Puroland”, says one mother in a blog on the net. Nevertheless, the family-event character of the celebration remains preserved also in

these cases. The day spent together will be preserved as a reminder of a pleasant, child-parent time in the family's photo album.

Major metropolitan hotels also come up with always more elaborate Shichigosan offers. In 2002, an article in *Nihon Keiei Shinbunsha* (2002, October 31) informed about a new type of Shichigosan package offered by first-class hotels. It comprises complex services including all standard elements of the usual celebration pattern. The most striking difference compared to other similar packages provided by hotels in the past, is the availability of the shrine purification ritual within the premises of the hotel. While in the past the usual pattern was to secure a collaboration with one of the shrines in the neighborhood of the hotel, in this version the shrine ritual is arranged in a room appositely set up for the purification rite. It is performed by a Shinto priest who is invited for the occasion. Another novelty offered by the package is the possibility to choose the option of a 'private' ritual, i.e. a ritual performed appositely for the single family. Shrines do not usually provide purification rituals for single families. The elevated number of visitors in the Shichigosan period would make this impossible and therefore families join in small groups according to the order of their application. These hotel packages target principally families which wish to avoid all the fussing on the day of the shrine visit, the going and coming between the several spots, shrine, restaurant and photo studio. The journal article mentions that similar packages have been offered since 1999 by a few high-class hotels in metropolitan cities, but now, due to the growing demand, an increasing number of hotels are joining the trend.

The multiplicity of celebration options can be seen as the market's reaction to a demand on the side of the families for more diversification. Ishii notes that recent social tendencies, such as the ever growing individualization and privatization of the lives of the Japanese, exercise their impact also on the ritual culture (Ishii 2009, 204-205). While the standardization of Shichigosan pattern has been accomplished by the 1970s – 1980s, the early 1990s brought again important alterations in celebration modes due to the overall changes affecting the Japanese society. An always stronger more accent started to be placed on individualism, on individual needs which brought about a shift towards diversification of personal choices. During the 1980s Japanese consumers were described

by sociologists as representing a fairly uniform mass (*taishū*大衆), but starting from the early 1990s this ‘mass’ began to be seen as more fragmented (*bunshū*分衆) with differentiated taste, needs and life-style views (Ivy 1993, 253). Personal taste, more accent on the individual and individualized behavior started to be given always more value by the Japanese. These changes were reflected in consumption patterns too, where emphasis on specific individual desires started to be observable. Advertisement industry, mass media as well as manufacturers built on these new trends and at the same time, they defined consumption patterns. The diversification and individualization of consumption practices came to be reflected both in consumers’ choices when deciding the details of the celebration mode of Shichigosan, and in goods and services provided by the market.

Aspects such as individual convenience and personal preference of single families are becoming today determinant in the organization of Shichigosan. ‘Match it to your personal taste and convenience’, ‘select patterns according to your family’s preference’, are recommendations frequently given by etiquette specialists or echoed on the pages of journals. The diversification of celebration manners is reflected also in the results of surveys conducted by childrearing web sites, such as for example the MikiHouse ([www.mikihouse-co.jp](http://www.mikihouse-co.jp)). The results of its 2010 survey affirmed that parents today prefer, and indeed feel entitled, to decide by themselves which aspect of the celebration to highlight and which modality of the celebration to choose.<sup>179</sup> Indeed, a wide range of choices is available and carefully weighed and selected by the families. An accompanying phenomenon is the move of the date away from the traditional celebration period. Shichigosan celebration today can take place also in periods that have no relation to the traditional date of the observance (November 15<sup>th</sup>). Though it is still not a mainstream trend, there are cases of families which observe the ritual in August or in January. In these cases, individual convenience and preference overweighs completely any adherence to tradition and custom. The reasons for selecting a date out from the October-November period can be many-fold. August is convenient because of the availability of air-conditioned restaurant rooms, for example. In this way, weather conditions that often hamper the pleasant outcome of the event in November, lose their relevance. January can

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<sup>179</sup> Survey results available on [www.happy-note.com/research](http://www.happy-note.com/research) (accessed on 2011, December 12).

be preferred by families which temporarily live abroad and return home for the New Year's holidays.<sup>180</sup> Also, it can be considerably cheaper to rent a Shichigosan festive dress out of the peak season (even though not all studios have this service throughout the year). Another non standard pattern is when the shrine visit and the purification rite is entirely quitted. In this case, the celebration is limited to the festive meal and photographing.<sup>181</sup> A similar tendency can be observed also in the case of *seijinshiki*, the coming of age ritual organized conventionally by municipalities. The traditional date of this public ceremony is the second Monday in January. However, in recent years there is a growing popularity of private *seijinshiki* parties. The date to hold these parties can be anytime throughout the year, though the month of August is particularly preferred. Contrary to the official *seijinshiki* organized by municipalities, these events are wholly arranged by young adults, usually classmates from high school, and additionally former teachers can be invited, too. Again, motivations for organizing a private *seijinshiki* are multiple. One reason explain this development is that there is a number of high schools in Japan that gather pupils from several municipalities and this means that former classmates would not necessarily participate in the same *seijinshiki* event organized by the municipality of belonging. In the last 10-15 years, *seijinshiki* is increasingly regarded by young people as an opportunity for a reunion of old classmates. The privately organized events guarantee this and thereby, they are sometimes preferred to the public events at which belonging to a given territory, rather than to a given school, is emphasized.<sup>182</sup> In addition, the official period of the public ceremony in January is a full winter period. Since most young women wear the traditional Japanese outfit for this occasion, the summer period is thought to be more comfortable and pleasant, given the fact that in summer moving around in kimono is easier and hotels, where these 'coming-of-age' parties take usually place, provide restaurants with air conditioning.

The individualization of choice of celebration patterns can be noted also in the decision that regards the age of children at Shichigosan. The difference given by the two age-counting system, the traditional *kazoetoshi* 数之年 and the modern *mannenreki* 万年曆,

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<sup>180</sup> Information from Anke Hansen, researcher at the Meiji shrine at the time of my interview.

<sup>181</sup> Information obtained from personal interviews.

<sup>182</sup> Information kindly provided personally by Professor Kenji Ishii.

give parents a possibility of choice. The native traditional mode adds one year to the person's age on the first day of each new year. In the past in Japan there was no custom to observe individual birthdays, apart from a few exceptions, such as the first birth day (*hatsutanjō*) or special selected birthdays in old age (see Chapter III). The modes of counting can produce slight differences in the interpretation of the child's age. Families thus have the option to follow either of the two modes and as a result, age of the child at the celebration can differ from family to family, depending wholly on the individual preference. If one opts for the traditional mode of counting, children as young as two years old (not completed three years) can already observe their first Shichigosan rite. Furthermore, in the last few years, the rules of age start to be taken even more loosely by families. The traditional Shichigosan ages, three, five and seven, are becoming only indicative and basically, any age between two and seven is seen as acceptable. The results of the Mikihouse online survey in 2010 also confirm this trend.<sup>183</sup> The gender-based difference of age is blurring, as well. The physical maturity of the child can influence the timing of the celebration, in particular in case of the youngest age cohort, the two-three years old ones. Mothers often take into account whether their child seems to be 'ready' to endure the celebration. Another factor can be the presence of other siblings. Families prefer to perform the ritual simultaneously for both children without regard to the traditional age rule. The combination of two rites of passage is also a popular option, for example the case when the family combines *miyamairi* (first shrine visit of infants) of a younger sibling with Shichigosan of the elder child (see also Shintani et al 2003). In general it can be said, that in present-day Japan for many families rather than 'tradition' it is convenience and considerations regarding the age and physical conditions of the child that figure as a determinant factor in deciding the date (and pattern) of celebrations.

A peculiar development is the 'repeated' and/or 'rehearsal' Shichigosan. 'My son was so cute in the festive dress that we decided to repeat Shichigosan next year again', says one mother for example.<sup>184</sup> The 'repeated' celebration do not normally means that the whole procedure of the celebration (photo, shrine, meal, invitation of grandparents etc.) is performed through. Usually, only some parts of it are performed, most often it is the

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<sup>183</sup> See on [www.happy-note.com/research](http://www.happy-note.com/research) (accessed 2011, March 10).

<sup>184</sup> Source: blog, [www.ma-na.no.blog.jp](http://www.ma-na.no.blog.jp) (accessed 2010, December 12).

shrine visit and the photo service. A further form of the 'repeated celebration' is the 'pre-Shichigosan', a term that indicates trial or rehearsal of the real event. 'Pre-Shichigosan' can take place either during the year prior to the 'true' celebration, or a couple of weeks before the celebration in the form of a rehearsal-photographing and/or a fitting of the festive cloth. These 'rehearsals' usually serve to assure that the 'actual' event will turn out in a most successful way.

Etiquette specialists in magazines, web sites, and etiquette guides also encourage families to create personalized patterns of celebration or to match the mode of celebration to their needs and preferences. Shrines too, though giving detailed information on the traditional customs concerning the celebration of Shichigosan (proper age, dress code, purification ritual), usually underline that families are free to make their own decisions. As it is repeated on various online and printed forums, the most important thing to which families should aspire is the creation of a memorable, i.e. pleasant and joyful event for all members of the family, and in particular for the child.

Lastly, the diversification of options available at Shichigosan has also to do with the increase of the entertainment aspects in the ritual pattern. The phenomenon of the increasing presence of ludic aspects has been noted by several studies on contemporary ritual practice. Jeremy Boissevain argues that this phenomenon often underlies the revival or expansion of ritual (1992c, 147). The author analyzed a devotional ritual in a Maltese community discerning two distinct parts in the ritual: the so called 'external' which was more playful and thus open to improvisation, and the 'internal' part characterized by formal rules. Boissevain described the 'external' part as more susceptible to change, and the 'internal' part as more stable in form. A similar division between external-internal division could be applied to Shichigosan, too. The shrine worship would stand here for the internal part and as such it is indeed distinguished by more rigid rules, solemnity and less apt for change. Whereas the photo session together with all other options available at the market can be seen as the external session which provide space for creative innovation and a play mode. The ludic elements enable actors to express their individuality, their preferences. In an ideal case, the two parts, though, preserve a balance between each other.

## 5.10 The role of the media

Starting from the 1980s, Japan has been described as an information society, i.e. marked by media saturation and a vast advertising industry. Information is available through a variety of sources, such as magazines, internet, advertising, which in turn exercise stimuli for further consumption of goods and services, generates and promotes new trends, lifestyles, and leisure activities. Clammer defines the role of the media in Japan as the “mediating link” which makes popular culture merge into the mainstream (Clammer 1997, 19). In other words, many of the current socio-cultural changes are mediated and disseminated through the media and then appropriated by consumers.

The impact of media on ritual needs to be addressed in more general terms. Media analysts argue that the media exercise a considerable impact not only on the perception of ritual but on its practice, too. Enthronement rites, royal weddings are today broadcast on television and radio. It gives the possibility for millions of people to participate – even though only passively - in these rites. The television takes over some of the functions of the ritual, and at the same time it alters the ritual itself. Takashi Fujitani’s study offers an insight in the character and degree of the impact of the mass media on major public ceremonies, such as the imperial funeral of Hirohito or the marriage ceremony of Crown Prince Naruhito (Fujitani 1992). It shows that television, and in general the media, indeed, is capable to shape ritual practice as well as the individual perception of ritual experience. It can contribute significantly to the transformation of ritual culture in the given cultural context. Print and electronic media add new elements to ritual, be it traditional, re-invented or newly created. Another dimension of this aspect is to be found in the mythologizing effect that the media possesses. The media often creates narratives and involve spectators to participate in the creation of an emotionally loaded experience (Bell 2009, 245). In brief, media can suggest new cultural ideas and/or interpretations of existing ones, and in this way it contributes to the creation of the individual imaginary.

With regard, Joy Hendry notes that electronic and print media add “a public dimension to socialisation, even in the home” (Hendry 1986, 57). The media affects the way mothers socialize their children, as well as it contributes to the homogenization of customs concerning childrearing practices.

The media’s effect on ritual culture is many-fold. It shapes the festive calendar and alters celebration patterns. On one hand, this happens by defining readers’ (or spectators’) perception of “what is aesthetically desirable and stylistically correct” (Van de Port 2006, 144) and by modifying the aesthetic taste and standards of readers (Moeran 1995). Mattijs Van de Port examined television’s role as authorizing agent in the case of a particular religious event and found out that broadcasting and the modalities chosen by the particular broadcasting agent can contribute to the upgrading of the religious event. On the other hand, the media interacts with people and with all cultural mediums, rituals and celebrations included. Magazines actively shape the meaning and pattern of contemporary ceremonial occasions. Not only new services and goods are offered on the pages of magazines, but new patterns and new interpretations are suggested as well. The kind of information the editors decide to pick up in the articles, the way a certain theme is treated, all affect readers’ perception and imagination. In the case of Shichigosan, magazines and newspapers have significantly affected the course of the celebration’s development. First, newspapers reported on the celebration regularly since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In postwar decades, with the expansion of newspaper and magazine readership, reports and photos illustrating the celebration majorly contributed to the diffusion of the urban Shichigosan pattern from the Tokyo area to the rest of Japan. Second, starting from the 1970s, magazine editors recognized a potentiality hidden in life-cycle and seasonal rituals. The smart use of cultural characteristics as potential instruments to widen readership has been described as typical to Japanese print media. Studies in the edited volume of Skov and Moeran depict several cases of the use of cultural themes, cultural predilections by editors of women magazines for the scope to raise advertising sales and to satisfy readers’ tastes (Skov and Moeran 1995b). The “unique sense of seasonality” is typically exploited by the Japanese marketplace in order to enhance domestic consumption (Daniels 2009, 172). The festive calendar plays an important role in defining the commercial calendar of department stores and of several

industries, as Ishii argues (Ishii 2009). Seasonal commodities on display in the stores, are changing according to the actual festivity, be it Christmas or Boys' Festival (*tango no sekku*). The rhythm of the calendar year is given by the arriving and passing festivities mirrored in the department store displays and shelves.

Today, magazines that target mothers of young children, treat Shichigosan as a major event in the life of child and family. They regularly publish reports on the event, enriched by advices, personal accounts of mothers and presentations of new services and products. Major magazines launch special issues on Shichigosan, usually a couple of month prior to the date of the event (in August and September). In 2009, the special Shichigosan insert in COMO's October issue had 36 pages with color photos covering all imaginable aspects of the celebration. The length of a similar insert in the magazine of Sesame was 20 pages long, in Akasugi, 10 pages. Childrearing magazines are not the only periodicals to include topics related to Shichigosan. Magazines focusing on the traditional Japanese fashion also publish Shichigosan-specials during the autumnal period. Furthermore, several magazines conduct regular surveys on Shichigosan. The surveys address families with Shichigosan-age children, but principally mothers are those who answer the questions. The results of the questionnaires plus comments of their authors are then made available for viewing to all readers. COMO's surveys have become a regular affair; each September an overall report with exact data is published in the magazine to inform readers about the latest trends and tendencies in celebration manners. Statistical data deriving from the questionnaire are always complemented with personal accounts of families with Shichigosan experience accompanied with their photos. These accounts usually include the description of the family's celebration with a detailed time schedule that the family followed at the planning of the event, costs, and other details. Apart from this, special inserts always bring advices of etiquette specialists, of fashion experts (both for Japanese traditional wear and Western style ceremonial wear), lists of recommended restaurants, descriptions of popular Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. These information are very useful to readers who are just planning their own Shichigosan event. Readers obtain a big amount of first-hand experience which they can use to make their own decisions. Magazines, in this way, play out a two-fold function: first, they promote new services, goods and commercial opportunities. Second, by publishing the personal

accounts of individual families, the editors provide a space where mothers can share their experience (these accounts are only formally edited). In this way, an impression is created that the magazine is here first of all for readers, and not vice versa.

Themes such as the historical origins of childhood rites of passage, also find their place in magazines. Approximately the same set of key information is provided each year with regard: a brief note on the meaning of the three historical age rites (*kamioki*, *hakamagi* and *obitoki*) combined with an explanation of the appropriate dress code. Most persons do not know the historical and folklore background of these age rites thereby, this part of the articles can be of interest to many. On the other hand, the historical explanations with references to a centuries-old tradition, don the celebration with patina and create a sense of continuity with the past. This link with the past legitimates the custom, gives it the sense of authenticity, but at the same time it also puts a veil on the fact that the social context, that gave legitimization to historical forms of age celebrations, has since undergone a complete transformation. By stressing the celebration's link to the past, and by representing Shichigosan as part of cultural traditions, the media also plays on the quest for nostalgia.<sup>185</sup> In brief, articles about Shichigosan smartly combine themes relating to traditions with references to modern, contemporary elements. Notions to traditions vest with authenticity even the most 'untraditional' options and the newest trends in the celebration.

## 5.11 Conclusions

The dismantling of the economic and political structures that used to constitute the base of rural pre-Meiji community life, was completed in the postwar decades. The community based life style and relating customs were slowly vanishing and new customs or altered forms of old customs stepped in to replace them. Besides, the development of

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<sup>185</sup> See a further discussion of this theme in Chapter VI.

means of mass communication and urbanization have contributed to the gradual homogenization of the differences that so far divided urban and rural standards of living.

The 1960s and 1970s marked the rise of consumerism, the growth of service sector and an intense commercialization of the festive calendar. This affected to a great degree the ritual culture of the Japanese. New festivities have been introduced and found acceptance, such as the Christmas, Valentine's Day, while old festivities were undergoing important changes, such as the New Year's festivities or weddings. In the case of Shichigosan, the commercial sector, among others the textile industry, retail and service sector, hand in hand with print and later electronic media had much interests in transforming the ceremonial occasion of Shichigosan into a profitable activity. On the other hand, however, the commercialization of several aspects of the celebration contributed greatly to the popularization as well as to the perpetuation of the ritual.

Nevertheless, as Ishii and Edwards argue, not all attempts of the commercial sector to popularize new festive occasions or new celebration patterns proved to be always successful (Edwards 1989, Ishii 2009). The commercial sector's efforts to establish the custom of Secretary's Day in Japan met little positive response, for instance. Similarly, the promotion of Valentine's Day witnessed little or no success in the beginning (Ishii 2009, 50). The introduction of the Valentine's Day into Japan was attempted already in the latter half of the 1950s when the chocolate industry joined by major department stores tried to launch a campaign with the scope to popularize Valentine's Day. The intention was to establish an event that would follow *hina matsuri* (Girls' Day) sale in March, securing so a flow of continuous sale occasions. Sales generated by Valentine's Day was slowly rising until 1968, but afterwards it sharply declined. The popularity of Valentine's Day restarted only around the end of 1970s when female pupils of middle and high schools picked up the custom as an occasion for confessing their intimate feelings to a chosen boyfriend in the form of a chocolate gift (Ishii 2009, 50-54). The sales of chocolates started to increase and the festivity has been enjoying a popularity since then. In spite of the efforts showed by the marketplace, the custom spread only after it found an adequate response on the side of a significant segment of the population. Also, the

foreign custom has been gradually adapted to the native cultural context where the celebration took on a unique pattern.

The impact of the marketplace on the ritual culture is hardly a one-way process. On one hand, the market promptly responds to demands that emerge in the society and tries to exploit them as much as possible. On the other hand, the instituting of new customs is almost always conditioned by the acceptance on the side of wide segments of individuals. Consumption is not solely an economic behavior, as Clammer points out, it is embedded in the social, religious, and historical context of the given culture (Clammer 1997, 8). Social and cultural factors influence to a great extent customers' choices. In the case of Shichigosan, consumption, display and a quest for an aesthetic experience, all integral elements of the celebration since the Tokugawa period, underwent further expansion in the postwar decades due to a number of factors, among them the rapid economic growth and changing value orientations. Many celebrations and festivities that in the past used to be observed by the community as a whole, shifted focus from collective to a family-centered celebration. However, this development is not unique to Japan solely. The changes in the ritual culture occurred, in a quite similar way, within other modern societies, too. The emergence of the family-centered celebration in 19<sup>th</sup> century's North America, for example, is explained by Elisabeth Pleck with the rise of the middle class and with the dissolving of the communal life style (Pleck 2000, 6). The authors call this development the triumph of the urban middle class and underlines that in America, market agents to promote these festivities used first of all the ideology of the family home and the romantic images of the family (Pleck 2000, see also Schmidt 1995).<sup>186</sup> On the other hand, changes in the American ritual culture brought about a drastic decrease in the number of the observed rituals and the simplification of the continuing ones. As a result, the wedding rite gradually started to be regarded the most important of all rituals in the lives of the Americans at which the significance of the happy occasion is emphasized first of all by conspicuous consumption.

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<sup>186</sup>Pleck also notes that the fact that the American society places emphasis on the celebration of wedding, and much less on funeral, demonstrates the difficulty with which the Americans approach issues associated with the theme of death (Pleck 2000, 9).

With regard to the commercialization of the festive calendar that occurred in Japan, it needs to be noted that this kind of ‘exploitation’ by the market is not a recent phenomenon in the Japanese cultural context. Kuraishi described the festive calendar of Edo town in the 18-19<sup>th</sup> century as heavily affected by the activities of merchants rather than by the agricultural mode of production (Kuraishi 1990, 266-268). On the other hand, the link between consumption and ritual needs also to be acknowledged. Consumption, of food or of other material items, have been always inherent in ritual practice in both traditional and industrial societies. Consumption and conspicuous spending do have the capability to enhance in a very efficient and visible way the importance of the celebration and add a glamour to it. Moreover, goods (or in modern times, also services) used or consumed in a ritual setting, acquire a particular meaning and communicate symbolic meanings to the participants (Douglas and Isherwood 1979). Nevertheless, the emergence of conspicuous consumption in the context of a ritual is often perceived by social commentators and critics as a threat. This threatening nature of consumption, or simply the presence of advertisements for example, is explained by Belk et al as a fear from the trivialization of the ‘sacredness’ of ritual, as if consumption would have the potential to trivialize and somehow to contaminate the experience. The mixing of the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane’ elements are thought thus to ‘desacralize’ the ritual (Belk et al. 1989). Another element that is often seen as threatening the authenticity of the ritual experience is the introduction of ludic elements into the ritual pattern. Entertaining aspects are often judged as ‘less elevate’ in a ritual experience and thus less important. Examples for such approaches come in big numbers from both popular writings and scholarly literature.<sup>187</sup>

The notion of ‘desacralization’ is however ignored by the average observer whose scope is to give an adequate importance to the symbolic value of the event. Conspicuous consumption can effectively convey the extraordinariness of the event to all participants. Also, in Japan, where consumer culture has a tradition over two centuries long already,

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<sup>187</sup> A recent example is quoted by Elisabetta Porcu when she refers to the words of the Japanese renowned folklorist and religionist, Tōru Yagi, complaining over the prevalence of ludic aspects in the Gion festival which he sees as the sign of the secularization of the festival. Yagi called for the need to return to the past form when faith was the ruling principle of the festival (Hinatani 2011 quoted in Porcu 2012, 102). On the role of ludic elements in contemporary ritual forms see also the study of Jeremy Boissevain 1992c.

consumption can be seen as a cultural practice deeply rooted in the social life of the individuals. It certainly should not be seen as lessening the meaning and significance that these celebrations represent for the observers and for the society in general. Consumption needs to be seen as an interactive process between two parts, the consumer and the marketplace. In a similar line of thought, consumption practices can be viewed as integral part in the process through which 'ritual experience' is being created by families, celebrating for example Shichigosan. Due to the variety and the multiplicity of choices, goods, services and patterns available to families, the molding of this experience becomes an active rather than passive act. It can be seen as a truly creative work whose performance can satisfy desires and needs of both individual and family. Shichigosan thus becomes a platform that provide space to variability and plurality.

Rituals, even those claimed to be traditional, are never static events, they reflect changes in the social as well as economical context of the examined culture. They are cultural phenomena and as such they cannot remain excluded from the stream of changes taking place within the society. While in this chapter I focused on changes of economic character in the next chapter I am concerned with the social aspects of the ritual and the way ritual reflects basic social relationships within the family.

## **6. SOCIAL ASPECTS OF SHICHIGOSAN**

### **6.1 Introduction**

Rituals necessarily unfold the social dimension. They reflect social relations and value orientation characteristic to the social reality in which the ritual in exam is embedded. Rituals also illustrate and challenge at the same time the hierarchy of values specific to that society. In present-day Japan Shichigosan is celebrated typically in the form of a family festivity, and as such, it necessarily reflects social relations and value orientations of the family and of the wider kinship. Moreover, each family member has a clearly defined role in the ritual. As a family celebration, Shichigosan has been influenced by major changes that affected the family institution during the history. It has been influenced also by the changing views on children in the society. Therefore, in this chapter, I would like to examine the process in which the identity of the family as institution is being constructed within the ritual experience and during the preparation of the celebration. In order to do so, the social dimensions of Shichigosan needs to be analyzed by looking at the actors-observers as and at their social context. Ritual also plays out important notions that the given society holds out as ideals, therefore, I will examine the nature of these ideals as reflected in the preparation and the performance of Shichigosan. The evolution of these ideals will be followed in a chronological perspective, with particular attention to the postwar history of Japan.

The role of the media in the creation of ritual experience represents the second major theme of this chapter. The media has been discussed so far principally for its role on the market, for its function to provide space for the business sector and thus, to encourage consumption. However, I argue that the role of the media cannot be interpreted exclusively in terms of its commercial function. It is important to acknowledge that media significantly contributes to the creation of a meaningful ritual experience for the

actors. This occurs in twofold way. First, media plays an important role in the transmission of ritual knowledge. Traditional sources of knowledge, represented in the past first of all by elder members of the family and of the community, have gradually become obsolete due to the changed life conditions. Today, grandmothers and mothers-in-law, do not typically provide knowledge on household management or on celebration manners. In the past, kinship ties and neighborhood relations, based on daily personal contact, served also as an effective source of information. The dense network of kinship and neighborhood ties within the community does not exist anymore in the urban settings of nuclear families. Here, the media stepped in as the most important source of information and advice for an overwhelmingly big segments of individuals.

Second, the media not solely provides information and advice. It partakes in the symbolical construction of the image of the family. The Japanese family today is generally a nuclear type family consisting of the married couple and one or two children. The traditional '*ie*' structure that characterized family institution in pre-war Japan, has been replaced by the nuclear family which does not hold the support of an extensive kinship. As such, it is relatively vulnerable and in need of self-affirmation. Family rituals, such as Shichigosan, can serve to effectively affirm the family identity as a social and psychological entity, and the media has an important role in this process. It can work as a mirror which reflects and at the same time validates the affirmation of the family both in the eyes of the single members of the family and of the wider public. On the other hand, the media has an active share in the preparation phase of the Shichigosan celebration. It provides public space for narratives of personal stories. Family members, first of all mothers as principal organizers of this celebration, re-tell the highs and lows of the celebrations, they share personal experiences with a big number of readers on the pages of magazines and online media. With its diversified activities through articles, surveys, advertisement, advice corners, the media not only gives an effective support to families, but it also redefines the social positions of actors within the ritual and thus within the family (stressing the importance of fathers or of grandparents in the event for instance). In this way, the media assists in the construction of a meaningful occasion and in a certain sense, it partly complements the missing or weakened community networks.

Although the principal lines of the changing social context of the Japanese family have been already depicted in the previous chapters, here I give a more thorough overview of the transformations that Japanese family was going through in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The socio-economic forces, that most greatly affected the family during this period, will be analyzed. The shifts in views on children in the Japanese society and changes in their position within the family will be discussed in a wider temporal span reaching back to the pre-war times. Values and ideas concerning the figure of child have altered greatly in the last century, and this became reflected in celebration patterns, too. Some parts of this chapter complement themes discussed in previous chapters, as the two sides, the commercial and the social aspects of the event, cannot be separated always so neatly. However, in general I will focus on actors-observers and on the way they interact with each other and with the media.

## **6.2 Birth of the ‘modern family’ in the interwar period**

In 1898, the Meiji Civil Code declared the old family model, the *ie* to be the basic unit of the society. This model was based on Confucian principles which organized the position of members within the family hierarchically. The model in question was typical first of all to the samurai class of the pre-Meiji period but the Civil Code aimed to broaden it to all levels of the society. It gave the male head of the family absolute authority over family members. Men had the right to keep control of the family property and inheritance, approve or disapprove of marriages and choices of residence of the rest of the family (Hendry 1981). The official politics chose this model also as a means to keep under control reform efforts, such as for example female movement calls for ensuring women’s rights. The *ie* model lasted, at least legally, until the end of World War II when

the traditional household system was officially abolished.<sup>188</sup> The new constitution in 1946 stated the nuclear family as the legal unit of the society, defined as based on the conjugal relation and the offspring, not including the wider kinship. This changes had important implications also on the inheritance system and on the position of single individual within the family.

As Merry White underlines, the family, however, was not only a passive recipient of political decisions and economic impacts, but also an important source of change in the pre-war era (White 1996, 209). Moreover, it can be said that these changes have been primarily centered around the figure of women. Their role as mothers, wives, and grandmothers, but also as work force on the labor market has been greatly affected by the overall socio-economic changes taking place in the Japanese society. Around the turn of the century, the image of the ideal family started to change. The family model based on the *ie* structure started to be perceived as inadequate for the scopes of the modern image of Japan. The new model gave a central role to women within the family and defined this role primarily within the private sphere of the family (Ambaras 1998). As a consequence, the public role of Japanese women in the society as well as their participation in labor market started to be systematically underplayed. The official ideology became expressed in the popular slogan of the time, ‘Good wife and wise mother’ (*ryōsai kenbo* 良妻賢母), and it determined the way in which for the subsequent decades the Japanese society would look upon women. The promoted idealistic model saw a complete separation of home domain, represented by the housewife, and the public domain, represented by the husband providing financially with his work for the family. This meant that women were expected to govern the domestic sphere by running the household, taking care of children and of the husband’s needs. This kind of development did not occur only in Japan. Western societies too have experienced similar trends, described by social historians as the upheaval of the ‘cult of domesticity’ (Schmidt 1995, Pleck 2000). In Japan, however, this also meant that women became responsible for the financial management of the

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<sup>188</sup> Traditional structures still persist in some peculiar and rural settings. Joy Hendry points to the continuing relevance of the ideology linked to the *ie* system in rural areas of postwar Japan (Hendry 1986, see also on this subject Hendry 1981).

household. Mertz el argues that it was due to this ideology that women started to be identified more with the ‘demand’ side and less with the production side of the country’s economy (Mertz el 2004, 327).

The official ideology, though, often differed from the reality. In the *ie* model which was prevalent mainly in the rural areas, relationships were defined principally on the base of the length of the person’s permanence in the household (Hendry 1981, 14-26). After the wedding, young wives usually moved to the household of the husband’s family and their initial position within the new household was very weak. It improved only with time and in particular upon the birth of the first male child who was the future heir of the household. The bride typically was under the direct supervision of her mother-in-law who did not entirely cede her power in the household until the husband’s official retirement from the position of the head of the family. Besides, it was expected that young wives actively participate in the economic activity of the household and their contribution in the form of their labour was often needed more than their work as care taker of children. Besides, the care of children was divided between mother-in-law and mother in a way that mother-in-law was expected to provide the principles of child-rearing (*atama wo tsukau hito* 頭使 人) and mother to provide the manual labor necessary for child-rearing (*karada wo tsukau hito* 体使 人) (Tsuru 2005, 70).

With the proceeding modernization in the 1920s and 1930s, the transformation of production modes and living conditions brought about significant changes in family structures, too. These changes reached first families living in urban settings of big towns and only later, in the postwar decades, it reached those living in rural areas. Already in the interwar years, the high grade of urbanization and industrialization drove big numbers of persons into the metropolitan areas where they established families belonging to the nuclear type. These families found themselves geographically separated from relatives and thus, far away from social obligations typical to close-knit rural communities. Modern conditions of urban housing (conditioned also by the small size of apartments), altered work modes and life-style made it increasingly difficult to adhere to traditional family values. In urban areas, husbands spent long hours away from home, employed in one of the many newly established factories or companies; wives were left alone to look

after the household and children. Young wives found themselves in a position untied by the rule of mothers-in-law, but in exchange, they could not rely on the help of other kin members regarding household tasks and child-rearing. They became the principal care takers of their children. Moreover, women's labor as full-time housewives became a physical condition for maintaining the family where the husband was absent in the big part of the day.

The pattern of female life-cycle went through a transformation, as well. For women born in the latter half of the Meiji era (the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries), it was typical to give birth to five children over a period of twelve years (Yoshizumi 1995a, 2-3). The length of this period shrank to half for women born in 1927 (the youngest of the children being born at 30) as number of children born to a family was gradually declining, arriving to 4.27 children per family in 1940. At the same time, life expectancy grew from 63 to 70 years. The decline of fertility rate was reversed in the immediate post-war years of the baby-boom but returned to a shrinking tendency again after 1950 (in 1952 the rate was at 3.5) (Yoshizumi 1995b, 4-5).

### **6.3 Women and family in postwar Japan**

After Japan recovered from the war disaster, the social trends initiated in the interwar era continued to unfold in an ever speeding manner. The two decades after the end of World War II witnessed an important change also in the economic conditions of the Japanese families. While the immediate postwar years were still years of economic hardship for most Japanese families, the two decades of the 1950s and 1960s were marked by a rapid economic growth. In this period Japan has accomplished its transformation from an agriculture based economy to an economy supported by large-scale industrialization, mass-scale production and growing service sector (Tipton 2008, 178). Urbanization affecting the lives of a part of the population already prior to the war, now started to alter

greatly the lives of families both in urban and rural areas. The ongoing changes were so great that scholars regard this period as one of the most profound transformations of the postwar Japanese society. During this period Japan witnessed the “assimilation of rural Japan into a national metropolitan culture” (Ivy 1993, 250). One of the most visible changes related to the family was the diffusion of the image of the middle-class lifestyle. The ideal of the middle-class lifestyle as standard model for all Japanese emerged already in the interwar period (Jones 2010). But while in that period to achieve middle-class standards of living was possible only to a minority of the population, now it became a realistic goal not for urban families solely but increasingly for rural families, too (Vogel 1963). By the beginning of the 1960s most Japanese families already considered themselves as belonging to the middle-class.

The middle-class family pattern and life-style was modeled after the so-called ‘*sarariman* family’ residing in one of the many suburbs of Japan. This, however, required the presence and support of a full-time housewife. Women became solely responsible for the running of the day-to-day management of the house. The breadwinner was the man but the household economy was mostly in the hand of the housewife, who received a central role in the practical creation of the middle-class pattern of living. This pattern had clearly its prerequisites on the material level, too. The knowledge informing this modern life-style, visual images and material culture, were propagated and channeled to housewives by the media and the world of advertisements, via newspapers, journals, and women magazines. From the early 1960s, the new media, the television started to exercise a growing influence (Tipton 2008, 180). Apart from these channels, the immediate neighborhood where housewives spent most of their time, served as important platforms for knowledge-sharing, for confrontation, and for display. Studies done by Ronald Dore in the 1950s and later by Ezra Vogel in the 1960s in Tokyo, illustrate the degree of importance that relations within neighborhoods represented in the lives of the families, in particular from the viewpoint of housewives (Dore 1958, Vogel 1963). As these two studies demonstrate, the middle-class life pattern came to be majorly expressed through consumption and notions such as prestige and display, received a particular importance in the housewives’ value system. As consumption started to occupy a significant place in the everyday lives of always more families, certain goods started to be valued for their symbolic value. For

example goods that stood for the period's technological progress, such as electric appliances became seen as requisites of the middle-class life-style. It was in this period, that women's role as consumers, in contrast to men as producers, became definitely affirmed in the Japanese society (Linhart 1988, 286).

In the 1960s, a new phenomenon emerged. It found its expression in the term, 'my-homism' (*mairoomushugi* マイホーム主義, from the word 'my home') (White 1996). The term, widely used by the media and by marketing texts of the business sector, was associated both with the desire to own a private family home and with the notion of an altered image of the family. The phenomenon emerged along the trend that saw an increasing valorization of the family life and within it, of the space that the individual member occupied. It was the period when 'private life' as such was started to be valued by a growing number of Japanese. This phenomenon gave a different interpretation to the family and to the goals that the family was expected to live for. Whereas traditional views placed importance on common goals represented by the family as a whole, now the happiness of the single members of the family, in other words, a happiness of a private kind, started to be valued. Ideals, such as sacrifice of one's own happiness for the interests of a wider family or of the whole nation, typical to the pre-war Japanese society, were not seen any more as desirable or necessary. This kind of ideology of the family, based on the individual members' desires and preferences, was embraced by many families as something new and liberating. Yoshiyuki Sakamoto notes in his study on the changes regarding the national character of the Japanese that one of the most dramatic change affecting the Japanese national character in postwar decades concerns this prioritization of the private life (Sakamoto 2000 quoted in Kokugakuin 2006, 2).

On the material level, acquisition and consumption of certain goods started to be regarded as one of the ways to achieve as well as generate this ideal. With improved economic conditions, the above mentioned electric appliances have been joined by the family car and the family home, as requisites of the ideal image of the home and of the family. The rise of leisure activities was also a significant marker of the shift towards the valorization of the individual and private family life. Expenditure on leisure was steadily rising during the 1960s and 1970s. Leisure became not only more available but also desirable, to an

extent that, as Nishimura notes, it had no precedence in the earlier history of Japan (Nishimura 2006, 272). On the other hand, this process of the privatization of social life has brought about, in the following decades, a considerable shrinking of social networks (Ivy 1993).

Together with the above described processes, significant changes were taking place in women's life-cycle too. The average age for marriage as well as the age of women at the birth of their first child have been postponed compared to the pre-war period. After the end of the war, women married around their 23 years of age. In 1980s, it moved to 26 years and since then, the age of marriage continues to slowly rise. The phenomenon of delayed marriage age is often explained by the growing participation of women in the labor market since the 1980s. Another factor contributing to the changes, is the rising level of education among women in postwar Japan. However, as the studies included in the edited volume by Inoue and Ehara demonstrate, a number of other factors, too, needs to be taken into consideration (Inoue and Ehara 1995). Among others, the problems related to absence of the figure of fathers in the everyday life of the family also accounts for a weakening desire of women to establish families of their own. Indeed, Japanese mothers are left alone during the trying period of child-rearing. How hard the first years of child-rearing can become for young mothers is illustrated by the term, *ikuji jigoku* 育児地獄, literally 'childrearing hell', which is used to call the period stretching from the birth of the child to the age when the child enters school. Also, due to the rising level of education of the Japanese women, an increasing number of women decide, if not to renounce, but at least to postpone the time when they are forced to give up employment in order to dedicate themselves to the family.<sup>189</sup> Today Japanese housewives belong to the most educated housewives of the world as they rarely have the possibility to continue the carrier that would correspond to the level of their education (Hendry 2003).<sup>190</sup> The

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<sup>189</sup> Even in present day Japan it is conventionally expected from a woman to give up employment once married.

<sup>190</sup> In the last few years, the employment rate of married women, in particular after children reach school age, is slowly rising. In 2007, more than half of all married women between the age 35 and 39 had some kind of employment though the positions and work done by them only rarely correspond to their education (source: [www.stat.go.jp](http://www.stat.go.jp)).

employment rate of married women typically falls at the birth of the child and remains low during the years when the children are in pre-school age. However, once all children enter school, women can enjoy a certain degree of freedom, unimaginable before the Second World War. Also thanks to technologies facilitating household chores, nowadays women can use the hours when their children and husbands are away from home, for themselves.

The general picture needs to be completed with a brief note on the state of Japan's welfare politics. This has traditionally relied on families and left the main responsibility for the care of youngsters and elderly to women in families. State support has never been given priority by the Japanese government. Merry White argues that the rhetoric of the official politics propagating an ideal image of the family played a role in the state's attempt to remain in the shadow and to assign the main responsibility of securing social security to the families (White 2002). In recent years the Japanese state, pressed by the growing number of problems related to the ageing population, partly changed its politics and some improvements on the welfare system were made. Nurseries, elderly care homes have been established, as well as maternity leave allowances introduced. In spite of these recent changes, women continue to bear the biggest part of the burden for household, child-rearing and care for elders.

In recent years, several surveys demonstrate that family life continues to move to always higher positions in the value orientation of the Japanese. Surveys inquiring about religious attitudes include also questions on values or questions on 'important things in life' (*taisetsu* 大切). In the survey conducted by Jinja Honchō in 2007, 'family' and 'health' figured among the most often indicated responses (both around 80%) (Jinaj Honchō 2006). Traditionally valued things, such as filial piety, respect for ancestors, occupy lower positions (between 57 and 59%).

#### 6.4 Views on children in the past and before the war

The above description focused mainly on the family as a whole, within which the figure and role of women emerged most clearly. What follows here is an overview of the principal changes affecting views on children in Japan. These changes influenced in several ways the evolution of Shichigosan pattern over the last two century.

The first legal definition of individual human age, within it of childhood, is offered by the ancient collection of law that defined the principles of the legal system adopted by the state in the seventh century, the so called *ritsuryō* 律令. This collection of law was compiled after the Chinese law system of Tang period. The document of *ritsuryō* included a separate part that focused on family registrations. Here young persons under the age of twenty were considered as not yet full-fledged adults. The period under twenty was further divided into periods under three years of age (*ryoku* ‘infants’), between three and sixteen *shō* 小, ‘small’, and between sixteen and twenty *sō* 少, lit. few (Yamaji 2005, 343). The ages in that times were counted according to the traditional age counting system, therefore three, sixteen and twenty correspond today to two, fifteen and nineteen. The age limits served first of all to delineate the duties of individuals with respect to the payment of taxes or other labor force obligations. Accordingly, the start of the duty for paying taxes was set at sixteen (modern fifteen). Girls around thirteen (modern twelve) were regarded mature and ready to marry (Yamaji 1989, 60-65).

Mark A. Jones argues that the modern concept of childhood that saw the child in the center of its world is a relatively recent development (Jones 2010). Jones places the start of this development to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Though, it has to be underlined that children have been traditionally endorsed high value in the Japanese society. On one hand, children were valued as labor force for their contribution to the household’s economic activities. The overwhelming part of Japan’s pre-Meiji population lived from agriculture and children’s participation in agricultural work and domestic chores was often essential for the household. Accordingly, children were taught perseverance and the worth of hard

work from an early age. On the other hand, children were also seen as potential successors of the *ie*, who would secure the continuity of household and family business.

The traditional view on children finds some parallels in the Western concept of childhood in the medieval period. The French historian, Philippe Aries, in his work on the changes in views on children in France, argues that the modern concept of childhood in Europe starts to arise in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Before this, children were viewed as ‘small adults’ rather than children (Aries 1962). The author identifies the age of seven as a threshold that separated early childhood from the phase when children were expected already to contribute with their work to the community’s livelihood. Children were regarded “small adults” after seven and this phase served to gradually remove the child from the sphere of the family and integrate it into the adult society. Aries underlines that in medieval Europe families lived mainly a community oriented life and thereby, the child was considered first of all as a member of this community. Children were not attributed more value or value of any special kind compared to adults. However, starting from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, particularly with the emergent middle class, a special affect towards children and feeling of togetherness within the family began to emerge (Aries 1962, 351). This was partly the result of the disappearing collective-oriented lifestyle and the birth of the modern state with centralized power. The family as an autonomous body, primarily based on the conjugal relation, was born and with it the concept of family transformed. Therefore, it can be argued that changes in views of children were a product of the development concentrating around an intensifying focus on family life. The child gradually found itself in the center of family life and together with this, education and principles of child-rearing grew in importance. Aries also notes that many of the collective festivities observed in medieval Europe were gradually transformed into quiet family feasts and these later grew into celebrations with the child in its center (such as Christmas, for example) (Aries 1962, 347).

Yoshiharu Iijima, following the line of this historical account of childhood in Europe, reconstructed some of the important milestones in the development of the view on children in the Japanese history (Iijima 1991). According to him, the child, that was seen as a ‘small being’ (*chiisakimono* 小さきもの) or a ‘weak being’ (*yowakimono* 弱きもの) in

the past, started to be perceived as a separate being upon the rise of the concept of the *ie* (*ie seido* 家制度, *ie*-system). The author dates the affirming of the *ie* to the medieval period, around the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century when small scale agricultural mode of production conducted mainly by family units, produced a growth in the population size. Children thus started to be valued not only for their contribution to the family's livelihood in the form of their labor, but also as potential heirs of the *ie*. The perpetuation of the family line was regarded of utmost importance to the *ie* for material and spiritual aims, as it was the heir who had the main responsibility to take care of the material possessions of the family as well as to assure that the appropriate rituals for family ancestors continued to be observed.

As already mentioned above, Jones places the rise of the modern image of the child into the Meiji-Taisho period (Jones 2010). This was the period when the diverse childrearing ideals characterizing pre-Meiji Japan and varying mainly according to social class belonging started to undergo a standardization (Jones 2010, 92-93). The modern image of child was an integral part of the modern family ideal and as such, it was considered to be central to the modernization of Japan. The family model stressed the role of mother and child in contrast to the hierarchical paternal model typical to the *ie*. Jones argues that it was during this period that the child was placed into the heart of the family and thus, it found itself in the center of a “descendant worship” (*shison sūhai shugi* 子孫崇拜主義), referring to a term used in the period's media (Jones 2010, 125). The new ideal, called here ‘descendant worship’ replaced to a certain degree the traditional ancestral worship which constituted one of the ruling principles of the traditional *ie* model. Also, the centrality of the child together with that of the mother was an underlying element of the *ryōsai kenbo* 良妻賢母 ideology which made from the family the primary platform where the middle class life-style was to be realized. The child started to be seen as the means for achieving upward mobility in the eyes of those who were aspiring to achieve the status of middle class (Jones 2010, 30-37). Jones points out that the ideal image of the child was not definite in the beginning. At the turn of the century, three different images competed. These were the ideal of the ‘little citizen’ (*shōkokumin* 小国民), of the ‘childlike child’ (*kodomorashii kodomo* 子供らしい子供), and of the ‘superior student’

(*yūtōsei* 優等生). In the course of the time, however, the ideal of *yūtōsei* prevailed also because by the 1930s, Jones argues, the child's education and performance in school became seen as one important means to reach higher position and status within an always more meritocratic society. The first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century thus are identified by the authors as the period when the child started to be perceived as a treasure to the ideal of the modern family.

Another aspect of social change focusing on the family regards the political function attributed to the family and within it to the child (Itabashi 2007). As Japan's militarism strengthened in the interwar period, slogans such 'Give birth, multiply!' (*Umeyo, fuyaseyo* 産めよ増やせよ) rendered the Japanese family instrumental for the politicians' ambitions (Jones 2007, 253). A special value on children as future citizens was propagated for the scopes of the military state. On the other hand, the ideal of the child as the future citizen reinforced the child's value within the family. The view that great care and devotion dedicated to the child is a condition to fulfill the number of aspirations towards the child, became diffused in wide segments of population. Jones underlines the role of mothers in achieving these aims within the moral training of the child as future citizen (Jones 2010, 157).

In Chapter III, I discussed some aspects of the rich reservoir of beliefs and customs in Japanese folk culture containing a singular view on children. Japanese folklorists starting from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the pioneer work of Kunio Yanagida, began to document these beliefs and as well as to conduct nationwide surveys on childrearing practices. These studies found out that the first period of the child's life was extremely rich of ritual customs and magical beliefs. Children up to the age of seven were believed to belong to a world between the realm of gods and of human world and the 'transformation' of the child into a complete human being occurred during the years of early childhood. The elevated number of rites of passage observed during this period is interpreted by Japanese folklorists as the need to ritually support this process (Iijima 1987). The attention paid to children especially during the early years of their growth is also explained by high infant mortality rates characterizing pre-Meiji Japan (Matsuda

1978 in Hara and Minagawa 1996, 15).<sup>191</sup> This factor also contributed to the view that saw children as a “scarce resource” (White 1987, 13). On the other hand, Itabashi notes that because of the high mortality rate in early age of children, death occurrence in very small children was perceived as less grave than in older children. Phrases that were commonly used in these circumstances, such as ‘bad luck’, ‘the next time it will go alright’, demonstrate that degree to which the gravity or the significance of these occurrences was intentionally underplayed in Japan (Itabashi 2007, 256).

In her ethnographic study on Japanese childrearing, Joy Hendry underlines that other ‘collective ideas’ contribute significantly to the view which regards the first period of the child’s life as particularly important in its education (Hendry 1986, 15-17). Such ‘collective ideas’ center around the way of seeing small children as ‘white sheets’ and therefore, the first years of the child’s life are thought to require particular and appropriate attention and care, more than any other stage, including for example the puberty. The view that sees children as ‘white, unspoiled sheets’ is also put into connection with the Shinto belief which does not look on the concept of sin as part of the newborn upon arrival to earthly life (Yamaji 2005, 344). Sin in Shinto is seen as something accumulated in the course of the life and which can be purified by rituals and regular observances.

## **6.5 Changing views on children in postwar Japan**

With the dramatic changes that the modernization brought on Japan, value orientations regarding children underwent a thorough change. The value laid upon the child persisted but it came to be expressed in different ways. These ways evolved in accordance with

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<sup>191</sup> Interestingly, the Taisho period recorded higher rates in infant mortality (infant here counts children up to the age of one) than the Meiji period. For comparison, in 1899, the infant mortality rate was around 158 death for 1000 births, in 1920, it raised to 165. After a temporal stagnation in the first post-war years, the rate fell dramatically to 4 in the 1990s. Since then, Japan together with Sweden, has the lowest death rate in this age group (Itabashi 2007, 254, Table 11, see also Hara and Minagawa 1996, 18).

changes in the family structure in a society that was witnessing transformation of its economy and everyday living conditions. One of the general changes concerned the decrease of reproductive rate which fell dramatically in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from 4.24 in 1920 under 1.5 in 1992 (Yoshizumi 1995b). Views on the ideal size of the family have also underwent changes. Whereas in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century three children per family was seen as regarded as ideal, in 1990s, one-child family became widely seen as socially acceptable. The diminishing number of children in the family had an important impact on the social relations within the family and kin.

In the decades after World War II, the accent laid upon on the child's achievement in school education became always stronger. Education achieved a leading place in the value system of the Japanese, and in 1960s, to be able to provide for a good-quality education of the offspring, ranged already among the priorities of most families (Dore 1958). Costs falling on the education of children came to occupy a big share in family budgets. By the end of the 1960s, this trend reached also distant rural areas in Japan (Tsuru 2005, 69). In present days, Japanese society continues to be characterized by a strong commitment to education which is still seen as a gateway to carrier (White 1987, 7). On the other hand, the high costs of education, together with the weight that this places on families' finances, has been pointed out as one of the principal reasons for the decreasing number of offspring per family (Yoshizumi 1995b).<sup>192</sup> The desire to offer the same high standard to all siblings, both with regard to their education and child-rearing items, makes it hard for a family to provide for more than two children.

On the other hand, the growing affluence of Japanese families in the postwar decade brought about the rise of another phenomenon. This is related to the child's 'consumption value' (Kondō 1999). The rise of consumer culture in the 1960s has affected patterns of childrearing as well as manners of indulgence. The new patterns came to include spending on the child and on child-rearing goods. Indulgence in the form of spending soon became not only socially accepted but also desired. In the previous chapter, I have already addressed the transformation through which the market, centering around the

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<sup>192</sup> The total fertility that has never risen above 2,0 since 1973, and it is continuously decreasing since then. In 2010, it arrived at 1.3 (Source: [www.mhlw.go.jp](http://www.mhlw.go.jp), access: 2011, January 20).

child and the whole sphere of childrearing, went through starting from the 1970s. As already said, this phenomenon is narrowly linked to the general socio-economic changes, such as the falling birth rate and the improved economic situation of the average Japanese family. A number of terms invented by the media and social commentators illustrate as well as draw attention to this phenomenon. So for example the expression, ‘five-pocket child’ (sometimes called also ‘six-pocket’) indicates the situation when children, more scarce in number within the single family, find themselves surrounded by adults, parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles all ready to indulge the child with gifts, cash and affection (Creighton 1994). Another term that could be translated ‘luxurious one-child-ism’ (*ichiji gōkashugi* 一児豪華主義), addresses the tendency when children in one-child families are ‘wrapped’ into a lavish well-being.<sup>193</sup> The number of children per family is significantly lower compared to the past, and accordingly, financial assets of parents do not need to be divided among numerous siblings. The material wealth of contemporary Japanese society thus is fully surrounding children, as well.

## **6.6 Growth of Shichigosan into a family ritual**

The above depicted transformation affecting the family as institution and the place of the child in the value system of the Japanese serves as background for the analyzes of the development of Shichigosan in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century up to present days.

Jones argues that celebrations of childhood were instrumental to the changing images of the modern family already in the interwar period (Jones 2010, 102-106, 157-159). They became instrumental especially in the hands of social reformers who promoted new ways of celebrating as part of their efforts to reform child-rearing practices.<sup>194</sup> Social reformers in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century recognized that it is important to pay adequate attention to every single phase of the child’s growth and childhood rituals became seen as

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<sup>193</sup> The phenomenon is comparable to China where the one-child policy of the Chinese government, started at the 1970s to control population growth, brought about the so called ‘Little Emperor’ syndrome referring by the term to the excessive indulgence with which Chinese children are treated by family members.

<sup>194</sup> See a discussion of reform movements regarding Shichigosan also in Chapter V.

important means to acknowledge this importance. Along the traditional rituals, new rituals were also promoted, among them for example children's birthdays. Jones notes that the scope of these celebrations was seen by social commentators and reformers first of all in their capability to give display to the 'childishness' of the child, a central notion in the propagated new image of the child. Various childhood rituals, the author explains, such as Shichigosan, the Boys' Festival (*tango no sekku*) or Hina Festival (*hina matsuri*) were affected by this movement aiming at creating a new image of the modern Japanese family. Among others, reformers promoted patterns of celebrations that would focus principally on the child (Jones 2010, 160). They criticized patterns that were 'not modern' and that gave display to parents' vanity, such as the case of Shichigosan.<sup>195</sup> Expressions that emerged in the media of this period were surprisingly similar to those that later, in 1970s and 1980s, started to be commonly used by media and advertisement texts. So for example one such phrase labeled Shichigosan "an important display of the love-filled heart of the parent".<sup>196</sup> Though, it needs to be underlined that in the prewar period these terms and slogans, being a part of a propaganda, were giving expression to views belonging to a group of social reformers and thus, they did not represent any nationwide trend.

In the immediate postwar years, Shichigosan was often portrayed in the media as a symbol of the restored peace. The images of children in gay clothes served as perfect symbols expressing the joy of the people over the restored peace. Shichigosan images were also used to illustrate the altered relations with the former enemy, the Americans. Newspaper photos of smiling American soldiers holding hands of little children dressed up for Shichigosan were to demonstrate that peace and friendship had been renewed. In the following years, these idealized images and associations with Shichigosan soon gave way to more 'profane' aspects, and advertisements and commercial information grew in number in the print media. Hand in hand with the rapid economic recovery and growth, more articles commenting on the latest fashion in dress styles listing the range of services available to celebrating families were emerging in the newspapers. In the increasingly

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<sup>195</sup> See for example *Katei no Tomo 7.7* (October 1908) in Jones 2010, 161. On the theme see also Chapter V.

<sup>196</sup> Takashima Heizaburō, *Katei oyobi katei kyōiku* (1912) quoted in Jones 2010, 160.

affluent and consumption-oriented Japanese society material well-being came to be seen as one of the main symbols of the life-style of the modern nuclear family. The celebration of Shichigosan fitted well into the image of this life-style. Its popular pattern that had developed in the urban environment of the Edo merchant culture and later in the Meiji Tokyo, contained since its beginnings significant notions of material display. This pattern was not at all distant from the requisits and conditions of the modern urban context. The new middle-class family needed new symbols that would express the changed value orientation.

Today, for many families Shichigosan is regarded *the* celebration of the early childhood period. It embraces multiple ideas, including material well-being, expression of feelings of parental joy over the growth of children, family solidarity and unity. Most importantly, it stands as a symbol for a happy family life. Photos in the media featuring smiling fathers and mothers with their children in gay clothes are representing this image of the happy family, of its well-being, both of economic and of emotional character. The figure of the father emerges as important to this image. In the past, fathers' participation in the event was not regarded as obligatory. In folk variations the age rite was principally an affair of the female members of the household. The child was accompanied to the shrine by its mother and mother-in-law or maternal grandmother, sometimes midwife or aunt. In the urban Edo pattern, the procession was made up usually by family members and/or servants. However the father's role here was principally to provide for the celebration in the form of financing the expenses. In the postwar decades, however, the father's presence at the celebration started to be seen as desirable, if not compulsory. The family character of the celebration started to receive an emphasizes. With the diffusion of the two-generational family unit consisting of parents and children, the presence of both parents at the celebration has become common, as well as expected. Grandparents often live far away from their grandchildren thereby their participation in the celebration is not always possible. Nonetheless, if possible, grandparents' participation is seen as desirable, too. Fathers' active participation in the celebration of Shichigosan was seen as a new phenomenon in the 1960s. This is echoed in the words of a company manager quoted in Sepp Linhart's study. The manager complained about - once unseen - fathers asking for a day-off from work in order to be able to participate in the celebration of their child's

Shichigosan (Linhart 1988, 287). In years when November 15<sup>th</sup> fell on a weekday, to render the father's presence possible, they needed to take out a holiday. However, soon this obstacle found its solution when the date of the celebration shifted to weekend days, first of all to Sundays. The trend that saw the shift of the dates of festivities from the traditional dates to the more convenient weekend days, affected most traditional holidays not only Shichigosan. It began soon after the introduction of the six workday week.<sup>197</sup>

Practical considerations gradually affected also the traditional date of Shichigosan and the 15<sup>th</sup> was always less respected among the families. It was slowly dropped and substituted by any other day during the month of November found as convenient by the family members. In the 1980s, most families already opted for the weekend days (Ishii 2009, 148). Among them, Sundays preceding the traditional 15<sup>th</sup> of November, became the most preferred options. Today, the span of time during which families celebrate Shichigosan, prolonged even further. It usually initiates in October and stretches to the last days of November. Regarding the move in dates of observance, Kenji Ishii in his followed the development of the timing of the ritual in four different shrines in Tokyo in 1994 (Ishii 2009). He has examined numbers of Shichigosan observers on days during the months of October and November. He found out that until the end of the 1960s, the most often chosen day for the observation of Shichigosan was still the 15<sup>th</sup> of November. A visible shift was detectable after 1970 when the traditional date began to be respected only in cases if the 15<sup>th</sup> fell on Sunday or Saturday. For similar practical reasons – work-free days – the two national holidays that fall on November 3<sup>rd</sup> (Culture Day) and November 23<sup>rd</sup> (Labor Thanksgiving Day) were, and are still today, very popular. Families weigh first of all their own convenience with regard the date. Ishii looked also into the impact of the belief regarding *taian* (大安) and *butsumetsu* (仏滅) days on the choice of the date of the Shichigosan celebration. *Taian* and *butsumetsu* days are calculated according to the traditional lunar calendar which defines each day in the six

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<sup>197</sup> Robert Smith brings an example of this shift in date in Kurusu where the author conducted fieldwork. Here while in 1953 most rest days and festivals in the village were still scheduled by the old lunar calendar, in 1971, the majority of rituals and ceremonies have been already moved to Sundays instead of the proper day indicated by the ceremonial calendar (Smith 1978, 220). Sunday thus became the ceremonial and festival day of the community.

days week as a fortunate or unlucky for a given activity or event.<sup>198</sup> On the contrary, *butsumetsu* are unlucky days and in the past, they were never chosen for auspicious events, such as celebrations. The system became widely popular in the mid-Tokugawa era and in certain cases, it still influences greatly the selection of the day, for example in case of weddings. Accordingly, *taian* days are thought to be fortunate for auspicious events, travels etc. Ishii's study show that this belief still exercise an impact on the choice of the Shichigosan date (Ishii 2009, 150). When possible, families prefer to avoid *butsumetsu* days for Shichigosan in favor of other days. Nevertheless, Ishii notes that not always families pay attention to these considerations. There is a growing number of families which show a disregard to the belief and in case, the choice of a day other than *butsumetsu* encounters difficulties, they opt for the days traditionally considered unlucky. Similarly, *taian* days are not necessarily the most often chosen dates for Shichigosan. Ishii's data refer to the 1990s but the continuing trend is demonstrated by the fact that today many shrines, though indicating the *taian* and *butsumetsu* days in their calendars of festivities, at the same time, they encourage Shichigosan observers to consider first of all their own convenience when choosing the date of the shrine visit, and only on the second place to take regard of the lucky and unlucky days.

Returning to the changes taking place in the 1970s, it can be said that an important shift in the value orientations of the Japanese occurred. The accent placed on the individual and the family life affected values connected to the family as such. The category of 'family' began to reach always higher positions on the scale of importance in several opinion polls. This contrasted findings of earlier surveys where the voice of 'work' used to receive higher valuation than 'family' (Linhart 1988). The once community-oriented values governing the lives of individuals within the family and within the wider community were replaced by the notion of family happiness, which was of a more private-like nature. The emphasis on family life was mirrored also in the festive calendar and celebration manners. New imported celebrations centering around the family were gaining popularity, among them for example the observances such as the Mother's Day,

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<sup>198</sup> This belief has received the influence of yin and yang philosophy and the system became known in Japan under the name of On'yōdō (see also chapter VII).

Christmas, or children's birthdays.<sup>199</sup> The custom of celebrating children's birthdays was propagated already in the interwar period by social reformers aiming at creating the image of the modern family. Though, in the prewar period its introduction was not successful and only now the custom to observe children's birthdays took hold among wider segments of the Japanese population.

## 6.7 The constitution of family ideal through the celebration

The social setting within which the family's identity is being constructed depends greatly on the conditions given by the social life of the examined period. In contemporary urban Japan, due to the physical absence of relatives from the vicinity of the family and in lack of an active network of kinship relations the modern family finds itself in a need of new ways to affirm its identity and unity. Celebrations, such as Shichigosan, can be excellent instruments by which these aims can be at least partly achieved. One of the most important functions of family rituals lies in their ability to contribute to a symbolic constitution as well as reconfirmation of values to which the family wishes to adhere.

Today, Shichigosan is seen as one of the most important celebrations during the early years of the child's life. Magazines, childrearing web sites, and etiquette manuals often call it the 'grand event' (大イベント) of the child and of the family. The celebration's focus on the family and within it on the child as the main actor of the event, is expressed in multiple ways. There is an emphasis on the quality of time spent in the family circle. Father's presence is required, grandparents' desired. The accent is placed on the enjoyable time, and therefore, families pay much attention to the appropriate choice of date, place and modality of celebration. It also entails that families give space to the child's wishes and/or interests regarding the practical details of the event. The emergence of the trend to combine the celebration with leisure also gives supports to this aspect.

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<sup>199</sup> Individual birthdays were not traditionally celebrated in Japan in the past, except from the very first birthday of the baby, known as *hatsutanjō* (see Chapter III). Today they became popular, though.

Shichigosan packs offered by entertainment parks (such as the Disneyland or Puroland), Shichigosan spent in thermal spa hotels (*onsen*), high-class hotels, or foreign countries, do not merely indicate the inventive marketing of the business sector but it also points to the existence of an increasing demand on the side of Japanese families to give value to the time spent together in the family circle on the occasion of the celebration. There are also cases when grandparents and other close relatives, aunts and uncles, join the nuclear family on these occasions. Accordingly, it can be said that the occasion of the celebration is perceived as an extraordinary moment when family members can meet and family time can be enjoyed. This kind of occasions have become very rare in Japan where holidays are short and family members often live in places distant from each other. The importance that these occasions are attributed by all members of the family are also confirmed, for example, by the words of a mother who described the celebration of Shichigosan of her daughter. The celebration took place in a thermal spot in the company of grandparents: ‘My daughter was so much excited to enjoy the company of the family and her grandparents. I am really happy that we organized it this way!’<sup>200</sup> Also, the celebration of Shichigosan can acquire an additional symbolic value when connected to the celebrations observed in the past by the other members of the family. Places of these past celebrations can be chosen for the place of Shichigosan. So for example, the latest fashion to observe Shichigosan in Hawaii is thought to be typical to families which celebrated their wedding ceremony there (Shūkan Shinchō 2005, September 8). These couples find it appealing to return with their children to the place to which pleasant memories bind them. The place that evokes associations closely linked to the family happiness, renders the celebration of Shichigosan even more significant as well as memorable.<sup>201</sup> Memories of the wedding and memories of a significant event in the child’s maturing merge into one whole substance strengthening the identity of the family in a powerful way.

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<sup>200</sup> Source: [www.happy-note.com/research](http://www.happy-note.com/research), accessed 2010, October 10.

<sup>201</sup> On the other hand, as one mother in her blog noted, after the birth of a child, couples often renounce on journeys and trips abroad. Once children reach Shichigosan age, the celebration can become an occasion to re-take the custom of travelling. Shichigosan thus can become seen as a rite of passage not merely for the child but also for the family (<http://sundaykodomoblog92.fc2.com>, accessed 2011, May 25).

There is another aspect that plays an important role in the constitution of the meaning of Shichigosan as a family centered celebration. Shichigosan is one of the series, more precisely the last of those rituals that were traditionally observed during the first seven years of the child's life (see Chapter III). From these today *miyamairi* (first shrine visit), *kuizome* (first solid food) and *hatsutanjō* (first birthday) are still celebrated with more or less continuing popularity. These rituals hold a particular significance in the process of the formation of the family as a psychological and social entity. They all take place in the early period of the child's life, which is as well the period when the family as such is created and shaped. While the wedding ceremony is a formal recognition of the conjugal couple, family identity is being constructed upon the birth of the first child. The birth of the first child alters the life-style of the couple in its bases. The new social formation made up by parents and child (children) asks for a formal acknowledgement and a public affirmation. Together with presenting the newborn child to the public including kin, neighbors, friends, the newly established family is also introduced. Family celebrations can be efficient vehicles by which this work is successfully accomplished. Among them ceremonies that include the child acquire a particular significance and emerge as special events in the family calendar. In the past, *miyamairi* marked the moment when mother and newborn baby left, for the first time, the realm of the private home (or birthing hut). The meaning of *miyamairi* has been altered since then. The notion of taboo clearing as well as the idea of ritual pollution became obsolete. Nowadays, *miyamairi* is observed as an important event when the family, possibly accompanied by the two sets of grandparents, dress up in their best and make a festive outing to visit the shrine (or temple) with the baby. The formal character of the occasion is marked by the ceremonial clothes of the baby, which can be kept for later similar occasions, such as Shichigosan, and by the number of photos that are taken during the event. These photos will then occupy an important place in the family album, along with other similar events.

However, as for the patterns of these rituals, *miyamairi*, *kuizome*, and *hatsutanjō* are still modest affairs compared to Shichigosan. *Kuizome* is often performed only symbolically as part of *miyamairi*.<sup>202</sup> *Miyamairi* and *hatsutanjō* do not involve lengthy preparations, the

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<sup>202</sup> Though the traditional date of *miyamairi* is thirty-three days after birth, today this is rarely respected. Its performance is often postponed even by several months.

professional photo service is often omitted, too. At these observance the child is still too young and the festive dress, too, is simpler. Moreover, in the case of Shichigosan it is important to take into account its aspects that provide substantial space to display or in other words, to public demonstration. Shichigosan is not merely a family event of a private nature. It presumes an outing to the shrine, eating in a town restaurant, sending small gifts to relatives to communicate the event to those who were not physically present. The event is therefore used both as an occasion for cementing relations within the narrow circle of the family and with members of the wider kin, and for seeking public recognition of the family as an efficient unit that needs to fulfill its socially recognizable roles and tasks.

Media and the marketplace supports the defining of Shichigosan as the ‘grand event’ of family life. Images of family happiness appear with frequency in association with the ritual. Advertisements, too, underline the image of family happiness created through and by observing Shichigosan. An example is provided by an ad in a local television, Fujiterebi, commissioned by a kimono shop (2010, June 9). The image focused on a harmonious family made of parents and two daughters, all dressed in Japanese kimono for Shichigosan wrapped in a serene, happy atmosphere. The intention was to represent kimono as a garment that represents cultural traditions but at the same time, it also connected it to the images of family happiness. It suggested the idea that kimono and Shichigosan together contribute to the creation of a cheerful family life.

On the other hand, single families can give their own personalized interpretation to Shichigosan. The celebration can be considered by some as an expression of filial piety, for example. ‘Shichigosan is a supreme way of showing filial piety towards grandma and grandpa’ (両家のじいじ・ばあばにとって最高の親孝行), says one mother in the questionnaire of the Mikihouse online survey.<sup>203</sup> An article in a weekly magazine in 1980 published an interview with a popular *rakugo* artist who referred to the celebration of Shichigosan of his seven years old daughter as an occasion to let the elderly grandparents enjoy the sight of their granddaughter dressed in a ceremonial outfit. The artist, too, used the term ‘filial piety’ (Shūkan Gendai 1980, November 20).

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<sup>203</sup> Source: [www.happy-note.com/research](http://www.happy-note.com/research), accessed on 2010, April 20.

## 6.8 Women's role in the preparation of the celebration

In this part of the chapter, I would like to add another angle of perspective to the interpretation of the meaning and function of Shichigosan. The role of mothers in the preparation and organization of the celebration will be addressed here. While each member in the family has a more or less clearly defined role and share in the celebration, mothers are particularly actively involved in the planning and preparation of the event.

On one hand, women's role as organizers of the Shichigosan celebration is closely linked to their position within the family. On the other hand, it is linked to the development which has seen the preparative and planning phase of the celebration stretch and grow in importance in the last few decades. The reasons underlying this development are manifold. In the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Japanese women were assigned the task of managing the everyday running of the household as well as the responsibility for child-rearing, as described above. Women's role as the principal homemaker did not change majorly even with approaching of the new millennium. Japanese women continue to be perceived publicly principally as housewives, without regard whether they undertake or not full-time or part-time employments.<sup>204</sup> Japanese housewife holds a central role not only in the construction of the family life on the physical level, but also in its construction on the symbolical level. Thus the image of the ideal family lays upon the women principally. Their exclusivity in managing the tasks related to child-care is also expressed in the figures of statistics measuring the division of labor among family members. In a survey from 1992, fathers who participated actively in child-rearing was little over 1%, the bulk of work fell on mothers (Akiyama 1995, 27). Also, mothers are generally the principal supervisors of the main events in the child's life, schooling, socialization, celebrations. Accordingly, the task of organizing events connected to the

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<sup>204</sup> For a more thorough discussion of this subject see Hendry 1986, Imamura 1987, Lock 1988, and White 2002.

child, such as celebrations, among which Shichigosan, belongs entirely to the domain of mothers.

The phenomenon of women as main organizers of festivities linked to the family life, is not unique to Japan. In North America, with the emergence of the cult of domesticity and of consumption culture around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the preparation and planning of festivities, such as Christmas and Thanksgiving Day, were fully appropriated by women, mothers and wives. But while in Western societies the pleasure of domestic occasion, to use Pleck's term (2000, 237), laid in the female community that these festive occasions created, in Japan, the increasing atomization of the family and the privatization of family life did not provide moments of shared female community in the way it did in North America. American family festivities in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were occasions where women, joined by female relatives and friends, could display their creativity and skills in cooking, baking, preparing the festive menu and gifts. These were moments that offered women praise as well as acknowledgment of their role as nurturers of the family and capable housewives. In postwar Japan, the organizing of family celebrations did not typically involve gathering of female kin. The housing conditions of families living in the restricted space of small apartments and the often big geographical distances dividing relatives, have rendered big family gatherings difficult, if not impossible. But it is not to say that Japanese women do not derive satisfaction or a sense of shared community from festive occasions. Apart from the function of these celebrations to constitute the ideal image of the family, many Japanese mothers also enjoy the tasks that the organizing of similar events represent. Moreover, the media, print and online, can partly replace the physical community by providing spaces where mothers can share experience and emotions.

Today, the observance of the Shichigosan celebration requires a number of goods purchased on the market. The orientation in the huge amount of available services and goods, options and modes, requires adequate and sufficient amount of information, and first of all, a corresponding period of preparation. The aim, as declared by most mothers, is to organize a highly satisfactory celebration – memorable and pleasant to all. In order to do so, mothers need to become good managers and also 'informed consumers'. The

organization of Shichigosan has been becoming increasingly elaborate since the end of the 1970s. By then, the Shichigosan pattern spread to all regions of Japan, and together with it, its potential to provide profit to the business sector grew. In the Tokyo area, the celebration had been already for long the target of a number of business activities. Later, when its popularity increased and spread to the rest of Japan, the marketplace launched more services offering a wide range of options to celebrating families. In this way, the texture of the event was rendered always richer. Desires have been created by the market, at same time they were demanded or welcome by customers.

In the course of the 1980s, the growing popularity of photo studios changed many aspects of the celebration. The moment of photographing taking place in the studio, started to detach itself from the celebration to be transformed into a separate element. The photo session in a professional studio was becoming regarded as an event by itself. The process of preparing the child for the always more stylized photograph requires time. The child needs to be dressed into festive clothes, it is adorned with make-up (in case of girls), with special hair arrangement. During this procedure the child is assisted by the employees of the studio and of the beauty salon that is often attached to the studio. This procedure takes a long time, and therefore, it soon became advisable, if not necessary, to arrange the performing of this session well ahead of the celebration consisting of shrine visit and family meal. Today, more than 80% of families turn to professional studios for their Shichigosan photographs.<sup>205</sup> This kind of development contributed to render the event of Shichigosan more complex. A whole range of things needs to be decided in advance, and this asks for well-timed decisions. Thorough planning becomes a necessity. Indeed, magazines and web sites all emphasize the importance of early preparation in order to achieve a satisfactory result, i.e. the creation of a memorable celebration. ‘The secret of a successful Shichigosan is the early start of planning’, is the advice that the reader often encounters in articles and on web sites. Mothers are encouraged to set up detailed schedules of all preparative. There are even magazines that present on their pages samples of schedule calendars for Shichigosan. These provide lists of things to do, to decide, and to prepare, divided under the headings of single months. In the schedule calendar of COMO (2009, September) for example, preparative, at the latest, must begin

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<sup>205</sup> Source: surveys done by Mikihouse (2010) and COMO (2010, September).

in August. Among things to be done in August we find: ‘check out your daughter’s hair length whether it is long enough to be tied up’; ‘do not expose your child to sunshine’;<sup>206</sup> ‘search for the photo studio, check it out and then make your booking’; ‘do the same with the rental shop’; and so on. During the month of September the schedule recommends to study the latest trends regarding festive dress fashion and hair style, to book the hair dresser salon, and to choose the shrine (temple) to be visited on the day of the celebration. Concerning the rite of purification, beforehand bookings are not usually available in shrines (and not all families opt for this rite), but etiquette experts encourage mothers to check out the site of the shrine well ahead of the event. The chosen shrine should meet the family’s expectations. Accessibility, parking, gifts provided by the shrine, costs of the purification rite, are all thought to affect the overall outcome of the celebration. The month of October is usually left for booking the restaurant, acquiring accessories and shoes required by the chosen dress-style, important especially in case of traditional Japanese outfit. November is reserved exclusively for the actual celebration.

Though, planning of the celebration sometimes can start even earlier. In 2008, 31% of respondents started preparations prior to the month of August; the first preparative fell mostly into the period between June and July (COMO 2009, August). Indeed, the early start of planning is seen as one of the most important condition for securing a successful celebration. In the September issue of the Akasugu Kids magazine (2009), the nine-page-long special on Shichigosan has for its title: ‘The perfect manual of how to avoid failure in Shichigosan’ (七五三、失敗しない完ぺきマニュアル). According to the magazine, planning and decision-takings should preferably start six months prior to the date of the actual celebration. As options of celebration modes are numerous, the selected pattern mostly defines the character, length and content of the planning and the preparative process. The very first thing that needs to be decided is the date (year) of the celebration. Most Japanese are still familiar with the traditional age counting, the so called *kazoetoshi*. As already mentioned (Chapter V), modern and traditional way of counting can produce a considerably big difference in the age of the child. Advice corners in online and print media receive a big number of inquiries from anxious mothers about the proper age to

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<sup>206</sup> Suntanned skin is traditionally not considered aesthetic in Japan.

celebrate. This, rather than indicating concern for tradition, has to do more with the complexity of the decision-makings and with the right timing of the celebration. Indeed, etiquette specialists usually assure mothers that the age in which the celebration is to be observed, is principally up to their individual decisions, determined by preference and convenience. In both Mikihouse surveys, conducted in 2010 and 2007, one third of respondents observed Shichigosan following the *kazoetoshi* mode, and two third of them according to *mannenreki*. Decisive factors can be at times very personal, such as the desire to see one's child in festive dress while still small and cute. However, generally speaking, in case of the first occasion of Shichigosan, i.e. at the age of three, the traditional age-counting is often avoided. Because of the characteristics of *kazoetoshi* counting mode (see Chapter V), a child considered to be three years old in *kazoetoshi* is, – according to the modern counting – only two years old. Hence, considering the fatigues that the celebration can place on the child (lengthy photographing, wearing the Japanese garment that the child is not used to, etc.), parents usually prefer to wait another year in order to assure a smooth flow of events during the celebration. At other times, the presence of siblings near with age, can also affect the choice. The family might wish to combine the celebration of siblings, and this can lead also to a complete disregard of the traditionally 'proper' Shichigosan-ages.<sup>207</sup>

After the decision about the date of observing has been taken, the next most important decision regards the modality of the celebration. There are two principal options among which most families choose. The first option consists of the pattern that sees all single parts of the event held in the course of one sole day. The second option is the one in which the single parts are separated from each other and spread over a longer period. Mothers pay big attention to this part of planning. The first option is considered to be the most difficult to organize and to perform, but at the same time, it is also thought to be rewarding because of the intensity of experience. In this case, the photo session, the shrine rite, and the festive meal are all performed in the course of one sole day. In the 2008 COMO questionnaire, only 32% of families chose this option, while the

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<sup>207</sup> Examples of cases when the two age counting systems were treated casually, in a manner convenient to parents, can be found also in the study done by Joy Hendry in a Kyushu community during the 1970s (Hendry 1981, 205).

overwhelming part opted for the second alternative (survey of COMO 2009, August). Reasons for amassing all parts of the event to one sole day can be various: 'We wanted grandparents to be on the photos, and therefore we decided to go to the studio all together on the day of the shrine visit' (ibid). Another voice says: 'We had the photographing on the same day of the ritual visit since we wanted to have the photo of our daughter dressed in her festive kimono. However, later, on a different day, we returned to the studio for taking photos of her in Western dress too, because this is a unique occasion in life' (ibid). The first option, while offering intense emotions, is thought to be risky as it represents high degree of 'risk of failure'. First, photo studios can be very packed on the days that are most popular for the celebration of Shichigosan (this means practically all weekends in November). Many families book their photo session to these days. Thus, there is a probability that it will not be possible to keep to the planned schedule, and all other events planned for the day will have to be postponed. In this way, the whole event can become strenuous, even annoying. Indeed, in their personal accounts, many mothers express their resentment for having chosen this pattern. Accordingly, families which prefer to detach the photo session from the day of the shrine visit, are those which want to avoid stress or the occurrence of unexpected things. They wish to spend the day of the shrine visit in a relaxed and serene atmosphere. The emphasis is indeed on the quality of the time spent together on this occasion, and this view is echoed also in the advices given by etiquette experts on several forums, in magazines, on websites, in etiquette manuals.

Another issue that represents considerable concern for mothers preparing the celebration is the festive dress to be worn by the child and by the other members of the family. The child's festive dress style, be it Western or Japanese, its mode of acquisition (purchase, rental, or borrowing from relatives) are all issues to make a decision about. Given the variety of available styles, the changing fashion, and the extreme richness of the sources providing ceremonial outfit for Shichigosan, this part of planning can be a time-consuming work. Information-gathering takes up a substantial part of the planning. Information is collected mainly through magazines, internet sites, publicity leaflets, and from fellow-mothers. Practical considerations, such as financial means available to the family, the option of a handed-down dress, the possibility of receiving the dress in gift from grandparents, are all to be weighed and sorted out. There are also other, more

emotional aspects, that can affect the decision. Families, who wish to conserve their child's festive dress as a reminder of nice memories, often decide to purchase rather than to rent, for example. Furthermore, recently there is an increase of families who would not like to choose between the two styles of dress (Japanese or Western). They wish to have both options and see their child both dressed in Japanese and in Western style. This can be achieved in several ways. The child puts on a different style for the two separate moments of the celebration: one for the photographing in the studio, and the other for the shrine visit. Recently, though, inventive photo studios launched Shichigosan packs that offer multiple dress-options: children can try on several dresses and can be photographed in all of them without a difference in price. The price is defined only by the number of prints that parents decide to order in the end. In brief, mothers usually carefully weigh all available possibilities, they check out more options before taking the final decision. Additionally, the festive dress worn by the rest of the family, husband, siblings, need to be prepared beforehand along with arrangement of the beauty salon where the hair and make-up of mother and child will be prepared.

The range of options is really wide and the single parts of the event need to be put together. Even families which opt for simple patterns, for example using a handed down dress or consuming the festive meal at the family's home, are still left with plenty of things to plan. *Seikō* (success), and *shippai* (failure) are terms that come often into sight reading the articles and advices on Shichigosan. It needs to be noted, however, that the media, and in particular etiquette experts exercise a considerable pressure by emphasizing the importance of performing a 'successful' celebration. Moreover, the 'failure' or 'success' of the celebration seems to depend entirely on mothers, who are seen as the main organizers of the event. In case something went wrong, be it a crowded photo studio, a distant and therefore inconvenient shrine, an imperfectly suiting dress, Japanese mothers readily admit their responsibility. The 'failure' is mostly explained as due to shortcomings in the planning: 'I wish I had prepared things more thoughtfully'. Other reasons for failure of some kind can include the shortcoming of the photo service, the missing adjacent parking at the shrine and so on. In all these cases, mothers admit that they failed to check out all details in an appropriate manner. The final outcome of the celebration seems to assess the organizational skills of the mother. Consequently,

Japanese women invest a big amount of energy and care to the overall planning of the celebration.

It must be added also that mothers of Shichigosan-age children, are mostly full-time housewives. The labor participation of married women tends to fall sharply after the birth of the first child and it does not significantly takes up before the youngest child enters school.<sup>208</sup> This also means that during the first years after the birth of the child, resp. in the years when the child, or the youngest sibling is in pre-school age, mothers normally dedicate their time almost fully to household and family. Also, Japanese wives tend to define themselves first of all as mothers, and only on the second place as wives. The intensity of commitment that Japanese mothers show towards child-rearing and the child's education, has been noted in several studies (Hendry 1986, White 1987). The importance laid on the education in the society along with the examination system adopted in Japan, produced also the phenomenon of the so called *kyōiku mama* 教育ママ, 'education obsessed mother', the mother who consumes all her energy and time to sustain the school performance of the offspring. Several observers of the Japanese society noted that this position of women in the family, vests them with power and authority in the sphere of the household and family, which is quite different from the view typical to the Western image of full-time housewife (White 1996). In brief, Japanese mothers view child-rearing as their most important task, and accordingly, they invest enormous energies in this task. Suzanne Vogel notes that Japanese women consider their task of being full-time mothers primarily as a rewarding and not a limiting experience (Vogel 1996). In this context, celebrations during the early age of the child, which represent one of the most intense periods in the mother's life, can be experienced as moments of highlight. Celebrations such as Shichigosan, can be perceived therefore as milestones that mark this intense period. They can be perceived as occasions when the 'results', at least partial ones, of the mother's work so far done, can be rendered visible as well as awarded, in a certain way. The ways Shichigosan provides expression to these aspects needs to be taken into account when the meaning of the celebration for the single observers of the ritual is to be understood.

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<sup>208</sup> Source: [www.stat.go.jp](http://www.stat.go.jp) (accessed 2012, October 15).

## 6.9 The role of Shichigosan in the socialization and education of children

Rites of passage have been described in the scholarly literature as playing an important role in the socialization of individuals into roles which can be multiple and varying. In classical interpretations, rites of passage mark the passages of members of society through life stages and social statuses, and as such, they facilitate the individual's (or group's) socialization into its new roles (see Chapter II). These rituals also teach important values of the given culture. A ritual can convey diverse messages and thereby the levels on which the work of enculturation and socialization occurs, are often multifold. In past, age rituals had diverse functions which differed also by region and by social class belonging. The diverse function that received varying emphasis depending on the pattern, included the child's social recognition as a new member of the community, function as initiation or coming-of-age rite involving trials, integration into the religious community (*ujiko*). Within the contemporary Shichigosan pattern, these functions are often difficult to be recognized. On one hand, it is because the focus of the celebration has shifted from the communal to the private one. To incorporate the child into a close-knit community or religious group is not perceived as necessary today. The significance of the community to whom family members and family as a whole was tied through a net of obligations and responsibilities, has been radically diminished. Nevertheless, Shichigosan can still fulfill roles that are comparable, to a certain degree, to the functions of age rites in the past. Shichigosan today can play a role in the socialization of children into gender roles, for example. All the more so since the age of early childhood is a period considered very important in forming children's gender identity (Smith 1987, 22). During this period, the mother is the person who principally shapes the child's life, makes the first imprints both with regards to gender roles and its preparing for entering wider society.

The gender division emerges in Shichigosan on multiple levels (Hendry 1986, 162). Gender difference is externally marked by distinctive signs of dress code. The clearly

defined dress code differing by gender contributes to the socialization of boys into male, and girls into female roles. Popular styles in traditional wear, such as the ceremonial outfit of samurai wear communicate the traditional masculine values to boys, as the ceremonial garments of girls communicate female ideal to girls. The message conveyed by the festive garment receives further support by beauty procedures that accompany preparations for the photographing, more in case of girls, but to a certain extent, also of boys. Shichigosan is often the first occasion when girls receive their first make-up. The procedures of embellishment give a taste of the times when they, as adult women, will beautify themselves. The ritual thus is also a lesson in the standard principles of aesthetics. The elaborate preparation, starting from choosing the dress, through the patient sitting during the hairdresser's work in the beauty salon, later in the photo studio, and finally the 'promenade' in the town (shrine) under the watching and admiring eyes of adults, all address girls' feminine sides. They vividly demonstrate to little girls the importance that is laid on the decorative, ornamental side of feminine existence. The procedures they go through can make them feel for the first time as true little women. Not accidentally is Shichigosan sometimes compared to wedding, and little girls to brides. Not lastly, the ritual shows the work that is hidden behind the perfect appearance. The fact that these moments are sometimes compared to the wedding preparation of brides, speaks also about the grade of complexity of the preparative. The intensity of the experience is enhanced by the fact that children are pampered by adults, assistants, family members. Mothers often take pride in the sight of their embellished daughters, or more precisely, in the appraisals that their daughters collect from others: 'I really was delighted to hear the many praises uttered by people watching my daughter in the shrine'.<sup>209</sup> The appraisal also gives mothers a sense of satisfaction felt over the well-done work.

In case of boys, the male role is emphasized through the historical male dresses, often imitating samurai formal dress styles and warrior costumes. Here cultural interpretations of masculinity, expressed in symbols of the samurai warrior spirit, are conveyed to children; at the same time they are reinforced with notions of the nation's glorious male-centered history. Modern military costumes, both Japanese and Western styles, were popular before the war and in the immediate post-war period. Today preference is given

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<sup>209</sup> Source: [www.happy-note.com/research](http://www.happy-note.com/research) (accessed 2011, December 12).

to the historical Japanese warrior costumes.<sup>210</sup> The clear-cut division between the two gender roles emerges also in terms adopted by media when commenting Shichigosan children models: girls are compared to ‘ladies’, ‘princesses’, and boys to ‘gentlemen’ or ‘heroes’.

To the festive dress is also one of the vehicles through which lessons from the material culture and from Japan’s history are communicated to children. Other children rites, first of all, the seasonal festival of boys and girls celebrated respectively in March and in May (*momo no sekku* and *tango no sekku*) have been also described by Joy Hendry as festivals that partake in the enculturation of values viewed as traditional in Japanese society (Hendry 1986, 147-149). The toys used traditionally to play with on these occasions all stand as symbols for gender-divided traditional values. Though not in line with the ideals of gender equality, these rituals echo deeply-rooted cultural values that see women first if all as brides and wives, and men as heroes bravely fighting the battles of life. In some respect, at Shichigosan, the experience of learning is even more intense. Whereas in case of *momo no sekku* and *tango no sekku* material culture is represented by the toys and decorations used for the occasion, at Shichigosan, this is represented by the traditional dress and accessories belonging to the outfit. Accordingly, the dresses are worn and not only viewed in this case, and thus the inscription of the experience occurs directly onto the body of the child. Thus it can be said that the experience is not merely visual and intellectual, but also physical. The Japanese traditional costume, which children might have seen so far only in books or television, this time is tried on. The work as well as the impact of the experience is more compelling since it entails walking and moving around in clothes that are often uncomfortable compared to clothes used in everyday life. Girls are also taught to bear patience in the act of moving around in kimono which allows only restricted movement. The educative function of the ritual is not limited to the wearing of the dress, but it includes the shrine visit, as well. Often, Shichigosan represents the first real occasion when small children are taught etiquette regarding visits into religious spaces. Not only the proper way to make a prayer is explained at this occasion, but it is often the first time when children participate in a formal religious ritual performed by a

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<sup>210</sup> In case of Western style, boys’ dress usually consists of a formal suit or other formal style used for ceremonial occasions.

priest. Given the character of Shinto and Buddhist religious practice, these formal rituals are available to observers only at few special occasions. The significance of Shichigosan as an opportunity to teach young children about Shinto etiquette, frequently emerges in the texts by etiquette specialists and in information materials provided by shrines. As for gift-exchange practice, though not typically part of celebration, sometimes small items, usually photos of children are sent to close relatives after the close of the event. With regard, etiquette specialist often encourage mothers to use the occasion of the ritual for teaching their children the wits of the gift-giving etiquette. Also in this respect, Shichigosan is acknowledged a role in the transmission of cultural knowledge to younger generations.

Shintani et al argue that rituals of childhood, among them Shichigosan, represent another aspect of enculturation which is related to the dual notion of *hare* and *ke* (Shintani et al 2003). The authors of the study conducted a survey among members of a child-rearing circle in the town of Asahikawa (Hokkaido). Though they concluded that these rituals as well as child-rearing itself are today heavily commoditized by the market, the authors admit that these rituals might represent important occasions when children can experience and live the extraordinary atmosphere of the holiday time, in contrast to the reality of the everyday life full of school obligations. In other words, the authors argue that the rituals are experienced as moments of *hare* (*hare no hi*),<sup>211</sup> that help children to perceive the difference between the common and extraordinary, or between the time of the everyday and time of the celebration. The authors underline the importance of this notion also because children's life in contemporary Japan is defined by a strict schedule of school attendance and obligations of school work. Holidays, celebrations thus provide Japanese children with the opportunity to make a division between school time and time for leisure. The interpreting of the division between the two moments within the frame of the dual concept of *ke* and *hare* implies also that this cultural notion continues to exercise its influence on the mind and attitudes of the Japanese up to present days.

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<sup>211</sup> The distinction between the two concepts of *hare* and *ke* is a much discussed theme in the literature of Japanese folklore studies (see also Chapter III). Following Yanagida's interpretation, the concept of *hare* and *ke* has been also paralleled with the dual notion of sacred and profane (see also Daniels 2009). In the traditional Japanese worldview, *hare* and *ke* indicated the difference that was perceived between the everyday and the extraordinary times.

Not lastly, Shichigosan is also an important lesson in consumption. On one hand, the Japanese marketplace sees children as target in their marketing strategies. The rise of commodification of child-rearing has been discussed in the previous chapter. On the other hand, Shichigosan can be also an experience for children, especially those of the older age group, that initiates them into consumer culture guided by their mothers. At this occasion, children experience in a direct manner the diversity of services or the multiple choice available in rental and retail shops and photo studios. In a society with a highly developed consumer culture such as Japan, this function of a ritual should not be overlooked or underestimated.

#### **6.10 Changed patterns of transmission of ritual knowledge**

Patterns of transmission of knowledge of customs, in this case of ritual manners and practice, have altered greatly in the postwar period. Until the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, knowledge, skills, and customs were normally passed on by the older generation. Ritual knowledge and etiquette, gift exchange manners, were all parts of the heritage that needed to be transmitted to younger generations. The role of grandparents, in particular that of mother-in-law, was of utmost importance. Young brides were normally not free to grow their children following their own way, instead the authority of mother-in-law was unquestionable in the issues concerning the care of children (Tsuru 2005). However, the socio-economic changes of the postwar decades have altered traditional organizational modes of household and also the residence patterns of families. The changes created a gap between the life-styles of the older and young generations. Young couples moving to suburbs established their own nuclear family, where the role of the mother-in-law became obsolete. Traditional customs, traditional ways of doing things, lost their validity in modern living conditions and became irrelevant in many respects. Mothers became the principal care takers of their children. Moreover, the quickly changing trends, new technologies and new patterns of consumption started to exercise their influence majorly

on the way of life of all generations. The knowledge where and what to buy, how to use modern appliances, to be informed about changing trends and fashion, were more akin to the younger generations. All these factors required new channels of information which soon were provided by the media, first print, later joined by the electronic one. Young housewives preferred to turn to magazines for information on new technologies used in the household or on new customs, rather than to their mothers or mothers-in-law. Between 1950 and 1960, women's magazines were gaining a wide readership especially among urban housewives. Ronald Dore found out in his study in 1951, that 40% of the interviewed housewives were regular readers, 30% occasional readers of at least one monthly magazine (Dore 1958, 85). Almost half of the interviewed housewives said that they took ideas for matters regarding household and family management principally from magazines and/or radio. Magazines informed about new methods mostly unknown for the generation of grandmothers. Though, as it will become clear, the media was not always able to fully replace the missing interpersonal relations and the advantages of the direct transmittance of knowledge and experience. Nevertheless, it can be said, that during the postwar decades, print and electronic media have undoubtedly become to be considered among the most important sources of information by young housewives.

The growing influence of print media is demonstrated also by the number of advice literature that has rapidly grown in the last decades. Each year, numerous books and other forms of publications, special issues of magazines for example, appear on the market. They discuss diverse matters ranging from proper etiquette manner, celebration manners concerning life-cycle events, and so on (Daniels 2009). The influence of magazines in disseminating all variety of information relating to child-rearing has been demonstrated also in a survey conducted in 2001 (Kokumin seikatsu 2001). The results of the survey showed that while in the period between 1970–2000 birth rate has sharply fallen (from 1 930 000 to 1 190 000), in the same period the number of published child-rearing magazines grew six times. The report explained this phenomenon with the difficulties that mothers nowadays encounter when in need of information. Persons whom advice could be asked from, or child-related matters discussed with, are often not available in the direct proximity of mothers. It is increasingly hard to find someone with whom they could discuss their doubts, troubles or other issues arising during the period of child-

rearing. Print and online media overtook, in many respects, the role of the transmittance and dissemination of knowledge. Not only, media also provides a useful platform where women can share their problems and feelings with other fellow-mothers. Skov and Moeran argue that print media has a determinant role in defining women's role in the contemporary society (Skov and Moeran 1995a, 37). Women magazines organize events, accompanied with promotional activities, on a variety of themes related to women's life and to child-rearing. They give space for narratives of personal accounts where readers share experience and views. Experiences told directly by readers are common features of Japanese female magazines, which lend a feeling of shared experience among readers.<sup>212</sup> Magazines conduct regular surveys on a variety of subjects whose results are then presented on the pages of the magazine. In recent years, the COMO magazine has been regularly conducting extensive surveys among families celebrating Shichigosan. The most important part of the survey is the questionnaire on Shichigosan experience from the previous year. Here, mothers report on the details of the celebration of their family, on its shortcomings and positive elements, on the difficulties of organization, and give account of personal impressions. The results of the survey and included comments are published then, in the August issue, on the pages of the magazine. These reports serve as important source of information for mothers planning the celebration in the ongoing or in one of the subsequent years. Similar surveys are conducted by other magazines and online child-rearing web sites, as well. Most of these surveys, apart from the statistics on expenditure, dress style, location of festive meal and others, include also individual accounts, often with photos of families, listing the 'successful' or 'less successful' elements of the celebration. Reading these reports and experiences of others, can considerably lower the anxiety level of the mother-organizer. Indeed, as the date of the celebration approaches, many mothers give voice to their feelings of stress and anxiety due to the quantity of matters that need to be taken care of.

According to the survey conducted by COMO in 2009 among 200 mothers, more than half of them used magazines as their main source for gathering information on Shichigosan (118 persons, COMO 2010, August). There were 89 persons who consulted

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<sup>212</sup> See more on this subject in Skov and Moeran 1995a.

fellow mothers, too.<sup>213</sup> The importance of child-rearing magazines has been confirmed also by the survey mentioned above. The already mentioned survey conducted by Shintani et al examined customs related to rites connected to pregnancy and birth (2003). The study found out that mothers of small children consulted magazines for information not only on practical matters of child-rearing issues, but also on rituals to be observed for their children. As one of the interviewed mother told when describing the celebration of *miyamairi* in her family: ‘I followed the instructions read in the magazine. At the shrine I asked my mother-in-law to hold the baby for posing for the photo because I read in the magazine that the custom requires this.’ (Shintani et al. 2003, 26).

The authors of the study also draw attention to the fact that child-rearing magazines in Japan often reflect a distorted image of birth and child-rearing. The images they offer make these event and period appear in bright colors comparable to a desirable commodity. Consequently, the less bright sides of raising a small child, the illnesses and difficulties of the everyday life are underplayed. The authors also argue that readers of these magazines can “[...] gain the impression that buying this or that item or spending money for this or that ritual, can assure an easy delivery or a healthy happy child” (Shintani et al 2003, 33). The disparity between the images of happiness reflected by media and the reality of child-rearing involving countless problems, is an often discussed problem in studies dealing with consumer culture.<sup>214</sup> However, whereas media presentation certainly does influence readers in their imaginary as well as actions, it must be also acknowledged that readers are never just passive receivers of information. Readers use information provided to them selectively in harmony with their needs and desires. Media articles often include promotional information, but on the other hand, they offer a platform where readers’ comments, experiences, and views can be expressed. In the last decade, internet has actively joined print magazines targeting Japanese women. Information and advice corners are offered by numerous web sites, among them general child-rearing sites designed for mothers with young children, information sites for etiquette manners, sites of kimono shops, photo studios and shrine web pages, as well as

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<sup>213</sup> Multiple choice was possible in the questionnaire, hence the number of mothers who turned for information exclusively to fellow mothers without looking for information in the magazines, is not clear. However, since the survey was undertaken among readers of *COMO*, the first option is highly improbable.

<sup>214</sup> In the Japanese context see for example contributions to the edited volume of Skov and Moeran 1995b.

specific sites for matters related exclusively to Shichigosan. Several of these sites undertake periodically surveys and questionnaires among their readers. The web site of Mikihouse ([www.55192.com](http://www.55192.com)) conducts surveys every three years among its registered members specifically on Shichigosan. In 2001, 182 mothers offered their own experience and impressions concerning the celebration of Shichigosan. Questions of the survey included inquiries on ways of planning and preparation, on the choice of the festive dress styles, on the number of participants in the event, and so on. In the final report, individual experiences are quoted in length and these enrich obtained data and are thus shared with public. Apart from the mentioned sites, blogs also serve as valuable source of information for mothers in need of advice. Here mothers can ‘meet’ and chat with other fellow mothers and discuss matters that cause them most worries. It is a platform where also more sensitive issues can be treated in an anonym way, such as for example differences in opinions on celebration modes between wife and husband, or more significantly between parents and grandparents.

The modality of choosing appropriate channels of information as well as the extent to which mothers’ dedicate attention to the phase when information on Shichigosan is gathered, is closely connected also to the problem of anxiety perceived by young mothers. In general, it can be said that Japanese women perceive high levels of anxiety with regard to child-rearing. Multiple factors contribute to the rise of this phenomenon. First of all, most Japanese mothers today are confronted with the phase of child-rearing without much prior experience. In times when families had numerous children, daughters were expected to participate in household chores that included also care for younger siblings. Moreover, altered life condition cause that children today have always less occasion to play freely with younger children in the neighborhood, or to come into contact with children and infants in the wider circle of family. Today, mothers are also more isolated. The limited availability of persons to whom mothers could turn for advice, combined with the lack of direct experience, often generates high levels of anxiety. Also, the celebration of Shichigosan normally takes place only once or twice in the same family depending on the number of siblings. Indeed, the term ‘once in a life-time’ though referring to the lifetime of the child, emerges very often in the media as well as in words of mothers. The frequent use of the term indicates, among others, that the celebration is

perceived as a unique occasion and also as unique in character. This ‘uniqueness’ appears to be true both from the child’s and the parents’ perspective. For parents the celebration can be the first experience of the kind and thereby, they are not able to draw from their own experience. Thirty years ago when the generation of parents today were in Shichigosan-age, the custom of the celebration was still not equally diffused in every part of Japan and also, the pattern of the celebration was less elaborate. Besides, the experience made as a child is not too useful when facing the task of planning as adult. To help these parents numerous forums, in print and online media, offer advices. These include not only etiquette manuals, but also the leaflets and websites of photo studios, rental shops and shrines. They recommend appropriate ways to celebrate, give explanation of historical origins, proper dress code. They offer advices even concerning details of practical character such as the right timing of the single phases of the preparative process, or what to do if the child gets tired during the event, they propose small tricks to make children to get used to walk in traditional shoes or to wear more easily the traditional dress, and so on. In brief, these and similar forums compensate the lack of ritual knowledge and the unavailability of direct sources of information.

Ultimately, the role of grandparents needs to be addressed. As already discussed, compared to fifty years ago the role of the older generation has become less significant in the transmission of knowledge. Though, grandparents’ contribution emerges today in several other ways. As for Shichigosan, grandparents’ help in covering the financial costs of the celebration is often significant. This can include the purchase of the festive dress of the grandchild. This practice can be out into connection with the custom in rural communities when traditionally it was the maternal grandmother who usually was assigned the role to send gifts for rituals observed for the grandchild (see Chapter III). Though, there are cases of families which follow the local tradition, in most cases this rule is not respected and any side of grandparents can provide for the dress. According to the COMO survey done in 2006, financial contribution came from both pairs of grandparents, only slightly more from grandparents on maternal side (COMO, 2006, September). In present days, cash gift is also common which is used then by the family to

cover the expenses of the celebration.<sup>215</sup> When grandparents join in to cover the expenses, their views on the pattern of the celebration is taken into consideration with more weight. In areas where local variations of the Shichigosan ritual still persist (mostly in rural places), the opinions of grandparents can be more important in defining the celebration pattern. The 2001 survey of Mikihouse concluded that in places with persisting local traditions usually a considerable effort is showed to adhere to the existing customs. The same is true also for families which conserve particular patterns typical to their own tradition. Furthermore, though not typical, there are also cases when families return to the native place, i.e. home of grandparents, to observe their children's Shichigosan.

## 6.11 Conclusions

Celebrations such as Shichigosan offer a unique opportunity to express and/or reconfirm values inherent in the society. The alterations in these values as well as shifts in the meanings associated to the celebration, have closely followed the transformation taking place within the institution of the Japanese family. Changes in social roles of single members of the family and wider kin, in particular those related to the women's position in the family and altering views on children and child-rearing in general, are all mirrored in the evolution of the social significance of Shichigosan and of its pattern. In the course of this development, Shichigosan has absorbed changes and proved capable to adjust to the shifting requirements that modern life-style with its values and priorities presented. Its contemporary pattern gives expression to these values and priorities inherent in the modern life of the Japanese. The celebration is today a family-centered event in contrast to traditional patterns where the role of community was emphasized. It provides a platform where the identity of the nuclear family can be constructed in a creative way and played out. It can be assumed, thereby, that rites of passage such as Shichigosan

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<sup>215</sup> The average sum that was given by grandparents, according to the COMO survey (2006), was around 35-42000 Yen (paternal: 36000 Yen, maternal: 43000 Yen). Although, cases when 300 000 Yen was given were registered.

participate to a significant degree in the psychological and symbolical construction of the family in present-day Japan.

Also, Shichigosan represents a unique occasion to celebrate family cohesion and loving bond between parent-child. Family rituals have been described as a relatively reliable index of family integration (Rook 1985, 295). Within a family unit, ritual practices can cement relationships (Bossard and Boll 1960). While the decision to omit the performance of Shichigosan is not indicating an inferior level of cohesion and solidarity within the family, the performance of the observance and the memories associated to the ritual experience play an important part in the symbolic construction of the family as an emotional entity in later years.

Shichigosan highlights a multitude of other aspects, as well. Through the multiple decisions taken during the planning process, individual values and preferences of single members of the family can be brought to light along with more universal values represented by the wider social environment. Besides, Shichigosan has also important functions in the enculturation and socialization of children. By living through the single parts of the wholeritual experience, the observance can convey to the child notions about age- and gender-related themes.

It is also important to underline that contemporary Japanese society is increasingly characterized by a plurality of life styles and views. Merry White argues that in Japan there is nothing like a uniform or singular family pattern, families are plural as they differ in shape, size, functions, class and even ethnicities (White 2003). This plurality and diversification is recognizable also within the variety of celebration modes in Shichigosan where none of the existing patterns is labeled as the only acceptable or proper. Socially accepted patterns of Shichigosan today make not only possible to match single family's needs, but also offer space to the expression of individuality in the form of personal preferences. The diversification of celebration manners is also supported by the marketplace which makes a wide range of services and goods available to observers. Besides, the freedom of choice is legitimized by etiquette experts and religious institutions which acknowledge the plurality as a salient characteristics of modern Japanese family life.

Lastly, Shichigosan today represents a valid and efficient instrument to which the Japanese family can turn for a symbolic expression as well as an affirmation of its identity and image as a family. The celebration can be effectively used to express values and associated imaginary in a manner that harmonizes with the priorities of contemporary Japanese society. The symbolical aspects of the celebration, its elements that serve as vehicles to convey important messages and the way this communication occurs constitute the subject of the next chapter.

## 7. SYMBOLISM IN SHICHIGOSAN

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter I intend to dedicate to an aspect which so far received only a marginal attention in my work but which nevertheless is equally important if the meaning of the observance is to be understood in its complexity. Ritual is defined first of all as a symbolical communication mode. It is this mode and the elements that constitute it that distinguish ritual from other ordinary social practices. Accordingly, the aim of this chapter is to identify these elements and to interpret them and to add, in this way, another important dimension to the interpretative framework of the ritual experience.

The analytical framework that has been elaborated by Dennis W. Rook for the analysis of the ritual dimensions of consumer behavior and of consumption rituals, distinguishes four tangible components on which ritual experience relies (Rook 1985).<sup>216</sup> Rook identifies the four components as following: ritual artifacts, ritual script, ritual performance roles, and ritual audience. From these components several ones have been already partly discussed in previous chapters. Thus, ritual scripts are for example manuals, written or non-written (etiquette) materials that provide instructions and rules with the scope to guide the ritual process. In this manner, the proper behavior during the ritual, the right sequence of actions or the appropriate way to use ritual artifacts. Several historical aspects of change in ritual script of childhood rites of passage were touched upon in the descriptive parts of this work. Ritual performance roles are roles that actors perform during the ritual. The role of actors can be strictly defined and formalized but it can enjoy a relative freedom, too. In case of Shichigosan ritual roles played by the child, mother, father, and grandparents has been addressed so far. Finally, ritual audience consists of

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<sup>216</sup> For this aim Rook adapted Goffman's use of metaphors in human social intercourse (Goffman 1959 quoted in Rook 1985, 253). Whereas I find this framework useful also to the interpretation of the contemporary form of Shichigosan, I do not wish to define the contemporary form of Shichigosan as a purely consumer ritual.

persons who attend the ritual. While in the case of public mass rituals it is obvious who the audience is, in other cases, for example at family rituals, it is not always possible to exactly identify the target audience. Also in case of Shichigosan, is today principally a family ritual, and as such, its audience is not clearly definable, or its target offers several readings. On one hand, persons present at shrine (or temple) can be recognized as a public witnessing and viewing, actively or passively, the event. On the other hand, relatives or friends taking part in the celebration in a direct or indirect way (for example through receiving a gift or photos of the celebration) can be also identified as the audience. Alongside the above mentioned components, there are several other actors assuming an indirect but all the more significant role in the creation of the ritual experience. These were partly already discussed in the previous chapters as they include several agents of the market, employees and assistants of rental and wear shops, of beauty parlors and photo studios.

While all the above listed components can have symbolic attributes, ritual artifacts are those that are most commonly associated with symbolic meanings. In simple terms, ritual artifacts are objects that are consumed during the ritual (food, drink) and/or that accompany it (ceremonial garments, gifts).<sup>217</sup> These objects are distinguished from other objects by their capacity to convey or communicate symbolic messages. The artifacts acquire symbolic meaning first of all by being used and consumed in a ritual context. They are “[...] integral to the meaning of the total (ritual) experience [...]” (Rook 1985, 253). It is important to recognize that a major part of tangible artifacts today are provided by the marketplace. Indeed, it is through these artifacts that the market as such actively partakes in the creation and shaping of ritual experience. Moreover, the commercial sector also makes suggestions which can often alter the ritual script, in other words, new manners are proposed to use new services and objects that are introduced to the market. The market, in this way, contributes to the creative process through which the meaning of single symbols of the ritual comes to be interpreted. On the other hand, all objects acquire a symbolic meaning only in the hand of the observers and this process, in which the objects are being transformed into ritual artifacts is always culturally determined by the given society.

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<sup>217</sup> See also Douglas and Isherwood 1979.

The most pertinent tangible ritual artifacts associated with Shichigosan is the festive dress, accessories, the photo, and food items. Symbolic forms always serve multiple purposes, hence attention needs to be paid to the multiple layers of meaning that a given symbol may be vested during the ritual event (Geertz 1973, 113). So the kimono, for example, owes its significance both to its capacity to convey the notion of tradition as well as family values. The photo, while objectifying family unity and solidarity, can satisfy certain culturally defined aesthetic standards. Though, there are also intangible components in ritual. In case of Shichigosan these are for example the numbers. The use of them is informed by symbolism inherent in the traditional Japanese cosmology. Besides, several external marks that communicate the auspiciousness of the event will also be analyzed with special attention to their historical and cultural contexts. The significance of single elements within a ritual can differ from each other in grade of importance, but nonetheless, together they make up the overall complexity of the ritual experience and meaning. They form an intricate system of symbols which contribute to the creation of a meaningful and rewarding ritual experience.

Before proceeding, I find it necessary to underline that for a ritual event I intend here the celebration in its totality, including both the preparation phase (planning, photo studio session etc.) and the actual celebrative event (shrine visit, purification rite, family gathering). The ritual experience of Shichigosan is, in my interpretation, constituted of a series of events each distinguished by a particular significance and role.

## **7.2 Historical examples of symbolism in childhood rites of passage**

Symbols and symbolic systems need to be interpreted in their own cultural and social environment since these develop always according to their own rules (Douglas 2003). Thus the interpretation of symbols is not only defined by the given cultural and social context but also by the historical period that provides a temporal frame to the ritual practice. When looking at the single components of the contemporary ritual form in

Shichigosan, it is important to acknowledge that many of them have their origin in the past. At the same time, it has to be underlined that the meanings associated to them have undergone important alterations in the course of the time. As indicated in Chapter III at closer examination, there are two main themes that emerge most frequently with regard to childhood rites of passage in Japan. The first centers around the progress of the human soul in the life cycle as part of the narrow circle of the household and later, as member of the wider social community. The second theme concerns the display of social status of the child and of the family, in other words, the reaffirmation of social ties that the household sustained within its social environment. In the course of the history, these two themes received varying emphases depending on factors such as the social status of the family and local customs. In pre-modern Japan, ritual patterns differed and changed mainly along the line of social membership. Accordingly, social membership was one of the main factors that defined the system of symbols used in a ritual. A move on the social scale could bring about a shift in ritual practice, as it happened, for example, when the warrior class seized power and made a move upward on the social scale. Together with this move, the military class adopted a range of customs and a significant part of the etiquette from the court aristocracy. Later, changes in the structure of economic power in the 17-18<sup>th</sup> century led the merchant population to a similar embracing of the ritual etiquette of the elite classes. Changes in the socio-economic conditions often cause shifts in emphases and alterations of contents in ritual practice. Change in the social reality brings about a need of adoption of an appropriate symbolic system in order to ensure the viability of the communication.

An instructive example of historical patterns of childhood age celebration popular among samurai families during the Tokugawa period can be found in the description and practice of the Ogasawara school (小笠原流). Members of the Ogasawara family have acted for centuries (for 31 generations) as the official etiquette and ceremony masters and tutors for the equestrian archery at the Tokugawa military government. Today the official heir and head of the Ogasawara etiquette school is Kiyotada Ogasawara (小笠原清忠).<sup>218</sup> The school scope is to preserve old ceremonial customs as transmitted for centuries and to achieve this it organizes numerous demonstrations for the interested public. The annual

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<sup>218</sup> For the official website of the school see: [www.ogasawara-ryu.gr.jp](http://www.ogasawara-ryu.gr.jp)

schedule of its events also includes celebrations of childhood age rites performed according to the pattern observed once among high rank samurai. The school sustains that these are true reproductions of rituals observed by samurai families in the Tokugawa period.<sup>219</sup> The pattern has been reconstructed from various historical documents, in particular from old writings in possession of the Ogasawara family.<sup>220</sup>

The Shichigosan rites are observed in the school separately. The first of the three rites, *kamioki*, is performed for both, male and female children, of the age of two-three. During the ceremony, an elder person, male for boys, female for girls, wearing a formal kimono assists the child to change its dresses into a formal kimono. The role of the guarantor during rites of passage among the upper social class was discussed in Chapter III and IV. In brief, the so called *kamioki* parent or guarantor, were present at the various rites of passage observed by the child and they often continued to act as a protector, a kind of social parent, also later in the child's adult life. At important moments, such as the selection of the future spouse or social advancement, the guarantor's advice and help was normally sought for. The social position and the elevated age of the guarantor stood as symbols of respect, health, longevity, prosperity, and success in life; all qualities desired for the child by its parents. The custom of asking an older respectable person to act as a guarantor during the rite was widespread in particular among families belonging to the upper social class where the affirmation, demonstration as well as perpetuation of social standing was of utmost importance.

An important symbol in the *kamioki* ceremony performed by the Ogasawara school is an ornament called *shiraga* 白髪 *Shiraga* is a bunch made from white silk thread. It symbolizes white hair of old age and comprises the blessing of adults of a long happy life

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<sup>219</sup> The source of this description is an article written by Kiyotada Ogasawara. It appeared in a publication appeared as a separate number of a series focusing on miscellaneous themes. This particular volume was on traditional Japanese childhood rites of passage (子供の成長祝いときもの 全部知りたいシリーズ vol.3, 2009 September). I added other information from materials published on the official web site of the Ogasawara school (Note 3).

<sup>220</sup> Among others the 18<sup>th</sup> century's Teijō zatsuki (貞丈雑記). An important source is also the Kojiruien (古事類苑), an encyclopedia compiled between 1896 and 1907 on behalf of the Ministry of Education of the Meiji government which is considered to be one of the largest collection of old historical documents. It includes numerous records of historical forms of rituals and customs.

for the child. During the rite, the guarantor places it on the head of the child.<sup>221</sup> In general, *kamioki*, as its name indicates (lit. ‘hair-putting/growing’), was connected to a change in hair style. It was associated to the custom of shaving children’s head in the early years of their life. Malign forces as well as illnesses were believed to enter the body of the child from the head, therefore, as a form of prevention, it was common to remove all hair from the child’s head after birth. *Kamioki* indicated usually the termination of this practice, as well as the beginning of the time when the hair of the child was allowed to grow in length. In some regions, the *kamioki* rite was followed by another ritual which marked the act of the first trimming of the hair. In families belonging to the upper social classes, the custom to shave children’s head was gradually abandoned and in this case often the first trimming rite called *fukasogi* 深削ぎ or *kamisogi* 髪削ぎ, replaced the *kamioki* (Inoguchi 1959). A change in hair style served as a visible symbol that communicated a definite status change regarding the physical growth of the child. The use of this symbol was common also at later life stages when the maturity of the individual was to be communicated to the public (see below).

The second Shichigosan rite, *hakama-gi*, in the interpretation of the Ogasawara school, was adopted by the samurai class from the court noble etiquette with the difference that samurai started to perform it for male children solely. The garment around which this rite focuses, the *hakama* (loose trousers), used to be worn without difference for gender until around the 14<sup>th</sup> century, after which it became part of the typical outfit worn by samurai. The *hakama* ceremony indicated that the samurai son was allowed to put on his first formal crested kimono (紋付のきもの). In the Tokugawa period a new style became popular as a formal wear among samurai which was called *kamishimo* 袴 This consisted of *hakama* combined with an upper wear called *kataginu* 肩衣 (Sasama 2001). Today, the Ogasawara school performs *hakama-gi* for five years old boys and it partly follows the pattern described in the case of the first rite, the *kamioki*. The child is helped into a formal crested kimono by an elder person who plays the role of the guarantor. Furthermore, children during the ritual are made to step on a *go* board (*goban* 碁盤). The popular game of *go* was viewed as a symbol of human life which was conceived as a

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<sup>221</sup> There were regions where the custom was part of the local version of *kamioki* in rural communities, too.

battle marked with victories and defeats. Moreover, since to play and to win in *go* requires wit and intelligence, the game suits well the symbolism of the rite of passage at which the same qualities are wished for the child. Paralleling thus the game *go* with the struggles of human life, the child is encouraged to jump off the board vigorously as it will have to face battles and troubles in its own life.

While today the Ogasawara school performs the seventh year's rite, *obitoki*, only for girls, in the samurai society of the Tokugawa period the seventh year ritual was observed also for boys. The *obi* was a piece of garment that was added only gradually to the Japanese wardrobe but in the Tokugawa period it was already seen as integral part of the wear. Among samurai families, on the occasion of the rite it was a custom to give the samurai son his first pieces of the samurai equipment: a pair of *katana* (sword) and other weapons, such as for example a spear called *yari* 槍 Today, the Ogasawara etiquette observes *obitoki* in a way similar to the one described in the previous two rites. Little girls are assisted by an adult, usually an older woman (child's mother and/or a guarantor parent). During the rite the child is helped into a new kimono which is then tied with a ceremonial *obi* sash. During the ceremony, the child has to face a direction believed to be auspicious.

These examples are illustrations of age celebration patterns that were typical to the warrior class prior to the Meiji period. Much of the symbolism of these rituals was associated to visible changes in the dress code and hair style. Dress and hair were important signs of social status in historical periods prior to the Meiji era.<sup>222</sup> They were seen as distinctive signs of social membership, of marital status, of age as well as of the importance attributed to a particular event (Tanida and Koike 1989). In the Heian period, the imperial court etiquette counted a complex system of dress order ranks where each position and function was assigned a particular style (Dalby 1993). Belonging to a distinct age group was also a fact determining the individual's dress and hair style. Hair-doing of girls before their coming-of-age ceremony and after its completion was different.

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<sup>222</sup>Several magical beliefs were associated to hair in Japan (Maeda quoted in Na-Young 2006, 81). Hair as such was believed to be a religious object and hence possessing magical powers. Examples described by Na-Young show that similar beliefs associated to hair existed in the past in Korea, too (Na-Young 2006).

Again, married women also differed in their hair style (Na-Young 2006). Not only age-rituals in early childhood but also the coming-of-age rites centered around the change of hairstyle combined with the change of dress.<sup>223</sup>

During the Tokugawa period the division between single social classes were further regulated by the *bakufu* government. A well defined social scale was created where every class was assigned its own sphere of responsibilities, duties and etiquette code. The regulations regarded also the permitted dress code for single classes. The *bakufu* government strictly monitored these rules and the frequent sumptuary laws aimed to outlaw inappropriate behavior and manners, among others with regards to the use of dress.<sup>224</sup> The dress code typical to a given social class influenced also the ceremonial use of garments, hence clothes worn during rituals, differed along the lines of social class belonging. As the *hakama* started to be worn mainly by warriors, the *hakama-gi* rite became a ceremony typically observed for samurai sons. The crested formal kimono worn for the ritual had a central role in the samurai society in which heritage and the continuation of the family line were viewed as of particular import. Similarly, today families, for whom the continuation of their line is important, or they simply value family history and tradition often insist that their son (grandson) wears a kimono with the family's crest on it during Shichigosan.

Apart from the distinction in dress code according to social class belonging, children's wear differed also by age. A child up to the age of two wore a simple kimono called *hitotsumi* 一つ身.<sup>225</sup> This was then changed into *mitsumi* 三つ身 worn until the age of three-four. After four-five a kimono called *yotsumi* 四つ身 was used usually until ten years of age. The first clothes of the infant, *hitotsumi* and *mitsumi* included, were tied with a cord which was changed into the sash (*obi*) when tying already the *yotsumi* sized dress (Taguchi 2011). These denominations indicated the length of the kimono which altered with the growth of the child. In some places of Japan, the festive dress, clad by the child

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<sup>223</sup> A girl's hairdo at her coming-of age rite was called *kamiage* (髪上げ) for example.

<sup>224</sup> The *bakufu*'s concern towards its subjects went so far as to order by law the date of the change from summer clothing into winter clothing and vice versa. So for example, the day of the change from winter to summer clothing was the first day of the fourth month (Sasama 2001, 94).

<sup>225</sup> The word *hitotsumi* indicates the smallest size of kimono. It does not bear stitches on the back as kimono of bigger size necessarily does.

at its seven year's age rite, was called *yotsumi no hareki* 四つ身の晴れ着 (lit. 'yotsumi festive cloth') (Suzuki 2000, 62, see also Chapter III). The change to *yotsumi* was marked with one of the age celebration and accordingly, the use of *obi* was conditioned with the completion of these rites occurring commonly between the ages of five and seven. *Obi*, the regular sash, was seen as a symbol of maturity and among all garments of the traditional Japanese wardrobe, it was this part of the garment that was most strongly associated with the symbolism of maturity and adulthood.

### 7.3 The notion of age-transition

In order to understand the importance of rites of passage in the Japanese cultural context, it is necessary to pay attention to the wider implications associated to the concept of age in Japan. In the traditional cosmology, human existence was viewed as a process through which the human soul progressed gradually from birth to death and again from death to rebirth (see Chapter III). Within this cycle, the phase from birth to death was thought of as a development from a lesser maturity to an increasing degree of maturity. The single phases of this development were marked ritually when knowledge was symbolically inscribed onto the individual and the change in status was communicated to the social environment. This particular cosmology produced a singular conception of age in the Japanese cultural context, and this continues to bear important implications also in the present. The Japanese society has been repeatedly described by Western scholars as an 'age-grade society' (Francks 2009, White 1987). White, for example, points out that whereas in Western societies ageing tends to be associated with negative ideas, the Japanese view ageing in a more positive manner. The Japanese perceive human life as a flow and accordingly, they tend to regard the cycle of human life in a more harmonious way compared to the Western view. This attitude can be put into connection with the fact that there is an increased awareness concerning age and transition of age in the Japanese culture. Since belonging to a given age grade is not perceived in a negative sense, the

adherence to a given age groups occurs on the individual level in a more conscious way. Also, the shift from one age group to the other occurs in a more visible manner. This accent on single stages and on the shift between these stages is demonstrated also in the study conducted by Joy Hendry on childrearing practices. The author argues that in Japan each stage in children's life cycle is attributed a given set of behavior models. Teachings judged as appropriate to the given stage are transmitted to the children by adults in a conscious manner (Hendry 1986, 77).

This culturally determined view on change in human life, has implications on several aspects of social life. First of all, the comparatively high number of rites of passage in the Japanese culture marking the changes in the life-cycle, can be put into connection with this particular cultural sensitivity and increased awareness with regards to age and its changes. Rites of passages mark these changes in a powerful and visible way. At the same time, they give an expression to the view that sees human life as a process rather than as a static state. The transmission of important cultural values often occurs in the form of ritual observances, such as for example be annual events or other festivities (Hendry 1986, 139-143). Furthermore, even though many of rites of passage observed in the past has become obsolete in modern days, there is a number of new rites that partly overtake the function of the traditional ones. Such new rituals are for example the school entrance and graduation ceremonies whose importance is discussed in a number of works on Japan.<sup>226</sup> Schools as well as parents pay big attention to the organizing of these events and this is indicative of the significance that is attributed to the ritual treatment of marking passages and transitions in the Japanese society. Peter Cave argues that these school ceremonies are conceived in Japan as modern rites of passage which aim at marking clearly the passage that change of institution attendance and change of status entails (Cave 2007, 175). These ceremonies communicate important, socially approved cultural values, and they help to create shared memories (ibid, 192). Hendry observes that in the Kyushu community she studied in the early 1980s, the ceremony marking the entry into primary school could even substitute the seventh-year Shichigosan (Hendry 1986, 38).

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<sup>226</sup> See for example Hendry 1986, Rohlen 1989, Peak 1993, Cave 2007.

The attention paid to age and its transitions is reflected also in another sphere of social life, that of consumer culture. The various age groups generate determined behavioral models in consumption patterns and these models often follow changes along the lines of life-cycle. Several studies demonstrate that in Japan there is a very close link between age-grade awareness and consumer behavior. This cultural trait of the Japanese to attribute significance to the shifts in age-grades is successfully used as a sale strategy by the Japanese commercial sectors (White 1987, Goy-Yamamoto 2004).

The contemporary form of Shichigosan gives expression to this cultural trait in several ways. First, mothers pay a fairly big attention to the age of the child when planning the time of the celebration. The decision when the celebration should be observed, lays today within certain socially accepted limits, on parents. As already indicated in previous chapters (Chapter V, VI), there exist a discrepancy in Japan between the two age-counting systems, the traditional and the modern. The difference between the two systems can produce, when calculating the child's age, a difference up to an entire year. Apart from rendering the decision problematic, the difference between the two systems also allows for a flexibility in defining the proper age for the performance of the celebration. Accordingly, the traditional age-counting mode (*kazoetoshi*) becomes convenient for those who, for any reason, prefer to anticipate the date of the observance. Whereas the modern way (*mannenreki*) is chosen by those who would like to perform the celebration at a later date. However, it needs to be noted that in spite of the advices of etiquette specialists who encourage families to suit the date of the celebration first of all to their own convenience, families still are anxious concerning the right decision. This is demonstrated by the big quantity of inquiries coming from worried mothers who feel insecure and concerned about the proper age of their children at the celebration. These inquiries target etiquette specialists active in advice corners in child-rearing magazines and websites. Most concerns regard the first of the Shichigosan celebrations which takes place when the child is between two and three. It is a relatively young age when the physical and mental maturity of children can show big individual differences. Many parents thinks that the successful outcome of the ritual depends also on the grade of maturity of their child at the celebration. A rewarding ritual experience is the most desired things of most families and therefore, they evaluate whether the child is mature

enough to enjoy the event, to endure the lengthy preparations necessary for the celebration, whether it will be capable to properly wear the festive dress, to move and walk in it for the entire duration of the event. At the same time, once the celebration terminates, the very ability of the child, having successfully performed the celebration without major problems, in a way assesses in the eyes of the adults the accomplishment of another grade in the growth of the child. Endurance through the troubles of a day-long celebration affirms the child's maturity. In a different way, the seventh year Shichigosan, too, is viewed as an important step in the child's growth. This time, girls go through an even more elaborate preparation than at the age of three. They receive a proper adult-like make-up and their hair is arranged to suit the style of the festive dress.<sup>227</sup> Girls at this age are also encouraged to actively participate in the preparation phase. Most mothers concede their daughters to express individual tastes and preferences when choosing the festive outfit and accessories.

There is another aspect of Shichigosan that can be connected to the concept of age-awareness. The celebration is an important occasion when the child is made to face the public. During the entire duration of the celebration, starting from the preparation procedure in the beauty parlor and in the photo studio, the visit in the shrine to the festive meal in the restaurant, the child is placed in the center of attention. Family members as well as other persons present at the single phases of the celebration provide the event with a formal recognition. Children receive praises for being 'brave' and 'behaving properly' on this important occasion. In brief, although dress code does not follow so strict regulations by age and social class belonging as it used to do in the pre-Meiji period, rites of passage such as Shichigosan can still effectively give expression to the culturally given sensitivity concerning age in Japan.

Not lastly, the ages when SHichigosan is observed are ages to which other noteworthy events are connected. The age of three marks the entrance of the child into its first preschool institution starting so an attendance which would eventually last nearly for two decades. This entrance into the first educational institution indicates also that the child moves out from the sphere of the family's direct control and that from now on it will be

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<sup>227</sup> On the meanings associated to make-up in the Japanese cultural context see Ashikari 2003.

the school that will guide its socialization. Joy Hendry notes that public institutions in postwar Japan overtook significant parts of the role that in the past community held with regard to the public socialization of children (Hendry 1986, 61). Again, the age of seven is conceived as a threshold when children move from kindergarten to grammar school and its separation from the family is even more marked. The joy over the growth and maturing of the child, which can blend with controversial feelings of sorrow, are echoed also in the words of mothers when commenting their Shichigosan experience: “It was so moving to see my son to behave during the celebration as a grown-up little person. Quite different from the little baby that he used to be only a while ago!”, “The celebration made me think about the quick passing of time. My child is growing quickly and soon it will become a proper little person.”<sup>228</sup> Accordingly, for many parents Shichigosan highlights the single steps achieved by their child in its physical, mental, but also social development. This echoes the interpretation of rites of passage given by the renowned psychologist, Erik Erikson who contested the theories that interpret rites of passage first of all as transformative agents. Erikson argues that true transformation occurs in the everyday conduct and rites of passage should be seen as public announcements of the new status rather than as a device to accomplish it (Erikson 1982).

#### **7.4 The idea of tradition in Japanese festive dress**

Today the festive dress, in particular the Japanese traditional style, is regarded the most important symbol of Shichigosan. Dress, ornaments and make-up figure as frequent symbols in rituals. Mary Douglas argues that this kind of adornment of the body can be regarded as a form of bodily control as well as of communication towards the external world (Douglas 2007).<sup>229</sup> The perception of these symbols is not only socially determined

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<sup>228</sup> Source: [www.na-na.no.blog.jp](http://www.na-na.no.blog.jp) (accessed 2011, June 20).

<sup>229</sup> Douglas puts the prevalence of symbols of bodily control in a given culture into connection with the degree of social constraints existing in the given culture (ibid, xxxvii). In the history of Japan, as already

but also can change over time (ibid, 9). Accordingly, in order to understand the way symbolic meaning attached to the Japanese wear evolved, it is necessary to examine the changes that Shichigosan festive dress went through in the course of its history.

When discussing the changes in festive dress, a distinction between Western and Japanese style needs to be made. Though, there were periods in the Japanese history when the Western style was worn equally often as the Japanese traditional wear at Shichigosan, today it is primarily the Japanese dress that is associated with the celebration. The Western style was popular in particular moments and it was mostly restricted to male wear. Such moments were, for example, the years before and after World War II when general changes in the wardrobe of the Japanese affected also the festive garments of children. The changes in the festive dress style followed closely shifting trends in the everyday clothing customs of the Japanese. It would be impossible to describe here the historical development of the Japanese wardrobe through ages, though, it can be noted that one of the most significant transformation occurred as a result of the modernization processes occurring in the Japanese society starting from the Meiji period in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In this epoch, the Japanese traditional wear was gradually giving place to the simpler and more convenient Western wear. The 1920s were the turning point when the Japanese wear came to be separated from the everyday use (Ashikari 2003). It was also the moment when the Japanese wear started its move into the realm of ‘tradition’ and as a result, it became relegated to specific, formal occasions (Dalby 1993).

In the decades before and after World War II, there were still big differences between urban and rural customs, both regarding celebration manners and clothing customs. As for Shichigosan in the Tokyo area, the Japanese style festive wear was the prevalent style at least until the 1920s. During the Meiji and Taisho periods newspapers often reported on clothing studios in Tokyo and the bustling periods before the date of the celebration when the studios hurried to satisfy orders of festive children kimonos. However, starting from late 1920s, as a result of the increasing impact of the Western influence on the

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mentioned above, there are numerous examples of social control exercised through a strictly determined fined use of dress code.

everyday customs of the Japanese, the Western style dress started to slowly penetrate into children's festive wardrobe. In children's everyday wear the Western style garments were still seen as rare and peculiar and this made it attractive for the festive attire, at least for those who could afford it. On the other hand, as the war approached, and in particular during the war years, a sharp decline of the festiveness occurred. Times were not suitable for celebrations and even those who insisted on observing the ritual, chose less conspicuous outfits. Children often wore clothes of everyday use or garments characteristic to war times, such as the *monpe* working trousers (see also Chapter V). Military uniforms as signs of patriotism became also popular due to the officially propagated ideology in support of the war.

As for the rural areas, local traditions and customs persisted longer and Western style clothing was adopted for everyday use only in the postwar years. In rural communities where local variations of childhood age rites were still observed, the prevailing festive dress style was primarily the traditional one. This changed in the decades after the war when customs, including celebration manners, have been affected by an overall standardization. In the 1950s, after the upheavals of the years following the end of the war, life slowly returned to its normal state, and children's clothes started to gain on quality and gayness (Kiyomizu 2005). The country's economy was launched into the phase of high speed growth, and famous department stores in Tokyo, such as the Mitsukoshi, included Shichigosan festive fashion into their first fashion shows. In the 1950s and early 1960s, for a short period of time, Japanese and Western style Shichigosan dress seemed to be equally trendy, though the Western dress as a festive child wear continued to represent a novelty in the eyes of most families. In 1955, a survey conducted by a women's college in Gifu, found out that whereas girls wore mostly the Japanese kimono for the celebration (90%), 80% of boys dressed a Westerns style outfit (Nippon Ifuku Gakkaishi 1990).<sup>230</sup> Surveys from the subsequent years showed a slowly rising rate of preference for the Japanese wear. In 1960s, the numbers inverted and boys wearing Japanese style outnumbered those wearing the Western one (Nippon Ifuku Gakkaishi 1990, Dōke et al 1990) . It was at this period that the Japanese style dress started definitely to be associated with the notion of cultural traditions.

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<sup>230</sup> The survey was done on sample of 2423 children.

The revival of the Japanese formal wear witnessed around the end of the 1960s, had also to do with a more general tendency towards re-evaluating customs regarded as traditional and lost with modernization. The high-speed economic growth accelerated the transformation and standardization of life style in both urban and rural areas. This development evoked a rise of nostalgia for things that got lost in the midst of modernization. Traditions, old forgotten customs as well as celebrations with roots in the past started to be viewed with feelings of romantic nostalgia. This quest for tradition in the Japanese society has been labeled also as the ‘nostalgia boom’ and its wider social implications have been addressed in a number of studies.<sup>231</sup>

After the Japanese traditional dress became marginalized within the daily wardrobe of the Japanese and kimono was relegated to festive ceremonial occasions, the Japanese traditional clothing started to be seen as part of the cultural heritage. Accordingly, a special value started to be attributed to the kimono. The complexity of the link between the notion of tradition and the Japanese wear has been studied in different contexts. Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni in her study on a wedding parlor notes that there is a notable difference between the different dressing rooms serving brides at their preparation for the ceremony. While the dressing room where ‘Japanese style brides’ were prepared (dressed into the Japanese style ceremonial kimono) was characterized by solemnity, serious and strict atmosphere, the dressing room where the ‘Western bride’ was ‘produced’, a take-it-easy and relaxed atmosphere prevailed (Goldstein-Gidoni 1997). The author argues that due to the general changes affecting the wardrobe of the Japanese, the traditional clothing started to be associated to qualities such as ceremonialism, solemnity, tradition, and first of all Japaneseness (ibid, 27). Today the Japanese dress is viewed as a symbol of traditional culture and as a constituent inherent in the Japanese identity.

Thus, also in Shichigosan wear an additional layer of meaning has been conferred to the Japanese festive garment. The Japanese kimono is not only to signify a formal festive attire expressing the subsequent grade in the child’s growth, but it stands as a symbol for Japanese culture and traditions. Once the notion of tradition has become inseparable from the celebration itself, the Japanese style dress acquired the role of the main conveyor of

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<sup>231</sup> Among others see the works of Robertson 1985, Kelly 1985, Smith 1988.

this notion. It is important to underline, however, that this development regards first of all the festive dress of the child. For the festive outfit of the accompanying adults, it is true to a much lesser extent. Adults' festive wear showed an increasing propensity for modern Western style in postwar decades. Surveys conducted by professional textile schools during the 1970s recorded a declining rate of adults wearing the Japanese style outfit at Shichigosan (Sano et al 1990). While in 1955, more than 90 % of all female adults put on a Japanese traditional dress, in 1961 the proportion of those who put on a Western style dress grew to 33%. The trend continued in the following decades and by the end of 1980s, women preferring the Japanese outfit for the Shichigosan ritual were already in minority (33% in 1988, according to the survey quoted in Dōke et al 1990). The difference in trends between the festive outfit of adults and that of children could be also interpreted as expressing the centrality of the child's figure within the celebration. Despite critiques targeting the alleged vainness of Japanese mothers using Shichigosan for their own display (see also Chapter V), the overwhelming part of mothers opt for modest outfits in subdued colors, mostly black, with the scope to allow the child emerge as central during the celebration (Kiyomizu 2005).

The change in attitudes towards the Japanese wear is reflected in its shifting price levels, too. The superior quality of materials used for kimono, in contrast to the simpler and cheaper Western style clothing, have made from the kimono an expensive item. Vogel notes that in the 1960s the elevated prices of kimono rendered it suitable to display of wealth and status among middle class families (Vogel 1962, 83). The rise of Japanese style wear as the ceremonial wear is also fueled by the textile industry with interest in traditional wear. The interests of this sector becomes visible also in the efforts of professional textile schools, closely connected to the textile industry, to follow with attention the development in trends and fashion in Shichigosan wear. As already indicated in several parts of this work, textile schools were the only one that regularly conducted surveys on Shichigosan clothing trends in times as early as the 1920s and 1930s. The results of these surveys occasionally appeared also in the epoch's newspapers (see also Chapter V).<sup>232</sup> Later in the postwar period, the organization called Clothing Association undertook similar surveys. The outcome of these surveys were published in

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<sup>232</sup>Unfortunately most of the original documents went destroyed during the war.

the journal of the association (Journal of Clothing Association, 衣服学会雑誌) (Dōke 1960).<sup>233</sup> More recently in the 1990s, professional textile associations such as the Cultural Association of Kimono (日本きもの文化協会) in collaboration with schools such as the Kimono Academy (きものアカデミア) have undertaken occasional surveys on clothing customs with regard to Shichigosan (Kiyomizu 2005). These were meticulous investigations into the details of the festive clothing, recording the exact compositions of the dress worn by each family member, type and color of foot wear, head cover, pattern, design, and color of textile.

Presently, the textile industry continues to follow with attention the changing trends in Shichigosan wear. In particular, the sector with interests in Japanese wear shows considerable effort to promote the kimono as the most appropriate outfit to celebrate Shichigosan. After the kimono was relegated to the ceremonial use, Shichigosan acquired an important place within the series of occasions that are promoted by the textile industry as occasions to clad the Japanese wear. By 1970s, sale figures deriving from dresses used for Shichigosan occupied already a significant share within the sales regarding Japanese traditional style clothing. Around the end of the decade, 10% of the total income coming from the sale of Japanese traditional wear, derived from the retail of Shichigosan festive dress (Shūkan Gendai 1980, November 20).<sup>234</sup> This can be explained by a multitude of factors. First, by this time the urban pattern of Shichigosan, developed mainly in the Tokyo area, has put stable feet into almost all regions of the country where it replaced, or filled in the space left by vanished local customs. Second, the notion of tradition became inherent to the celebration by this time and children's festive attire appropriated the role of being the principal conveyor of this notion. Third, thanks to the significant economic improvement, financial availability of families increased and this made possible to launch exclusive Japanese style garments onto the market, whose cost could arrive even at 400 000 Yen (ibid).

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<sup>233</sup> All surveys done by the Association took place in the shrine of Inaba (伊奈波神社) in the town of Gifu. The surveys usually were based on the observation of one sole celebration day (from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.), that of the 15<sup>th</sup> of November.

<sup>234</sup> Data provided by Kyoto's oldest traditional textile association (京都織物卸商組合), quoted in Shūkan Gendai 1980, November 20.

The import of Shichigosan traditional festive wear for the industry has been also acknowledged by The Japanese Trade Organization of Kimono (社団法人全国日本きもの振興会) when it selected the 11<sup>th</sup> of November for the ‘Day of Kimono’ (きもの日). The date was selected in consideration of the near 15<sup>th</sup>, the traditional date of Shichigosan observance. The leaders of the organization recognized Shichigosan as a par excellence celebration which represented two important cultural traditions at the same time: the age-old celebration of children, and the Japanese traditional garment. Additionally, the 15<sup>th</sup> of November became known in the textile industry as the day of ‘the celebration of silk’ (絹の祭典) (Kiyomizu 2005, 29).

Today, the connection between Shichigosan and the traditional Japanese garment is constantly reinforced by the media, the commercial sector, as well as by religious institutions. Shichigosan occupies an important place among those rites that are promoted as occasions to wear the Japanese style dress. Other rites, such as *miyamairi* (the first shrine visit), *jūsan mairi* (rite at thirteen years of age), the coming of age ceremony, the university entrance and graduation ceremonies, and the wedding ceremony make also part of this category.<sup>235</sup> Media articles and adverts transmit the idea that the traditional Japanese dress has the capability to enhance the glamour and the solemnity of the ceremonial events. The articles often use expressions such as the ‘soulful life’, ‘courteous way of celebrating’, ‘kimono expressing heart and mind’ with the aim to reinforce the positive attributes attached to the kimono. Besides, the links of kimono to national cultural heritage is emphasized by expression such as ‘the return to the origins of the Japanese’. The kimono’s association with tradition and Japanese culture is further sustained by photos that feature Shichigosan children models clad in ceremonial kimono in front of well-known shrines, for example the Hie Shrine, the site of the ‘first Shichigosan’, as the shrine proudly announces.<sup>236</sup> The textile industry and the retail sector is thus significantly contributing to the image of the Japanese kimono that recognizes it as an important symbol of the Shichigosan celebration.

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<sup>235</sup> A survey conducted by the web site Sankei Living in 2009 found out that 40% of adult women (total of 541 respondents) wore kimono for ceremonial occasions. Among these Shichigosan covered 15% ([www.sankeiliving.co.jp](http://www.sankeiliving.co.jp), accessed 2012, May 05).

<sup>236</sup> See for a detailed account Chapter III.

## 7.5 The dress and its multiple meanings

In the Japanese cultural context, there is a rich symbolism connected to the kimono. As already mentioned above, wear in the past was a visible sign of status, gender, and age. Any change in these qualities entailed also a change in dress code. Besides, as Nakamura points out, in the past there was a very distinct division between clothes worn for everyday use and those for festive occasions (Nakamura 1989). Accordingly, a distinction was made between *hare* and *ke* wear, whereas *ke* referred to garments worn in the everyday contexts. The *ke* wear was further subdivided into labor wear and garments worn inside the house. The *haregi* 晴れ着, lit. the festive dress accompanied almost always the significant occasions of the human life course, symbolizing the transition at the same time.<sup>237</sup>

The importance attached to the wear is detachable also in the numerous folk customs connected to the first wearing of a new garment. Before industrial mode of production would have moved the production of kimono from the household manufacture to the factories, the fabrication of clothes was a time- and energy-consuming labor done principally by women. From the preparation of the thread to weaving and sewing, all necessary phases entailed a careful and hard work. In various regions of Japan there were customs connected to the moment when a newly prepared kimono was put on for the first time. The first cladding of a newly made kimono was seen as a special occasion and several rituals were observed at this occasion throughout Japan (Fukuo 1984, 66-67). A big variety of words were used to call this occasion, such as for example *kizome* 着初め (or *kirioroshi*). There were places where this augural occasion was marked by a shrine visit, called *shinchō no aisatsu* 新調の挨拶, lit. greetings on the occasion of newly made kimono. It was also common to select a special day for this occasion, for example the day of a wedding or another auspicious day. To wear a new kimono for the first time, for

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<sup>237</sup> On this argument, see also the work of Kiyoko Segawa *Haregi kō* (1948) .

example, on a funeral, was regarded highly inauspicious. The nature of the first occasion pointed to the next future occasion, and thereby unlucky, unhappy occasions were to be avoided. Also, in many places there were special words or chants that were to be recited during the cladding.

Several beliefs were associated to the first cloth into which the newborn baby was dressed after its birth, too. In many places of Japan it was thought of bad omen to prepare the dress of the child before its birth. The newborn baby was, therefore, wrapped upon birth into an old piece of cloth belonging to one of the parents (Ōtō 1989).<sup>238</sup>In many places of Japan, magical potentials were attributed to this old piece of cloth which was supposed to protect the child against malign forces and ensure a healthy growth. The first kimono, called *ubugi* 産着(also 産衣), was completed during the first days after the birth by one of the grandmothers or often by the midwife. The change of clothes from the old piece into the newly prepared *ubugi* occurred on one of the first ritual occasions, and this could be the third day rite (*mikka iwai*) or the seventh day rite (*oshichiya*) (see also Chapter III). In some places this occasion was seen and called also as *kizome*, i.e. the first ritual wearing (see above). The shape of the *ubugi* differed by region and but conventionally it was a *hitotsume* size kimono, without sleeves, and of white color. There were places where the first kimono was made out from the father's old kimono. Also, Ōtō argues that the parallel observable between the two events of the human life, birth and death, is manifest in the common characteristics that garments associated to these two occasions shared (such as for example the pattern without sleeves or the color of white) (Ōtō 1989, 4). The type of wear worn for the two occasions as well as the local denominations used for these garments reflect the same reservoir of views which inform the transition of human soul in the traditional Japanese worldview.

The symbolism inherent in kimono, even though in a different way, but continues to make part of the complex meaning attached to the dress worn for Shichigosan. Today, according to the prevailing view, the most appropriate dress code for children at Shichigosan is the traditional Japanese style wear. The latest surveys show that in 2010, 90 % of three and five years old girls and over 50 % of five years old boys wear the

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<sup>238</sup> Girl babies were usually dressed into a garment of father, boy babies into mother's.

Japanese dress for the shrine visit on the occasion of the celebration (Taguchi 2011). The textile sector together with the media and religious institutions support this custom. Information materials on Shichigosan, provided by major shrines, often provide detailed explanations on the single components of the festive Japanese style dress differentiated by age and gender. This knowledge is thought to be a lost knowledge and therefore, Japanese families are believed to be in need of information and instruction concerning the details of the traditional dress code. The explanations on the web pages and in the printed material of the Meiji shrine offer the most thorough information regarding the appropriate patterns of Japanese style wear and manners to wear the appropriate garments. So for example, it is advised that five years old boys are dressed in *haori* 羽織, a Japanese half-length coat without sleeves, tied with *obi* made of elegant *habutae* 羽二重 silk, and of a garment called *noshime* 熨斗目, a ceremonial robe once typical to the samurai outfit. As an alternative, a *hakama* of black or brown color with *haori* is proposed. It also says that boys' festive kimono should be decorated with the family crest. A meticulous description of seven years old girls' wear includes recommended patterns and colors for the kimono as well as for the sash. The proposed garments are mostly inspired by the wardrobe typical to the upper samurai class of the Tokugawa era. Thus, the selection of proposed patterns emphasizes the celebration's links to the past. Besides, associating Shichigosan to the upper ranks of the samurai society a sense of glamour is conveyed. This connection to the elite historical culture significantly enhances the celebration's value in the eyes of the observers. Not lastly, the associations to the aristocratic and elite culture are interconnected with the locality, in other words, to the idea that the Meiji shrine is the place where this kind of ritual experience might be achieved.

Nevertheless, Meiji shrine is not the only one to forge the association of Shichigosan with the culture of historical elite classes. The kimono patterns proposed by kimono rental studios and retail shops for Shichigosan, imitate styles from particular historical periods. Trendy designs are often reproductions of patterns typical to the imperial court of the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries. The elevated prices of these models express the added value of this garments.<sup>239</sup> Articles in print media allude to the fact that these patterns and colors

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<sup>239</sup> Prices of these models can exceed even 500 000 Yen.

inspired by glamorous historical periods can add appeal to the celebration. The autumn issue of a fashion periodical in 2010 included a twenty pages-long special on Shichigosan (Sesame 2010, September) that featured a full page photo of a *furisode* model on a seven years old girl, costing 340 000 Yen. It was a piece designed by a famous artist who confessed to have adopted patterns in use in the Heian period imperial court. Consequently, the origins of the ritual are being reinterpreted through allusions to distant and elite origins, at the same time the historical origins become blurred and mystified.

Another important motif that emerges in relation to the Shichigosan children's wear concerns family values. This regards especially the dress of the three and five years old children as it is in their case that the festive dress used in an earlier occasion may be re-adapted. So for example the kimono used the baby's first shrine visit rite, *miyamairi*, is often a kimono that is purchased, or otherwise obtained, to be used later at one of the Shichigosan rites of the child. The kimono is a size of a three-five years old child and the baby is normally only wrapped into it at the occasion of *miyamairi* being too small to wear it in a regular manner. Moreover, families that opt for observing some of the first rites, such as *hatsusekku* (first seasonal festival) or *kuizome* (first solid food eating), whose popularity is rising in recent years, can re-use the same garments on repeated occasions if they wish. In this case the dress acquires a symbolical value for the family. It conveys the feeling of a flow of events and reinforces the sense of continuity during the first years of the child's life. Furthermore, the notion of continuity emerges also with regard to the family line. In families where the festive kimono is inherited from mother to daughter, or from father to son, the garments symbolize the continuation of generation within the family. The re-use of an inherited garment contributes to the upholding of family traditions in this way.

The family crest is also a symbol of the perpetuation of family line, as it accumulates the symbolical significance attached to the importance of the family line. The use of the crested kimono is characteristic to those families which value the perpetuation of the family line. Though, it is necessary to underline that the notion of the continuing family line may have, today, different connotations compared to the past. While in the past the family line was interpreted almost exclusively within the hierarchical system of the *ie* household structure, today, in the era of nuclear families it takes rather the form of

affection accumulated within the family with regard to offspring. A telling example is the case of mother who made a collage of old photos taken twenty years earlier on the occasions of the Shichigosan celebration of herself and her husband. She added to these two photos the photo recently taken at the Shichigosan of her daughter and by scanning created a photo collage. The result was a photograph that grouped two generations of family members all in Shichigosan attire.<sup>240</sup> The photo was a demonstration in a condensed form of the emotions, meanings and memories attached to and evoked by the celebration. It represented a symbol of unity as well as continuity. The relevance of the notion of the perpetuation of the family line with regard to the festive kimono is revealed also by the MikiHouse survey in 2007. Several respondents underlined here that they saw Shichigosan as part of their family tradition. It is illustrated by the words of a mother from the prefecture of Saitama: ‘I wish that the kimono that I wore for my own Shichigosan might be worn by my child, and later by his child.’<sup>241</sup> Apart from the desire to hand down the festive dress over generations, these accounts point also to the fact that Shichigosan is regarded as something that represents family tradition, something that makes the link between generations. Within this perspective, the festive garment of the child emerges as an important symbol of this transmission of tradition and of values attached to it.

## **7.6 Symbolism in dress patterns and colors**

The visual elements of the Shichigosan dress, such as the decorative patterns and colors of the fabric, have also symbolic meaning. The Japanese dress might appear to the non-Japanese observer as static in shape and design but in the course of its history it absorbed numerous changes regarding its design, patterns and colors. Whereas the cut of a contemporary Japanese kimono is more or less uniform, the utilized fabrics can greatly

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<sup>240</sup> Source: <http://sundaykodomo.blog92.fc2.com> (accessed 2011, March 15).

<sup>241</sup> Source: Mikohouse survey, [www.55192.com](http://www.55192.com) (accessed 2011, June 18).

differ from each other in pattern, color, and of course quality. In the past these naturally depended on the social class belonging and financial means of the family. However, it can be argued that popular patterns, while following prevalent tastes, often reflected the sensitivity of the Japanese for changes in the nature. Each season had its typical and popular motifs, such as for example winter months asked for bamboo, pine, spring months for sakura and butterflies (Dalby 1993). As for the children's festive wear, in the past the festive dress of a child was basically a new dress, if financial means made it possible, which was then used later for everyday or festive occasions. Today, whereas the decorative patterns on the fabric of the festive garment follow trends in kimono fashion, there are several patterns traditionally associated with Shichigosan. A beloved pattern for Shichigosan child dress is the one called *takarazukushi* 宝尽くし, which is a classic auspicious pattern constituted of seven objects traditionally believed to bring good luck. They include magical objects such as *kakuregasa* 隠れ笠 or *kakuremino* 隠れ蓑, a magical umbrella or straw raincoat, rendering the person invisible, and standing as symbols for protection from danger; *chōji* 丁子 is the fruit of clove imported from the South to Japan in the Heian period, symbolizing health and longevity. Patterns of peach blossoms and other seasonal flowers, such as the chrysanthemum (because of the autumnal period) or cherry blossoms, or patterns of plants that grow quickly, such as bamboo leaves for example, appear also with frequency on children's kimono (Matsuyama et al 1995). These objects incorporate a wide range of meanings that the celebration itself represents: wish of happy and long life, good health, well-being, success, vigorous growth, and blessing. An article in the fashion periodical, *Sesame*, (2010, September) writes: "Even though times change, feeling of parents towards their children do not alter. The festive wear for Shichigosan bears patterns that never fade: crane, peach, plum, bamboo. The spirit of Japan is preserved within these patterns and they represent the treasure box of our country. The message that we wish to transmit to the children of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is expressed and mounted up in the Shichigosan festive dress." Notions of tradition, nostalgia, and family ideals are smartly combined creating so a complex of images that might appeal to a wide segment of persons.

Finally, the Western style Shichigosan dress needs to be addressed. As already mentioned, the Western style dress witnessed shifting levels of popularity in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the recent decade, the Western style outfits are gaining again a place in the festive Shichigosan wardrobe as a result of the diversification occurring in the services provided by rental and photo studios. As photo studios became more popular their services grew more elaborate, for example in the form of offering rich collections of diverse outfits for the celebration. This collection today include a variety of styles, also within the Western style. Apart from the classic Japanese style garments and the formal Western wear (suits and one-piece dresses) they often provide costumes of play figures and ‘cosplay’ (anime) costumes. This, indeed, has reinforced the playful facet and the entertainment aspect of the celebration. By the convenient service sets children are encouraged to try on different costumes and enjoy a nearly carnival-like atmosphere during the photographing. As the number of shots is practically unlimited, children and their parents can enjoy the game of disguise in the photo studios. Photos in funny dresses, or princess-like, hero-like outfits are taken along more ‘serious’ photographs in ceremonial outfits. The garments provided by the photo studios serve normally the photo session which means that they are not rented out for outings. This tendency, typical to the photo studios only, is in sharp contrast with the shrine-ritual which is lived as a more solemn and serious occasion. There is a difference also between the attitudes of parents when choosing the appropriate outfit for this or that part of the ritual event. Whereas the shrine visit is mostly done in the Japanese style dress, the rich choice of garments available at photo studios enable to try on many different models which include models of both, Japanese and Western styles as well as models with no association to festiveness or solemnity.

### **7.7 Other symbolic aspects of the Shichigosan celebration: *chitoseame***

Another popular element regarded widely as a symbol of Shichigosan is the candy sold for the occasion, called *chitoseame*. Its history has been mentioned already in Chapter IV

therefore here I would like to recapture those features only that make from it a symbol of the celebration. The legend says that the white long candy was invented by a candy seller in Edo around the Genroku period (1688-1703) (Nakae 2007, 62-62). *Ame*, candies have been produced already much earlier in Japan but the technology of producing candies of big size was introduced only in the beginning of the Tokugawa period when it became a sweet typical to the *chōnin* (urban dwellers). It was usually sold by merchants nearby temples and shrines during the numerous festivals that were held in big towns. *Ame* was used also as offerings to gods. It also started to be used as an auspicious gift to distribute among relatives and friends for occasions such as *miyamairi* and Shichigosan.

With the typical inventive of the merchants of the Tokugawa period, the particular kind of *ame*, the *chitoseame*, was created as a sweet that would match the principal themes of Shichigosan. The scope was probably to render it more appealing to the celebrating families and their children visiting the shrine on the occasion. The long shaped white candy embraced the family's wish of happy and long life for the child. Not only the shape but also its name (lit. thousand years candy) was to symbolize happiness and longevity. Furthermore, the color of the sweet, white, was associated with purity and thus with auspiciousness in the Shinto cosmology. Today, the legend of the origin of *chitoseame* is often reproduced by the media, by candy producers and sellers. The symbolic messages conveyed by *chitoseame* are underlined by the motifs used to decorate the bag into which the white sticks are wrapped. Popular motifs evoke auspicious themes such as luck, happiness, health and longevity. Usually they consist of the set of three trees, called *shōchikubai* 松竹梅 in the Japanese culture believed as propitious: pine tree, bamboo and *ume* tree (Japanese apricot tree). These motifs have probably Chinese origins since pine and bamboo in China were traditionally linked to the winter period and appeared as frequent motifs of traditional paintings featuring winter themes. The *ume* is among the first trees to bloom after the end of the winter and therefore marks the start of the spring. In Japan the motif of the three trees have been transformed into symbols of auspiciousness and their branches were often used as decorations during festivities. Also, pine tree was venerated as a sacred tree and it stood as symbol for longevity and endurance concerning human nature. Animal motifs, too, appear on the bags of *chitoseame*. The most beloved are the crane and the turtle. Crane (*tsuru* 鶴) is also called

*chitosedori* 千歳鳥, literally ‘bird of thousand years’. It was traditionally associated with longevity and was believed to be a lucky omen. Turtle (*kame* 亀), or with its other name, ‘thousand years turtle’ (*sennen kame* 千年亀), was used for divinations in the past and symbolized longevity. Recently, there are shrines that commission the design of bags of *chitoseame*, to be distributed to children visiting the shrine for Shichigosan, to famous designers as part of their effort to render the shrine more appealing to families and thus to attract more visitors.

The number of candy sticks in the *chitose* bag is also indicative. Usually it is said that bags contain as many sticks as many years old the child is. Moreover, the three numbers associated to Shichigosan have a rich symbolism in the Japanese cultural context (see below).

The *chitoseame* today is seen as inseparable from Shichigosan. Most adults when remembering their own celebration, recollect memories of having received *chitoseame* with nostalgia and emotions. Its special character owes also to the fact that it is normally not sold outside the period of the celebration. Most shrines offer *chitoseame* as a gift to children who, with their families apply for the formal purification rite in the shrine’s premises. Major shrines wrap candies by themselves. Maidens in the service of the shrine, the so called *miko* 巫女 are in charge of this work. Reports on this activity regularly appear in the media. In 2010, for example, the journal of Sankei reported that Kobe’s major shrine (生田神社) set out more than 3000 bags to be distributed among children visiting the shrine for their Shichigosan that year.<sup>242</sup>

## 7.8 Symbolism associated with numbers

The three numbers contained in Shichigosan, seven, five and three, is one of the best-known three-number combination in Japan. Interpreting numbers had been popular since

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<sup>242</sup> Source: [www.sankei.co.jp](http://www.sankei.co.jp), accessed 2010, October 24.

ancient times in Japan and in the course of the time, the symbolism associated to them received a great impact from China. Thomas Crump argues that the Japanese enjoy a big creativity in the use of numbers (Crump 1992, 60). This manifest itself also in the calendar systems that were in use in pre-Meiji Japan. Adopting the lunar calendar as a base, the agricultural production and in particular wet-rice cultivation greatly affected the yearly calendars that were provided by temples and shrines for establishing the dates of due festivities as well as the start of works on fields. These calendars regulated the rhythm of rituals, works, worship, assigning a decisive role to local *kami* (Shinto deities) in the community's life (ibid, 157). Spiritual and economic survival was thus conditioned by the rhythm of observances determined by the calendar. The days combined with a specific number were believed to be auspicious and inauspicious to certain activities. The base for the interpretation of the character of numbers was provided by a mixture of beliefs coming from popular Shinto, Taoism, Buddhism combined with elements of less clear origin.

The exact origin of the auspiciousness of the three Shichigosan numbers is not clear. Historical documents, collections of ancient laws (*ritsuryō*), indicate that the ages of three and seven were considered as important thresholds also from a legal point of view (Sakurai 1939, 121; see also Chapter VI). Before the age of three (two, following the modern way of age counting), the child was labeled as infant. Ten was often the age limit before which children were not regarded as responsible for committed crimes, resp. were not punished before that age (Yamaji 2005). Other theories see the origin of the three numbers in the Taoist tradition, in particular in the philosophy based on yin and yang principles. As already indicated this philosophy called in Japanese *on'yōgogyō* 陰陽五行, entered Japan from China around the 5-6<sup>th</sup> century (Yasui 2000). The rules inherent in the system of *on'yōgogyō*, combining the working of yin and yang principles with that of cosmic dual forces and the five elements (metal, water, wood, fire, earth), influenced various aspects of everyday life at that time. They were used as divinatory technique to individuate days that were fortunate for particular activities, to define lucky and unlucky spatial directions, or to investigate into the reciprocal compatibility or incompatibility of potential spouses. Furthermore, most traditional Japanese festivities are thought to have

received the impact of this system. While its use today diminished considerably compared to the past, the system is still popular in our days.

Within *on'yōgogyō*, numbers are divided into auspicious and inauspicious ones. Odd numbers are believed to have a yang character and thus are thought to bring luck.<sup>243</sup> Even numbers are yin, and therefore inauspicious. Accordingly, days with odd numbers were believed to be more appropriate for auspicious events, such as festivities, ceremonies, travels and so on. In the same vein of thought, ages with odd numbers were believed to be more fortunate (Yasui 2000). The working of yin and yang principles might have influenced the choice of the month for celebrations, as well. The eleventh month was the period of the so called *ichiyōraifuku* 一陽来復, i.e. when the yin principle turns again into yang. This rendered the eleventh month into a particularly auspicious month for celebrations. The day of fifteenth, to which the official date of Shichigosan settled, besides being a day with odd number fell also on a full-moon day (*mochi no hi* 望の日) in the lunar calendar.<sup>244</sup> Full-moon days were believed to be fortunate and therefore suitable for auspicious activities such as celebrations. Besides, the divinatory technique of *on'yōgogyō*<sup>245</sup> was so much popular already in the 12-13<sup>th</sup> century that in aristocratic families it was common to invite and consult a specialist before deciding the exact date for an auspicious and important event such as the celebration of a rite of passage for example.<sup>246</sup>

The inclination of the Japanese to attribute symbolic meanings to numbers is shown also by the popularity of theories in present days that aim to give explanations to the particular ages of Shichigosan. A website specializing on advices on rules of etiquette offers a theory that explains the significance of three ages with the Taoist triple division of cosmos into heaven, earth, and human sphere (*ama-chi-hito* 天地人).<sup>247</sup> The expert explains that Shichigosan unifies the spiritual and vital energies of the cosmos and these are then

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<sup>243</sup> A meticulous description of the use of numbers within this context can be found in Thomas Crump's study (1992).

<sup>244</sup> Interestingly, the sum of the three numbers, 7, 5, and 3 is also 15.

<sup>245</sup> Another name for this system is *on'yōdō* 陰陽道.

<sup>246</sup> See for example the document of *on'yōdō* masters, the Tsuchimikadoke Bunshō 土御門家文書 from the Heian period (Sugawara 2000, 47).

<sup>247</sup> Source: [www.allabout.co.jp](http://www.allabout.co.jp) (last access: 2011, September 15).

channeled to the child during the ritual. The theory makes use of the classic ying-yang associations. The number of five is thus linked to the five forces of wood, fire, earth, metal and water. Seven is achieved by the addition of further two more elements, the sun and the moon. Shichigosan, thereby, should be seen not merely as an expression of parental loving bond – the experts concludes -, but also as an occasion to celebrate the formation of the child's character upon the above listed cosmic forces. This and similar popular theories illustrate the extent of concern with which the Japanese turn towards numbers and associated issues.

References to the three particular ages contained in Shichigosan emerge also in commercial texts. An advertisement in the daily of Asahi Shinbun in 1999 (September 12) promoted the purchase of family house by linking the single developmental phases in the growth of the child to the situation that calls for an expansion of the family home. So when the child is three years old the time is ripe for the second child and consequently, for a bigger home. At five, the child should start to sleep in a separate room and thus the necessity of moving to a new home arises. At seven, the child enters school which again asks for a separate study room. The advert adds that Shichigosan, apart from being a significant threshold in the child's life, is also closely connected to the family whose image is symbolically contained in the family house.

### **7.9 *Goban no gi* and the festive menu**

A few other things are associated with Shichigosan celebration that have a rich symbolism but are not part of the widespread pattern of observation. One of these is the rite of the *go*-board (*goban no gi* 碁盤の儀). This rite is available in a few shrines throughout Japan, among which the Hie shrine in Tokyo. The rite was popular among samurai families and was probably observed in the manner performed by the Ogasawara school described above. Symbolic meanings associated to board games are not uncommon. Board games, such as the *sugoroku* 双六 (Japanese backgammon), were believed to reflect the universe with their division into twelve compartments. The

division into twelve compartments symbolizes the entire year made up from twelve months, and the two colors, black and white, are seen as the distinction between day and night (W.W.N. 1890).

The go-board put in display in several shrines on the occasion of Shichigosan is used typically without much formality by the families. Children are asked to stand on it and then vigorously jump from it while facing a lucky direction, which is mostly the inner part of the shrine. In the Hie shrine a brief explanation of the symbolic meaning of the rite is provided to the visitors on a notice board. The explanation says that by observing this rite the child will grow into a healthy and courageous adult. As already described in Chapter III, the shrine of Hie advertises itself as the place of the very first observation of the Shichigosan ritual. The rite of the go-board was probably popular among samurai families and by referring to this element of the tradition the shrine makes an effort to uphold this tradition evidently emphasizing that it is referring to the tradition related to the samurai culture. By underlining this connection, the shrine also attempts to create a particular image by upgrading its position with respect to other popular shrines in Tokyo.

Another important element of the celebration that bears symbolic attributes is the food consumed at the occasion. First of all, consumption of food and its sharing in community has been always inherent in ceremonial occasions in different cultures throughout the world. Family members and friends create bonds by taking part in the consumption of a festive meal. Communal food can symbolize shared community when through the act of eating together membership in a given group is acknowledged and/or reaffirmed. Almost all celebrations of the family require a family meal, see for example Easter, Christmas or birthdays (Pleck 2000). In the Japanese cultural context, too, meal has been always an important part of rituals. The offerings to the deities are central part of the Shinto and Buddhist rituals and the subsequent festive meal indicate a communion with the spiritual entities. Besides, in the past the auspicious menu served at festivities differed by social membership, local custom, and financial means. An important component of the festive table was the special ceremonial tray, called *oiwaizen* お祝い善, used for different kinds of festive occasions. While the single parts of the festive menu could differ from region to

region, it usually included foods such as the sea bream (*tai*鯛<sup>248</sup> with its head, boiled and seasoned food (*nimono*煮物), *sekihan*赤飯 (glutinous rice steamed with red beans), pickled vegetables (*tsukemono*漬物), soup (*shirumono*汁物), or *mochi*. It was a custom to offer parts of the festive menu to the divinities, either by placing it onto the *kamidama* (Shinto household altar) or bringing it to the local shrine and offer it *toujigami* (the guardian deity of the community).

Single components of this menu can be included in the festive menu today but it is not seen as strictly necessary. Many families today go to restaurants or turn to catering services. There is a number of restaurants that in November offer special Shichigosan menu for families with special courses for children and these may include some of the traditional dishes listed above. Nevertheless, parents usually prefer to satisfy their children's wishes and opt for meals and restaurants that suit best their tastes. Advices of etiquette experts also encourage parents to keep in mind the preferences of the child, the main actor of the event, when choosing the festive menu. The above listed traditional foods are recommended by experts mainly to those who "care for traditions".

## 7.10 The emergence of photograph

The discourse on symbolic aspects of the Shichigosan would not be complete without an analysis of the role that photographs play in the celebration. The photographing technology that appeared around the turn of the century and started to be used broadly by professional and later by amateur hands, changed in a significant way the manner in which memories are constructed and preserved. It also affected the celebration manners as it became an inseparable part of most of family and public rituals. The practice of photographing family events had a radical impact on the perception of family

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<sup>248</sup> Sea bream has been traditionally seen as an auspicious food in Japan because of its nice shape among fishes (called also the king among fishes) and because of its name 'tai' that is part of the word *omedatai* signifying auspicious or happy.

celebrations (similarly to the phenomenon which emerged with the practice of broadcasting public rituals on the television). The way photographing and the custom of preserving memories through photographs can alter the understanding and the interpretation of the ritual event attracted since then much scholarly attention coming from a range of disciplines.

In Western scholarship the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu was among the first to draw attention to this phenomenon (Bourdieu 1990). Bourdieu pointed out that the practice of photographing becomes necessarily subordinated to family functions rather than to aesthetic or other functions. In other words, decisions such as what and when will be photographed, in which context and form, are always conditioned by the value orientation and system of perception of the given group (ibid, 30). The inferior importance of aesthetic standards when photographing significant occasions of the individual's or family's life found confirmation also by Ben-Ari in his study of a traditional rite of passage in a Japanese rural community (Ben-Ari 1991). The study on the sacred nature of consumer rituals by Belk et al emphasized the capability of photographs to capture the fleeting experience of occasions such as rituals or of visits to once-encountered places (Belk et al 1989, 29). When tourists take photographs of places visited they seek a symbolical reminder of the memories in order to keep these memories vivid and real. The authors interpret these occasion as 'sacred consumption', since places visited are regarded as sacred and thereby time spent there is also perceived as sacred. The use of photographs receives an importance in sustaining the memories of these meaningful experience, be them visits to important places or rituals observed on important occasions. The role that photographs play in this process appears clearly in the elaborate photo albums that are carefully preserved. Photographs emerge so as the tangible link that connects the family's present and past.

In the Japanese context, the affinity of the Japanese to photographing has been noted by several commentators of the Japanese society and culture.<sup>249</sup> Eyal Ben-Ari's study examines the role that taking pictures and recording selected moments play in a rite of

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<sup>249</sup> See more on the theme in Ben-Ari 1991, Sakamoto 1999. See also Tōru Anami's 'Shashin no fōkuroa. Kindai no minzoku (写真のフォークロア—近代の民俗—)' in *Minzokugaku* 日本民俗学 vol.175 (1998).

passage of a small community in Japan (Ben-Ari 1991). The author underlines that photographs and modern recording technologies influence the perception of the given ritual event not only because the presence of photo devices can alter behavioral patterns of participants during the execution of rites. But also because the use of these technologies can transform the entire process of remembering (ibid, 89). The author elucidates these aspects by analyzing the differences between photographic attitudes of several groups present at the rite. The rite in exam is a coming-of-age rite (*seinenshiki*) performed on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January for two twenty-years-old youth members of the community. Using Sontag's definitions of the function of family photos, Ben-Ari recognizes the significance of photos taken by family members within their function of strengthening "family continuity and connectedness", thus playing an important role in the process of creating family histories (Ben-Ari 1991, 92, Sontag 1979, 8).

Indeed, from its very beginning, photographing has been closely connected to the important moments of family life. The very first ceremonial event that gave space to photographing was the occasion of weddings. Both in the Western part of the world and in Japan, photographs took feet at wedding ceremonies around the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The practice of photographing was then gradually introduced into other major events regarding the life cycle of the individual and the family. Bordieau applied the term "solemnization" to describe the process through which the practice of photographing qualitatively adds to the formality or solemnity of important events (Bordieau 1990, 6). He also pointed to the relation between the order of the introduction of photographing into family rituals and the social importance of these events (ibid, 21). Indeed, photographing as technology has been introduced first in those events which were deemed as of major interest and significance. In this line of thought, the fact that photographing emerged in relation to Shichigosan, at least in Tokyo, already in the interwar period, can be regarded as of major importance. Among others, it also indicates that Shichigosan was deemed to be worth of an attempt to promote the services of professional photographers. In 1937, dailies of Tokyo published already several advertisements of photo studios offering a range of services to families (see also Chapter IV). The most innovative studios came out with service packs comprising photographing combined with beauty salon services and kimono assistance, foretelling so a pattern that

would become diffused later in the 1970s. The war had for a while interrupted the popularization of photographing. In the 1960s, however, thanks to the economic and technological boom photograph machines became available also for private use. Hence, in case of Shichigosan, it was the individual photographing that became first integral to the celebration only later followed by professional photo services.

The family member responsible for photographing during Shichigosan was – and still is – the father. With women as principal caretakers of children and organizers of family events, fathers occupy only a marginal role in these activities and they are seen first of all as providers. Additionally, when the use of photographic devices became widespread, husbands and fathers have assumed the task of recording the major events in the family's life. The widespread use of photographing as inseparable part of the celebrations paved the way to professional studios which starting from the early 1970s began to claim a growing role in this sector. Their services have gradually become more requested and Shichigosan packs combining a range of services were launched by the market. The department stores were the first that in the 1970s came out with special 'Shichigosan plans' that included also professional photo service. These 'plans' soon enjoyed an extraordinary popularity among families and they contributed to the popularization of professional photographing (see also Chapter V).

### **7.11 Photo studios and the fragmentation of the ritual event**

With the rising popularity of photo studios among families celebrating Shichigosan, photographs taken by family members during the celebration did not cease to exist. Today, most families opt for combining the two methods; they record the most memorable moments of the ritual both on private photos and by relying on professional help from studios. Professional indoor photos conventionally feature the child in Shichigosan outfit not necessarily joined by the other family members. Private photographs normally are taken during the shrine visit and the festive meal. The

introduction of the services of professional photo studios into the standard pattern of celebration have, however, brought about the fragmentation of the ritual experience. Today the standard ritual pattern of Shichigosan consists of two distinctive parts: the photo studio session combined with beauty parlor and dress assistance, and the shrine visit followed by family gathering and feast. With the increasing popularity of professional photographs, the session spent in the photo studio acquired an importance of its own and in a certain sense, autonomy within the celebration. It started to be seen as a separate event and at last, the two events, photo session and shrine visit became completely separated. It has become a rite of its own. Consequently, Shichigosan was gradually transformed into a complex set of events that take place in separate moments temporarily distant from each other.

This development which saw the growth of the significance of the photograph is, naturally, embedded in the broader socio-cultural context of the contemporary society where pictures and images occupy an important role in the perception of the everyday reality. Visual images today overwhelm everyday reality. Regarding Shichigosan, first, studio photographing was meant to complement individual picture-taking by family members. However, the favorable socio-economic conditions, expressed in the increasing financial availability in the hands of the Japanese families, the decreasing number of children and improving technology of photographing all have favored the popularization of professional photographing. Professional studios provided their always more demanding clients with always more elaborate services. Studios specializing on photographing children emerged.<sup>250</sup> In 1980 the Japanese Association of Photography Culture claimed that income gained during the period of the Shichigosan celebration often balanced the red sales figures of the rest of the year (Gendai Shūkan 1980, November 11). At the same time, the photo session within the studios has become increasingly intricate and thus requiring longer times. As a result, the procedure including the preparative has become in a certain sense ritualized, or in other words it became a ritual within the ritual. The extent to which the photograph acquired importance within the ritual becomes apparent in particular in the so called photo-Shichigosan (写真七五

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<sup>250</sup> Studio Alice is one of the most well-known and also successful photo studios specializing on child photography.

三) which indicates a pattern when Shichigosan is performed solely on photos.<sup>251</sup> In practice, this means that the family omits all other parts of the celebration, including shrine worship, meal, and family gathering. It can take place in any period of the year with no regard to the conventional date of the observance. In this pattern the accent is on the visual image of the child and on the photograph that preserves this image. There can be a number of reasons for opting for this pattern. A combination of difficulties with timing and a certain disregard for the religious dimensions of the ritual is typical. Like for example the case of a Japanese lady married and living abroad who visits Japan only a couple of times during the year.<sup>252</sup> She decided to do the photo-Shichigosan for her nine years old daughter and six years old son during their holiday in Japan in July. She considered the celebration just an occasion of seeing her children in the Japanese traditional wear and to preserve a memory of it in the form of photographs. The celebration of Shichigosan served, probably, only as a pretext. She also noted that it was a good occasion for the kids to try on different costumes. The photographing was neither accompanied with a shrine visit, nor the father was present at the occasion. Besides, the ages of the children were also not the typical Shichigosan ages. The accent here was placed on the entertaining aspect of the occasion and to a much lesser degree on its representing cultural tradition or family unity. Nonetheless, that very fact that she found it important to organize the event indicates that she wished to share with her children this part of her cultural traditions.

Today, child-rearing magazines and online forums recommend mothers to choose two separate days for observing the single parts of the ritual. This basically means to choose a separate day for the photo studio session. The temporal separation of the shrine visit with family meal and the photo studio session can at times exceed even a couple of months. The reasons underlying this phenomenon have been discussed above in this chapter and in previous chapters, too. In brief, photographing in the studio is not about the child's simple posing for the photograph. The dress needs first to be selected from a big collection of models. Besides, the Japanese style dress requires an appropriate hair style,

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<sup>251</sup> A similar phenomenon exists also in connection with weddings when couples, independently from the actual wedding rite, visit a photo studio to produce wedding photos.

<sup>252</sup> Source: interview 2010, August 30.

accessories and make up in case of girls. Therefore, the lengthy procedure of preparation, assisted by the employees of the studio, can take a couple of hours or even more. There have been an escalation of standards for judgment of what is a perfect and desirable Shichigosan photo in the recent twenty years. Today, Shichigosan photos of children are often perfectly arranged miniatures of adult models, and this is true for both the formal Japanese style and Western style. During the preparative children go through a true transformation, from a normal look of a little child into a fairytale-like princess, lady clad in gorgeous kimono with wig and make-up, or little perfect samurai. Following the most recent trends supported by the improved technology that digital photographing made possible, today many photo studios offer the possibility to try on and to be photographed in as many outfits as desired. Photos are chosen upon viewing the complete collection of photos in digital form and the final number of prints is usually higher than what was planned before.

Furthermore, the escalation of photo standards led a few photo studios to ride the wave of interests. Some of them develop diversified strategies to attract more clients. One such strategy is the organizing of beauty contests for the most beautiful Shichigosan photo. Prior registration is required for participating in the contest. According to studio managers these 'beauty contests' enjoy quite a big popularity among families. The photo of the winner of the contest is then displayed on the web pages of the studio. Another strategy introduced by several studios is the reproduction of star model-like atmosphere in the studio for children who, according to the advertisements, would like to feel like a movie star for a whole day. These two options may be extreme cases but on the other hand, they can be seen also as playing out a salient aspect of rites of passage, namely the alleged capacity of rites to guide their objects through transformation of a kind. In an ideal case, the individual having passed through the experience of a rite of passage proceeds to a 'no-return' stage. The act of photographing can be acknowledged a degree of transformative quality, too. Though it might not realize a thorough transformation of the self, the photograph itself transforms the object it reflects, and on the other hand, it may transform memories attached to the particular event. While photos taken by families are mostly characterized by spontaneity and natural poses, the indoor conditions of a photo studio and the professional aspirations of the employees produce more elaborate

and structured photos. It is the photographer and the assistants that instruct the child on the pose it needs to take for the photo. The external look of the child is highly controlled here. The hours of preparative work of dressing, make-up, hair arrangement all serve to crystallize the very moment of the photographing. The glamour, artificial poses, or in certain cases the fairytale-like atmosphere that transpires from many professional Shichigosan photos, lend an almost unrealistic look to these photographs which, on the other hand, would be difficult to reproduce by privately made photographs. Though again, it needs to be underlined that without the positive response on the side of the customers, the commercial sector would not be able to introduce this kind of ‘innovations’. Families usually are more than ready to indulge their children and spend money on them. On the other hand, this highly stylized photos add to the value of the celebration. They are preserved in albums or on CDs among the most important memories of the family.

### **7.12 Memories, photograph, and kinship relations**

Susan Sontag argued in her study on the significance of photography that photographing is “a rite of family life” as much as it records the achievements of its members and it symbolizes connectedness and continuity (Sontag 1979, 8-9). Importantly, Sontag also points to the fact that family albums are often the only place where the family appears still as an extended family. In contemporary Japan, the model of extended family is vanishing and it seems as though with the diminishing number of extended families, the symbolic importance of albums for the family would be increasing. The family album is often the place where distant relatives, grandparents, cousins make their appearance in the life of the family. Besides, in the case of Shichigosan, photos of the child are commonly sent by mail (or email) to relatives that did not participate in the event. Relatives can thus indirectly partake in the experience and are compensated for their absence. In this way, the photo has also the function to reestablish or/and reinforce kin relations.

Also, photographs occupy a significant place in the gift-exchange practices of the Japanese. Sending/giving photo of the celebration as a gift is a common practice not only in Japan but also in other cultural contexts. Bordieu noted that already in the 1930s' France, it was common to give photos of the baptism of the baby to family relatives and friends (Bordieu 1990). Similarly, Sakamoto observes that in Japan sometimes photos of Shichigosan or of children' birthdays are sent as New Year's card (Sakamoto 1999). Referring to Bordieu's thesis on the meaning of photograph as a symbol of family solidarity and continuity, Sakamoto also underlines that in Japan photos of children act as a symbolic vehicle for the family unity. When incorporated in greeting cards they fulfill two functions at the same time: that of a formal greeting and another of a testimony of family growth and harmony (Sakamoto 1999, 123).

Furthermore, the photograph is a unique device with which fleeting moments can be grasped and fixed, and thereby they can give the impression of stopping – even if for a while - the flow of time. Photographs also provide evidence that the event really took place (Sontag 1979, 5). With regard, Sontag quotes the writer, Zola: “you cannot claim to have really seen something until you have photographed it” (Sontag 1979, 87). Celebrations which were not photographed are perceived are remembered as lacking a crucial element. A mother planning the Shichigosan celebration of her child complains: “I am told that when I was at that age I celebrated Shichigosan. However, no photos were taken on that occasion. In our family album I find photos of my brothers' Shichigosan only. As if my celebration would have not been that important”.<sup>253</sup> Along the fact that photos help mark an occasion as significant compared to other more ordinary events, photos also raise the magnitude of the event. Sontag, with a critical hint, uses the term ‘aesthetic consumerism’ to call the desire to enhance the experience by an affirmation through photographs (Sontag 1979, 24). Continuing this line of thought, Sakamoto points out that photographing from a mere technique in the beginning has become an end in itself. He argues that photographing has been ritualized to a degree that celebrations serve first of all to provide occasions for photographing rather than the other way round (Sakamoto 1999, 196).

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<sup>253</sup> Source: [www.na-na.no.blog.jp](http://www.na-na.no.blog.jp) (accessed 2011, June 20).

### 7.13 Conclusions

This chapter made an attempt to identify and to interpret the symbolic aspects of the Shichigosan celebration and to describe the way in which the meaning of single symbols of the ritual is being constituted and shaped in a creative process. The particular elements which convey a given set of messages and the messages themselves have changed due to transformations in their social context of belonging. Past versions of childhood age rites differed from each other not only in pattern and names, but also in the theme to which the given ritual was giving emphasis. The diversity of the ritual pattern and its social functions generated diversity also with regard to ritual symbolism. Compared to the past, contemporary ritual forms of Shichigosan are fairly united and standardized. The dress which has always stood at the center of the ritual has, along with the photograph, become the two most powerful symbols of the ritual today. Concerning the festive dress of the child, its meaning and the associations it evokes, have undergone significant changes in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Before modernization affected the wardrobe and the overall clothing customs of the Japanese, the gradual changes in the dress code visibly marked the single phases in the growth of the child. In modern times, however, the Japanese style dress appropriated a very different meaning. On the one hand, the Japanese wear moved out from the everyday use, was relegated to ceremonial occasions and it started to be regarded as part of cultural traditions. Simultaneously, within Shichigosan the Japanese festive garment of the child has become the main conveyor of the notion of ‘tradition’.

The second salient symbol of the ritual is the photograph. In general, the practice of photographing changed the ritual pattern and meaning of Shichigosan in multiple ways. Starting from the 1970s the photo taken at Shichigosan acquired a growing importance within the family photo album. In other words, the celebration’s potential to create memories linked to the family life has come into focus. Unlike in the past when the performance of the rite was recorded solely in the individual memories, today thanks to

the photo memories can be preserved in a visible and tangible way. The photo itself occupies a central place in the symbolic construction of the Shichigosan's meaning in the eyes of the families. It is the object through which the family can create its own imaginary and reaffirm its identity as a family. It can be argued that the display and showing off as inherent elements in the urban pattern of the celebration in the past, have partly undergone an internalization process. A moved from the public dimension towards the internal dimension in the form of family albums has occurred.

Furthermore, other historical elements, such as *chitoseame*, the symbolism of numbers, the *go* board today contribute to strengthen Shichigosan's link to the past evoking themes associated with the notion of tradition. These associations to the past acquired importance particularly in an age when the alienating aspects of the modern life style are widely experienced by an increasing number of persons. The newly introduced elements such as the photo, and the changed symbolism of the festive dress, add new dimension to notions inherent in Shichigosan, such as the perpetuation of family continuity, family solidarity, and affection towards the offspring.

## **8. THE ROLE OF RELIGION AND OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SHICHIGOSAN**

### **8.1 Introduction**

The last chapter of my thesis deals with the religious aspects of the Shichigosan observance. I left this important theme to the very last chapter also because the difficulties that the interpretation of this aspect presents. I decided to face this issue through an analysis of the way religious institutions, shrines and in a lesser degree, temples, have affected and still affect the shaping of ritual pattern and meaning. In other words, I examine the way in which religious institutions participate in the constituting of the ritual experience. The interpretation of the religious dimensions of any ritual is a fairly complex issue. The criterion of what stands for religious in a ritual is difficult to assess. On one hand, this problem has to do with the definition of ritual itself. Ritual has been long interpreted as a social practice in which religious conceptions are generated and become explicit. Most analysis of cases on which ritual theories were based were done in religious contexts and accordingly, ritual was interpreted mainly as religious expression (see Chapter II).

At this point, it is necessary to ask the question whether Shichigosan in its contemporary pattern can be considered a religious ritual. To answer this question is not an easy task, given the problematic character and the complexity of concepts such as religion, religious consciousness or commitment in modern societies. I will endeavor to give an interpretation to this complex problem starting by ordering data regarding some of the aspects of the ritual that are widely associated with religion. The data come from surveys on religious attitudes of contemporary Japanese and from my analyses based on case studies of two selected religious institutions which presently are actively involved in the organization of Shichigosan.

## **8.2 Surveys on religious attitudes and observance rate of Shichigosan**

In the postwar decades not many in-depth surveys have been done regarding issues of religious consciousness in Japan. Though, in the last two decades this changed and several institutions carry out periodically opinion polls on the subject. In the past religious activities and commitment have been mapped usually by opinion polls done by major newspapers or governmental agencies. Since 1996, regular opinion polls are being organized by the central Association of Shinto Shrines of which approximately the half of all shrines present in the country makes part. The surveys take place every five years (Jinja Honchō 2007). In 2003 and 2004, two opinion surveys on religious attitudes of the Japanese were conducted by the Kokugakuin University within the Kokugakuin University 21<sup>st</sup> Century Center of Excellence Program as follows-up of a 1999 survey on similar subject (Kokugakuin 2006). The main scope of these surveys was to define the religiosity of contemporary Japanese in particular with regards to shrines. Furthermore, they were designed to map the current state of Shinto, to elucidate the changes that occurred since the end of the World War II, and to understand the rates of participation and modes of involvement in religious activities of the Japanese.

The two opinion polls designed by the Kokugakuin University targeted 2000 participants aged twenty and older throughout the country and included questions both on individual religiosity and on involvement in religious organizations. The authors of the surveys were also concerned with the problem of the quantification of religion. Indeed, giving the character of religious attitudes of the Japanese, opinion polls working with numbers can easily misinterpret obtained data and the assessment of personal attitudes can become highly problematic. The complexity of the problem is aggravated by the fact that it is not always possible and feasible to use indicators of religiosity adopted by surveys in foreign countries and adapt them to the case of Japan. Claims to belong to a given religious group, which in Western countries, for example, can be an indicator of religious commitment, is not typical to the Japanese case. For this reason, the Kokugakuin scholars designed questions in a way to include diverse aspects of religious attitudes, such as for

example the participation in religious activities (rituals, festivities, purchase of amulets etc.) and value judgments with relation to the sphere of religion. Nonetheless, questions addressing faith of respondents figured still among the principal questions of the survey, which authors explain with the uttermost importance of this type of questions in religion-related surveys worldwide. As a matter of fact, the results of the two opinion polls showed a very low rate of affirmative responses to questions about faith (in both surveys less than 30% of respondents claimed to have faith). The data were compared with surveys from the immediate post-war years. During the 1950s, several organizations conducted surveys on the religious attitudes in Japan, among them the NHK Research Institute, newspaper companies such as the Jiji Press, the Asahi Shinbun, and the Yomiuri Shinbun. According to these surveys, until the 1950s the rate of those who answered affirmatively to the question ‘Do you believe in something/ Are you a believer?’<sup>254</sup> wavered between 60% and 78% (Kokugakuin 2006, 9). However, since then the rate of faith has decreased and the most recent results show that the numbers sunk below thirty per cent.

Though, the interpretation of these data is problematic. First, postwar surveys typically did not specified the type of ‘faith’ respondents claimed to have. There are other difficulties, too, that emerge when interpreting data on religiosity of the Japanese. The NHK<sup>255</sup> surveys between 1952 and 1979 included a series of questions inquiring on the religiosity of the Japanese (NHK Hōsō Seron 1982). These included questions like: ‘Do you think religion is important in your life?’<sup>256</sup> ‘Do you believe in gods or Buddha?’<sup>257</sup> ‘Do you believe in the Other world?’<sup>258</sup> ‘Do you have a faith or do you believe in something?’<sup>259</sup> The rate of affirming answers to the first, rather general, question on the importance of religion in the everyday life shows a clear decline between 1952 and 1979. Nevertheless, questions on faith in Shinto gods and Buddhist deities, along with question on faith in the Other world do not follow the same trend. The rate of affirmative

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<sup>254</sup>何か信仰とか信心とかをもっているか.

<sup>255</sup>NHK: National broadcasting company of Japan.

<sup>256</sup>日常生活の上で宗教は必要か、必要でないか.

<sup>257</sup>神や仏を信じるか.

<sup>258</sup>あの世を信じるか.

<sup>259</sup>(何か信仰とか信心とかをもっているか

responses are quite constant and remained around 50% and 35% (ibid, 102-106). Even more surprising are the results of answers to questions inquiring specifically about religious behaviors, such as shrine or temple visits or purchase of amulets. This type of questions were included in the questionnaire only after 1973. Data from 1973 and 1978 show that persons who turn to a religious institution (Shinto or Buddhism) for practical benefits increased from 20% to 30%. These findings demonstrate that the interpretation of concepts such as faith, affiliation to a religious group and religious behavior has its specificities in the Japanese cultural context and caution must be applied when interpreting data obtained from these surveys.

This problem is even more accentuated when other factors are taken into consideration. As Kenji Ishii points out it is necessary to be aware that when answering questions about their faith, respondents often refer to an affiliation based on household rather than to individual faith (Ishii 2008). In surveys, questions inquiring about individual religious attitudes are often formed as following: ‘Is there a religion in which you believe? Select from the following list: (...)’. The three possible answers that surveys commonly provide are: Shinto, Buddhism, and Christianity. In this type of questions, usually the rate of those who choose Buddhism, significantly overruns those choosing Shinto or other religions (more than 50% for Buddhism, and less than 10% for Shinto in the 1950s, 20% and 5% respectively in 2004).<sup>260</sup> However, as Ishii underlines, it is necessary to note that affiliation to Buddhism, out of historical reasons, in Japan is conventionally based on household, i.e. kinship-based, or in other words, it is perceived as the ‘religion of the family’ (*ie no shūkyō* 家の宗教) (ibid, 22). As for Shinto, traditionally it focused on the community and was therefore typically locally based. Therefore, it is important to take into consideration that answers to this type of questions often do not indicate individual religious consciousness. The historical background of single religious groups must not be overlooked.

This problem has been recognized also by the authors of the Kokugakuin surveys (conducted in 1999 and 2004). They acknowledged that significant differences between

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<sup>260</sup> See for survey results for postwar years Ishii 2008, 22, Table 11, and in the period between 1999-2004 see Kokugakuin 2006, 11, Table 2.

the character of affiliations in case of Christian churches or New Religions, or between locally based Shinto affiliation and kinship-based Buddhist affiliation, can alter the interpretation of answers appearing in surveys (Kokugakuin 2006). Therefore, in order to overcome the highly problematic character of the concept of religious affiliation within the Japanese religious context, they decided to add questions regarding religious behavior. More precisely, they included inquiries about the participation rate in customs and/or events associated with religion. The religiosity of the Japanese has been defined by the authors as “a set of beliefs of religious character that, rather than having to do with the individual’s consciously-chosen religion, they come to be affirmed within the sphere of everyday life” (Kokugakuin 2006, 20). Indeed, the disparities between answers regarding religious belief and those indicating the participation in concrete religious activities highlight certain characteristics of the Japanese religiosity as well as its complexity.

To summon up, the possible answers to the question inquiring about occasions at which the respondents visit one of the two principal religious institutions (shrines and temples), were the followings.<sup>261</sup>

‘daily’, ‘when happening to pass one’, ‘New Year’s prayer’, ‘critical ages (*yakuyoke*)’, ‘Shichigosan’, ‘*obon*, *ohigan* and *omatsuri*’<sup>262</sup>, ‘to make a request’, ‘never’, ‘other’

The highest score was obtained by New Year’s prayer (*hatsumōde*初詣), with 70% of respondents claiming to visit a shrine at this occasion, and 15% a temple. The numbers are interesting in particular with regard to Shinto considering the fact that, in the same survey, only 35% of respondents affirmed a belief in the existence of *kami* and slightly more than 5,6% of respondents claimed to have faith in Shinto (Kokugakuin 2006, 11, Table 2). Among occasions to visit a shrine, Shichigosan emerged as the third most

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<sup>261</sup> The question sounds: When do you visit shrines or temples for worship? Mark that apply:’ (Kokugakuin 2006, 13, Figure 5).

<sup>262</sup> *Obon* お盆, the Bon festival, *ohigan* お彼岸, the equinoctial observance, and *omatsuri* お祭り, shrine or temple festival.

popular one, with 25% of affirmative responds.<sup>263</sup> The surveys (1999 and 2004) included also questions about traditional folk- religious concerns, called by the authors *ki ni naru mono* (things that matter). Surprisingly high scores were received by observances of precautions during the years believed as critical (so called *yakudoshi*厄年) with 44%, by belief in theunfortunate days (*butsumetsu*凶滅) (to be avoided for weddings) with 42%, and with 43% to avoid fortunate days for days for funerals (*tomobiki*友引).

The reports of the Association of Shintō Shrines (Jinja Honchō) confirm the findings of the Kokugakuin research group (Jinja Honchō 2006).<sup>264</sup> Thesurveys carried out by the association did not include Shichigosan among their questions on traditional observances. Here the two listed traditional observances linked to childhood, *hinamatsuri*(Girls' Day) and *tango no hi*(Boys' Day), marked 37% of participation rate. Shichigosan was, however, included in the question about occasions at which shrines are most often visited but the same question indicated two other traditional rites of passage and thus, Shichigosan was joined by the name-giving ceremony (*meimei*) and *miyamairi* (first shrine visit of the baby). Shichigosan and the two ritesscored at the second place with 53%,preceded by New Year's visit (62%). Interestingly, the other three occasions which traditionally involved shrine visit, such as shrine festivals, Shinto weddings or New Year have been witnessing a declining rate between 1996 and 2006. The only exception is *seijinshiki*, the official coming-of-age rite. Shrine visit was usually not seen as an element of this observance but recently, a growing numbers of persons decide to visit a shrine on the occasion of the observance.<sup>265</sup> The rise is not significant (from 50% to 68%), but in comparison with the other observances that show a clear tendency of decline, it can be regarded as indicative. In general, rites of the life-cycle, and among them those that have a link to family life or focus on the child, witness rising rates of participation. Social

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<sup>263</sup> The second occasion that saw the highest number of shrine visitors was *obon, ohigan and omatsuri* with 30%. In case of temple visits, the occasion with the highest rate of observers was *obon* and *ohigan* (55%), followed by New Year's (15% ).

<sup>264</sup> In 1996, 50% of respondents responded negatively to the question about faith. This number rose to 68% in 2006 (Jinja Honchō 2007). The number of persons who declared to 'believe in Shintō' is extremely low ( 3-4%). Buddhism marks the highest rates of believers, but on the other hand, this too witnesses a declining trend (from 38% in 1996 to 27% in 2006).

<sup>265</sup>The percentage of those visiting a shrine at the occasion of the coming-of-age rite, rose from 12.7 in 1996 to 15.3% in 2006. The category of childhood rites, made up from three childhood rites of passage, one of which Shichigosan, witnessed a rise of observance rate in the form of shrine visit from 52.2 to 53.1%.

trends described in previous chapters, among them the declining number of children, the increased importance of occasions celebrating and highlighting the family, the privatization and evaluation of family life mirror a change in the hierarchy of values of the Japanese. These changes, on the other hand, are reflected in the rising popularity of observances linked to the family.

Concerning observation rate at Shichigosan, it is very difficult to obtain exact data on nationwide participation rates. No opinion polls specific on Shichigosan observance have been done so far. Families at some selected shrines on the 15<sup>th</sup> of November have been occasionally counted by journalists and by professional textile associations and schools (see Chapters IV and V). In the recent years, a number of journals and online sites specializing on childrearing issues or on ceremonial wear conduct surveys among their readers. Surveys and opinion polls of larger scale that aimed at grasping the problem of religiosity in Japan, only rarely included Shichigosan among its questions. Though, in the last few years, the shrine worship taking place at Shichigosan starts to appear among the indicators of religiosity. It is, however, usually comprised into categories which unite several observances (see above), rendering thus a precise analysis of specific data difficult.

Examples of surveys that use observance rate of Shichigosan as indicators of religiosity are provided by the two above mentioned surveys conducted recently by the Kokugakuin research group. Shichigosan figures among those traditional observances (together with seasonal festivities and traditional rites of passage), that are used by the authors to elucidate and define the character of religious attitudes and the degree of religious commitment in contemporary Japan (Kokugakuin 2006). These surveys included a separate voice for Shichigosan in their questions on the respondent's attitudes towards shrine worship. In the question: '*When do you visit a shrine for worship?*', in the years of 1999 and 2004 approximately 25-26,6% of respondents chose 'Shichigosan' (70% for New Year's visit, 33,8% for not specified festivals) (Kokugakuin 2006, 33). To this another 2,2% can be added that is made up by those who visit a temple rather than a shrine for Shichigosan. However, these data do not provide a complete picture on the observation rate concerning the celebration. One reason for this is the fact that the two opinion polls addressed a sample representing the entire adult population, thus including persons with no children, singles, students, elderly people. Since the question did not

specify whether it refers to a past experience, for example in the form of an eventual observance during the respondent's childhood, the way the respondent intended the significance of the question is not clear. A student, for instance, may indicate Shichigosan thinking on his or her own Shichigosan during his childhood, or he may ignore this option as not being part of his/her concerns at the moment. In sum, there are no available data to assess the exact observation rate regarding Shichigosan. The information can be deducted only through indirect sources, from data provided by the business and media sector, partially from the above mentioned surveys and from the few existing studies on contemporary ritual forms.<sup>266</sup>

### **8.3 Shichigosan and its connection to the *ujigami* belief**

The above mentioned studies and surveys generally reach the conclusion which points to the remarkable loss of interest among population for traditional observances, and with it for the traditional belief system. These conclusions are drawn not only from a continuingly declining rates of those who claim to have a faith in Shinto and Buddhism, but also from the diminishing level of knowledge and faith in *ujigami*, the Shinto patron deity of the community (Jinja Honchō 2006, Kokugakuin 2007). Traditional childhood rites of passage, among them those related to Shichigosan, have been interpreted by the Japanese folklore literature as rites with important links to *ujigami* belief (see Chapter III). In the community-based lifestyle centering around agricultural production, the community's tutelary deity played a significant role in the lives of the members of the local community. It stood in the focus of many Shinto observances. One of the interpretations of traditional childhood rites of passage was given by their function to integrate new members of the community in the community of parishioners ( so called

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<sup>266</sup> For example Yūko Taguchi's recent study on childhood rites of passage. The author notes that number of visitors for Shichigosan worship seem not to decline in spite of diminishing number of children in Japanese society (Taguchi 2011).

*ujiko*, children of *ujigami*). These rites signified often a formal recognition of the child as a new member of not only the social but also the religious community. However, with the dramatic changes in the social and economic structure of the Japanese rural society following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, this traditional community lifestyle gradually lost its legitimizations and together with this, links that tied communities to the cult of *ujigami*, have weakened. Today, studies on religious attitudes of the Japanese demonstrate that the belief connected to *ujigami* is slowly vanishing, in particular in the urban settings. Most young people never heard about the existence of *ujigami* belief.

As for Shichigosan, the *ujigami* cult had a weakened presence already in the 17<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> century when the urban pattern developed. It was in this period that the popularity of a few selected shrines in Edo, and in other big towns of the epoch (Osaka, Kyoto) started to rise. These shrines (and temples) were usually centrally located and often boasted adjacent green areas. The shrines received big numbers of worshippers with little or no regard to the traditional association based on the *ujigami-ujiko* relation. In case of Shichigosan, in Edo it was the Hie and the Asakusa shrine that were among the most popular sites to visit on the occasion of the Shichigosan celebration. The Hie shrine was thought to be the shrine where the first age celebration bearing the pattern of Shichigosan was celebrated (see also Chapter IV). The Hie shrine was also considered to enshrine the tutelary deity of the Tokugawa clan which was in a broader sense the tutelary deity of the population of the town of Edo. The popularity of the Asakusa shrine grew also because of the regularly held end-of-year markets in its vicinity which attracted big numbers of visitors from everywhere. Later, in the Taisho period, the newly build Meiji shrine has joined the list of the most popular shrines in Tokyo, and at the same time, it became one of the most favorite shrines for Shichigosan worship. Up to present days, the above listed three shrines continue to occupy the top places on the list of the most popular shrines in Tokyo regarding Shichigosan observance. The development occurred in the 17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in Edo was quite indicative of the future trends. Today, a few famous and popular shrines throughout the country concentrate the biggest numbers of visitors for traditional observances that enjoy popularity, such as the New Year's shrine visit for example. This takes place on the cost of a sharply declining number of worshippers in other minor shrines and temples (Ishii 2009, 29-30). Accordingly, the choice of the shrine

to visit is defined more by the popularity of the site and by individual convenience, rather than by concerns for the *ujigami* belonging.

Whereas, these tendencies are typical first of all to urban areas and in rural settings persons can have more affinity to their local *ujigami* shrine, it can be said that the above described phenomenon has a growing propensity. Also, the shrine worship at Shichigosan is today not typically associated to the *ujigami* cult. The *ujiko*-membership (parishioner) of the given family is not seen as strictly necessary even by shrine personnel. They themselves often encourage Shichigosan families to follow their individual convenience or preferences when selecting the shrine to visit at the occasion. The underplaying of the importance of *ujigami* links in case of Shichigosan emerges also in the study of Jennifer Robertson (1994). In her study of the Kodaira town the author noted that the town's chief shrine offered Shichigosan ritual among the rites addressed to the wider public ('newcomers' to the town) and not among rites that are accessible only to a narrow circle of (or 'native') residents. Robertson argues that children's festivals such as Shichigosan, serve for the main shrine of the town to distinguish between the two groups of the population of the town: natives and newcomers, in other words, 'true' and 'common' parishioners. Accordingly, newcomers, arrived to the town in the recent decades, are not admitted by natives among full citizens of the town, and are thus excluded from certain ritual events (Robertson 1994, 134-135).

In a number of studies on the religious consciousness of the Japanese, the declining cult of *ujigami* is interpreted as indicating a declining importance of Shinto in the lives of the Japanese (Kokugakuin 2006). In a similar line of thought, the declining link of Shichigosan observance with *ujigami* cult is also put into connection with the loss of the religious meaning of the celebration. In other words, it is assuming that this loss somehow lessens the authentic and 'original' meaning of the celebration. This kind of comments appeared also in the media in particular during the 1950s and 1960s. They pointed to the fact that celebrating families often did not even know the name of the venerated deity of the shrine they happened to visit for the occasion. The diminishing importance of *ujigami* belief indicated for these commentators the loss of 'original' and 'proper' significance of the celebration (see Chapter V).

However, in my opinion these conclusions are problematic. First of all, not all patterns of traditional childhood age celebrations documented in folklore literature and in historical materials were centered in a clear-cut way around the cult of *ujigami*. It is more precise to say that though the cult of *ujigami* had a central role in a number of regional variations of childhood age celebrations, not all existing variations put clearly an emphasis on this association and function. Furthermore, also regarding the custom of shrine visit, there is no historical evidence that would prove that this element would have been part of the childhood age celebrations in all historical moments and in all existing patterns. Old documents mentioning the custom of childhood rituals does commonly not mention the shrine visit as part of the observance pattern (Sugawara 2000). Neither is it mentioned in the collection of historical materials, the Kojiruien (Kojiruien 1969). The first documents that include the custom of shrine worship into the common pattern of *kamioki* or *hakamagi* rites come from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century (Taguchi 2011, 127). The urban pattern evolved in Edo around the 18<sup>th</sup> century integrated shrine visit as a significant element of the ritual pattern, though, the *ujigami* connection was underplayed already in this period. Popular and major shrines of the town tended to be preferred to the *ujigami* shrine of the family as soon as the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **8.4 Religious institutions: two case studies**

After the separation of religion from the state was defined in the new Constitution in 1946, all religious institutions in Japan had to cover their financial needs by themselves and thus, they needed to seek for support in alternative ways. The number of worshippers became crucial for the single shrines as their contributions in the form of offerings and in the form of fees they paid for several ritual occasions. This is the case in particular of those shrines which have resident priests and have to rely, for a substantial part of

income, to the services offered to worshippers.<sup>267</sup> Accordingly, shrines (or temples) which adopt diversified and multi-fold strategies are more successful in their endeavors to attract great number of visitors. Indeed, as Nelson points out, the loss of state financial support gave religions institutions also more freedom to decide and to manage their affairs in their own way (Nelson 1997).

Shichigosan occupies an important place in these strategies. Today, major shrines throughout the country are offering special Shichigosan-plans to the public. These are not dissimilar to those provided by commercial institutions such as the photo studios or rental shops, discussed in previous chapters. The practice to set up service plans for selected celebrations started probably with the introduction of Shinto shrine weddings in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Shinto shrine weddings were established in the early 1900s following the wedding rite of the imperial Crown Prince (future Emperor Taisho) in 1900.<sup>268</sup> In the interwar period, this specific wedding pattern started to grow on popularity first among the members of the social elite and later among common people, too (Shida 1999). Shinto shrine weddings spread particularly in towns where traditions were gradually giving way to new customs. Though, accompanying service packs became widespread only from the 1960s when a new industry, that of the service industry, has emerged.<sup>269</sup>

The involvement of religious institutions in commercial activities has never been seen as something improper in Japan. Both Buddhism and Shinto, historically catered for several this worldly needs of the population. Though, the abolition of state financial support after 1946 many religious institutions found themselves in economic difficulties. The need to find other, alternative means of livelihood was felt as more urgent. In Tokyo, the first shrine offering additional services accompanying the wedding rite was the Meiji Jingū (明治神宮) in 1947. In the 50s-60s, when the wedding ritual industry started to grow in

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<sup>267</sup> A big number of minor shrines have no resident priests since this requires financial means to secure their wage. Life-cycle rites such as Shichigosan, are usually sought for in shrines where the purification rite is available, i.e. in shrines with resident priests. Also, shrines which offer accompanying services are more popular among worshippers.

<sup>268</sup> At the royal wedding an unprecedented combination of Shinto ritual practice and ceremonial customs of the imperial court was invented, in order to create a wedding ceremony comparable to Western royal ceremonial events (Shida 1999, Ishii 2005 ).

<sup>269</sup> See detailed descriptions of the phenomenon in Edwards 1989, Goldstein-Gidoni 1997, Ishii 2005.

the country, many other shrines joined the Meiji Jingū. Shida argues that from this period onwards Shinto shrines and their priests started to act as ritual specialists (Shida 1999, 197-198). The shrines that made out a profit from this service began to emphasize the allegedly ancient origin of the shrine wedding ceremony. In spite of being of a relatively recent invention the shrines' scope was to render the Shinto wedding ritual to seem authentic, and at the same time, to render the role of Shinto priests as ritual specialist necessary.

#### **8.4.1 Case study I: Meiji Jingū**

The case of the Meiji Jingū<sup>270</sup> illustrates the above depicted development through the observance of Shichigosan. The Meiji Jingū is a relatively new institution. Completed in 1920 it was built to enshrine the souls of the Emperor Meiji and his wife, Empress Shōken, and as such it was to occupy a central place in the hierarchy of Shinto shrines in the country. Indeed, soon after its inauguration it became one of the most popular shrines in Tokyo and even today it continues to enjoy popularity. The shrine is centrally placed, located in the Shibuya district of Tokyo. It boasts a vast green area (700 000 square meters) covered with an evergreen forest which provides a pleasant ambient as well as a recreation site for the visitors. These characteristics made from the shrine a popular place for Shichigosan worship almost immediately after its foundation.

It can be said, that Meiji Jingū has attracted big numbers of families for the Shichigosan prayer from its very beginning.<sup>271</sup> Its popularity continued even after the war and also because of this, up to the period when the declining birth rate was to show its effects - it means up to the early 1980s - the shrine did not feel the need to actively promote the observance. The 70s and 80s were the decades of the baby boom generation. From 100

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<sup>270</sup> The word of *jingū* commonly indicates within the system of Shinto shrines that the shrine is connected to the imperial house.

<sup>271</sup> The account has been constructed mainly based on the interview made with Mr. Daimaru, resident priest of the Meiji Jingū. An interview with the employees of the indoor rental studio of the shrine was made, too.

000 to 150 000 children came at Shichigosan to the shrine each year. In these years often long queues were formed by families waiting for their turn to enter the ceremony hall for the formal purification rite. However, around the beginning of the 1990s, due to the declining birth rate, the Meiji Jingū like many other shrines throughout the country started to register a sharp decline in number of Shichigosan observers. In these years, the fee for the formal purification rite for Shichigosan was still volunteered by an individual contribution. The earnings coming from these contributions represented an important entry for the finances of the shrine. The declining number of Shichigosan visitors thus affected negatively the shrine's finances and therefore, Meiji Jingū decided to set up promotional materials to attract more families to its premises. Though, for many years this promotion did not take the form of service plans or sets. It was only in 2003 that the shrine presented its first pack of services designed for families planning to observe Shichigosan. The pack was designed after the model provided by commercial institutions (photo studios, rental shops). The pack that the shrine offers today comprises a number of services ranging from beauty assistance, professional photographer, to rental of outfits. The entry that distinguishes the shrine plan from those offered by commercial institutions, is the shrine worship and the formal purification rite available at the shrine.

The promotion of these services occurs in several forms. One is the monthly bulletin that the Meiji Jingū publishes, titled Magokoro. When the date of Shichigosan is approaching the bulletin includes news about Shichigosan services available in the shrine. In 2009, the first information on these services appeared in the August number. The information provided a brief explanation of the three traditional age-ceremonies associated to Shichigosan. Families were invited to celebrate and pray for good health and growth of their children. Apart from this bulletin, there are other publications that provide information on the observance. There is a leaflet, for example, that lists all occasions for which purification rites are offered at the shrine, such as domestic safety, individual safety, business prosperity, examination success and so on. Life-cycle rituals are also included among which Shichigosan. It lists the following occasions:

naming ceremony (*meitsukeor meimei*), first shrine visit (*hatsumiyamairi*), first solid food rite (*okuizome*), Shichigosan, school entrance and graduation, coming-of-age rite, wedding, wedding anniversaries, *yakudoshi*, *kanreki-iwai*(60<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration).<sup>272</sup>

As it becomes clear from this list, apart from the traditional observances new occasions, too, are included here (such as school entrance and graduation and wedding anniversary). In this way, the shrine aims to offer a complete cycle of significant events regarded as important thresholds in the life of the individual and of the family. It acknowledges the continuing relevance of the concept that looks at human life as a flow and as a progress through subsequent phases.

Apart from these materials, Meiji Jingū has also a Shichigosan pamphlet which features details of the service pack offered at the shrine premises. The style of the text reminds in many ways texts used in materials of the media and business sector. The text of the rental studio, for example, says:

‘We offer our assistance to help to turn this important event of your child into a memorable occasion. We have prepared a rich collection of adorable and elegant clothes.’

Photos of the pamphlet feature children models in festive Japanese style dresses. In 2009, the pack cost around 35 000 Yen which comprised the prayer ceremony, *chitoseame*, small gifts for children, rental of dress, make-up, hair set, and assistance with kimono. The price did not include the cost of the photo service, neither did it include decorations and accessories making part of the child’s formal attire. Several separate leaflets inform on single parts of the Shichigosan plan, such as for example the photo service. They give information on prices and other details regarding the photo service (albums, photo paper etc.). There is also a restaurant within the area of the shrine where special Shichigosan menu is available in the period between the tenth of October and twenty-ninth of

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<sup>272</sup>According to the lunar calendar, at the 60<sup>th</sup> birthday the twelve zodiac signs (in Chinese astrology, sexagenary cycle) complete their circle and return to the first sign in which the person was born. Today, it is celebrated according to the modern way of age counting, hence on the 61<sup>st</sup> birthday. This ritual is also believed to be a symbolic rebirth of the individual (see also Chapter VII).

November, for a set price.<sup>273</sup> The time schedule of the event as described in the pamphlet is:

1. 30 min of hair arranging and make-up (professional artists)
2. 30 min of dressing up (by assistants)
3. 30 min photo-service
4. Prayer

The promotion of Shichigosan at the Meiji Jingū starts during the month of August when usually an open day (information event) is held at the shrine's premises. A big number of families effectively arrange their bookings during this day. On this day, the indoor rental studio opens its doors to all for viewing its latest collection of Shichigosan dresses. The studio is otherwise closed during the year. The collection of Shichigosan dresses (counting more than 460 models) is refreshed every year in order to follow changing trends in fashion and taste. The promotional texts of the Meiji Jingū emphasize the reputation of the shrine as an important national cultural asset. References to a glorious past and national history abound in texts referring to Shichigosan, as well. The pamphlet underlines that its collection of Shichigosan dresses boasts numerous garments inspired by Japanese history. These are, for example, ceremonial outfits typical to the samurai class from the Tokugawa period, or garments bearing Heian imperial court patterns. Aristocratic aesthetics is emphasized in the descriptions of Shichigosan dress models and nostalgia for the past is nourished in this way. A separate leaflet promotes a special pack that combines two sets of Japanese style festive dress, one more common for the morning prayer, and another more sumptuous for the afternoon photo service.

Information is provided not only in print form but also on the official website of the shrine. This gives detailed explanation of the proper dress code for the celebration, subdivided by age and sex of the child, with due explanations of their historical significance.<sup>274</sup> The recommended dresses all belong to the traditional Japanese style,

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<sup>273</sup> Child menu for 3150 Yen, adult menu for 9000 or 7000 Yen.

<sup>274</sup> For example there are detailed explanations of patterns and colors used on the kimono sash (*obi*) as part of the seven years old girls' outfit.

with special attention to details and accessories that render them ‘truly elegant and traditional’. The website is very informative also concerning other practical details of the observance. It gives an account of the origins of the childhood age rituals (*kamioki*, *hakamagi*, *obitoki*). It offers advices on how to decide the proper age for the celebration, explains the difference between the old traditional way of age counting and the modern age counting. The text recommends parents to take into consideration their individual convenience and preferences both regarding the age of the child and the date of the celebration. The 15<sup>th</sup> of November is not seen as a strict rule to be followed.

The ceremonial prayers (purification rites) that the shrine offers to the public are hosted by the ceremonial hall of the shrine, the Kaguraden. There are three types of application forms available at the reception desk: a form to apply for a prayer for the occasion of *hatsumiyamōde*, a form for the Shichigosan prayer, and a form for other ceremonies (defined as other than Shichigosan and *hatsumiyamōde*). Parents are asked to fill in on the application form for Shichigosan the name of the child, its age and sex, and address.<sup>275</sup> For all ceremonies a fee applies which in case of Shichigosan is 10 000 yen, but higher sums can be volunteered, as well. All children who apply for the purification ceremony receive a memorial medal and *chitoseame*.

In 2006, 830 families opted for the Shichigosan plan and the number shows an increase since then (in 2007: 921, in 2008: 970). The total number of families visiting the shrine for the Shichigosan prayer is of course much higher than those who also purchase the entire Shichigosan plan. It would be difficult to estimate the total number of Shichigosan families during the period of October and November, but the number of applications for the purification rite can be also indicative. According to the estimation of Annika Hansen, a resident researcher in the Meiji shrine, in 2006 this number amounted to 6700 and in 2008 to 7300, showing an increasing trend (Hansen 2009).

At present, Shichigosan is the second most frequently requested formal rite in the Meiji Jingū. The first place is occupied by *yakudoshi*, the purification rite to avoid bad luck during the unfortunate years. Whereas the Shichigosan purification rite is available in the

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<sup>275</sup> The form for *hatsumiyamōde* asks to indicate the names of parents and of child, and child’s birth date.

shrine throughout the entire year, the number of applicants reaches its peak during the two months of October and November. The Shichigosan purification rite is performed for small groups of families which enter the ceremonial hall in order of application and payment of fee. During the most popular weekends (around the 15<sup>th</sup> of November), it occasionally happens that the shrine office has to turn down applicants because of excessive number of inquiries. Nevertheless, before-hand applications are normally not available. In contrast to the purification rite that is available throughout the year, the Shichigosan-pack comprising several services is offered only during a restricted period prior to the 15<sup>th</sup> of November. Nonetheless, a trend to anticipate the start of this period can be noted. While in the years when the service was introduced the promotion started in October, in 2007 the pack was launched already in August and the availability of the service stretched to November. This is also due to the fact that in recent years always more families tend to disregard the traditional dates of the observance (Hansen 2009). There also cases when families observe Shichigosan in January or July. Families residing overseas and returning for the winter (or summer) holidays might find it more preferable to observe Shichigosan in these periods instead of the traditional period around October-November.

#### **8.4.2 Case study II: Hie Jinja**

Hie Jinja (日枝神社) is another well-known shrine in Tokyo among families observing the Shichigosan shrine ritual. It is situated in the Akasaka area of Tokyo. Already mentioned in previous chapters (Chapter IV and V), the shrine claims to be the place where the ‘first Shichigosan’ was observed by the members of the Tokugawa family in the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (precisely in 1681 according to the shrine’s official explanation). This historical note is publicized on the official web site of the shrine as well as on the pamphlets it issues. The official explanation provided by the shrine refers to a historical document

from 1803 that already mentions the rite in connection with the shrine.<sup>276</sup> Hie shrine claims the title of ‘*uji* shrine’ of the village which became known as Edo when in 1590 the Tokugawa clan decided to settle down and build its castle there. The deity (*Ooyama kuhi no kami*)<sup>277</sup> venerated here is the god of Mount Hie situated in Shiga prefecture and it is known also under the name *Hie-no-kami*.<sup>278</sup> This deity was venerated as the *ubugami* (the tutelary deity) of the Tokugawa clan and as such it became regarded as the *ujigami* of the people of Edo. The shrine originally was situated within the compound of the Edo castle, and only later was it moved out from there.

The Hie shrine is one of the few places in Japan where the *goban* rite is available to the worshippers (see Chapter VII). A huge mat in the yard of the shrine is prepared for all Shichigosan children in the period between September 11<sup>th</sup> and November 30<sup>th</sup>. The Hie shrine, too, offers Shichigosan sets very similar to the one described in the case of the Meiji shrine. The pack includes rental of festive dress, hair and dress arrangement, photographing, and the purification rite. The schedule of the event is also explained to the last detail and is illustrated with photos on the website of the shrine. Children taking part in the Shichigosan plan receive in the end of the ritual toys in gift. In 2011, these were a doll dressed as *miko* (shrine female assistant) for girls, and a set of toy cars for boys.

The shrine provides a special calendar in which families can check out days which are expected to be the most crowded for the celebration of Shichigosan. Among fairly popular dates one can find days traditionally believed as inauspicious for celebrations. This indicates that the traditional considerations are not taken too seriously anymore, at least not in the case of Shichigosan. This view is also supported by the shrine itself when in its promotional materials advises families to consider their personal convenience first and only on the second place to take into account the fortunate days. During the Shichigosan period the Hie shrine organizes other Shichigosan related events, too. In October 2010, for example, there was a tea ceremony gathering dedicated to Shichigosan (*Shichigosan Ochakai*).

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<sup>276</sup> The document mentioned is the *Zōho Edo nenjū gyōji* (増補江戸年中行事) from 1803.

<sup>277</sup> 大山咋神

<sup>278</sup> Since the Heian period, numerous branch shrines of the Hie shrine in Shiga prefecture were built throughout Japan.

The Hie shrine bases its reputation not only on the claim to be the place of the first historical performance of Shichigosan. Apart from Shichigosan, the shrine is also known for prayers for safe pregnancy and birth, the so called *obi iwai* (see Chapter III). The two guardian figures of monkeys that stand at both sides of the shrine's main gate represent a married couple and are believed to be the messengers of the enshrined deity. The female holds a baby in her arms. Monkeys and dogs were thought in the past to be auspicious and bringing good luck for women approaching childbirth. Besides, monkeys are animals living in groups and are believed to raise their offspring with affection and care. It is possible to purchase a special *obi* (sash) in the shrine shop and, for an additional 10 000 Yen, to have it blessed in a purification rite. Apart from *obi iwai*, the shrine offers also other childhood rites such as the seventh day rite (*oshichiya*), the first shrine visit (*hatsumiya mairi*), and so on. Compared to those described in the case of the Meiji Jingū, here new observances are not included in the list, only the traditional ones are. The accompanying descriptions focusing on the meaning and origin of the ritual, are, however, similar to those given by the Meiji shrine.

## **8.5 Religious institutions as service providers**

When discussing the role of religious institutions that are involved in the celebration of Shichigosan, both Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples must be included. In the Japanese religious context single ritual events are not always strictly appropriated by one or another religion. In general terms, it can be said that the Shinto shrine cares for immediate wellbeing of the family, the house, and the community (Jeremy and Robinson 1989). The Buddhist temples, on the other hand, are associated with the family lineage and with the honor to the deceased, thus, they traditionally and mainly cater for funerals. However, these are not strict rules. While Shichigosan belongs normally to the domain of Shinto, there are several Buddhist temples that are actively involved in the celebration. This occurs in particular in case of temples which have a reputation to safeguard

childbirth related events. Nakayama-dera (中山寺), described in the study by Ian Reader and George Tanabe, is for example a Buddhist temple in the Kansai region that capitalizes greatly from Shichigosan (Reader and Tanabe 1998, 206-207). The temple is known for safeguarding childbirth and therefore, it attracts big numbers of worshippers. However, when the impact of falling childbirth rate started to be perceived in the form of a diminishing number of visitors, the temple decided to widen its religious competence and add other childhood rituals to its promoted events. The promotion of Shichigosan as an event in close connection to childbirth proved to be a successful strategy for this scope. According to Reader and Tanabe, however, there is a notable interchangeability of *kami* and buddhas which is in close connection with the concept of *genze riyaku*, i.e. this worldly benefits (see its discussion below) (Reader and Tanabe 1998, 260). The authors argue that in Japan, it is efficacy in providing help that is decisive when persons choose the institution or religion to rely on in a concrete situation.

On the other hand, the survey on the religiosity of the Japanese conducted by the Kokugakuin research group in 2003-2004, found out that the Japanese have a strong impression that Shinto (shrines), with difference to Buddhism (temples), tend more towards this-worldly benefits, such as warding off disasters and making requests (Kokugakuin 2006). Whereas the results show that Shinto and Buddhist institutions continue to be commonly associated with issues of emotional/psychological nature as well as with traditional ceremonies and rites (coming of age, wedding, Shichigosan etc.), Shinto was regarded by respondents as being more 'benefit-oriented'.

The economic interdependence of religious institutions and of lay communities have been described as characterizing religious institutions of several countries in East Asia (Nelson 1997). Most institutions heavily depend on the support of worshippers; on the other hand, worshippers depend on the 'services' that religious institutions provide them with. Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples have been the target of criticism coming from scholars and religious theoreticians for their alleged orientation towards profit-seeking and thus for lacking spiritual authenticity.<sup>279</sup> Nevertheless, as Reader and Tanabe argue in their

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<sup>279</sup> See more on this issue Helen Hardacre *Shinto and the State* (1989), also Reader and Tanabe 1998.

volume, ‘this worldly benefit’ seeking aspect has been inherent in Buddhist and Shinto religions in past as well as in present times. Nelson notes that in the case of Shinto shrines the kind of liberty of enterprise and the degree of autonomy that they enjoy today, is a relatively new development(Nelson 1997, 703). In the past, Shinto shrines were much more under the control of the worldly powers, such as landlords, military rulers and state officials. The new postwar Constitution not only separated religion from the state but it also put religious institutions into the necessity of self-support, which, on the other hand, rendered them more autonomous.

Today shrines and temples need to cover the expenses of the day-to-day run of the institution and thereby, have to seek financial support. For many of them the promotion of traditional observances has become one of the means to achieve these aims. One big part of their income comes from offerings made by daily worshippers, from large donations by local patrons, from collections and the sale of amulets at festivities, and from contributions made by the neighborhood during the annual festivals.<sup>280</sup> Life-cycle rituals figure among the significant sources of funds. Since Shichigosan belongs to the fairly popular observances among Japanese families, religious institutes can draw a considerable benefit from the event. Indeed, there are cases when Shichigosan is appositely used as a fund-raising event, such as in the case described by Jennifer Robertson. Here apart from the above described circumstances, the shrine of Shinmei-gū utilized Shichigosan also to improve its finances (Robertson 1994, 134).<sup>281</sup> A fairly precise estimation of how important can be the income coming from Shichigosan for the finances of a given shrine, can be drawn from the figures provided by John Nelson in his research on Shinto shrines and on the role of priests as managers. According to the information obtained by the author, the funds that the shrine in question received from Shichigosan prayers, represented approximately the 2,5 % of its total yearly income (Nelson 1997, 700, Note 10). However, I agree with Nelson in seeing this activity of the shrine as not deriving solely out of financial interest. Nelson argues that the creative

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<sup>280</sup> In Theodore Bestor’s study of a Tokyo neighborhood the only two life-cycle rituals that were observed at the local shrine were *miyamairi* and Shichigosan (Bestor 1989).

<sup>281</sup> The basic fee in Shinmei-gū was 10.000 yen in 1984.

effort of the institutions “[...] to respond to, anticipate, and sometimes even invent the needs of a changing society” need to be acknowledged, as well (ibid, 704).

The strategies to maintain a stable number of worshippers for Shichigosan or to attract more, can be diverse. In case of Hie shrine an emphasis is placed on the historical references. The shrine capitalizes on its fame to be the ‘birthplace’ of the first urban Shichigosan observance. Other shrines or temples can utilize for the same scope different themes. The institute’s connection to childbirth-related rites can be used to include Shichigosan, such as the case of the temple described above (Reader and Tanabe 1998, 206-207). The changed financial and social circumstances made this temple to reassess its symbolic capital and include Shichigosan among its major events. Indeed, the authors explain, the traditional reputation of the temple as an institution caring for childbirth made it easy to widen its sphere of influence. The set of rites of passage has been so completed and in this way, rites connected to the period of early childhood constitute the temple’s ‘specialty’.

Another strategy was chosen by the Ikuta shrine (生田神社) in Kobe which in 2010 organized a Shichigosan event for foreign children.<sup>282</sup> The shrine invited thirty children from seven countries and provided them with traditional Japanese outfits for the occasion. The event was duly publicized in the media attracting thus attention of the public. Another shrine, the Imado Jinja (今戸神社) in Asakusa (Tokyo) decided to target young, to-be-parents.<sup>283</sup> In 2009, the shrine decided to set up *anomia*i party (meeting for young people for finding a partner). The shrine responsible explained the motivation for this event with the sharp decrease of Shichigosan visits in the last two decades. While 20 years earlier more than 200 families per year came to observe Shichigosan to the shrine, the last few years saw a decline of this number to 30 families a year. The shrines representatives thought that one of the reasons for this change has to do with the falling number of marriages. Thus, they decided to help young people meet each other and they encourage them to establish families of their own. The interviewed priest also added that

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<sup>282</sup>Article ‘*Gaikokujin Shichigosan-mōde*’ (外国人七五三詣) in [www.sankei.co.jp](http://www.sankei.co.jp) (Sankei News 産経ニュース, 2010, June 11) (accessed 2010, September 9).

<sup>283</sup> Source: [www.sankei.jp](http://www.sankei.jp) 2009, February 07 (accessed 2011, May 10).

by organizing these events they hoped that couples formed with their help, would eventually celebrate their wedding in the shrine, and later also the rites of passages of their children, among them Shichigosan. Indeed, it has been noted that families often decide to celebrate Shichigosan of their children in shrines or temples to which the family has already established connections in the past (COMO 2006, September). Such connection can be the celebration of the wedding or of *obi iwai* (pregnancy prayer) in the same religious institution. The accumulation of auspicious events observed in the same place can effectively enhance the symbolical significance of these events for the family. The religious institute is rendered, in this case, witness of the family's happiness.

## **8.6 The multiple functions of religious institutions**

In his discussion on the role of priests, Buddhist and Shinto alike, Nelson calls attention to the fact that one of the most important tasks of these priests lays in their role of ritual specialist (Nelson 1997). Priests act as mediators of relations between human and nonhuman powers and as such they “can have considerable impact on the structuring of social relations as well as the social calendar” (ibid, 689). By ranking ritual activities according to their importance, significance and efficaciousness, priests contribute to the creation of the social calendar and shape the way these rituals are assessed by common persons. Indeed, this is what Shinto shrines do when they provide lists of recommended ritual events. Through these recommendations shrines (or temples) offer their interpretation of what should be regarded as appropriate or important and what is of minor importance. Yūko Taguchi notes in her study on contemporary forms of *yakudoshi* observance that persons often become aware of the need to observe when they happen to see the *yakudoshi* boards on display in shrines (Taguchi 2008).

The lists of ritual events recommended by religious institutions remarkably coincide with lists provided by popular etiquette guides. The catalog of childhood celebrations listed in

the etiquette guide of Matsumoto Shigemi is almost identical to the list of events presented by the Meiji shrine (Matsumoto 2005):

*obi iwai*, *oshichiya* (called also *meimei*), *okuizome*, *hatsutanjō*<sup>284</sup>, *hatsusekku*<sup>285</sup>, *omiyamairi*, kindergarten entrance, Shichigosan, school entrance and graduation, *jūsanmairi*<sup>286</sup>, coming-of-age rite (*seijinshiki*)

An essential difference between the two lists is in the description of the appropriate celebration manner. The only three events at which a visit to a religious institution is recommended by the etiquette guide are *omiyamairi*, Shichigosan and *jūsanmairi*. Instead, the shrine recommends a prayers or purification rite in case of all observances listed here. In underlining the importance of shrine visits at the occasions of rites of passage, Shinto shrines draw on traditional associations which link rites of passages to the Shinto symbolism. These associations are, however, adopted also on events that are not among the traditionally observed ones, such as school entrance and graduation, or the coming-of-age ceremony.

On the other hand, shrines in their role of ritual specialists are seen and also act as service providers. First, the purification rite as an optional element of shrine worship at Shichigosan (and at other rites of passage observed in the shrine) started to be increasingly regarded as a service from the early 1980s.<sup>287</sup> For long it offered for a fee on a voluntary base. From the latter half of 1980s, more and more shrines established the practice of requiring a concrete sum for the rite. This occurred partly to meet families' wishes since – as the period's media wrote – parents coming for the Shichigosan rite often felt puzzled when having to decide the appropriate sum to offer. The weekly *Shūkan Gendai*, in an attempt to offer an explanation for the trend, quoted the words of a shrine representative: “mothers of these days regard faith as a material thing, hence something that has its due cost” (*Shūkan Gendai* 1980, November 20).<sup>288</sup> Today, the

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<sup>284</sup> The first birthday.

<sup>285</sup> The first seasonal festival of the child (*momo no sekku* and *tango no sekku*).

<sup>286</sup> Traditional rite of passage observed at thirteen years of age in the region of Kansai (see also Chapter III).

<sup>287</sup> According to an estimation made by Yūko Taguchi based on numbers of visitors in several shrines in Tokyo, over 50% of Shichigosan visitors participate in the purification ritual (Taguchi 2011, 130).

<sup>288</sup> 今のお母さんたちは信仰は物質と考えている開講傾向がある。

purification rite is indeed viewed as a service, demonstrated also by the fact that there are families which complain over its 'quality'. Voices of mothers appear in the media criticizing the fact that in spite of the fee paid for the Shichigosan purification rite, they are asked to join several other families to receive the blessing - instead of receiving it on an individual base. These complaints indicate that families consider the purification rite as a service for which they paid the due fee. Consequently, they feel entitled to give voice to their expectations with respect to the quality of the service.

The image of religious institution as service providers is further strengthened by the media. On the pages on the magazines, detailed summaries of pros and contras of selected shrines appear. Readers are advised to check out several shrines before deciding the most suitable one to visit for Shichigosan. 'Check out which shrine gives you the most pleasant impression' (COMO 2006, September). In 2008 the Kansai Walker published a guide of shrines and temples of the Kansai area that provide Shichigosan purification rite. Readers received detailed information here on the popularity of the selected shrine or temple (based on the number of visitors for Shichigosan in the previous year), on the sum of the fee for the purification rite, on the availability of the rite throughout the year (a service not provided by all). The guide also made an assessment creating a list of the top places based on the range of gifts offered to children, on the presence of natural environment, and on other favorable conditions of the premises.

The natural ambient and geographical setting of the institution figure among the criteria that can influence the perception of the concrete religious institution. The presence of a park or garden in the vicinity of the shrine, of a zoological garden, or simply a central and easily accessible location can enhance its appeal in a significant way. The recent trend that sees a notable increase in the play and entertaining aspects of Shichigosan have been touched upon in Chapter V and VI. This has to do with the fact that the celebration is seen today first of all as a family event, and as such, it is an occasion which is expected to be spent in an enjoyable manner within the family circle. In this respect, shrines which have an adjacent park or garden can be seen as more attractive. With regard to the entertaining aspects of shrines and temples as physical space, Kenji Ishii notes that nowadays these spaces are increasingly becoming spots for urbanites' entertainment and recreation in Japan (Ishii 2000). Ishii underlines that apart from a recreational function

the green realm surrounding major shrines and temples also represents a symbolical sacred space in the eyes of the visitors. The green environments are often the only peaceful spots in the busy metropolitan areas in Japan today. The time spent here is experienced as a time set apart lending a sacred dimension to these spaces that can complement or even entirely replace the sacredness that used to be provided by the ritual action solely. Using the example of New Year's festivities, Ishii argues that contemporary urban Japanese by giving preference to shrines and temples with green space, "seek for a sacred area in which to pursue life's renewal" (Ishii 2000, 10).

Religious institutions have thus multiple functions in contemporary Japan. Apart from providing required services and a pleasant setting in urban areas, the 'sacredness' of these places is strengthened also by their associations with the past and traditions. Feelings such as 'nostalgia for tradition' can be experienced and lived out in shrines and temples that belong to the few places in urban areas which bear historical associations. In this way, they vest with the feeling of authenticity the rituals observed there. The combination of diverse elements evoking themes, such as tradition, entertainment, family bonds, and non-everyday contexts, participate in the creation of a meaningful occasion in the eyes of the contemporary observer.

### **8.7 Conclusions: Practical benefits and spiritual needs**

Clammer argues that Japan is one of the few societies in which religion and consumption have reached a cozy accommodation (1997, 8). However, as Clammer continues, any kind of social phenomenon - if its meaning is to be understood in its complexity – needs to be placed within its social, religious and historical context. In Japan's history, major religious influences have always remained close to the needs of everyday life.<sup>289</sup>

Social change affects religious institutions in the same manner it affects any other institution in society. According to John Nelson, the capacity to embrace changes and

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<sup>289</sup> With regard to Buddhism, in a recent study Galen Amstutz argues that materialism and commerce have been part of Shin Buddhism since early 18<sup>th</sup> century at least (Amstutz 2012).

remain close to the needs of everyday life of the individual might be one of the explanations why religious institutions in Japan continue to be present in the lives of the Japanese to a greater degree than what is typical to Western societies (1997). Nelson notes that it is mainly thanks to the creative work of the religious institutions and their priests that “stagnation and decay” have been avoided in Japan (ibid, 704). Shrines and temples in Japan often use a rhetoric, such as in case of Shichigosan, fairly similar to the one used by commercial agents also in order to preserve a continuing relevance to modern life conditions.

Examples of cases when change is not always embraced in such a degree are numerous in the scholarly literature. Clifford Geertz, in an analysis of a modern Javanese funeral ceremony, recognized religions and ritual as centers of social stress (1957). Here the uniformity of religious beliefs and practices, disturbed by population growth, industrialization and urbanization, have brought about a diminished efficacy of the examined funeral ritual. In Japan religion and ritual practice tend to integrate structural changes in a more harmonious way. In the case described by Geertz, the funeral rite failed to fulfill its function to create social equilibrium for its very lack of capability to embrace the pluralistic context of social change (ibid, 53-54).

In Japan, the providing of ‘services’ or ‘worldly benefits’ are inherent in the function of the major religious institutions. Reader and Tanabe argue that the concept of ‘worldly benefits’, or *genze riyaku* 現世利益 (‘this worldly benefits’) offered by religious institutions to their worshippers is often disregarded by scholars as mundane and unreligious (Reader and Tanabe 1998, 257). Nevertheless, this particular aspect of Shinto and Buddhism in Japan, the authors say, is assuring, nowadays as well as in the past, a high degree of relevance of religion to the everyday life of people. Furthermore, the associated ritual observances enabled by shrine and temple worship constitute for the Japanese a valid “spiritual care system” (Reader and Tanabe 1998, 259).

In this perspective, Shichigosan, too, enters in the conceptual framework of practical benefits. The celebration itself plays a multiplicity of roles in the lives of Japanese families. By appealing to Shinto and Buddhist deities the need of the modern individuals to rely on some kind of help and spiritual surveillance over the well-being of their

offspring and family, is acknowledged. The ritual in general, and the shrine (or temple) worship in particular, is an instrument to petition for this help. It is an instrument that is traditionally regarded and perceived by most Japanese, more or less consciously, as sufficiently effective or at least acceptable.

Whether the shrine visit at Shichigosan, or at any other similar occurrence, occurs out of faith or not, in the Japanese cultural context it is not easy to be assessed.<sup>290</sup> In Japan, in the case of amulets and talismans, Reader and Tanabe notice that persons use them affectively but not cognitively (1998). It means that individuals, by purchasing an amulet or by visiting a shrine, not always assert personal faith or religious affiliation through these acts. The need to buy amulets or to observe rituals may be explained by the need of the modern man to acquire insurance in an uncertain world (Nelson 1996, 41). Uncertainty is, however, sustained also by the emphasis that modern man places on the rational and by his unwillingness to allow space for the irrational, at least on the conscious level. On the other hand, it needs to be acknowledged that the rational motivations constitute a whole with the so called irrational motivations. The case of Shichigosan is a demonstration of this.

Therefore, I do not think that it would be useful to try to assess whether Shichigosan can be considered a religious ritual or less. To make a clear-cut distinction between categories such as religious and secular might prove less useful as analytical categories than what might be presumed. From the actors' perspective it is of little importance whether the ritual in question is religious or secular according to the conventional interpretative categories of religious studies or of Shinto belief. The effort to apply these categories can narrow down the sphere of interpretation of the meaning of ritual. Moreover, individual actors may attribute very personalized meanings and significance to the single elements of the ritual. The photo of one's child in the family album may bear a much more elevated symbolic meaning, or in other words, may reveal a sacred dimension of human life than, for example, the purification rite celebrated by the Shinto priests.

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<sup>290</sup> With regards, Nelson points out that shrine visits are multifunctional; they encompass worship in religious terms as well as visit with the scope of recreation or sightseeing (Nelson 1996, 147, 5).

This is not to say, though, that the shrine worship is bearing little meaning for all observers. It can indeed be an important constituent in the significance of the ritual for the individual. Whereas I agree with Kenji Ishii's conclusion that the reasons for the possible future changes regarding the observance of Shichigosan will have to be searched outside the shrines and the Shinto organization (Ishii 2009:150), I find it important to underline that the role of shrine (and temples) emerges today crucial as they provide a structure – physical and symbolical – within which significant events such as the performance of a ritual can be created and experienced. The contemporary practice of shrine worship in the case of Shichigosan provides a recognizable platform, symbolizing continuity with the past and/or cultural traditions to most Japanese (be them true or invented).

## 9. CONCLUSION

The present study analyzed the case of one ritual, the Shichigosan. Through six chapters I followed the historical evolution of its pattern and layers of meanings attached to the ritual in different historical moments. In Chapter III, the interpretation frame was provided by the results of the Japanese folklore research. Chapters IV-VI were set in a temporal framework. Chapter VII and VIII were mainly thematic chapters, the former dealing with the symbolical aspects inherent in the ritual and the latter focusing on the role of religious institutions in shaping the ritual meaning and on the function of shrine (or temple) worship within the celebration.

Chapter III elucidated the principal themes that emerge with frequency in the rural versions of childhood rituals which influenced the contemporary form of Shichigosan. The social and cultural context of these rituals, persisting in various regions of Japan to a varying degree until World War II, was set in the traditional rural life style with its underlying cosmology. The most prevalent themes of the interpretation provided by the folklore research, focused – to summon up briefly – around social integration, religious affiliation, and the cyclical progress of human soul. In Chapter IV, I aimed at complementing the picture by widening the temporal frame to the pre-Meiji period and the spatial frame that would include also non-rural contexts. This objective was important also because the contemporary form of Shichigosan owes many of its aspects to the development that occurred in the rapidly expanding Tokugawa capital, the city of Edo, in the 17-18<sup>th</sup> century. The urban life style which developed in this particular historical period gave a strong imprint to the ritual of which many features persist to present days. Chapters IV and V monitored the diffusion of this pattern first in the Tokyo area and later throughout the country. In these two chapters I also analyzed the process through which consumption had been acquiring a growing share in the celebration pattern. Today, consumption is not only an inherent element in the celebration of Shichigosan, but it also serves as a useful means in the hand of the ritual actors to give expression to diversification as well as to individualization. The main actors of the ritual experience

were identified in Chapter VI where, examining the changing roles of actors and how these changes came to be reflected in the ritual, I aimed at adding a further dimension to the analysis of the current meaning and role of Shichigosan. The family and within it the role of the mother and the attention dedicated to the child emerge as focal themes in the interpretation of the examined ritual. It is along the lines of the transformations that the Japanese family went through that the factors accounting for the postwar popularity of this observance should be sought for. Chapter VII addressing the ritual's symbolical aspects, analyzed the single elements that serve as conveyors of messages, also in a historical perspective. Lastly, in Chapter VIII, my attention moved to the sphere that is commonly interpreted as constituting the religious part of the ritual experience, i.e. the shrine (or temple) visit and/or worship. In the past, shrine worship was not necessarily a constituent of childhood rites of passage, however, today it is regarded – more or less – an integral part of the observance. Shrines (and temples) provide a spatial and conceptual context to a number of rituals in present-day Japan, including Shichigosan.

I would like to draw three important conclusions from my work. First, socio-economic conditions that characterized the capital of Edo during the Tokugawa period gave rise to a dynamic pattern of Shichigosan that demonstrated itself as capable of adaptation over time without losing those elements that rendered it recognizable as a ritual expression. Second, the case of Shichigosan allows us to think that market forces, family, and religious institutions, with the media's intermediary role can work together for social equilibriumsatisfying plural interests. Third, the ritual represents an efficient communication mode with which most Japanese feel in harmony in present days as in the past.

The urban pattern bringing together a variety of patterns of childhood rites of passage offered sufficient space for the expression of the multitude aspects of the newly emerging urban culture during the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Japan. This ritual pattern continued to embody multiple layers of meanings entailing ancient beliefs related to views on human soul and more 'profane' aspects complying with the urban life style. The historical development depicted in case of Shichigosan is an example of a ritual that, while preserving a

significant part of its constituents, has successfully integrated new elements into its form. Several parts of the ritual preserved their form from the past with minor modifications (name, dress, ages of observance, just to mention some), but acquired new interpretations. Also, entirely new elements joined in (diverse options, photograph). During its evolution it interacted and continues to interact in an ongoing process with its social reality while it has remained congruent with the surrounding and changing social structures.

Through six chapters I deconstructed the ritual to make an attempt to grasp the various factors that contribute to the continuing popularity that Shichigosan enjoys among Japanese families. By doing so, the angle of examination shifted from actors-observers on the one side, and several agents active in the organization of the celebration, among which the marketplace, the media and religious institutions, on the other side. In particular, I looked at consumption practices and at the work of the marketplace and the media and acknowledged their contribution to the creation of a rewarding ritual experience. I also viewed ritual practice as a subject of continuous negotiations in the wider society as well as within the more private sphere of individual families.

While diversification of options in celebration modes appears principally in the form of options made available and/or invented by the marketplace, consumption patterns act as a vehicle through which to express individual choices and personal preferences. Single families are thus enabled to add their own piece of interpretation or a personalized mode to the celebration and this makes Shichigosan a practice which is truly modern in character. On the other hand, the creative innovation present both on the side of the commercial sector and of the families, is balanced by the adherence to proper manners – represented by mothers' concerns – and by the more or less determined rules of the shrine ritual. This assures that ritual's characteristics as ordered action will be preserved.

Ritual is a complex form, presenting simultaneously multiple meanings, functions and possibilities of interpretation. Ritual is also very effective to render manifest controversial issues that abound in our lives. Shichigosan allows families to enjoy consumerism and at

the same time it gives space to reconsider or reaffirm ideas about family, solidarity, or simply priorities or aesthetic standards. Providing a dense, emotionally loaded occasion, ritual is a valid and efficacious platform where ideas can be enacted, reflected and validated, but also contrasted and shaped. Nevertheless, there exist significant differences in the readiness with which single cultures reach to this instrument of expression. Recently, the effectiveness and importance of ritual mode of communication and expression in social life is increasingly acknowledged in Western societies where ritual has long been seen as obsolete. Professionals and scholars alike recognize that human experience continues to rely on the use of symbols to express and reaffirm social ideals and personal values.

Whereas the validity of ritual expression is general and universal, there are cultures that give particular value to this mode of expression. Japan can be listed among these cultures. Rituals as symbolic actions can be efficacious only if symbols are comprehended and if a sensitivity to symbols is present in the society. I think that this sensitivity to symbol and to symbolic communication is still intense in Japan and the continuing popularity of not only Shichigosan, but also of other rites of passage, such as *miyamairi* or *yakudoshi* are indeed proof to this. The efficacy of the ritual as a communication mode depends heavily on the Japanese readiness to convey shared meaning of ritual acts through symbolic codes.

Finally, the study of a ritual can be useful and constructive in a number of ways. It can be regarded as a platform where the dynamics of social life in a particular cultural context can be observed. It can also demonstrate the extent to which a given culture gives importance to symbolic modes of expression and actions. Whether Shichigosan will continue to enjoy a popularity also in the future will also depend on its ability to absorb changes in an effective manner without losing a widely recognizable ritual frame. The complex form of Shichigosan, involving ludic as well as more formal and solemn elements, allows me to think that it will remain a dynamic form that will be able to serve the Japanese family still for long.

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