

SHINTANI TAKANORI 新谷尚紀. *Ryōbosei to takaiikan* 両墓制と他界観 [The double-tomb system and notions of the afterworld]. Nihon Rekishi Minzoku Sōsho 日本歴史民俗叢書 [Collection of Japanese history and folklore]. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1991. 326 pages. Illustrations, tables, figures, maps, index. Hardcover ¥5,850; ISBN 4-642-07351-5. (In Japanese)

The present volume is on a subject—the double-tomb system (*ryōbosei* 両墓制)—that may by now seem fully understood, and whose interpretation might appear to pose no further problems. Scholars have interpreted this system as an expression of a primeval and enduring attitude of repulsion when confronted by death, a repulsion that went so far in early societies as to cause the pure and simple abandonment of the corpse. The double-tomb system was believed to be a tempering of this fundamental attitude, an explanation that seemed reasonable as long as one did not take into consideration the sporadic nature of the system and the huge diversity that it encompasses.

The author goes back to the root of the problem, and gives us a remarkable lesson in methodology. He first explains the history of the research on the subject, from the first awakening to the distinctiveness of the double tomb to the most recent analyses, giving in the course of his explanation the origin of the term “double-tomb system.” He then develops his own analysis, utilizing what is, in hindsight, the only logical approach: a systematic field survey of all the known examples of double tombs.

His survey is rigorous. In each case he begins with a systematic documentation of the tombs and monuments, explaining their setting in relation to places of habitation and religious significance. A comparison of the different types of double tombs and of their coexistence with other systems of burial (simple tombs, no tombs, etc.) allows him to situate the system in time and space. The point of departure for his survey and analysis is the Nara basin. The existence in this region of huge cemeteries used from the Middle Ages right up to the present enables him to show that the appearance and subsequent development of the double-tomb system did not overturn the organization of these cemeteries.

The different nature of the double tombs found in the peripheral zones relative to the Kinai region provides him with the opportunity to propose the most attractive hypothesis in the book, that of “waves” in the way death was represented and treated, waves that originate from the ancient capital of Kyoto, and that were, so to speak, frozen at the edges of the zone of greatest influence. One has here a masterly demonstration of everything one can gain from a combined study of the data from both on-the-spot surveys and historical research. The author’s analysis shows the diffusion of funerary practices that correspond to a concept of death as absolute defilement in their original setting (the Heian Court), while, at the moment of their diffusion, the center of the wave has itself already adopted other types of representation. Furthermore, the book suggests that the adoption of these practices at the periphery does not signify the same attitude towards death, namely, a reaction of horror in the face of defilement.

In the course of his treatise the author resolves a number of problems. He discusses of the system that is identified by the absence of a tomb, a system that holds only a theoretical place in his chart (41) because it is impossible to cite any example of this practice within the framework of burial customs. In similar fashion, his last chapter, on the washing of bones or the practice of reburial, demonstrates clearly that this involves completely different systems that have no direct connection with the double

tombs. His concern with situating the manner of burial within a larger context leads him to deal not only with funerary rites, from those connected with the final agony up to and including burial or cremation, but also with anniversary memorial services and cults directed towards ancestors. This allows him to restore some of the complexity of burial, a subject upon which the explanations are too often reductionist. The *o-bon* rites allow him to show that the ancestors are equally present in the burial tomb, in the funerary monument, and in the tablets on the family altar. It is no great step from there to the other great question, that of the divinization of the ancestors, who are not worshipped either at the same time or in the same place as the gods, even if people say that the ancestors become gods on the occasion of the anniversary rituals.

This volume demonstrates once again that it is impossible to study and grasp any aspect of "popular" beliefs and practices unless one puts them within the framework of historical evolution. It shows that the double-tomb system was born within certain conditions during modern times and that it thus presents only one aspect of the Japanese attitude towards death. This study thus constitutes the first decisive link in a history, still in the process of being written, of the tombs and funerary practices of Japan—practices that do not reveal a single basic and invariant attitude but large oscillations. We need only reflect on the enormous tomb-monuments of the Kofun period, which was followed by a period of several centuries (from the Nara period to the Heian period) during which there were virtually no funerary monuments at all.

The renaissance of cemeteries in the Kamakura period within the framework of a revitalized Buddhism also revealed certain religious cleavages. As the author demonstrates, followers of the Jōdo Shinshū sect set themselves apart from their contemporaries by their rejection of tomb-monuments, at the same time dissociating themselves from the system of classical double tombs.

I have two regrets that nevertheless remove none of my admiration for this rigorous and innovative work. The first is the absence of any references to regions outside Japan. The analyses of Robert HERTZ (1960 [1907]), long recognized as classic, would have provided a convenient framework for presenting the connections among tombs, mourning practices, and funerary rites. The second regret is that, though the conclusions to each section are good summaries of the different points examined in that section, one would have liked a general conclusion that would have brought out the single thread of thought running through the different sections, and that would have better situated the appearance of the double-tomb system within the general evolution of Japanese funerary customs.

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