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## A Tokyo Shrine Revisited

### **Abstract**

This article traces twenty-five years of the adaptation of a representative, modest-size Shinto shrine in an urban Japanese neighborhood, to population shifts and to the new prosperity. The annual autumn festival has shrunk in size and as a significant event in the neighborhood calendar; the mythic mime-dance has become too costly, with too few professional practitioners, and has thus all but disappeared. The structures of the shrine organization remain strong and in place, though conspicuously dependent on the personal charisma and diplomatic skills of the priest; the sacral formalities of the season are basically unchanged, and even show some small capacity for adjustment to new values in a new age. The difficulty the shrine's board of governors experienced in the postwar years in maintaining a continuity of priesthood within one family appears to have resolved itself with the emergence of a new generation that nurtures some vague nostalgia for times lost.

**Key words:** Priest — Shinto shrine — status of women — neighborhood change — shrine festival — *kagura*

#### THE NEIGHBORHOOD, AND THE FESTIVAL

**T**HIS is a Rip Van Winkle story; or, if you prefer, an Urashima Tarō tale. In the autumn of 1990 I returned to the Tokyo neighborhood where, twenty-five years earlier, I had done an extended study of a Shinto shrine and its people, and of its annual autumn festival.

On our old street there had been one modern “mansion” (a ferro-concrete building housing fifteen families on three floors, in mixed-style apartments, half Western, half Japanese), and a company apartment building just going up (four storeys, more crowded, less Western-styled). Otherwise, the street was lined with old, wooden-frame houses with high fences, tiny gardens, and ceramic tile roofs. Many of the side streets were very narrow; just wide enough, we were told, for one warrior in full armor. At the bottom of the hill was a somewhat wider street of “mom and pop” stores, with the shop (fish, meat, vegetables, rice crackers, stationery, magazines) in front and the family quarters in back. You could stop in at nine at night, and find the family gathered around the supper table or the television set, always ready to enter the shop and welcome the late patron.

On the half-hour walk from our old home to the shrine, only two of the old, wooden-frame houses are now left standing. The destroyer this time is not war, nor earthquake, but prosperity. The old-style houses have been replaced by more ambitious structures, employing all the modern materials. They are still family dwellings, but larger, allowing for new quarters, and a degree of privacy, for new branches of the extended family. The young no longer move out to start a new home elsewhere; real estate is too tight in Tokyo. And so the old house is torn down and a new one built in its place. The new generation takes over the ground floor, and the aging parents move upstairs.

Some of these new homes are done in white tile and look like inside-

out bathrooms. Some have rounded, instead of squared, corners. Some have minor turrets and recesses. They are the castles of the new urban rich. Entry is often through a carport, with its sparkling, polished BMW or Mercedes right there at curbside for all to see and admire, protected by an elaborate ironwork accordion gate. The house may have a curved facade, with curved sliding glass doors opening out onto curved balconies; the roof may be made of steel, but curved and rippled in such a way as to suggest the clay-tile roofs of olden times.

The old shopping street has been widened and is now an elegant boulevard, with the traffic lanes separated by islands of ornamental trees. With the widening of the street, most of the old "mom and pop" stores were torn down and replaced with larger buildings housing offices and workrooms of various sorts. The merchants were given shop space on the ground floor of these new buildings, often just a block or two up or down the street from their old locations; but the sense of intimacy and neighborliness is gone.

And on the boulevard itself, dramatic changes are apparent. Women no longer carry their children on their backs; they carry them in the baskets of their bicycles. There are bicycles everywhere. The boulevard, and other roads like it, have sidewalks now, so that the pedestrian need not keep constant watch over his shoulder for cars; now he jogs down a wide sidewalk, ever vigilant for careening cyclists, while dodging around vast clusters of bicycles, parked and untended.

Everywhere you will see young people wearing T-shirts with English-language slogans that make no sense whatever; for example:

Snickers  
Frankly Carry Out Target  
Contemporary

or:

Something  
One's  
Club

The national dress is effectively gone. Along the boulevard, we saw no kimono; it has surely vanished as everyday wear. At festival time we did see a few *yukata*, but young women were, for the most part, dressed in shorts, jeans, and trousers.

During the autumn festival, twenty-five years ago, girls stood on the sidelines as the *mikoshi* (神輿, the festival ark) went by, and giggled at the somewhat underclad young men (SADLER 1972, 99-114). Now they seem more grown up, more involved, less giggly. Some participate in carrying the *mikoshi*; say, three girls and twenty boys to a *mikoshi*.

Male exhibitionism is much diminished, though in each *mikoshi* group there would be at least one young man exhibiting his bare buns. The girls, for the most part, went ahead of the *mikoshi* carrying red paper lanterns held aloft on long poles looped at the upper end, like croziers. The lanterns are an innovation, since my time.

I heard no “*wasshoi*” or “*hai-za*” this time; it was all “*hei-ya! hei-ya!*” with some vigorous demonstrations of enthusiasm in front of one *ujiko*’s (parishioner’s) shop. I saw no sign of acts of vengeance, no Halloween spirit (SADLER 1972, 92–99), among the *mikoshi* crews I followed—though this was always rather a “nicer” neighborhood than those nearer Hongō and Asakusa. I saw none of the sort of changes noted by Ted BESTOR in his book (1989), no car batteries on the *mikoshi* for nighttime illumination, none of the tinhorn jazziness of his Shinagawa neighborhood. If anything, the festival street processions looked, not more modern, but more in keeping with the customs of the Edo Period; that, at least, was the effect of the lantern bearers preceding the *mikoshi*.

#### THE SHRINE, AND THE RITUAL

On the grounds of the shrine itself, little had changed. The *mizuya* 水屋, the place where entering worshipers cleanse their mouths and hands with fresh, running water, had still not been rebuilt (it was destroyed in the 1945 bombings, along with everything else); there was just a tap there. The parked cars were gone, but only temporarily, for the weekend of the festival. (There is a shortage of parking facilities all over Tokyo, and the priest still takes advantage of the fact, for the sake of a bit of regular revenue; SADLER 1975b, 5.) The rubble of broken fox statues and stone torii and stone markers and monuments had all been cleared away—the last traces of war’s destruction—but no new trees had been planted, no new structures erected (with the exception of the priest’s house, adjacent to the main shrine, which went up the year after I left, thanks, I believe, to the generosity of the old banker and local historian who lived next door to the shrine grounds and who was its patron). One of the minor shrines was gone: the *Zeniza Inari*, which had once belonged to the mint in Bunkyo-ku where copper and iron coins were made (SADLER 1975b, 12). It was reclaimed by Mr Kawasaki, of the Kawasaki Bank; when he built his mansion, he took it back for his garden. The recent history of the shrine seemed to be a history of subtractions and no additions: a time of dormancy and stagnation. The *kagura-den* 神楽殿 was boarded up, and I was told that *kagura* had not been performed there for three years.

Scattered along the boulevard and some of the avenues branching

from it were the gathering places of the neighborhood laity called *o-miki-sho* お神酒所 (places for taking communion saké after the *mikoshi* run; and hence also places where the *mikoshi* are kept when they are at rest) (SADLER 1972, 104–107). These were, as ever before, filled with middle-aged and aging men in *yukata*, presiding over (and consuming) vast supplies of beer and saké (which now comes in a packaged beaker under the popular brand name of Ōzeki One-Cup Sake; *ōzeki* 大関 is the name given to one of the higher ranks of sumo wrestlers). With the men are their wives and sisters and sisters-in-law, presiding over vast supplies of food. It would be unthinkable to refuse any of this proffered bounty, and a stop at each *o-miki-sho* becomes a pleasant social obligation. The merchants of my old neighborhood recognized me, or said they did, and laughed heartily when I told them that I was Urashima Tarō, returned from the sea. Another group in another neighborhood where we were not known cheered as we went by, trudging home after the festival; they were sitting on the ground in that Tokyo rarity, an open lot, sharing snacks and saké and reminiscences. These gathering places are clusterings of warmth and humaneness in a city where insensitivity crowds ever closer.

On the shrine grounds the usual itinerant merchants had set up their stalls (SADLER 1975a, 13–18), and they danced in place to pop music tapes. Dancing right along with them were their wares: soft plastic cylinders painted to replicate Budweiser cans that crease in the middle, as though bending from the waist, and sneakers that tap away to the rhythms of the rock and roll. There are not as many masks for sale as there once were, and not as many goldfish to take home in plastic water-filled bags. There were foods of the quickly-prepared sort, but none of the old-fashioned foods and candies and taffies that once lent the festival its exceptional atmosphere, its air of nostalgia.

On Saturday, September the ninth, at 10:30 in the morning, the priest opened the festival. As the officiating priest, he wore his red robes. As he faced the sanctuary to recite the opening prayer (*norito* 祝詞), he was flanked on the left by a row of four lay elders, seated on metal folding chairs, and on his right by two ranks of folding chairs, the first occupied by five priests from neighboring shrines (he will reciprocate by attending them at their festival rites, a bit later in the season); behind the visiting priests sat, in a row, three musicians playing the solemn and eerie music known as *gagaku* 雅楽. They are members of an association of musician-priests who make themselves available for ceremonial occasions of this kind.

The rest of us were seated in parallel rows facing the sanctuary, with an aisle left down the center for comings and goings. The offi-

ciating priest (who takes pride in the title of *gūji* 宮司, now that his father-in-law has died and he has succeeded as head—and sole—priest) began the ceremony by solemnly opening the doors of the sanctuary, and then reciting his carefully prepared (written) prayer (SADLER 1974, 32), inviting the divine spirit (*kami*) to emerge from the holy of holies and take his place in the midst of the celebrating community. In formal procession, the attending priests then began bringing offertory trays of specially prepared foods from the entryway, stage right, where the ceremonial hall (*heiden* 幣殿) connects to the rectory (*shamusho* 社務所), which serves as the resident priest's office and home. As each tray was brought before the sanctuary (*honden* 本殿), the officiating priest reverently placed it on a table before the open sanctuary. When this presentation and arrangement of offerings was completed, the four especially distinguished lay leaders were invited to place a *tamagushi* 玉串 (a sprig of the *sakaki* bush, tied with a ceremonial white paper) on another offertory table placed there for the purpose. Then all of the assembled *ujiko* 氏子, lay persons each representing a different small neighborhood within the larger parish, were invited to do the same. They filed up, row by row; each was handed the sacred sprig, with the stem toward the offerer; each approached the holy of holies, turning the sprig so that its stem pointed toward the sanctuary (this is called "returning the source to the source" [SADLER 1975b, 6]), clapping twice and bowing, then bowing to the priest, who of course bowed in return and then poured a saucerful of communion saké (*miki*), which the parishioner drank; the parishioner then returned to his seat. My wife and I were seated in the last row, along with our old neighbor, the doctor's wife (the doctor was away for the day, at a medical conference); and we, too, were ushered forward by the hospitable laity around us, to make our offerings, pay our respects to the deity, and receive our communion. My wife was the first woman to offer the *tamagushi* at the opening rites of the annual festival, and our old neighbor the second. The pedant in me (a still, small voice) had his reservations: we were there to observe custom, not to change it. Then I heard indirectly that the priest's wife had commented, "It's about time!" (She said no such thing when we talked with her later, and as I did not hear her say it, I must report it as hearsay.) In any case, my qualms were quickly stilled by the realization that if change happened that Saturday morning, it happened in the usual Japanese manner, that is to say, by full consensus. In short, if something essential changed, it was due for change.

I think, too, that Japanese society—at least modern Japanese society—has about it a genuinely egalitarian spirit. Guests at this particular ceremony must be a genuine rarity. The regular participants

are the elected representatives of their neighborhoods. They are all men. Will it ever be so? Surely not; women are successfully entering politics at all levels. Will women elected to the lay association (*ujiko sōdai* 氏子総代) be accepted as full members? Surely yes. The priest, in any case, saw nothing remarkable in the incident, and I am inclined to take him at his word. There is no ritual obstacle to participation.

#### THE PRIESTLY HOUSEHOLD

During the two-day weekend festival, I made three visits to the priest's house. Each time his wife was very visible, very gregarious, and fairly bubbling with energy, good cheer, and apparent good health. The latter was somewhat illusory; since we last saw her she had lost much of one lung to tuberculosis, and has recently struggled with the after-effects of a broken leg. But her spirits are obviously higher, and she is more of a presence in the shrine household than she was in former days. Twenty-five years ago she was all but invisible and silent.

She had just celebrated her sixty-sixth birthday ("How old are you?" she asked, looking us dead in the eye). Her husband will be sixty-six on Christmas Eve ("For three months of every year I am older than my husband"—this in a land where seniority of the minutest sort matters). "He never gets to celebrate a birthday, he is so busy getting ready for the New Year." She is, as you can see, quite chatty, if not downright chatty. And very warm, very welcoming, and very likeable.

Her husband, by contrast, looks downtrodden. His hair has turned white at the sides, and there is a look of exhaustion about him. He appears drained.

"What became of Mr Ichikawa?" we asked. He was the retired banker who had served the community as its self-appointed historian; a kind and gentle and generous man who had joined the Japanese navy just after the sinking of the Russian fleet in 1905, in the Straits of Tsushima (SADLER 1975b, 13-18, 27). "He died in 1975, after serving as the shrine's treasurer for sixty-odd years. He was in his eighties." "Who serves now as treasurer?" I asked. "*Watakushi*" ("I do"). And what became of the sawbones (I rebel at the thought of calling him a surgeon) turned politician, who served as head of the six-member governing board of the shrine (*miya sōdai* 宮総代) (SADLER 1975b, 28-29)? "He died in 1986." "Who now serves in that capacity?" "*Watakushi*." And his assistant, the fire chief and director of welfare (SADLER 1975b, 28-29)? "He died two years later, in 1988."

The old priest, this man's father-in-law (SADLER 1975b, 32), died in 1974, making our man *gūji*, or senior/chief priest. Clearly the death

of his father-in-law gave our man a freer hand in managing shrine affairs; and it gave his wife (the old priest's daughter) new authority within her own household (which, it may be remembered, included also her brother, the failed priest who had become a car salesman, and his wife and three children). It was with her father's death that she suddenly emerged from the shadows and began to sparkle. As she entered her ascendancy, however, her husband entered his decline. He had gained in independence, but in the end did little with it. He, it will be remembered, was an architect, well established in his chosen profession, when, at the age of 36 (five years before I began my study), he gave in to considerable arm twisting and accepted the post of junior priest (his father-in-law had just reached the age of 66 and was contemplating retirement), in lieu of the rightful and hereditary priest, who, arguing financial need, went to work in an automobile showroom. When he thus reluctantly entered upon his priesthood, our man (whose whole story is told in SADLER 1975b, 32-34) had the help of many experienced hands: the doctor-politician, the fire chief/political hack, the banker/aristocrat, and of course his wife and father-in-law, who knew all the ins and outs of running a shrine. In short, he was supported by people with sacral and political know-how, and the power (the "pull," the "clout") that goes with political office or private wealth. As his old mentors died off, he took over all the administrative jobs of the parish. And, alas, he is not what our vernacular calls a "people" person. He is somewhat lacking in tact. He has none of the grace and charm of a successful politician. Yet that is what his position calls for.

I found myself recalling an earlier conversation I had with him, when he was still feeling his way into his new (unchosen) profession. We were discussing revenues for the shrine, and the unpleasant necessity of renting out shrine land as parking facility. He had said that he might tear down the sheds where the neighborhood associations stored their *mikoshi* at the foot of the hill below the shrine (SADLER 1972, 102), and build garages he could rent to apartment dwellers. "What would happen then to the *mikoshi*?" I asked. "They belong to the neighborhood associations" he said—as though to say, that's not my problem, it's their problem (SADLER 1975b, 37). Now, twenty-five years later, the dilapidated *mikoshi* sheds stand exactly as they stood before. I asked about his old plan. "Oh, that fell through. The community folk objected."

What about the *mizuya*, in need of rebuilding lo, these forty-five years? "I had a water pipe and tap installed. It suffices. Of course, it is an important part of a shrine, a place to cleanse oneself before approaching the kami. But space [he means parking space, I fear] is tight;



and *mizuya* are often vandalized by children; so I have no plans to build one."

The cars are still there on the shrine grounds. He rents out twenty spaces now, more than before (how convenient to have lost the *Zeniza Inari*); and he charges each patron ¥30,000 a month, ten times the fee he charged twenty-five years ago.

We asked about the boarded-up hall for the performance of the sacred mime known as *kagura* 神楽. "Oh, the building has gotten old and rickety, so there was no *kagura* this year. In fact, we have not had *kagura* for three years. The building is unsafe, and the dancers have gotten expensive. It costs ¥200,000 just for the musicians of the group, and more for the dancers. So it's too expensive, and the building is unsafe." The old dancer I had met there in 1965 (SADLER 1970a, 284-85, 288) died in 1974 or so. His generation danced for the love of dance. It was not easy to find a replacement. "Will there ever be *kagura* here again?" we asked. "If the *kagura-den* is rebuilt [note well, not when but if]. And then, there isn't much interest in *kagura* today. There are so many other forms of entertainment."

And so everywhere I saw the signs of twenty-two or twenty-three years of decay. If American presidents are given a one-hundred-day grace period at the outset of their administrations, I suppose I first came to know my shrine priest during his "hundred days." He was new, and he was given the benefit of the doubt by all the neighborhood folk. And he had many a helping and experienced hand. But it was a brief honeymoon, and it has been over a long time.

#### THE PRIESTLY SUCCESSION

What, then, of the future? Here history has taken an ironic twist. Its advance harbors a return to the past. I have mentioned the older priest (our present priest's wife's father), who died in 1974 at the age of 80. He was born in 1894 and became priest in 1920, five years before his father's death in 1925. His father was in fact the first priest of this shrine; up to the time of the Meiji Restoration, the shrine was under the protection of *Denzūin* 伝通院 (SADLER 1975b, 32), that once-mighty Buddhist temple to the south, just beyond the Botanical Gardens. This founder priest was born in 1843, of a samurai family. He was sympathetic to the supporters of Emperor Meiji; by way of reward, he was appointed shrine priest in 1873—the samurai class having been abolished by the Meiji administration.

Here, then, is the order of succession to the priesthood at this Bunkyō-ku shrine:

1. The founding priest, in office from 1873 to 1925.

2. His successor, his son, in office from 1920 (a five-year overlap with his father—a time of apprenticeship) to 1974.

3. *His* successor, grandson of the founder of the line, in office 1957 to 1960, when, protesting that he could not support a wife and children on a priest's income, he quit and went into automobile sales. This man—who still lives at the shrine rectory, be it understood—had three children. The eldest has become a medical doctor. The middle child died in a car crash. And the youngest, a son, is a Shinto priest, currently serving at that great shrine of old Tokyo's "downtown" merchant district, Kanda Myōjin!

4. The man who substituted for the defecting priest, the man who married the sister of the rightful heir and then found himself pressured into a profession decidedly not of his choosing, on the argument that these (the late fifties) were hard times for priests, and our man, having no children, had less need of a proper income than his more fertile brother-in-law. He has served from 1960 to the present.

5. And now, the dark-horse successor (I offer this as prophecy rather than fact), the youngest son of the car salesman, born in 1956, and now a young man of 34 years.

Of course, I went to talk with this young man. He is tall, rather good looking, quite personable, at ease with strangers, and just a bit taken with himself. His education was all on one campus, from first grade through university graduation, at the famous Gakushūin, once the school set aside for the aristocracy's children—the chosen few worthy of associating with the emperor's sons—but since 1945, a good school for those (as a friend put it) who "can't make it into Tōdai [Tokyo University]." He graduated from Gakushūin in 1979 and floundered for a bit, not quite knowing what to do with himself. His father invited him to join him at the auto showroom, and so for three years he sold Ford cars, but didn't like the work (another fascinating irony: he tried his hand at car sales for the precise amount of time his father had spent at the priesthood). His uncle, the present (reluctant) priest said: "Just get a *kannushi* [priest's] license." Then he recalled that when he was 18, and a high school senior, his old grandfather, on his deathbed, said to him: "You should do *kannushi*."

His uncle explained to him that Kokugakuin University offers a special course, available only to the sons of priests, that entails a mere fifty days of classes (with the understanding that a priest's son who has grown up in a shrine already knows the ropes pretty well); then a month's apprenticeship at a big shrine, and another month at a small shrine. He signed up, spent his half semester in the classroom, served at Kanda Myōjin 神田明神 (the big shrine) and at Nezu Jinja 根津神社

in Hongō (the small shrine), and received his priest's license from the Jinja Honchō 神社本庁 (Shrine Association).

"It was my intention, after getting my license," he said, "to go into other work, but the president of Kanda Myōjin said, 'Come here,' so I did."

"What other work had you thought to go into?"

"Art."

"What aspect of art? Art history? Art dealer? Artist?"

"Swords."

"Swords?"

"Swords."

Not quite what we Westerners think of as art, I suppose; at least, not the first art form that pops into our minds. But here, too, there was a story. The man I have identified as the founding priest had in his possession many relics of the last years of the Edo period, including a vast collection of old swords and other antiquities. He was, in fact, a noted authority on pre-Meiji artifacts, and was known around Tokyo during the Meiji period as an expert appraiser. Several museums, gathering up the remnants of feudal weaponry for their antiquarian collections, counted on him for his expertise.<sup>1</sup>

The boy can have had no memories of this collection; it was melted down to amorphous blobs in the great incendiary raid on Tokyo of the night of 24–25 May 1945. But his grandfather would have remembered it well, having lived with it in the household for the first fifty-one years of his life. The grandfather was, in fact, custodian of the collection for the twenty years from his father's death in 1925 to that terrible night in the spring of 1945, and must often have spoken to his grandson of it, sadly, longingly. The boy grew up hearing tales not from the Brothers Grimm or Andrew Lang, nor even from the *Heike monogatari* 平家物語; he grew up hearing stories of that wondrous collection of shining steel weaponry of a bygone era. (There is, you see, a little of Mishima Yukio's youth and fantasies in this youth's formative years.)

When I told all this to the present priest, he seemed to be hearing it all for the first time. "He seems to have dreamed of becoming an antiques dealer, specializing in old weapons," I said.

"He can't have been serious." And then, after some thought, "He had no training in that." Another pause. "That was probably more my brother-in-law's idea than my nephew's."

"Will this young man become your successor?"

Here the atmosphere became decidedly uneasy, and I could see that I would have to tread softly and be prepared to change the subject quickly. Husband and wife clearly had been over this ground many a

time, often heatedly; as he spoke, he watched his wife from the corner of his eye, as she watched him. The matter was under censorship.

“I want him to, but I don’t want to force him.” (Silence) “He had planned to come to this shrine [a glance in his wife’s direction], but now we don’t know where he will go.” (Pause) “He *will* remain a priest, but we don’t know where.” (Looks of extreme discomfort)

I had the distinct impression that, contrary to his protests, my priest *was* trying to force his nephew into this ministry, but meeting with great resistance from the lad; and that his wife was telling him to go easy and let nature take its course.

If my conjectures are right, here then is further irony. The man who was dragged, unwilling, into this post of priest was now trying to drag in his own nephew. But is he to be faulted? Surely anyone can see the fitness, the fine symmetry of it all: this young man (alas, he seems younger than his thirty-four years) has within him the spirit of the founding priest, reincarnate. He may not know quite what to do with this possessing spirit of the post-warrior past; but he does know, intuitively, that he must undo his father’s wrong in passing up his familial duties in favor of a near-intruder. The lineage that is his now must come full circle. Great-grandson must fill the shoes of great-grandfather.

I went to speak with one of the young man’s former teachers and described the situation to him. I said the lad seemed reluctant to take his place at the shrine in whose household he grew up. He answered simply, “He will.” Then he went on to speculate: “It is probably no more than a one-priest shrine, with not enough activity to support two priests. So, until his time comes, he will work at larger shrines.” I said I thought the present priest, at sixty-six, was contemplating retirement. A colleague of his remarked, “Priests usually go on for a long time. There is no requirement to retire. Many, still active today, are in their eighties.” There seemed no doubt in their minds; it is the young man’s destiny to be the successor-priest.

#### PRIESTLY SHOP TALK: DISRUPTIONS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The conjecture that this is, at heart, a one-priest shrine, was borne out by further conversation with our resident priest. I told him that I was a bit surprised at how quiet the shrine was during this autumn’s festival, and at how few *mikoshi* processions I encountered on the streets. I knew that, year by year, a larger festival (*rei-tai-sai-shiki* 例大祭式) alternates with a lesser festival. Was this one of the off years? No, he said; this was a *rei-tai-sai* year. He only wears the red robes at the *rei-tai-sai*; it is his most formal costume.

Then why so quiet, we asked. He said *mikoshi* processions were limited this fall all over Tokyo because the metropolitan police have to attend planning and training sessions for the coming enthronement ceremonies of the new emperor. And then he engaged in a bit of shop talk: "Over at Nezu Shrine, they were allowed to use only one shrine *mikoshi*, and no *chō-kai* 町会 [neighborhood association] *mikoshi*, because police are so shorthanded." (The issue, of course, is traffic: each *mikoshi* route must be planned out in advance and approved by the Tokyo police—who must then appear on the scene at the appointed time and see that the route is followed, with a minimum of inconvenience to passing motorists.)

"But aside from that," he continued, "the number of *ujiko* [parishioners] is in decline. Land prices here have skyrocketed, and many of our old parishioners were obliged to move out of the neighborhood. Families are having fewer children than ever; the population is getting steadily older. I am called upon to do only half as many *o-miya-mairi* お宮参り [ceremonies of presentation of infants to the shrine] as I once did, and a third as many *shichi-go-san* 七五三 [a November rite of passage for children aged three, five, and seven]—though ground-breaking ceremonies for new buildings have doubled. Fewer people ask for *o-fuda* [shrine amulets for the home altar], and there are fewer people to carry the *mikoshi*. Before, few women participated in the *mikoshi* procession; now, many want to."

The structure of the shrine is still the same. There are twenty-five *chō-kai*, as before. Of their membership, eighty or so are invited to serve on the *chō sōdai*, or shrine board of governors; seventy-two or seventy-three accept, and serve. Of these, six are still chosen to form an executive board, or *miya sōdai*. Only, now, two of the six serve as auditors of the books, since the priest himself is the treasurer.

The old gardener is still there (SADLER 1975b, 34). He is seventy-six now, and still participates in ceremonies; but his son, who is in his mid-thirties, has, for the most part, taken over the work.

My priest, who is from Izumo, is feeling uncomfortably bound to his duties at the shrine. His wife's niece was to be married at Izumo Taisha on October fifth, and he would have liked to have gone; but he and his wife must stay home and keep an eye on the shrine. They have been warned that political radicals, opposed to the emperor's enthronement ceremonies, would likely be lobbing fire bombs into the interiors of old shrines around Tokyo (a prophecy that proved true, not at this shrine but at a Hachiman shrine in Nippori and at other locations).

I asked about his neighboring shrine parish, where, during my last stay, a young policeman was having a terrible time passing the examina-

tions for his priest's license, and was being coached and protected (SADLER 1975b, 35) by the old priest at Misaki Jinja, in Suidōbashi. "He passed" was the good news. "In fact, he was one of the five priests assisting me at the opening ceremony of the autumn festival. My nephew was there too." The policeman, I recalled, had married the old priest's daughter; he had no son to inherit the priesthood. "It was a *yōshi* 養子 marriage," his wife put in, delightedly (that means that the young man was adopted into his father-in-law's family and took the latter's name; in a *yōshi* marriage the wife has far more authority in the household than in an ordinary marriage). She added: "Ours was a love match."

Before I left for home, twenty-five years ago, I was invited to participate in the rites of dedication for a new torii at the lower entrance to the shrine grounds (SADLER 1975b, 6). The old one had survived the 1945 bombing, but it was seriously weakened. As I left via this gateway, on my way home again, I recalled how moved I had been by the *miya sōdai*'s asking me, the first American to take up residence in this neighborhood since the end of the war, to join them in the offering of the *tamagushi*. That was in 1966. As I left this time, I noticed that the new concrete torii is already showing vertical cracks, running up both support beams. The old stone beams are still there, stacked along the wall at the foot of the steep stairs to the shrine grounds.

#### THE WIDER SIGNIFICANCE

Twenty-five years ago, the treasurer of this shrine, a retired banker, predicted (SADLER 1975b, 37) that Tokyo could not long sustain all its neighborhood shrines, and that eventually there would have to be mergers, with perhaps just one shrine left for each city ward. I saw no sign of shrine closings and mergers. Neighborhoods' identities have changed, but their sense of identity is not necessarily weakened, and the shrine remains a viable (if somewhat disused) emblem of that unity. The going is not easy for the priest and his family: they have profited little from their neighbors' gains in wealth and leisure. But they survive. The old banker would have found satisfaction in that.

There is, however, a subtle change in the function of the shrine. Once, the autumn festival (in its rural origins, a harvest festival, and therefore a year-ending festival) was the main event. The January New Year (SADLER 1970b, 190–207; 1976, 19–27) was a near rival, and the lunar New Year (SADLER 1970, 278–81) and the end-of-June "little New Year" (SADLER 1970b, 207–14) were noteworthy; but the autumn celebration was the time when the whole neighborhood came together. It was then that you saw most clearly the shrine's vitality, and the energy

and enthusiasm of the shopkeepers who were its mainstay. That festival is now of diminished importance. And so indeed are the shopkeepers, as chainstores and discount marts drive them into a corner, and rising land values drive them to gradual oblivion.

With the annual autumn festival dwindling in importance, there is no more going-out of the kami (SADLER 1969, 5-9) into the back alleys and sidestreets of the old neighborhood to visit his people and dispel the contaminations that come with time. He doesn't go to visit them: they come to visit him. As something of the "high culture" survives, something of the "low culture" is lost. For the going out of the kami was a boisterous, raucous affair: clamorous and lusty. A visit to the shrine is more sedate.

The quiet around the shrines in the fall was not all Imperial Enthronement preparation and Imperial Enthronement jitters. We went to many a summer festival, nine and ten months later, and found much the same thing. The shrine is becoming a way station for the walk-in trade; the low culture of *matsuri* is suffering. We found no *kagura* whatsoever. The music was there, but not the dance, and usually the music was on tape. At one shrine we encountered two quintets playing the barebones festival music of old Edo. One of them was the remnant of a once-proud company of *kagura* dancers who, twenty-five years ago, performed at shrines all over Tokyo.

Where homes give way to hotels and high-rise office buildings, the *mikoshi* procession vanishes along with the parishioners. We saw one fine old *mikoshi* on display in the lobby of one hotel, with a little placard explaining what festivals once were. Those special merchants with the gypsy-like airs (SADLER 1975a, 13-15) who once plied all the festivals, big and small, now concentrate on the larger events at the major shrines. Some do a brisk business; others bring along a magazine and catch up on their reading. It is an unpredictable business. The ground cherry market at Fuji Shrine in Bunkyō-ku on 19 June was jam-packed with shoppers, but no one wanted to visit the portable House of Horrors. That same horror show, at the Yasukuni O-Bon on 15 July, did a booming business; but the man running the plant shop had no customers at all. The old taffy maker (SADLER 1975a, 15-16) who shapes gooey squirrels and mice from lumps of candy with a few deft twists of the wrists and swipes with his scissors was there: not extinct, as we had feared, merely endangered. His bandaged finger indicated a certain loss of skill.

A friend who read our first draft of this piece answered our query regarding the disappearance of the once brisk trade in small goldfish, tenderly taken home in a little plastic bag filled with water. You must

not be aware, he delicately informed us, that many people now have elaborate tanks full of fantastic tropical fish in their homes. Those plain little fish have lost their appeal for people who see much more exotic fare every day at home.

If the kami is now a stay-at-home, and shrines cater more to the walk-in trade, the shrines that will gain the most are the shrines at the city's famous crossroads: places like Suidōbashi and Kanda and Ueno, where venerable bridges cross the old canals, or where traffic routes intersect. Neighborhood shrines like mine will not profit. Tokyo's newer boulevards are designed to speed commuters past such quiet residential backwaters.

In short, with the passage of time, the shrines are becoming more like temples. They are places where people go for specific acts of devotion. The temples are flourishing. The funeral trade is a sure thing, inevitable as taxes; but the Buddhist priesthood has also learned to tap the anxiety among the young over abortion regrets. Row upon row of small stone Jizōs, bibbed and hatted and accompanied by a pinwheel, are to be found in almost every temple yard—eloquent testimony to minds and hearts in distress that have turned to the temples for comfort.

There is nothing comparable, in Shinto, to the funeral trade and its associated services. However, shrines located near high schools and universities have a special appeal in the stalls where *ema* (wood shingles for the inscription of wishes) are sold, and the racks where they are hung. They are a growth industry. I have seen a young man purchase one such, apparently on the eve of his English examination, and then spend a good quarter of an hour as he sat on the curbside composing his wish in—we would hope—excellent, if labored, English. Then he spent another five minutes selecting just the right spot to hang his masterwork, as his girlfriend patiently waited beside him. Then they both prayed at the shrine, in soft voices, with the gentlest of claps. An old woman brushed past them, clapped vigorously, prayed earnestly, and then rubbed her hand over the embossed emblem of the shrine, a plum blossom standing in relief on the offertory bin.

Urbanization—the engine that propels so much of the social change we have noted—has not diminished piety. That, I think, was the biggest surprise for this Urashima Tarō. How much thought that boy put into his *ema*, and how reverently he placed his innermost desire before the kami! At Misaki Jinja in Suidōbashi I watched one day as passersby stopped off at the shrine. A schoolgirl brought in her three chums. They all offered a prayer and took a slip of paper with their fortunes on them. They discussed them at length, and then she showed her friends how to tie them to a tree branch on the shrine



grounds, to make them come true. A flashy young man in a drape suit went up to the shrine, set down his can of soda, rocked back on his heels and pulled the bell cord, took a fortune, and left. He returned a moment later and furtively tied it to the same shrub. A middle-aged office worker, much more conservatively dressed, pulled the bell cord, clapped, held his hands together in a long and thoughtful silent prayer, bowed with the highest respect, picked up his briefcase, and left. And this scene is repeated all over Tokyo, at many a busy shrine.

If seasonal celebration is on the wane, personal, everyday piety is not. The shrine faith is evolving. In its urban setting, at least, it is becoming less communal and more personal.

## NOTES

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1. You will find a photograph of him, rigidly posed with one of his prized swords at his side as he awaits the phosphorous flash, on page 9 of SADLER 1975b.

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