MELINDA PAPP

SHICHIGOSAN

CHANGE AND CONTINUITY OF A FAMILY RITUAL IN CONTEMPORARY URBAN JAPAN

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Change and Continuity of a Family Ritual in Contemporary Urban Japan

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To Marco, Matteo, and Lelia
és szüleimnek köszönettel és szeretettel

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Introduction

In the month of November, preferably during a nice sunny weekend, Japanese families with small children between the ages of three and seven leave their homes in their Sunday best to visit one of the popular shrines in the city to pay their respect to the deities and petition for their benevolence and their protection over the children. The occasion is called *shichigosan*, literally, Seven-Five-Three, a rite of passage that is nowadays one of the most popular observances of the Japanese family. The day of the celebration in November is usually preceded by a lengthy preparation and organization phase during which mothers design many practical details of the celebration. Certain parts of the celebration can take place in the weeks preceding the shrine visit. A visit to a professional photo studio is often arranged several weeks before the day of the actual celebration since the preparation of a professional and elaborated photo of the child dressed in the festive clothes requires considerable time and attention. The other thing to be arranged beforehand is the festive dress. Children usually wear traditional Japanese costume, which can be either purchased, rented, or borrowed. The arrangement of this also needs time and care. Other important details to be taken care of are the festive garments of the single family members, the invitations to grandparents, and the booking of the professional photo studio service and of the restaurant for the festive meal. Japan is distinguished by a highly developed consumer culture, and accordingly, the selection of the proper dress, the accessories, the restaurant, or other kinds of catering services, and the shrine to be visited, is not only facilitated by

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the exuberant market in goods and services but the selection also becomes a time-consuming procedure because of the abundance and diversity of available options. The amount of time and the degree of attention to be dedicated to the selection and organization are greatly enhanced by certain cultural characteristics of the Japanese, such as, for example, their high degree of self-consciousness when it comes to formal events and etiquette.

The name of the case study of this book, *shichigosan*, comes from the ages at which the rite is observed, that is, seven, five, and three years of age (usually girls at three and seven, and boys at five years of age). The ritual conventionally belongs to the category of rites of passage, which was first defined by the Belgian/French scholar, Arnold van Gennep, in his seminal work published in 1909, *The Rites of Passage* (van Gennep 1960). In Japan, there is a rich tradition of rites of passage and many are still observed today. The celebration of *shichigosan* unites several rites that in the past used to be enacted during the years of early childhood, specifically between the ages of two and seven. Historical documents lend proof of the existence of these rites as far back as the tenth to eleventh centuries. The name *shichigosan*, however, emerged only in the eighteenth century, and started to enter everyday use throughout the country only in the mid-twentieth century. Before this, the rite had many different forms and names, and differed by region and social class. The emergence of the denomination of *shichigosan* indicated that this variety had started to undergo a simplification. A ritual form that would unite the numerous scattered patterns and names in use for the various age celebrations between the age of two and seven was taking shape. This constituted a common pattern that would be easily recognizable, and that at last had brought under one roof the variety of childhood rites.

One of the reasons for my interest in this particular ritual is the fact that it represents an illustration of how a cultural practice with roots in traditionally organized community life can be rendered as a highly modern phenomenon. The pattern of the celebration has undergone several transformations during the course of its history, adapting to changing socio-economic and cultural circumstances. During this process of adaptation, it has not lost those elements that render it recognizable as a ritual mode of expression. However, it is undeniable that in the course of the last four decades, it has become a strongly popularized and commercialized event. Today, it is observed in the midst of a dense consumer culture in the highly industrialized modern society of Japan. In spite of the fact that the ritual is associated to religion by common actors as well as by scholars (see chapter

'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage'), its recent development, in particular with regard to Japan's postwar history, has been mainly shaped by forces such as changing family norms and values, commercialization, and the media.

In brief, this book discusses a social phenomenon, namely, ritual practice, performed within the densely commercialized context of urban Japan. By investigating the case of Japan, I wish to contribute to the general understanding of ritual practice in urban modern societies, as this is a still relatively underexplored field. Also, concerning the case of *shichigosan*, which is a very popular observance in present-day Japan, this has received almost no significant scholarly attention in English, and even in Japanese, there exist only few specialized studies on this ritual. This fact has induced my curiosity: how is that a phenomenon of this much popularity and history attracts so little scholarly attention? Also, how is it that even the works which mention or examine the ritual, to a lesser or greater depth, often disregard its contemporary pattern as having little to do with its 'original' and 'authentic' predecessor, and regard this as a prevalently commercial affair? Undeniably, on one side, we find a flourishing business world taking its profit from the observance. However, on the other side, there are the families eager to set up a rewarding celebrative event and to create cheerful and meaningful entries in the family's collective memory and of its single members. I would argue that consumerism alone cannot account for the popularity of the celebration. Nevertheless, it can play an important role in the process of the constitution of the meaning of the ritual. The understanding of this role and of the particularities of the process through which the overall meaning of the ritual is being constituted are among the highest priorities of the present work.

The examination of the various aspects and components of the celebration of *shichigosan* shows that consumption and commodification need not to be seen as hampering the effect of the ritual action. Ritual is a complex and varied phenomenon, and as such, the constitution of its meaning always occurs on multiple levels. It works through symbols, being a mode of symbolic communication, and consequently, the single elements building up a concrete case of ritual experience need to be carefully analyzed in order to understand the meaning system conveyed to the observers in its complexity. In the case of rituals observed in modern urban settings, and in particular in the case of *shichigosan*, ideas and practices of consumption make part of this experience. Yet, commercialization and/or commodification often continue to be seen as somehow 'contaminating' the ritual

experience, by all kinds of social commentators, and at times by scholars, too.[1] In my work, consumption represents one of the principal sectors within which families-observers become acting subjects as well as shape the ritual form to suit their particular needs, values, and preferences. The examination of consumers' patterns, of the existing assortment of goods, and of the variety of celebrative modes can elucidate the way consumer practices are used by consumers-observers in ritual practice to express values and ideas pertinent to the individual and to the family. The outcome of this analysis demonstrates that indeed consumption practices find their legitimation within the ritual mode of expression.

The second important aim of this study is to contribute to the general scholarly discourse on ritual in the modern urban context. Likewise, Japan is one of the most urbanized and technologized societies in our contemporary world. Therefore, I think that an example of a case study from this particular society can effectively add to the understanding of the problem being examined. Even though I do not want do deny that Japan represents particularities typical only to itself—which indeed will be duly examined—I think that it also represents many of the features that can be regarded as representative of many other modern urban contexts.

This book examines the case of a modern ritual practice, looking at its social context, at its continuity and/or discontinuity with the past. The book tracks the path of its development, which is basically the path of a society from a traditional to a highly modern one; hence, it bears many of the common traits of the track pursued by any other contemporary society. Through the chapters, the examined ritual unfolds as part of the individual's, the family's, and the community's strategies for dealing with as well as interpreting their everyday reality. The ritual represents a foremost important instrument for the observers, as it plays a role in the social experience and symbolic construction of the family and of the images of the self. The Japanese society has undergone a transformation of its social structure very similar to the Western one, with the difference that the time span of these changes in the case of Japan has been much more restrained compared to the Western world. The size of the Japanese family—being typically of an extended type in the past—has shrunk during the last five or six decades. An urban Japanese family today is usually a nuclear one with one or two children, who may live at a distance or at least be separated from both grandparents and relatives. Consequently, the reduced family size and shrinking kin networks produce a need for different ways of self-identification, different ways of transmission of ritual knowledge, and

for instruments that would enable the affirmation of its unity and norms. In this social context, the ritual can emerge as an effective instrument. It contributes to the strengthening of the image of the family as well as of its sense of togetherness. Also, it offers space for social expression and distinction for both the individual and the family. The ritual can be seen as a shared platform where basic social values, views on children and family life, attitudes toward the significant moments in life, and, not lastly, individual sensitivities and preferences that arise are expressed and molded at the same time. In order to understand these functions of the ritual, the changes in the ritual practice have to be examined through history up to the present day, together with major socioeconomic factors that have had an impact on the evolution of the ritual pattern. Through a close historical analysis of the evolution of the ritual, we can gain an insight into the process in which the meaning of the ritual is constantly being shaped through dynamic interaction between the individual actors (family and its members), the actors in the marketplace (shops, photo studios, restaurants) and religious institutions (shrines and temples), with the media playing an intermediary role.

As for the methodology, in order to encompass the multiple aspects of ritual practiced in intensely urbanized social contexts in general, and in present-day Japan in particular, I applied a multidisciplinary approach. The methodology throughout the research reflects this approach as so far it applies instruments of analysis belonging to more than one discipline. This kind of approach is justifiable also because in recent decades, the study of ritual has increasingly become a multidisciplinary field. In contrast to early approaches which looked at ritual as an expression of religious concepts and ideas, successive generations of scholars added new perspectives to the study of ritual.[2] As a result, an extensive amount of literature in the fields of anthropology, religious studies, sociology, and ritual studies has been produced with regard to ritual, a part of which is introduced in chapter 'The Study of Ritual in Contemporary Urban Society'. Here, I discuss works focusing on rituals enacted in modern social settings and their relevance to the case study considered in this book.

Chapter 'Consumption and Ritual' is dedicated to theories on consumption and consumer culture and their applicability to the study of ritual in modern urban contexts. I find approaches from consumer behavior studies very useful as these draw links between rituals and consumer behavior theories, and can contribute to a significant degree to our understanding of contemporary ritual practice. Chapter 'Consumer Culture and

Changes to the Ritual Calendar in Postwar Urban Japan' presents a general overview of the socioeconomic and historical context in which the subject of my case study is embedded. It deals with the main factors that have influenced Japan's postwar transformation and analyzes the principal social trends in the urbanized society, among them, shifting birthrates, changing family structures, views on children and gender roles, and changing value orientations. The chapter also outlines the main characteristics of Japanese consumer culture and gives a general description of the modern ritual calendar in Japan, presenting a few case studies from the specialist literature on popular observance in postwar Japan.

In order to track the historical path of the development of the celebration of *shichigosan*, I relied on a number of methodological approaches. In terms of a general understanding, the historical temporal framework is useful, and accordingly, the findings of my research are ordered mostly within a temporal frame. Chapter 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage' follows the earlier phases of the ritual's evolution, from its traditional forms to the rise of its urban version in Tokyo. The chapter also outlines the main characteristics of Japanese consumer culture and gives a general description of the modern ritual calendar in Japan, presenting a few case studies from the specialist literature on popular observance in postwar Japan. The topics discussed include the patterns of traditional, rural celebrations of age in childhood and how these are embedded in the traditional cosmology in which the life span—and its stages—are regarded as one phase in the progress of the soul. The main source for this part of the work is the rich folklore literature documenting folk beliefs and customs since the end of the nineteenth century. The rise of the Edo (the old name for Tokyo) urban pattern around the eighteenth century is tracked using secondary literature on sources mentioning early forms of customs connected to the celebration. For more recent phases, I draw on a combination of data from the relevant specialist literature and—most importantly—from surveys of the epoch's print media, for example, articles in the main newspaper from the very first issues from the end of the nineteenth century, roughly into the 1950s. I monitored not only the changing number of single articles on the observance but also the quantity of associated publicities and their content. Publicity, apart from offering data on the rise of the popularity of the observance, also testifies to the proliferation of business activities targeting celebrating families. The data obtained from this part of the research proved useful, since practically no research has been done on the urban development of the ritual during this particular period. It allowed me to follow the

path of the progress of some of the characteristic features of the celebration as well as the route that led from the 'traditional' ritual pattern to the emergence of the pattern known today throughout the country. The analysis also sheds light on the extent to which there is continuity between the ritual's present forms and its urban past.

For the postwar phase of the course of the development of *shichigosan*, the subject of chapter 'Business Sector, Media and Religious Institutions', and partly also chapter 'Constructing the Ritual: Dress, Photographs, Actors, and Script', I analyzed articles from the postwar media dailies and periodicals, and later, online sources. In the last three decades, periodicals targeting mothers with small children have increased in number, and these offer plentiful articles on the most varied aspects of the observance. I also looked at fashion magazines, in particular, those including inserts on the festive wear used for the celebration and special editions on etiquette-related issues. The postwar high-speed economic growth not only fueled the proliferation of business activities, service and retail industries, and media publicity firms. The intense urbanization and standardization of lifestyle between urban and rural areas also contributed to the diffusion of the urban pattern of *shichigosan* throughout the country. The chapter also addresses the role of religious institutions and the effects that the laws issued by the new postwar constitution in 1946 had had on them. The separation of religion from the state has forced religious institutions into the state of financial autonomy which brought about the necessity to adopt diverse strategies to attract visitors to the shrines. The role of the religious institution is significant in creating the ritual experience for the Japanese observers; therefore, a case study of one major Tokyo shrine is provided in the book. The case study offers the reader an insight into how religious institutions function in Japan, as well as what shrine worship, as component of the overall ritual event, may represent for Japanese families today.

I complemented the research based on literature and media through making a number of field trips to Japan between 2009 and 2010 when I interviewed employees of the institutions involved in the organization of the celebration. I spoke with priests and the employees of two major shrines in Tokyo, the Meiji and the Hie shrines. These were guided interviews during which I obtained information about the history of observance rates 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 families, and the interpretation of the significance of the ritual by the interview-

ees. I also conducted interviews with employees of rental and professional photo studios, 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*. A few unstructured interviews were also carried out with families with firsthand experience of the celebration, as well as with families just about to plan the observance of the ritual.

Data gathered from the Internet proved to be extremely useful. Today, online sources provide a large amount of information from the side of both the commercial sector and the observers of the ritual, the families. Contemporary Japanese extensively use online media as a source not only for seeking information but also for expressing opinions, consulting each other on sensitive issues, and asking experts about a variety of subjects. The Internet abounds in websites that in one or another way focus on the *shichigosan* celebration. These include child-rearing sites, etiquette consulting sites and blogs, websites of business firms providing services related to the celebration (photo studios, rental shops, restaurants, dress shops, hotels, travel agencies, magazines), shrine and temple home pages, statistical data on the celebration provided by a number of agents (magazines, newspapers, industry), websites of professional associations, and others. The conspicuous number of sites related to *shichigosan* also reassured me that the celebration indeed represents a significant social phenomenon in present-day Japan. The careful reading of contents of these sources sheds light on hidden aspects of the ritual as the Internet provides a relatively uncensored view which is not constrained by direct contact with an interviewer. Online consulting sites are popular for similar reasons, because of the anonymity that this form of communication offers. Between 2010 and 2012, I scanned the themes and details of the accounts, blog inserts, and contents of various websites regularly, and between 2012 and autumn 2015, I did so fairly regularly. This provided me with a range of information and with the type of insight that would have been impossible to gain otherwise.

It is also important to add that the participants often find it difficult to communicate the meaning of a ritual practice, making it hard to interpret; this is something which has been noted in the scholarly literature.[3] While, for example, the interviewed persons give quite precise answers regarding the practical matters of the celebration, they find it rather hard to interpret or verbalize the meaning of the particular observance. Also, it is the case that due to the diverse layers of meanings associated with ritual practice, meanings can only be captured partly and indirectly by an examination of

the different aspects and dimensions of ritual practice. The exact meaning of the ritual need not be clear to the observers in order to fulfill its function. Furthermore, the interpretation that scholars of the ritual provide in their studies need not necessarily coincide with the interpretation given by actors who are enacting and creating the ritual experience. One of the main aims of my work is, therefore, to attempt an interpretation of the role of *shichigosan* in the lives of the families through both direct and indirect ways, hoping that, in this way, the complexity of the task of investigating such a complex phenomenon may be partly reduced.

Chapter 'Constructing the Ritual: Dress, Photographs, Actors, and Script' places the various elements of the ritual experience within a broader interpretative frame. It analyzes the symbolical aspects of the ritual as well as the social roles single actors play within the ritual. The recurrent elements of the ritual, such as the photograph, the festive traditional dress, and the special candy-gift, all have a significant place and convey a complex set of meanings to the actors. The festive dress of the children represents the most recognizable symbol of *shichigosan* today, and as such, it receives special attention from both actors-observers and market-actors. The multiple meanings attached to the dress and the changes these meanings went through in the course of the time are duly examined. Within the analysis of ritual actors, shifts in views on children in the society, women's role in the celebration, and the role of fathers and grandparents will be followed.

Finally, I find it important to underline the fact that I am not principally engaged in a debate over the 'authenticity' of the ritual, or whether its present form can be considered 'traditional' or 'religious'. To do so would be following a limited approach to the understanding of the meaning that the rite bears for the families in its complexity. Instead, I am interested in exploring why this celebration continues to have meaning for a large number of families, and how this meaning is constituted in an interactive process between the commercial sector, families, the media, and religious institutions. The final chapter of the book draws together the various links introduced in the previous chapters. I hope to relate this study through a comparative perspective to other non-Japanese societies, showing that the findings of this work have validity for a more general and wide understanding of at least two issues. First, there is the relevance of a complex cultural practice—the ritual—within a contemporary urban context, within or beyond the religious sphere. Second, there is the role of consumption and consumers' practices in shaping ritual experience and meaning. Consumption emerges as an important aspect of this analysis as

it demonstrates that consumer practices can be assigned meaning within the cultural practice of the ritual. If we draw parallels between the Japanese case and our Western culture, this study can reveal some of the subtle aspects of our world and our ideas about it, and the ways we deal with our reality. Furthermore, the Japanese case can show itself as thought-provoking if we consider that the Western world, which is so deprived of rituals, has witnessed a surge of renewed interest in this particular symbolic form of communication in recent years.[4]

Notes

1. For a critical approach on this see for example Belk et al. 1989.
2. For a detailed overview of the history of the field, see Bell 2009.
3. It has been noted that rituals resist interpretation on the theoretical level. Scholars themselves often disagree about the issue of the objectification of ritual (Goody 1977).
4. For a stimulating discussion of this growing interest from American observers, see Ronald Grimes' work, *Deeply into the Bone* (Grimes 2002).

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The Study of Ritual in Contemporary Urban Society

Since the birth of the first theories on ritual, ritual has attracted extensive literature on religious studies, anthropology, sociology, and joined later by disciplines such as history, psychology, and most recently, consumer research. In this overview of literature, I pay special attention to approaches that I find most productive for the present study. This means that I dedicate more attention to works that address ritual practice in modern urban context and less to the literature produced in the beginning of the scholarship on ritual.

Terminology

The main subject of this book, *shichigosan*, is conventionally defined as a ritual, more specifically, a rite of passage, the definition of which will follow later in this chapter. However, in both English- and Japanese-language literature, a number of other terms related to the term 'ritual' are in use.[1] Regarding the differentiated use of the related terms, although there are scholars who make a distinction between the use of these terms, I opt for a usage that does not make distinction and uses the term 'ritual' interchangeably and as synonymous to other closely related terms, such as rite, celebration, festivity, ceremony, or festive occasion (van Bremen 1995, 16).[2] Nonetheless, in the 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 'cer-

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emony' 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).[3] 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 include these notions. However, as Gluckman himself says, these are solely suggestions and not a general rule followed by scholars. Another prominent scholar of ritual, Ronald Grimes, offers an approach which differentiates between ritualizing, ritual, and rite. 'Ritualizing' refers, in his interpretation, to the activity when actors cultivate rites, while 'rite' is what people actually do. 'Ritual' is understood by Grimes as a scholarly category created by theorists (Grimes 2013).

Another term, 'public celebration', has been adopted by Jeremy Boissevain for rituals observed by groups and communities in public space, in particular, in modern social contexts. The author distinguishes between 'public celebrations' and 'family rituals' and says that the latter is characterized by lack of tourism and presence of outsiders (1992b, 4–7). Barbara Myerhoff introduces the term 'nonce ritual' for rituals practiced in Western urban societies, characterized by the presence of both sacred and secular parts, as well as stable and improvised parts (1977, 200). 'Secular rituals', 'collective ceremonial form/occasions', and 'secular ceremonies' are only a few examples of the variety of terms used by scholars of rituals conventionally and interchangeably (Moore and Myerhoff 1977a, 5).

In the case of *shichigosan*, it needs to be noted that the term 'ritual' is sometimes used to call one specific part of the celebration, that is, the Shinto shrine rite (or sometimes Buddhist temple rite), thus excluding the other components of the event, such as the professional photo studio and the family feast, that are part of the whole ritual experience. I find this division and use problematic and think that an approach that would divide a complex celebration form into 'ritual' and 'non-ritual' elements does not add to the discussion and understanding, first, because this approach indicates that one part of the event is more important compared to another part. As it will be discussed at length during the course of this book, 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. The second reason is that if following a differentiating approach, the shrine worship might be further narrowed down to two distinctive parts: the individual prayer and the more formal purifica-

tion rite celebrated by a priest. While the first is performed on an individual basis and is open to all according to the custom, the latter is available only to those who apply and pay the due fee beforehand. The purification rite usually takes place in a separate and closed space of the shrine's premises. Though, not all families celebrating *shichigosan* decide to apply for the purification rite, and are satisfied with the individual prayer performed according to the common etiquette. Moreover, most families regard the so-called 'commercial' parts of the event (photographing, feast consumed in a restaurant) equally important as the shrine worship. Thus, to avoid the ranking of the single parts of the celebration known today as *shichigosan*, I view the celebration as a complex ritual event comprising all elements, be they conventionally viewed as 'religious', 'sacred', 'secular', or 'commercial', categories I endeavor to apply critically throughout this book.

At this point, it can be useful to underline that 'ritual' is a relatively new concept, and as such, there exist no clear-cut definitions of it (Bell 2009, ix–xi). The difficulty of defining this concept is also furthered by the complexity of ritual as practice and by the symbolic means it works with.[4] It has been argued that "(…) the domain of ritual resists efforts to theorize about and define it" (De Coppet 1992, 9). Indeed, a great variety of things has been said about ritual and on the way it works. The difficulty of theorizing ritual is given, above all, by the fact that ritual is a complex phenomenon, and therefore, the constitution of its meaning always occurs on multiple levels. In spite of this complexity, elusiveness, and difficulty in stating the borders of it as a concept, several working definitions of ritual have been proposed in order to interpret the function and structure of ritual activity.[5] It has been stated that ritual is a complex type of behavior which usually has a stable purpose, more or less rigid form, and uses symbols or symbolic mode of communication; hence, it usually 'alludes to more than it says' (Moore and Myerhoff 1977b, 5). Performing a ritual has social as well as psychological effects on the individual and the society. Rituals reconfirms, and also shapes, cultural ideas; it reinforces social ties; and it can reorganize as well as create them. The use of symbols can be regarded as a distinguishing feature of the ritual mode of expression in contrast to other modes that are instrumental and do not rely on the use of symbols to the extent that ritual does (Bell 2009). However, often it is this very symbolic mode that imposes the complexity and difficulty of interpretation. Another problem is with regard to the verbalization of ritual meanings by the actors themselves. The meaning of a ritual action is rarely grasped by words by the observers, and/or single observers

often offer differing interpretations of the actions they perform. In other words, only a careful observation of the different aspects and dimensions of ritual practice can capture partly and indirectly the multiple layers of meanings associated to a given ritual. Grimes, therefore, notes that any study of ritual should pay attention to the least verbalized features of the ritual action, and only subsequently on its meaning and function (Grimes 1982, 546).[6]

As the term 'ritual' is used in many diverse disciplines, for the scopes of the present work, it is important to define what is not meant by ritual in my interpretation. I am not engaging myself with the so-called 'ritual/ritualized behavior', or in other words, patterned repeated behavior (such as morning preparations and meals consumed together), an issue addressed within the family context first by James Bossard and E. Stoker Boll (*Ritual in Family Living* 1950, *The Sociology of Child Development* 1960). These studies typically were not applying a clear-cut division between rituals/celebrations and 'ritual behavior'. The authors investigated into the role that rituals and ritualized behavior play in phases of human life and their importance in providing assistance to individuals and families to cope with transitions in their life. While these studies illuminate the function and meaning of rituals in the psychological development of the individual, my study primarily addresses a ritual which emerges as an important festive occasion in the family's life, and as such, it fulfills a variety of needs and scopes in the eyes of the family and of its individual members.

Approaches to the Study of Ritual

The beginning of the scholarship on ritual coincides with the origin of the scholarly interest in religion and its origins. The first generation of scholars studied and observed rituals in the so-called 'traditional' societies characterized by comparatively high degree of communal life, strong shared traditions, and a cosmology typically based on religious ideas (Bell 2009, 1–10, 210–212). Apart from creating a direct link between ritual and tradition, these studies conveyed the message that ritual belongs to the religious context only. The leading approaches known also as myth and ritual school were primarily engaging in debates on the role of rite in relation to religion, and on the origin and function of religion in society.[7] These approaches viewed ritual as almost always linked to religion, sacred or magic, and ritual was interpreted primarily as an expression of religious ideas and concepts.

The French sociologist, Emile Durkheim, in his seminal work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, enriched ritual theory by the social dimension. He emphasized the social function of ritual, looking at it as a practice that reflects the social reality of actors and relationships in the community (Durkheim 1995: in Bell 2009, 24–28). Durkheim's interpretation of ritual was informed by his understanding of religion's function in the society. He pointed to the integrative and adhesive functions and 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 individual to be able to conduct social living as 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 keeps social ties vital and strengthens solidarity within a group (Mitchell 2006, 490).[8]

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, 30–33). Gluckman also examined the reasons underlying the high degree of ritualization in traditional (or 'tribal') societies. He argued that in preindustrial societies, social relations serve manifold purposes, from social to economic and spiritual ones (Bell 2009, 38–39). Rites of passage (discussed below), have the function to segregate the different roles that people simultaneously fulfill in small groups, which otherwise could be confounded. Gluckman regarded rites of passage incompatible with the structure of modern urban life, where the differentiation or segregation of roles is more complete and takes place in a secular way.[9]

In 1970, Mary Douglas' work, *Natural Symbols*, exercised a major impact on the study of ritual. Douglas wished to develop Durkheim's approach to religion, so that it could apply to both so-called traditional societies and modern societies (Douglas 2003). She stressed the importance of the cultural environment and social structure in which the ritual is embedded as these add important variations to the ritual symbolic system. For Douglas, ritual is a form of communication and symbolic action which inherently expresses the social reality of the given community. Douglas also enriched ritual theory with 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 in her interpretation is strengthening both grid and group, and as such, it exercises a constraining effect on social behavior.

Rites of Passage

The celebration of *shichigosan* according to the conventional and classic interpretations belongs to the category of rites of passage. This category was first described and defined by the French scholar Arnold van Gennep in his work *The Rites of Passage*, published in 1909. Van Gennep examined descriptions of a number of disparate cultures and found out that each of the examined cultures perform rituals that share a common structure (van Gennep 1960). These rituals, labeled by van Gennep as 'rites of passage', usually marked important turning points, or thresholds, that divided the life of individuals or groups into separate stages. So, for instance, rites of passage mark in almost every social reality critical junctures, such as pregnancy, birth of a child, marriage, or death. In van Gennep's understanding, rites of passage have the role to facilitate the transition or passage of turning points that are often perceived as moments of crisis by the community. Rituals are called in help because change in the physical appearance (such as transition of age) not always goes automatically with acknowledgment of the individual's new position in the society (van Gennep 1960, 60–68).[10] 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. It is through rituals that the child upon birth is incorporated into the group and becomes 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 needs to be marked on the social level, too. Accordingly, van Gennep made a distinction between social and physical integration, social and physical puberty, social and physical parenthood. In this perspective, he placed emphasis on the politico-legal and social aspects of the ritual, and less on its magic and religious aspects. Rituals assist in the task of elaborating and appropriating change and transformation, they help reduce risks and the negative effects that crisis, and in general change, poses to the society.

Van Gennep's theory was elaborated later by generations of scholars; among them the most influential was Victor Turner. Turner significantly contributed to the dissemination of the knowledge about van Gennep's theory. Within van Gennep's three-sequence theory, Turner drew attention to and developed further the intermediate stage, which he labeled the 'liminal' phase (Turner 1969). Turner also broadened the applicability of van Gennep's theory to modern industrial societies.[11] By discerning the key stages in the ritual process, namely, the breach of norms, crisis, remedial

procedures, and the restoration of social peace, Turner emphasized the ritual's function to assure that change would be integrated and accommodated, viewing ritual as an important device to sustain and regenerate communities.

Since van Gennep's 'sequential method' theory (the three-stage sequence), it has been understood that the three phases (separation, transition, and incorporation) do not always receive the same accent within a single case of rite. One or more of these stages can even be missing altogether. Van Gennep's method has been criticized by Gluckman, who pointed out that his theory, while being an important addition to the theory of ritual, fails 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. In the following decades, different aspects of rites of passage have been stressed upon. Martha N. Fried and Morthon H. Fried called attention to the symbolic aspects of transition (1980). By drawing examples from different cultural contexts, they showed how in most societies physical birth is followed by a social or symbolic birth during which the new member is admitted into the 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 (Fried and Fried 1980, 263). In Japan, similar beliefs were at work behind the custom not to offer children under the age of seven a proper funeral rite. Children in the first years of their life were believed to stay in an in-between state, that is, between the world of the gods and that of the humans. It was believed that during this period, children may return to the realm of gods and spirits more easily compared to later stages of their life when the bond that tied them to the humans was thought to have grown stronger (Iijima 1987, 1991). The conspicuous number of rites observed in this period of childhood are explained by the Japanese folklorists and anthropologists with the 'liminality' attributed to the phase of early childhood in the traditional Japanese life-view. Rituals, in this interpretation, were primarily performed with the scope to safeguard this potentially dangerous and unstable phase of human life.[12] In this regard, Bossard and Boll pointed to the vulnerability of the period of early childhood from a psychological aspect, arguing that changes during this period tend to be perceived as crisis also because they involve the whole habitual interaction system of the individual. Rites asso-

ciated with the social development of the individual thus become essential to restore equilibrium during these transitions (Bossard and Boll 1960). Concerning *shichigosan*, observed during the first seven years of the child's life, I will demonstrate that while association with passage and transition may make part of the overall meaning system of the contemporary ritual practice, these are coupled with other equally important notions, such as family identity, parenthood, individual values, and views on children.

'Temporality' of Ritual Practice

The first ethnographic analyses of rituals often described the realities to which the ritual in exam belonged, as unchanged and timeless. These studies usually worked with materials based on oral traditions, accordingly, ritual itself was often perceived as part of a timeless tradition (Kelly and Kaplan 1990, Bell 2009, 210). The significance of change and its effect on ritual has been greatly underplayed. In the Japanese scholarship, a big part of works coming from the field of folklore studies exemplifies this approach (see more in chapter 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage'). Kelly and Kaplan 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 has been a gradual process (1990, 139). Indeed, ritual as any other social practice is embedded in its social reality; it reflects the surrounding world, and as such, it must follow changes if its efficacy is to be preserved. Rites are not just rigid structures; they also change (Grimes 2002). Jennings, contesting the allegedly unchanging nature of ritual, argued that ritual is adaptive, varying in space, and changing in time (1982, 126). Indeed, recent approaches emphasize the importance of applying a temporal frame to the study of concrete ritual practices, to pay adequate attention to the changes in the social reality, and to see single patterns of cases of ritual practice as products of different historical moments, an approach I am strongly pursuing through the present work. Following the development through which the pattern and role of the celebration went across times, unfolds the path that closely followed transformations of the Japanese society, regarding in particular, family structure and norms, view on children, modes of production, consumption, and closely related economic conditions surrounding individual lives. All these affected the celebration and became reflected in the symbolic system of its past and present forms.

On the other hand, it must not be forgotten that not in every case changes are integrated successfully into ritual practice. Ritual 'tend to resist change' in a more effective way than other social forms and customs do (Bell 2009, 211). Indeed, major changes in the social reality of a given ritual practice often cause the loss of ritual practice. Significant and long-lasting transformations imply a change not only upon a particular ritual practice but also on the wider ritual culture of the given community and society. In most Western societies, for example, modernization and industrialization brought about the decline of a big number of rituals as well as an overall transformation of the ritual calendar. It is also important to note that the issue of change in ritual is a major subject of debate of not only scholarly research but also ritual experts and social commentators. In this regard, Stausberg called for caution when controversial opinions judging changes in a concrete case of ritual practice emerge (2004). Religious organizations are often concerned with the appropriate ways to adapt "traditions of worship to shifting social and spiritual realities" (Bell 2009, 210). Numerous cases of controversial opinions will be cited in the case of *shichigosan* when during its path of development 'new' elements emerged in its practice. Critical voices often accompanied the introduction of these new elements. In present-day Japan, for example, the omnipresence of consumer culture and commodities used in the context of the celebration are targeted by frequent negative and critical comments by scholars, journalists, and lay public. The slightest change in ritual form is often perceived as evidence of the loss of authenticity also because adherence to tradition and to an unchanging stable pattern and meaning is commonly judged as the legitimating force of the ritual's authenticity.

Numerous studies address the issue of adoption of change in ritual, not only in Western contexts. Stausberg describes the case of ritual change among the Parsi-Zoroastrian in India, where, like in other societies, modernization has brought about a large-scale de-ritualization and secularization of everyday life. Though, the ritual in exam has not vanished; 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 influences the form and significance of ritual recently represents a major theme in the scholarship on ritual. Grimes, the already mentioned distinguished scholar of ritual, stresses that ritual practice needs to be understood as an activity or process which is in continuous change (2013). The loss of its 'receptivity', in other words, the ritual's capability to be perceived by others (supernatural

or human agents), is one of the main factors, and symptoms, determining the decline of a ritual practice (Grimes 1982, 549).

My work will address extensively the issue of change in ritual. *Shichigosan* owes its name and pattern to the particular historical conditions of the urban society of the seventeenth- to eighteenth-century Edo, the capital of Japan and the old name of Tokyo. The ritual, however, roots in rites observed during the early childhood throughout different social classes since earlier periods. The present study will introduce these childhood rites, follow the changes in their practice, as well as examine the socioeconomic infrastructure underlying contemporary ritual practice. The account of this evolution will, hopefully, show the way change 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 will be examined. This examination will also unfold the process in which the state of equilibrium—a requisite for an effective and compelling ritual practice—between new and constant (or seemingly constant) elements is maintained and recreated by their continuous interaction within the ritual.

Ritual in Urban Modern Context

In the 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 theories and approaches that I find most specifically relevant to my subject. Starting from the 1970s, an increasing number of case studies and analysis of ritual practice performed within modern contexts (in particular from the West) have been produced. Often, these studies differentiated between religious and secular rituals, and thus, the notion of sacred played a central role in the applied approaches.[13] The 'sacred', making part of the religious sphere so far, started to be gradually viewed as a separate entity from the religious. In 1977, Moore and Myerhoff argued that "rituals are not either sacred or secular" (Myerhoff 1977, 200, also Moore and Myerhoff 1977a). Studies undertaken in urban contexts call attention to the fact that whereas the dissolution of traditional lifestyle as an effect of modernization has brought about—at least in the beginning—a large-scale de-ritualization, in the recent decades, we are witness to a notable revival of ritualism (Berghaus 1998; Grimes 2002).[14] Recent studies suggest that individuals and communities in every society continue to rely on ritual as an efficient instrument to

cope with transitions and significant moments in the human existence. 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" (Bell 2009, 202), showing that ritual practice is not always closely linked to the degree of religiosity present in the society.

The contributions included in *Secular Ritual* present several case studies of collective rituals enacted in industrial societies (Moore and Myerhoff 1977a). These demonstrate that rituals not only perpetuate traditions, as argued by classical ritual studies, but they are also used to lend the image of 'tradition' to events and practices that are in lack of this quality.[15] The case studies provide several examples of revived or invented 'public ceremonies'. Another edited volume by Jeremy Boissevain, *Revitalizing European Rituals*, offers nine case studies of renewed or revitalized rituals from contemporary European contexts and brings further the theory of 'invented traditions' proposed by Hobsbawm and Ranger in 1983 (Boissevain 1992a).[16] Numerous rituals considered traditional by the public, 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. Boissevain also adds a discussion of the factors underlying the revival of rituals. The author identifies the decade of the 1970s as the period when a renewed interest for rituals emerged in Europe. Whereas the motifs of revitalization of a ritual practice are always complex and multiple, one of the most important factors lies in the changed social reality of individuals and groups, in particular, in the form of the response that groups and individuals give to the rapid socioeconomic changes dissolving traditionally organized communities (Boissevain 1992b, 6).[17] The sense of isolation, accompanying phenomenon of these changes, renders life conditions as more unpredictable, insecure, and often alienated (Boissevain 1992a, c, 147). The studies included in Boissevain's volume also show that whereas religious elements may be underplayed in rituals observed in contemporary contexts, ludic aspects become strengthened. Play and ludic elements provide space for display and can significantly enhance ritual experience as well as contribute to the affirmation of the individual or group identity (Boissevain 1992c, 151).

The phenomenon of ritualization and/or revival of rituals in modern social contexts have since become a much-discussed issue in scholarly literature.[18] Among others, Grimes deals extensively in this work with the question of reinvention and invention in ritual, and ritualizing within the North American context. Grimes argues against the close association of rituals with

religious institutions and says that rituals may effectively work beyond religious institutions and that this does not necessarily lessen their meaning and effect (2002). Rituals and symbols are generated and cultivated outside the domains associated with religious movements and they do not always refer to divine things and imply formal behavior (Grimes 1982, 540). Rituals are also invented in order to respond to the demands of groups and individuals. Importantly, Grimes points out that 'ritual' and 'tradition' are not synonymous as well as not all ritual actions come from long-standing traditions (1982, 541). Numerous researches prove that the distinction between religious and nonreligious, profane or secular, is not always applicable or useful for the understanding of ritual practices in contemporary contexts where often new rituals are created and old ones renewed.[19]

Historians, too, engage with the study of ritual. Historical accounts of ritual practices can give a valuable contribution to the study of change in ritual as these studies track the path of development of ritual forms and meanings over a prolonged period of time. Historical approach to the study of ritual in modern industrialized contexts has been applied by Elizabeth H. Pleck and Leigh Eric Schmidt in their works on North American festivities, both authors giving particular attention to the ongoing influence that marketplace exercises on the evolution of the ceremonial occasions (Pleck 2000; Schmidt 1995). Pleck critically views arguments on the rigidity and unchanging forms of American festivities, pointing to the necessity to recognize the multitude of processes of change in the development of ritual practices (Pleck 2000, 13). In different historical moments, ritual can serve diverse scopes: from preserving a tradition while a group is adjusting to new ways of life, serving as vehicle of ethnic identity, promoting group solidarity, or serving as display of the middle-class lifestyle. Consumerism, religiosity, and popular culture are identified among the major factors contributing in the shaping of family rituals in North America (Pleck 2000).

Family Ritual

The category of 'family ritual' applied to the case study of this book is a term primarily emerging in studies in contemporary contexts. While it has no clear definition in social sciences, it is adopted in diverse fields studying ritual practice. In psychology, the term is often used for describing elements, ceremonies, and ritualized behavior patterns in family life.[20] An early adoption of this term in the field of social psychology comes from the abovementioned works of Bossard and Boll (1960).

A more recent categorization of family rituals within the same field is offered by Wolin and Bennett (1984). The authors list three groups of rituals under the label of 'family rituals', namely 'family celebrations', 'family traditions', and 'patterned routines'. Within this categorization, *shichigosan* belongs to the first group, while the other two groups do not represent the subject of this book. The abovementioned social historian, Pleck, defines the category of 'family ritual' as "(…) a highly stylized cultural performance involving several family members that is repeated, has a formal structure, and involves symbolic behavior (…)" (Pleck 2000, 10).[21] The author also notes that though family rituals have a standardized and recognizable structure, personalization given by single families is an important feature of these occasions. Indeed, personalization plays a significant role in the identity constitution of the families. The study of Wallendorf and Arnould of the American Thanksgiving ritual, described in detail in the next chapter, shows that family rituals are an important device in the hands of individuals serving to reaffirm core values and to strengthen family solidarity (1991). Families enact these rituals to experience family togetherness and create experiences of shared values.

Tracking the history of American family rituals, Pleck finds their former forms in the carnival communal festivities which moved out from the streets into the homes of middle-class families with the growth of the middle class during the nineteenth century (2000). In the course of the time, the carnivalesque aspects (such as children begging on Thanksgiving, masking and costuming on Christmas, Halloween, and New Year) have given way to stress on domesticity and family privacy, all this occurring out of the need to answer changed circumstances in people's lives. These new forms of celebrations came to be distinguished by a commercial and sentimental style, a phenomenon of which is called by the author the "rise of the sentimentalized occasion" (Pleck 2000, 235). Pleck argues that family rituals were active agents of social change in a period when the fusion of religious piety, familialism, and consumption emerged as important forces.

Finally, my choice of the term 'family ritual' for *shichigosan* may need further explanation. The main reasons lie in the neutrality of the term, especially compared to the term 'rite of passage', which encloses an exact categorization and definition of the ritual in question. It is, also, disputable whether *shichigosan* in its contemporary form fulfills all characteristics of the 'rite of passage' category, whereas it certainly does not contradict

the term of 'family ritual'. *Shichigosan* today is above all an important occasion in the family life through which, among others, family ideals are communicated as well as reconfirmed. The following chapters will hopefully illuminate the question in more details. However, before turning to the description of the concrete case of *shichigosan* and to its historical evolution, in the next chapter I address some of the general implications of consumption and consumer culture with regard to ritual practice. I raise this issue also because consumer culture is among the principal factors that have shaped the role and form of *shichigosan* ritual in the course of the twentieth century.

Notes

1. *Ritual* is sometimes distinguished from *rite* by referring with the term of ritual to the code of ceremonies followed during the performance of rites, in other words, the prescribed order of a rite. Nevertheless, this difference is only rarely used in the specialized literature.
2. General dictionaries (e.g. The New Oxford Dictionary of English, Webster's New World College Dictionary) use the terms 'ceremony' and 'celebration' interchangeably, making use of one term to explain the other term. So, for example, 'ceremony' and 'celebration' are adopted to define the meaning of the word 'occasion'.
3. Gluckman follows in this Evans-Pritchard's usage.
4. See more on the objectification of ritual in Goody 1977.
5. 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).
6. Ronald Grimes, one of the most renowned scholars of contemporary ritual and founder of the interdisciplinary discipline of ritual studies, advocates a practice-oriented approach to the study of ritual which means that it should be studied from the actor's view.
7. Edward B. Tylor, James Frazer, Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, and Mircea Eliade, just to mention the most important authors of these theories.

   Successive scholars assigned new characteristics to rituals. A.R. Radcliff-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski further developed Durkheim's sociological approach adding new dimensions to our understanding of rituals. Whereas Radcliff-Brown focused on the unifying function of ritual, Malinowski emphasized the emotional involvement of actors performing a ritual and pointed to its function to alleviate anxiety and distress in human life (Bell 2009, 27–28). Mircea Eliade, the renowned histo-

rian of religion, placed emphasis on the cosmological dimension of ritual and regarded it a re-enactment of sacred prototypes (Eliade 1963).

8. 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 (1962).
9. In this regard, Grimes underlines that not every passage is a rite of passage. Passages take place, but rites are carried out intentionally (2002, 5).
10. Turner also made an important contribution to the general theory on ritual. In his seminal work, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Antistructure* (1969), he offered an interpretation of ritual as 'social drama', emphasizing drama or process rather than structure within ritual and social institutions. Turner viewed social dramas as agents that promote social development, and within this, he argued that rituals play out a twofold function. First, they help preserve social order; second, they sustain dynamism within the society. Ritual itself being a process assures a continuous interaction with its social reality.
11. I will dedicate an essential part of chapter 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage' to this theme.
12. See more on these approaches Kapferer 1977.
13. 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.
14. Authors use the term 'traditionalize' (Moore and Myerhoff 1977b, 7). See also Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983.
15. These studies have been proposed by Boissevain as complementing the influential volume of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (1983).
16. As for the modalities of revival, Boissevain defines four different modes of revitalization process: revival/reanimation, restoration, retraditionalization, and folklorization (Boissevain 1992b, 6–14).
17. For a list of works, see Grimes 2002.
18. Grimes brings in his works numerous examples of invention and renewal of rituals in present-day Western societies. 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 the Western societies do, for example.
19. See, for example, Bossard and Boll 1960 and Erikson 1982.
20. Pleck's work addresses the most popular festivities celebrated in North American families, such as Christmas, Easter, birthdays, Halloween, and weddings, also paying attention to the diverse customs and celebrations observed in the major ethnic groups present in the USA (2000).

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Consumption and Ritual

This book on a Japanese ritual can be read as a history of the evolution of a particular ritual practice in a non-Western society. However, it may also be read as a history of consumption with special focus on a cultural expression called family ritual in Japan's urban context. The latter reading sheds light on the evolution of consumption practices and consumer choices in the modern and contemporary world of the Japanese consumer. Japan is distinguished by a sophisticated consumer culture and it has been argued that the historical beginnings of Japanese consumer culture are rooted in eighteenth-century town and city life. As already noted, consumption and consumer culture have majorly influenced the development of the *shichigosan* practice during its history, as they have affected other ritual practices in contemporary societies. Therefore, in this chapter, I will examine major theories on consumption with special attention on those works which relate these theories to ritual, in an attempt to understand the role and meaning that consumption may vest within ritual practice.

The principal reason why consumption theories are indeed relevant to this work lies in the fact that modern ritual practice is almost always closely interwoven with consumption practices. The degree can vary significantly in the case of individual rituals. At one end of the scale we find modern ritual practices that overtly utilize modern market commodities and which include a variety of consumption practices, be it consumption of food, goods, gifts, and services. Examples of such practices are Thanksgiving Day (see below) and Christmas in the Western tradition. These celebrations

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have often been described as celebrating material well-being, hedonism, and abundance, since they make extensive use of commercial services and commodities. Christmas gift-giving has been characterized as an illustrative example of the organized co-ordination of the accumulation and distribution of goods (Appadurai 2006, 97–98). At the other end of the scale, we can find rituals that entail modern consumption practices, and the use of commodities, to a lesser extent. Examples of such rites are few not only because the overwhelming part of modern rituals involve consumption, but also because consumption of some kind, be it food or other material items, has always been an inherent element of rituals and celebrations. The only significant difference may be in the extent to which consumption of food, clothes, and objects is linked to the market in the form of the purchase of commoditized goods. In the case of *shichigosan*, consumption practices play an important role not only with regard to its present pattern. Early forms of consumption of goods distinguished some premodern patterns of the ritual as early as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In this case, the overall analysis and interpretation of the ritual needs to engage with an analysis of the changes that also occurred in related consumption.

Scholarship on Consumption

In the social sciences, discourses on consumption go hand in hand with discourses on modernity. Consumption and consumer culture are at the center of scholarly and public discourses engaging with the analysis of the salient social phenomena of our world. Consumption's crucial role in the development of modern capitalism was recognized as early as the nineteenth century; nonetheless, until just a few decades ago, consumption was still a new topic to the social sciences. At the turn of the twentieth century, Thorstein Veblen and Emile Durkheim acknowledged consumption as one of the main social forces shaping the modern capitalist society. Veblen was among the first to theorize the relation between individuals' preferences and their social position, introducing the term 'conspicuous consumption' into the terminology of social sciences (Veblen 1899 in Trigg 2001, 1–3). Although, for a long time consumption continued to be studied primarily as an economic system and the accent was laid on production and its mechanism. In the late 1970s, anthropologists started to turn their attention to consumption and a number of social science works emerged on the issue. Sahlins underlined the importance of the

function of consumption in defining human needs and of interpreting consumption practices within their particular cultural context (1972). He analyzed the types of exchange from the viewpoint of the relation between actors. In 1979, Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood presented their critical view of the conventional theories that had paid attention so far solely to the economically rational aspects of consumption practices (*The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*, 1979). In this influential work, the authors proposed to interpret consumption, and the use of goods, their purchase and sale beyond their economic meaning. They launched a new debate on the subject diverging from conventional theories which tended to see merely materialist needs and desires behind consumption. The authors called attention to the social significance of consumption as this is always embedded in social relations.

The new approaches to the study of consumption explored the multilayered function and meaning of consumption in society, economy, and politics. However, consumption as an individual research topic appeared on the agenda of social science scholars sometime between the 1980s and 1990s. In the 1990s, Daniel Miller's work significantly contributed to the field. He argued that applying the perspective of consumption in social science studies may ask for a revision, or at least rethinking, of several conventional theoretical models in academic disciplines, such as economics, sociology, anthropology, history, marketing studies, and psychology (Miller 1995).[1] Miller proposed to analyze the role of consumption and the consumer society in enabling the individuals to create relationship with their surrounding realities. "The consumer society exists when, as in industrial societies today, most people have a minimal relationship to production and distribution such that consumption provides the only arena left to us through which we might potentially forge a relationship with the world" (Miller 1995, 16). Miller also pointed to the need to explore the social, cultural, and moral dimensions of consumption, proposing to critically re-examine debates on the morality of consumption, frequent in colloquial and academic discourses.[2] The contemporary celebration pattern of *shichigosan* is an illustrative example of this kind of discourse. The presence of consumption—at times conspicuous, but not always—is often regarded per se as an obvious sign of the loss of a 'once authentic' and 'true' tradition. Critical voices targeting consumption in the celebration of *shichigosan* emerged at various times during its history over the last two to three centuries. In this regard, Miller emphasizes that it is useless to view consumption itself

as moral or not; instead, the analyst should turn his or her attention to the use actors make of consumption within the concrete ritual context (Miller 1987).[3] The works of Douglas, Isherwood, Miller, McCracken, and others demonstrate that the relationship of individuals with objects extends beyond mere utility and materiality. The consumption of goods and other non-tangible artifacts is used to multiple purposes and needs, whether basic or imagined. Goods and their consumption help people to express individual and group identities, distinguish the self from the other, manage, shape, and organize interpersonal relationships.[4] In this understanding, material culture is an inherent element of our social world, and it is meaningless to make judgments regarding its morality.

History and Consumption

In the past few decades, numerous works on the history of consumption were produced. These studies look upon the particular sociocultural and economic conditions that gave rise to the modern consumer society and mass consumption tracing back their roots into the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Whereas the first generation of scholars focused geographically on the West (European and North American contexts), recently numerous accounts document the history of consumer society in non-Western societies. These studies indicate that the evolution of consumer society and consumer culture is not the privilege of the Western world; on the contrary, non-Western societies have their own consumption history distinguished by particular characteristics owing to the local sociocultural conditions. In many aspects, these histories developed independently from Western influences, even if, as Trentmann points out, starting from the late twentieth century, the manifold globalization processes cause an ever-increasing interdependency among disparate contexts (Trentmann 2004).

Among all historical accounts of consumption, works which shed light on the evolution of celebrations and the relation between commerce and celebration are the most relevant to the present study. In the already mentioned studies of Schmidt on the most popular American festivities, such as New Year's, St. Valentine's Day, Christmas, and Easter, the author examines the development of patterns and meanings within the sphere of the market (1995). The author proposes to view the interplay between the market and observer as an expression of cultural creativity, a dynamic intertwined relationship between cultural production and consumption.

Consumption, in his view, represents a democratic world where luxury and fashion, combined with self-fulfillment, "subverted the fixedness of hierarchy" (Schmidt 1995, 33). Festivities also provide rhythm to the calendar year, and thus, they are often used by the market as occasions for modern merchandizing. The market also introduces significant new elements to the festivities in the form of minor common rites (such as, e.g. the custom of greeting card exchange). Pleck, on the other hand, argues that the escalation of lavish family feasts cannot be simply explained as solely driven by the market (2000). 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 came to be seen as requisites for the creation of ritual experiences that centered on the celebration of family life (Pleck 2000, 54–58). The author individuates the early nineteenth century as the period when family rituals gradually became involved in consumerism and in the display of status, social standing, and wealth. Today, gifts, food, and drink are provided by the market expressing abundance and providing the observer with status. Whereas the marketplace significantly contributes to the escalation of consumption, it is important to see that consumers use goods and services in a conscious way.

Pleck says that American festivities in the Victorian era were seen by the Protestant middle class as "[…] a solution to the social changes created by the industrial revolution", and as such they "[…] functioned as active agents of social change" (Pleck 2000, 234). Whereas initially family rituals were thought of by Victorians as a means to protect family life from consumerism (such as spending, growth of commerce, and industry), consumerism came to be embraced to an ever greater extent. Families learned to use goods to enhance their festive occasions, and in turn, the agents of the market, department stores, florists, sellers of greeting cards, and confectioners did their best to render these occasions more elaborate and glamorous. This development in American festivities stirred criticism of materialism, and consumption became seen as "profaning the sacred meaning of the occasion" (Pleck 2000, 236). On the other hand, consumer and mass culture contributed to the standardization of family rituals. Pleck also notes that while in the past American celebrations majorly reflected family ideals, today they upheld individualist values which are increasingly pluralist and consumerist.

Marketplace and Consumption

Grant McCracken's work had a great impact on the study of consumption and consumer culture. He investigated, among other things, the constitution of the cultural meaning objectified by goods, and the factors that influence this process (McCracken 1986). While acknowledging the importance of the cultural context from which meaning is drawn by the consumer, McCracken identified the marketplace (using case studies from North America) as one of the main platforms where meaning appropriation and meaning transfer take place. The range of choice in the meaning allows individuals to select the most appropriate object and its associated property. Individuals make use of meanings appropriated by goods for self-defining as this—the author notes—is left largely undefined in contemporary North American culture. McCracken also pointed to the mobile character of meaning and underlined that meaning is in constant transition (McCracken 1986, 71–73). Importantly, McCracken's work placed the marketplace back into the overall picture of consumption theory. The marketplace emerged as the main arena within which the transfer of meaning from goods to individuals takes place, advertising, fashion, and rituals serving as instruments for this transfer.

In McCracken's theory, ritual as an instrument of cultural meaning transfer comprises rituals of exchange, possession, personal grooming, and divestment (1986, 77). Ritual as a complex communication mode, makes use of symbols, and thus, can effectively affirm or transform meaningful properties such as cultural categories, symbolic acts, and symbols. So, for example, rites of passage that mark transitions in the individual's life cycle, imply a transfer of meaning associated with one of the life stages, social role, or position. Stages and positions are viewed as cultural categories, each of which is associated with a given set of symbolic properties. The four ritual types defined by McCracken as those involved in meaning transfer have an explicit function in the process of appropriation, transfer, or manipulation of cultural meaning. So, for example, gift-giving is an exchange ritual where the gift-giver chooses an object that he or she finds appropriate for the relation to be established with the gift-recipient. Again, possession rituals are enacted to personalize objects that come from a mass production mode.[5] Through possession rituals, these objects are turned into personal objects, they become vested with properties that are informed by the owner's desire. Through the ritual, individuals give their definition to objects, and through objects, they construct ideas of self as well as of their social relations.

McCracken's theory of meaning transfer finds application in the analyses of the contemporary *shichigosan* ritual. As it will emerge in the following chapters, several of the processes described occur during the preparation and celebration. The lengthy procedure of beauty preparation in the photo studio can be seen as a grooming ritual, during which the child is prepared for the photo or the public appearance. This stage may employ conspicuous consumption practices as well (see more in chapters 'Business Sector, Media, and Religious Institutions' and 'Constructing the Ritual: Dress, Photographs, Actors, and Script'). Gift-giving, even if not pervasive within *shichigosan*, is a culturally and socially meaningful act for Japanese observers through which kin and non-kin relations are carefully weighed, reconfirmed, or established. Several parts of the celebration can be seen as possession rituals. For example, the traditional gift of candy given to children for *shichigosan,* and produced today in mass manufacturing processes, becomes personalized prior to the celebration by the shrine maids wrapping each one in bags appositely designed by famous designers (see chapter 'Business Sector, Media, and Religious Institutions'). In all these cases, goods objectify concrete and selected meanings which are then transferred to persons, thus illustrating the diverse use that individuals make of goods and objects in an effort to achieve the desired aims.[6]

In brief, it has been understood that the influence between market and consumption is, indeed, reciprocal. On one hand, consumption is based on free personal choice, which renders the consumer active in contrast to the passive actor which used to emerge in earlier studies of consumption. Choice is informed by the surrounding micro and macro level cultural context of belonging; however, ultimately it is always negotiated on the individual level. On the other hand, it has to be recognized that commercial interests manipulate received ideas and ideologies to serve the purposes of the market. Advertising images and publicity texts are selected according to these interests and then channeled to consumers. Cultural images are thus often reshaped, reinterpreted, and amplified to render commercial interests and aims appealing to consumers. Although studies in consumer culture theory (CCT) emphasize that even in this process consumers are not passive recipients of information or messages, rather they act as "interpretive agents" (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 875). Symbolic meanings enclosed in advertisements and marketing devices are indeed deciphered by consumers and subsequently reinterpreted, appropriated, and personalized. In this regard, Miller pointed out that the communication between production agents and consumers needs to be

studied as a dialectical process in which producers, retailers, and marketers adjust their products and modes of marketing and communication to the needs and preferences of the consumer (Miller 1987).

The present-day popularity of some of the Japanese rituals, among them, *shichigosan*, is often explained in scholarly and popular literature as the result of commercial interests and media. Indeed, the influence of the marketplace must not be overlooked in the overall analysis of the meaning and role of contemporary rituals in Japan. Hints to the allegedly ancient roots of *shichigosan* in marketing and popular texts, for example, reinforce associations with the notion of tradition in the eyes of observers. These kinds of allusions evoke positive responses in customers; and industries involved in the celebration, such as the Japanese clothing industry, are well aware of it. However, it needs also to be underlined that market forces alone cannot account for the popularity and continuity of customs. In this regard, the studies and theories presented above can make a valuable contribution to the understanding of the present-day popularity of *shichigosan* as well as of other popular rituals, such as the first shrine visit of the baby (*hatsumiyamairi* 初宮参り) or *yakudoshi* (厄年, ritual observances connected to the belief about calamity or unfortunate years). These phenomena need to be placed in the sociocultural circumstances surrounding Japanese individuals and families, in which commercial profits are but one part of the phenomenon and not the general and exhaustive explanation of the phenomenon. In contemporary industrial societies, including that of Japan, consumer culture acts as a resource for the definition of self, values, and meaning; in other words, a source through which people "construct narratives of identity" (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 871). I hope to demonstrate the validity of this argument through the case study of *shichigosan*.

Consumption Theory and Ritual Studies

Many of the works introduced above 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 the redistribution and even destruction of resources on ritual occasions such as weddings or funerals (Kingsolver 2002, 445). Ritual destruction of wealth is known also in contemporary Asian contexts, such as the prac-

tice of burning paper money in some regions of China (Yang 2000). Paper money, and sometimes even real money, is reported to be burned for the gods' birthdays, as offerings to the gods when asking for help and success in life, or at funerals and other ritual events (Yang 2000, 479).[7]

After an initial period when scholars were exploring ritual consumption primarily in nonindustrialized, small-scale social settings, attention turned to the analysis of ritual and consumption in urbanized modern societies. The innovative approach offered by Douglas and Isherwood with regard to the relation of people to the material world, highlighted the 'cultural' aspect of goods (1984). They demonstrated how goods are used by individuals to mark the significance of particular events and how goods utilized for the creation of a ritual experience help effectively distinguish festive, extraordinary occasions from ordinary, 'low frequency' events. Objects involved in the ritual experience, such as food and drink, decoration items, clothing, and accessories represent 'high rank' products, as they are loaded with symbolic meanings and communicate the special importance of the event (Douglas and Isherwood 1984, 127). Appadurai further developed this notion in his study on the social biographies of goods where he called attention to the necessity to analyze the entire life cycle of objects and examine the values attached to them over a period of time. He also shed light on the relation of rites of passage to consumption concerning the issue of periodicity of accumulation and distribution in the modern marketplace (Appadurai 2006, 97–98).[8]

Most recently, the relatively young field of consumer culture studies is contributing in a major way to the study of modern ritual practice as part of consumption culture. In the focus of this field, known as CCT,[9] are the sociocultural, psychological, and symbolic dimensions of consumer behavior, identity construction through consumption, and the role of the cultural context in consumption. CCT does not view the consumer as a passive actor upon whom marketplace processes exercise their power. Rather the consumer is an individual who makes conscious choices and actively shapes his or her culture and identity. Culture is not viewed as a definite set of shared beliefs and values belonging to a given group; in other words, it is not seen as a "homogenous system […] shared by a member of society", rather it is seen as something that is continuously negotiated by individuals and groups within their everyday realities (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 869). In this perspective, the consumer emerges as culture producer, and consumption as one of the foremost human practices

in contemporary societies through which individuals take part in shaping their social realities (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 873).

Several studies coming from this field explore the ritualistic aspects of consumer behavior within modern ritual practices.[10] Rook's essay, although primarily examining personal grooming as an example of ritualistic consumer behavior, has important implications for the study of ritual in contemporary contexts too (1985). Rook argues that the division of the components of ritual experience into 'sacred' and 'less sacred' is not always constructive. He 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 situations" (Rook 1985, 254). Ritual is analyzed first of all as a communication mode that uses symbols which continue to play an important role in communication practices. Symbols are used to express and reaffirm social ideals and personal values, and rituals and ritualistic behaviors provide space for the enactment of these ideals and values.

The dichotomy of sacred and profane has been applied in extensive consumer behavior research conducted by Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry who explored the sacred dimensions of consumption (Belk et al. 1989). Russell Belk and his research team have developed a theoretical framework, mainly informed by the sociology of religion, and applied it with the aim of examining particular types of consumption through which modern consumers may experience the sacred, and the transcendent. The authors analyzed processes by which consumers understand particular aspects of consumption as set apart, extraordinary, and sacred. The notion of 'sacred' refers here to things, experiences, times, and places that people feel and consider as extraordinary, set apart, or extremely important, in brief, as something that qualitatively differs from the everyday. These are usually things that express core values, norms, and convictions. The notion of sacred is thus applied in a context that conventionally has always been thought to belong to the secular sphere, in other words, in the context of consumption in modern industrial society. By implementing conventional scholarly theories on religion—rejecting Weberian separation of science and nature—the authors propose to see consumption in contemporary society as a vehicle for experiencing the boundaries between the sacred and profane. In the authors' view, these boundaries are strategically manipulated by the consumer (Belk et al. 1989, 30).

The basic premise from which the authors start is that people in all sociocultural circumstances feel the need of transcendence and of extraordinary experience, and consumption may be perceived by many as a transcendental vehicle. This premise is closely connected to the theory about the secularization of religion in contemporary society. Accordingly, traditional religious institutions in the West are failing to provide extraordinary experience to individuals, as a consequence, those spheres of our social reality that used to be viewed as belonging to the secular (such as the world of politics and science), today are witnessing a certain degree of sacralization. Moreover, Belk et al. argue that consumption might be regarded by many as a realm where experiences that transcend everyday life can be encountered and created (1989).

Belk and his team identify seven processes through which things, places, times, or experiences can be imbued with sacredness (in other words perceived and treated by the consumer as more significant, powerful, and extraordinary than the self). These processes are enacted purposively by consumers in an effort to create sacred meaning in their lives, and they are, namely: ritual, pilgrimage, quintessence, gift-giving, collecting, inheritance, and external sanction. Ritual is regarded as a process through which ordinary objects are symbolically transformed and become sacred. This theory closely draws on Kopytoff's singularization theory where singularization refers to the process through which objects/commodities are taken away from their usual sphere of use (Kopytoff 1986).[11] This process, while not identical to 'sacralization', makes 'sacralization' a possibility. In the authors' understanding, rituals such as festivities of the calendar year and the life cycle help contemporary consumer distinguish between sacred and profane, 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 Japanese folklore literature for the interpretation of the significance of traditional seasonal festivities in the life of agricultural communities.[12] So, for example, Ishii offers a theory that draws a parallel between traditional and modern seasonal festivities (Ishii 2009). In his view, modern versions of seasonal festivities can be regarded as *hare* occasions in a sense that they, too, divide the calendar year. However, today this division is made by the marketplace which exploits festive events for the promotion and sale of goods and services. Ishii's explanation diverges from that of Belk et al. as he highlights the commercial aspect of the process, at the same time implicitly pointing to

the loss of the 'authenticity' of ritual occasions that are today surrounded by consumer culture (Ishii 2009, 205, 211).

While Belk's theory might find applicability not only in the realm of consumption but also in the study of cases of contemporary ritual practices embedded in dense consumer culture, it is important to note that the division of contemporary consumer experience into sacred and profane may prove to be problematic, above all because of the ambiguity of these concepts and the difficulty of interpretation in a diverse cultural context which may confer different meanings to them. Without going so far as to label parts of consumption as 'sacred', it may suffice to examine the ways in which modern observers add further meaning to their rituals through consumption practices. My assumption here is that consumption is not 'emptying' or 'taking away' something 'valuable' and 'precious' from the ritual under examination (*shichigosan*), but it acts as a meaningful act within the ritual. For the scope of analysis, I therefore decided to treat various elements of the contemporary pattern of the *shichigosan* ritual as a complex set of events that include both consumption during the preparative phase and photographing, as well as parts regarded as the 'traditional' building up of the ritual event, that is, the shrine worship and the family feast. In this way, I wish to avoid simplifying approaches that would focus on the 'commodification of ritual', often seen as both cause for and proof of the loss of the meaningfulness of the occasion.

Case Study of a Western Ritual Practice

The scholarship on modern ritual practice that would give space to an analysis of consumption within the ritual experience is not abundant. While the above-mentioned studies on North American festivities (Schmidt 1995; Pleck 2000) do take into account consumption and its role, their primary focus is the historical evolution of the festivities. A thorough analysis of consumption practices within the modern ritual of Thanksgiving in North America is provided by Wallendorf and Arnould (1991). Since case studies of this kind are few in number, I describe the findings of the survey in more detail than is usual, drawing connections also to my own study where this is the case.

The festive occasion of Thanksgiving is a "collective ritual that celebrates material abundance enacted through feasting" and consumption is interpreted "as a discourse among consumers about cultural categories"

(Wallendorf and Arnould 1991, 13). One of the main aims of the study is to define the larger universal themes which become enacted during the ritual as these are often expressed only implicitly. Indeed, it has been noted by scholars of rituals (see also previous chapter) that actors themselves are only rarely able and/or willing to explain explicitly and verbally the meaning of ritual. Another important issue concerns change, particularly the controversy between change and stability with regard to ritual practice. Participants tend to consider the Thanksgiving tradition as timeless and changeless. However, as personal memories reach no further back than two generations, the authors see in the missing longer perspective the reason why, on the contrary, changes can occur relatively rapidly even if veiled by the ideology of stable and timeless traditions.

Regarding minor alterations in ritual practice, Wallendorf and Arnould point to the flexible property of rituals that enables them to incorporate and tolerate variations, mistakes, and divergences from the etiquette deemed as 'proper' by participants. The degree of flexibility, though, depends on the functionality of the family as institution. "When functioning properly, the ritual, like the family it represents, is robust and tolerant of variation" (Wallendorf and Arnould 1991, 18). In this case, divergences can even reinforce family solidarity and core values. The study of Thanksgiving also touches upon recent changes in consumption customs when homemade foods are gradually replaced by food items processed and offered by the market. The question of how mass-produced food items can serve a ritual purpose, a question relevant to most contemporary ritual practice, beginning with Christmas in the West to New Year's in Japan, is answered by the authors by saying that foods served at ritual occasions are 'quintessential', or in other words, strongly representative to the event.[13] Authors are here adopting the theoretical approach developed by Belk et al. who viewed quintessence as an instrument through which sacralization can occur, in other words when ordinary objects are treated by consumers as extraordinary (Belk et al. 1989). So, for example, family recipes, or adding special ingredients to purchased food, help transform food into ritual food, that is, 'sacralize' commodities (Wallendorf and Arnould 1991). The 'temporal separation' of ritual food—used only on the occasion of the ritual and not in the everyday context—is another way to singularize industrially produced and purchased food. However, as the authors note, changes in the festive menu occur regularly in the history of ritual, and this shows that even quintessential or symbolic foods are reinterpreted over time in order to adapt them to changed demands and circumstances.

In a similar way, in *shichigosan*, for example, the candy-gift (*chitoseame*) is a quintessential food item symbolizing the ritual itself. Its temporal separation is manifest in the fact that it is sold only in the period of the celebration, during the months of October and November. Indeed, for many adults *chitoseame* is a quintessential element of the celebration, the sight of which evokes powerful images and memories of the family celebration during their childhood. The question of change versus tradition, and the tension that this opposition generates, is salient in discourses connected to *shichigosan* as well. These emerge in popular discourses concerning the 'authenticity' and 'functionality' of the ritual not only in the present day, but also in the past, for example, in the interwar period when issues of modernization and changes in views on child-rearing contrasted existing modes of celebrating (see more on this in chapters 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage' and 'Constructing the Ritual: Dress, Photographs, Actors, and Script'). It can be said that the antagonistic relation between tradition and change is central to any discourse on ritual, be it academic or popular. What the socioeconomic processes are that generate these discourses are addressed in the following chapter which also presents several cases of ritual change from the postwar Japanese ritual calendar.

Notes

1. See also Miller's *A Theory of Shopping* (1998) and *The Dialectics of Shopping* (2001).
2. Consumption is not good or bad, rather consumption is used by the individual and groups to construct moral and other projects (Miller 1995, 27).
3. Miller argues that behind many of these assumptions "lies the idea that at some earlier period humanity lived in a firm relationship to the world around it, within which it was socialised as part of larger cosmological, moral, and utilitarian projects. Today, by contrast, we simply choose/purchase our worlds with a largely ephemeral and irrational lack of genuine concern" (Miller 1995, 22).
4. Recently, Trentmann called attention to the need to shift focus from private consumption, and include in the research agenda the aspects of public consumption, collective identity, and public consumption acts (Trentmann 2004, 390).
5. See also Miller 1987.

6. Divestment ritual is not typical for *shichigosan* but in some cases families may turn to this kind of act when, for example, they decide to hand over, give away (or sell) the old ceremonial clothing of their child.
7. The economy of waste and ritual expenditure of surplus has been approached in an innovative way by Georges Bataille who developed his theory to explain excessive ritual consumption in modern societies. For an elaboration of Bataille's theory and application to the case of China, see Yang 2000.
8. As an important case, he mentions Christmas gift-giving where the co-ordination of accumulation and distribution of goods are in direct relation with the successful outcome of the event.
9. CCT is defined as the "theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings" (Arnould and Thompson 2005). For a detailed overview of studies and research results from this field, see the authors' essay.
10. See Arnould and Thompson 2005 for a list of such works.
11. See also Appadurai's decommoditization (1986).
12. This theme is further explained in chapter 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage'.
13. These are often foods closely associated to the ritual event. They become seen as symbols of the event (turkey or fish as Christmas food in the West, or *mochi* [rice cakes] or *sekihan* [red beans] as augural ritual food/offering in Japan).

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Consumer Culture and Changes to the Ritual Calendar in Postwar Urban Japan

The particular socioeconomic and cultural context in which ritual is embedded, represents the broad contextual frame and the reservoir of meaning from which observers draw the particular range of meanings pertinent to them. In the case of the contemporary practice of *shichigosan*, there are a number of factors that can be viewed as influential in shaping its popular patterns and associated meanings. Some of these are related to issues of national economy that influence individuals' financial resources and the development of markets, others are social factors that include changed views on children, alterations in family structure, birth rates, women's position in society and within the family, and other kinds of shifts in the hierarchy of values. This chapter, therefore, will first address the general social and economic processes leading to the rise of a highly developed consumer culture in Japan. It will also provide a brief description of the most salient features of Japanese consumer culture. Second, it will deal with the most important changes that have affected the postwar ritual calendar in urban Japan. I pay attention to these changes since the evolution of *shichigosan* has to be placed into the greater picture of the Japanese ritual calendar that comprises both traditional and newly adopted festivities. The previous two chapters introduced general theoretical approaches relevant to the main subject of this book, whereas the present chapter presents data specific to Japan.

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Consumption and Its Socioeconomic Foundations

Scholarship on consumption has long been dominated by case studies from Western contexts that allowed a view of this phenomenon as unique to Western history.[1] Since the 1990s, however, a growing number of studies analyzing non-Western consumption histories demonstrate that single regions have their own path and dynamics of development leading to the growth of consumer culture. The phenomenon is definitely not unique to one society alone; rather the path to its rise can be seen as unique to the region under study. In this regard, Lemire states that "[W]hat is apparent is that consumerism was not 'imported' into Asia from an external birthplace, but emerged over the seventeenth and later centuries as an organic expression of regional forces" (Lemire 2012, 321).[2]

Starting from the 1990s, a growing number of works concerning consumption in Japan presented so far unnoticed and neglected aspects of Japanese culture and society.[3] These works cover a wide range of topics from material culture to the subculture of consumer groups. This scholarship demonstrates that particular consumer practices already existed in seventeenth- to eighteenth-century Japan when the influence of the West can be said to have been insignificant and superfluous. Several of the modern attitudes to consumption in Japan are rooted in times that precede the introduction of modern industrial production, well before the arrival of the influence of Western lifestyles to Japan. In this regard, Francks argues that the quick transformation of Japan into an elaborate consumer society in the postwar period was mainly possible because of its long history of consumption (Francks 2009a, 11–19).[4] This development, nearly 200 years ago, laid down the base for a consumption-oriented economy and mass consumption culture. The 'pre-existing' tastes and practices of pre-Meiji Japan (prior to 1868) continued to greatly influence the development of industry, mass production, and, ultimately, mass consumption in modern times (Francks 2009a, 220). This is, however, not to say that we can speak about an eighteenth- or nineteenth-century consumer society in Japan.[5] However, the long history of the consumption of goods, including luxurious ones, that was embedded in a developed urban culture, accounts for the rise of the distinctive features of contemporary Japanese consumer behavior, such as intense fashion awareness, refined taste, and strong concern for the appropriateness of goods to status and situation (Francks 2009a, 222).

Among the historical factors that shaped Japan's consumer culture, we need to mention an early and intense urbanization in the feudal period

which led to the development of a highly sophisticated urban culture in certain regions, more precisely in the major towns of the period. The feudal era, named after its reigning Shogun dynasty as the Tokugawa era (1603–1867), witnessed an unprecedented urbanization that centered around Tokyo (then named Edo), Osaka, and Kyoto, where a flourishing merchant urban culture developed also due to a peculiar political situation (see chapter 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage'). This historical condition played an important role in the standardization of *shichigosan* patterns as well. The name itself became known during this period, overwriting several other names that, until then, were in use for childhood rituals. A detailed discussion of this phase in the development of the ritual pattern will constitute the main subject of the next chapter.

The wide-ranging modern industrialization of the country began in the second half of the nineteenth century and grew in intensity in the first decades of the twentieth century. It was during this period that the first modern corporations were established and modern production modes enabled the rise of industrial mass production (Gregory 1975). These changes had an enormous impact on consumption. Goods produced with modern technologies became cheaper and this, in turn, enhanced popular consumption, including the consumption of goods that in earlier times had been the privilege of elite classes. Newly established department stores were the first and most visible marks of modern consumption. Famous department stores, such as the Mitsukoshi, played an important role in the formation of the urban lifestyle and soon became seen by the public as symbols of modern life. They acted as guides to modern consumption practices and introduced the population to the latest trends in material culture, items of Western fashion and lifestyle, technological innovations for housework, and so on (Tipton 2008).[6] Department stores also emerged as pioneers in new marketing and advertisement techniques. They launched special thematic sales that were enriched with related events such as exhibitions and lectures, seen today as the first examples of modern advertisement (Jones 2010).[7] The beginning of hedonistic consumption, characterized as consumption that not only fulfilled needs but also provided pleasure and recreation, is sometimes also located in the period between the 1920s and 1930s, even though this kind of consumption can already be found in earlier historical periods; the difference was that it was now vested with much greater dimensions (Clammer 1997).

It must be not overlooked that these processes and phenomena were, above all, representative of urban centers in prewar Japan, and a large part of the countryside continued to live in a traditional manner based primarily on agricultural production.[8] Furthermore, the Second World War interrupted many of the above described processes and trends. Nevertheless, it can be said that they largely defined the direction of the development after the end of the war. The two decades after the end of the war were periods of intense change, especially in rural Japan. Agricultural reforms, industrialization, and rapid urbanization resulted in major transformations in the lifestyles and customs that had ruled the lives of villagers for centuries. After the hardships of the immediate postwar years, economic and social reforms were relaunched, and from mid-1950s, the country entered the era of high-speed economic growth. In the course of the 1950s–1960s, Japan was transformed from an agricultural to an increasingly urbanized industrial society and its economy became characterized by large-scale industrialization, mass-scale production, and a growing service sector (Tipton 2008). This development produced rising standards of living not only in urban centers but in rural areas as well. The difference between urban and rural lifestyles was quickly diminishing and the urban lifestyle quickly spread from the metropolitan areas to the rest of the country. This development was assisted by intense migration from rural areas to large urban centers, driven by the employment opportunities that these centers offered. The dissemination of new trends, views, and knowledge informing urban lifestyle, were propagated and channeled to the population by the media and the world of advertisements. From the early 1960s, a new form of media, the television, started to exercise a growing influence (Clammer 1997).

It was under these circumstances that Japan was gradually developing a consumer-oriented economy. It has been argued that one of the most notable characteristics of Japanese economic growth during this period was a "veritable consumers' revolution" or, in other words, consumption revolution, a term which started to enter usage in analysts' language from the end of the 1950s (Gregory 1975, 859).[9] From the late 1950s to the early 1960s, consumer expenditures doubled and in the following period, up to 1973, it increased fourfold. Standards of living reached, and soon overtook, those of many European countries.[10] The domestic consumer market played a crucial role in this unprecedented economic growth as it stimulated production as well as the investments of Japanese firms (Francks 2009a). Ronald Dore, in one of the first sociological works on postwar

urban Japan, *City Life in Japan* (1958), found evident signs of a shaping modern consumer culture in the 1950s. Dore's work described patterns of consumption in the everyday life of the families in an urban district of Tokyo, individuating goods, the possession of which provided symbolic value for the lives of the individuals. In particular, electrical devices, such as refrigerators and electric fans, were seen as important symbols of economic and social status.[11] The rapid spread of electrical household and kitchen appliances has also had an enormous impact on Japanese housewives' time-use and time-saving (Macnaughtan 2012).

The 1950s–1960s witnessed the rise of the so-called middle-class ideology. By the end of the 1950s, 70% of Japanese people considered themselves belonging to the middle class. Thanks to high-speed economic growth and rising incomes, this middle-class lifestyle was increasingly identified with a consumer lifestyle.[12] Furthermore, in the 1950s–1960s, together with growing consumption expenditures for goods and housing, the Japanese began to spend more on leisure, education, and childcare. In 1951, Dore's analyses of families' expenditure showed that even families with low income tended to spend a considerable sum on their children. The sphere of childcare was "most pervaded by the competitive desire to "keep up with the Jones's"" (Dore 1958, 62). The desire to provide for their children represented a significant burden for almost every family in the neighborhood of the study. Schooling occupied a significant share of the expenses related to child-rearing. By the end of the 1960s, costs related to the education of children, and to child-rearing in general, came to occupy a large proportion of family budgets (White 1987; Tsuru 2005). This development is not unique to Japan, in South Korea in the second half of the 1980s, when the rate of consumption expenditure witnessed a rapid growth, children's education was leading the list of items to which excessive expenditure was directed (followed by leisure and travel) (Trentmann 2004).[13]

During the 1970s, leisure and entertainment began to receive a growing priority in Japanese society. Working hours declined with the move from a six- to a five-day week, and the weekend was used for leisure activities and shopping (Gregory 1975). On the other hand, economic growth slowed down and along with it, the negative effects of the previous period of uncontrolled industrialization and urbanization began to emerge. These effects were diverse in nature, including economic, environmental, and social. The early 1970s were also a turning point with regard to the birth rate, which began to decline during this period, a trend that has not since

been reversed.[14] It has been argued that the high cost of child-rearing together with raised standards of education is among the reasons for the decreasing number of children in society (Yoshizumi 1995).[15] Japanese families feel they cannot afford to financially provide for more than one or two children. On the other hand, the smaller number of children in society brought about the growth of children's 'consumer value' in the marketplace (Kondō 1999), as discussed in detail in chapter 'Business Sector, Media, and Religious Institutions'.

The decline in the number of children and the growth of child-rearing-related expenditure have also affected family celebrations. Celebration patterns changed most quickly in urban areas where altered housing conditions, transformed family structures, and the improving economic condition of the population as a whole influenced the way important events in the individual's life were perceived and celebrated. The value orientations of the Japanese, in particular those regarding the family, have undergone significant transformation. The extended family model (*ie* 家), typical in the prewar period, gave way to the nuclear type model (*kazoku* 家族), especially in urban areas, and this brought about a shrinking of the size of the average family, an overall alteration of kin relations and inheritance system, and, accordingly, a complete change to the corresponding lifestyle. The improved economic conditions of the families and the intensified attention directed to children had a significant effect on celebrations related to children. Lavish modes of celebration were becoming popular, and rituals such as *shichigosan* also came to be seen as occasions for expressing parental indulgence.

The 1970s not only marked the era of a consumer boom but also the rapid growth in the advertisement and service industry, and in the development of mass media. Media was promoting an American style of consumption that was more casual and leisurely (Minowa et al. 2011).[16] It was also the period when Japanese society began to be described as an information-consumer society and Japanese people as information maniacs (*infomaniakku*), both characteristics implying significant alterations in consumer behavior (Galbraith 2011).[17] The five years following 1986 are known as the era of the bubble economy, an era characterized by several divergent social phenomena. The term *shinjinrui* (新人類 new human breed) entered into language use as a label for the generation that had not experienced the Second World War and whose values and aspirations differed radically from those of the previous generation. Members of this and the following generation, called *shin-shinjinrui* (新新人類 new-new

breed), are distinguished by more individualistic values, less willingness to follow the stern philosophy of their parents toward life and work, and in constant search of entertainment and novelty. Importantly, this generation already regards consumption as a way of life.

In 1989, Emperor Akihito succeeded to the throne, and with that, a new era named Heisei (meaning 'Peace and Success') was initiated in Japan. With the new period, a prolonged economic recession, with no precedent in Japan's postwar history, began. A number of socioeconomic factors—among which was declining population growth (aging of the population and low birth rate) and competition with Asian economies, characterized by a surplus of labor force—have been listed as background to the Heisei recession (Hamada 2003). Problems deriving from the aging of society became a much-discussed theme and a concern of the government, and today this continues to represent a major problem that awaits a solution. The decade following the collapse of the bubble economy of 1989 is also known as the 'lost decade' (*ushinawareta jūnen* 失われた10年). However, due to continuing hardships and lack of recovery, the subsequent decade is also often included, giving rise to the label of 'lost two decades' (*ushinawareta nijūnen* 失われた20年).

The collapse of the bubble economy and the accompanying worsening of the economic environment also left their mark on consumption. Modesty and simplicity emerged as priorities, even though this did not mean significant withdrawal from consumption in general (Minowa et al. 2011); only that the quest for extravagancies and excessive consumption diminished. The beginning of the new millennium brought about a number of social problems, too. The disparity between the poor and the rich has become more visible, thus undermining the postwar ideology of a homogenous middle-class Japan. Economic difficulties forced Japanese companies to break with the decades-long custom of the lifetime employment system and this brought uncertainty and insecurity to the job market. The long history of almost nonexistent unemployment has come to an end and today patterns of employment are undergoing transformation. Alternative forms, such as temporary or part-time jobs, produce new social subgroups, for example, the 'freeter' (employed in part-time or temporary jobs) and NEET (not in employment). These changes have implications for consumption practices, as well.

The above-described phenomena are closely connected to changes in the life course of the Japanese people. An increased freedom of choice regarding the preferred life course option is notable among the young generation (Ishii 2009, 204–207). Until only a few decades ago, life course choices

were typically standardized, with marriage and childbirth as the only viable and socially acceptable option. Even if this pattern is still the most socially approved and opted for, the range of choices is now wider and more individualized. Due to the delayed age of marriage and a shift in the priorities of the younger generations, the proportion of single people in diverse age groups is continuously rising. So, for example, there is wide discussion and criticism of the 'parasite singles' (*parasaito shinguru*), young singles that continue to live with their parents without contributing significantly to household expenses.[18] Another group is the so-called *arafo*, single women over forty, with education and career, rebelling against traditional views concerning the role of women in society and attracting much attention for their spending power—principally directed on themselves. Though not singles, but also enjoying considerable financial means, are the so-called 'dinks' (double income no kids), pointing to couples with no children but enjoying dual incomes (Haghirian 2011b). The number of singles belonging to the older generation over sixty is also rising. This 'silver market' sector takes a greater share in consumption, and thus attracts the increasing attention of the marketplace in current Japan.[19] The emergence and role of these social subgroups is also significant because they are distinguished by particular consumer behavioral patterns that represent a challenge to the market, retailers, and producers alike.

Japanese Consumer Culture

One of the first English language sociological analyses of consumer culture in Japan was produced by John Clammer as part of his comprehensive study of Japanese contemporary urban society (Clammer 1997). He argued that a close examination of consumption and consumer behavior patterns is vital for understanding modern Japan. Japan is a heavily urbanized culture where consumption constitutes "a way of life" and the "dominating principle of everyday life" (Clammer 1997, 2–3). Consumption emerges as a cultural form or tool through which individuals express the self, values and opinions, and form and manage networks and kin relations.

In a recent study, Haghirian notes that the Japanese consumer market still poses numerous challenges to the analysts (Haghirian 2011b). This remark points to the importance of contextualizing studies of consumption practices and to the particularities of single consumer societies. In the 1990s, Clammer individuated the issue of status competition among the most significant principles that define consumption behavior

in Japan. Postwar Japan has often been described as a homogenous society with no clearly defined classes, and in this regard, Clammer argues that social equality in Japan is only an ideology and that consumption acts as 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" (Clammer 1997, 6). On the other hand, it has also been noted that group pressures toward conformity still prevail within single consumer sectors, in spite of an increasing pluralization of life choices and a growing trend toward individualization in contemporary Japan (White 1994). This largely defines consumer behavior within a particular sector and counterbalances forces toward differentiation.[20]

In addition, Japanese consumers are described as quality-oriented and intense consumers of fashion and design (Haghirian 2011c). They also lead innovation development in technologies and are noted for their thirst for new technologies and innovations, especially those related to new media (mobile phones, Internet services), readily accepting new technologies, devices, and applications. This kind of behavior, among others, enhances the development of the mobile market (Hentschel 2011).[21] This particular consumer behavior acts as the principal motivator for the market to further develop services and advance innovation, demonstrating an example of the reciprocal influence that works between the market and the consumer. On the other hand, Hentschel notes that these techniques, apart from representing a new kind of consumer communication, also provide major access to the analysis of data on customers' behavior, which in turn pushes forward the process of the reciprocal influence.

The role of the media also needs to be mentioned. The media play an important role in terms of the dissemination of consumer information in a society where information is among the highest priorities of both the marketplace and the individual consumer. The diverse aspects of the interplay between the media and commercial actors as providers of goods and services for the celebration of *shichigosan* on one side, and consumers as ritual observers on the other, constitute one of the leading themes of chapters 'Business Sector, Media, and Religious Institutions' and 'Constructing the Ritual: Dress, Photographs, Actors, and Script'. These chapters describe how print and electronic media that promote services and commodities related to this celebration, act not only as important sources of consumer information, but also as sources of ritual knowledge. The media provide a platform for observers/consumers where experiences of the celebration

can be shared and where doubts and questions related to the organization and celebration of the ritual can be discussed. In this way, the media also contribute to the creation of communities organized along similar interests.[22] The subsequent chapters will discuss not only the influence of the media on ritual-related consumer practices, but also its contribution to the shaping of ritual meaning and pattern in contemporary Japan.

Consumption and Gender

As in other parts of the world, in Japan, too, consumption is highly gendered. The housewife as the controller of everyday consumption in the household has been characterized as the ideal representative of the modern consumer in several industrial societies, and as such, vital to world economics (Miller 1995). In Japan, already in the urban setting of the interwar years, changes in family structure and the separation of work and home brought about a neat division of gender roles in the family as well as in society (Francks 2009b). It is from this period on that Japanese housewives started to be identified on the consuming side (Vogel 1963). Vested with the role of household managers, women usually have control over the family budget and this gives them major access to consumption and to decisions about consumption. With regard to women's major identification with the domestic sphere rather than with the public one, it has been argued that the active participation of women in consumption counterbalances the lesser power that women hold in the public sphere (Skov and Moeran 1995a, b).[23]

The central role of Japanese women in consumption renders them the main target of advertisements and media. A multiplicity of images and messages is channeled to women by the media in Japan. The essays included in the edited volume by Skov and Moeran (1995a) show the multiple contents and the complexity of the meanings these messages represent. Images of the media and advertisements place women in an idealized and fantasy world that is also often stereotyped. Nevertheless, women should not be seen as passive subjects of marketing. Women respond and by means of consumer choice construct their self, and ultimately, in a reciprocal process actively contribute to the shaping of the marketplace and media information (Skov and Moeran 1995b).

In the recent years, an increasing trend toward individualization and a slow but certain change in views on women's position in the society are becoming reflected in changed consumption patterns characterizing female

consumers. Apart from the single groups described above (*arafo*, silver generation, parasite singles), women in present-day Japan are described as more ready, compared to the past, to spend on themselves rather than only on their families. Women's role also represents an important issue in the present work as it is women who are the main organizers of family rituals, including the celebration of *shichigosan*. Mothers take the major role in decisions over the many practical details concerning the organization of *shichigosan*, ranging from the proper timing of the celebration to the selection of place (shrine, restaurant, photo studio), and the selection (purchase, rental) of items for the festive outfits for the whole family. The preliminary search for information is regarded as crucial for the successful outcome of the celebration. Moreover, the new media currently act as one of the most important source not only for consumer information (goods and services used for the celebration), but also for matters of etiquette (proper ritual patterns, information on shrines) and other related information (discussed in chapter 'Constructing the Ritual: Dress, Photographs, Actors, and Script').

Finally, the issue of conspicuous consumption must be addressed both in relation to the *shichigosan* celebration and with regard to consumption in general. Japan is known as the "only "mass luxury market" in the world" where demands of well-off customers exercise a powerful drive for the commercial sector (Haghirian 2011b, xi). The marketplace attentively follows the conspicuous consumption practices of this affluent sector as these often inspire the introduction of new services and goods.[24] With regard to celebration, conspicuous consumption has always accompanied rituals, even though this has provoked critiques in society both in the past and in the present. In *shichigosan*, certain patterns of conspicuous consumption are traceable as early as the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries, although this were limited to a very narrow elite sector of the population. A further example of conspicuous spending in *shichigosan* is the pattern that is still to be found in certain regions of Japan, in particular in the prefectures of Saitama and Chiba. In these cases, however, the particular family and inheritance structure traditional to the region is the underlying factor for the persistence of this particular pattern, a more detailed description of which follows in chapter 'Business Sector, Media, and Religious Institutions'. On other hand, in the postwar decades more general changes to the family structure, and in views on children, have brought about the rise of heightened expectations concerning child-rearing standards and a noticeable growth in child-rearing-related expenditure. These factors,

combined with a favorable economic situation, have produced a sector that tends to indulge children (also) through conspicuous patterns of celebrations (see chapter 'Business Sector, Media, and Religious Institutions'). The following chapters will discuss some of the current trends in *shichigo-san* that involve the demand for extravagant commodities and services (in the form of clothes, travel, photographic services, and others).

Culture and Consumption

'Market' and 'culture' are sometimes regarded not only as two distinct forces working within societies, but also as two forces in antagonistic position to each other (Trentmann 2004). However, consumption needs to be studied as embedded in the particular cultural context to which it belongs. Indeed, culture largely defines the salient features of the given consumer culture which has its own particular characteristics in every society. The present work does not pose itself the aim to individuate and analyze all factors, cultural or not, underlying the consumption practices of Japanese consumers as this is too complex an issue requiring a study of its own. Here I simply would like to give some examples of those factors that can be regarded as influential for Japanese consumer behavior related to modern ritual practice.

The role of cultural factors in consumption and consumer behavior is receiving increasing attention not only with regard to rituals, but also more generally in consumer research. Cultural factors are acknowledged as partial explanations, for example, irrational decisions in consumer behavior and in consumer choice. Irrational behavior is said to be informed by beliefs and knowledge that stem from a particular cultural context, such as values, preferences, superstitions, beliefs, and others. In this regard, Yuko Minowa points to commonsense knowledge and internalized beliefs as important factors influencing consumption practices in Japan (Minowa 2012).[25] Through examples of New Year's celebrations, the tea ceremony and other Japanese traditional holidays, the author examines the influence that "tacit knowledge" has on consumers' attitudes to celebrations.[26] The author labels these rituals "transcendental consumption rituals". Whilst I agree with the author that significant cultural ideas and notions do indeed need to be taken into account when interpreting consumer behavior, I also think that it is important to make a distinction between ritual and consumption. Ritual practice entails consumption and consumption in modern society is occurring through the marketplace. However, ritual is

not only about consumption. It is a much more complex form, within which consumption is often an instrument to achieve one part of the desired goals and purposes. Therefore, to speak about knowledge and beliefs affecting 'transcendental consumption rituals' is to blur the difference between concepts such as 'ritual', be it transcendental or less, and 'consumption practice as part of ritual'. Beliefs, cosmological views, and knowledge do indeed play a crucial role in ritual practice today as they did in the past. Minowa is right in assuming that one part of these remains unchanged, even in times of globalization and modernization, and continues to inform both ritual practice and consumer choice. It also needs to be underlined that whereas studies interpreting consumer choice and consumption in general often neglect or fail to take into account factors that are not rooted in the economy or in a pragmatic way of thinking (as the author also notes), studies on ritual practices, on the contrary, often focus on so-called cultural factors such as the legacy of traditional beliefs, views, and knowledge, thus neglecting to pay attention to the analysis of the role that consumption and consumer practices play in these rituals.

Traditional cosmology that includes views on life and death, conceptions regarding nature, and particular sensitivities to the change of nature and seasons, all affecting consumers' views on everyday life as well as their attitudes to ritual observances. Closely connected to these are the 'preferences' of a society toward particular expressions and communication forms and means. These kinds of preferences or predilections are deeply rooted in the given culture and can be part of 'tacit' or 'unconscious' knowledge (Minowa 2012). So, for example, several scholars of Japan have commented on the predilection of the Japanese toward ritual expression.[27] The transmission of important cultural values in Japan often occurs in the form of ritual observances such as annual events and life cycle ceremonies (Hendry 1986). Ritualistic expressions can be found at all levels of the society, including consumption, business, institutions, and human relations. Ritualistic patterns, such as the exchange of business cards (and its importance in establishing interpersonal relations), complex gift-exchange rituals, and the multilevel politeness language system that reflects hierarchies of personal relationships, have been described in numerous works on Japan. The prevalence of uniforms in institutions and complex greeting formulas, combined with ritualistic behavior in everyday life, are further examples of this cultural practice.

In this regard, the continuing popularity of *shichigosan*, and of other rites of passage in present-day Japan, relates to two cultural factors. One

concerns the Japanese preference, described above, toward a ritual expression mode. Another refers to the heightened sensibility of the Japanese toward thresholds and transitions. Indeed, there exist wider implications associated with the concept of age and age transition in Japanese culture. These can be connected with the continuing relevance of traditional cosmology—informed by both the native belief system, Shinto, and imported religions, such as Buddhism and Taoism—that views human existence as part of a process through which the human soul gradually progresses from birth to death and then to rebirth (see a detailed description of this worldview in chapter 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage'). In the past, every phase of this progress, also perceived as progression from a lesser maturity to a higher degree of maturity, was marked by ritual means. Japanese folklorists explain that this view accounts for the high number of transition rituals in premodern Japan. It is thought that this particular cosmology produced a singular conception of age and, presumably, it continues to bear important implications in present days, too. Japanese society has been also characterized as an 'age-grade society' (White 1987). White, for example, points to the difference with which concepts of age and aging are viewed between the Western world and Japan. Whereas Westerners tend to hold negative associations regarding aging, the Japanese view aging in a more harmonious and positive manner. The author explains this difference as the Japanese perception of human life as flow. Indeed, age, and, in particular, the transition of age, is not only perceived in a more harmonious way but it is also acknowledged by individuals and groups with greater awareness. In other words, adherence to a given age group by the individual occurs in a more conscious, as well as a more positive manner compared to the West. The shift between the ages often requires visibility as it needs to be recognized by the society. The accent on the stages and on the shift between them is also noted by Hendry in her study on child-rearing practices. The author argues that in Japan each stage in the child's life cycle is attributed a given behavioral model which is transmitted to children in a conscious manner by adult society (Hendry 1986).

The heightened perception toward age transitions also has implications for consumer behavior. It is widely known that single age groups generate determined behavioral models in consumption patterns, not only in Japan but elsewhere, too. In Japan, however, this receives frequent manifestations since behavioral models closely follow changes along the lines of the life cycle. In an analysis of the teenage sector, White shows how the cul-

tural significance attributed to the shift in age-grades is successfully used in the sales strategies of the commercial sector (White 1995).[28]

The concern for age is also apparent in *shichigosan*, and is particularly expressed in mothers' preoccupation with the correct age of the child at the celebration. Whereas the ages are formally defined by tradition—three and seven for girls and five (in some places also three) for boys—the two age-counting systems that exist in Japan provide a certain degree of flexibility and thus space for choice. The discrepancy between the two age-counting systems, traditional and Western-type modern, is shown in the difference between the two methods: in contrast to the conventional Western method, the traditional system, called *kazoetoshi* (数え年), adds one year to every person's age on the first of January with no regard to the individual's actual birthday (the latter being a date that was not observed in the past).[29] Hence, a child who is three years old according to the old method may actually only be two (or even younger) according to the modern method. Mothers usually carefully weigh the most appropriate age for the celebration based, above all, on the maturity of the child. Considerations are made on the child's maturity—physical and psychical—to endure, and also to enjoy, the events of the celebration (see also chapter 'Constructing the Ritual: Dress, Photographs, Actors, and Script' on this issue). This practice, although seemingly governed by practical and pragmatic considerations only, may be also seen as pointing to a greater awareness with which the Japanese turn to the notion of age and aging.

The culturally determined view of change in human life has implications on several levels of social life. The comparatively high number of rites of passage in both traditional and modern Japanese society has already been mentioned. Rites of passages give expression to the perception of human life as a process rather than a static state. Whereas many of the traditional rites of passage ceased to be performed, especially in urban settings, new ones often partly took their place, see for example, the prevalence of school ceremonies (e.g. entrance and graduation ceremonies).[30] The care and attention with which these new rites of passage are organized and observed highlight the importance acknowledged to transitions and passages in Japan. A recent example of the introduction of a new rite of passage is the 'half *seijinshiki*' (ハーフ成人式),[31] proposed as an equivalent to the coming-of-age rite (*seijinshiki* 成人式) that is observed at twenty years of age. The ritual is usually observed as a school event to which parents of ten years old children are invited and during which children are asked to make a public speech about their future dreams and plans.[32] Popular texts commenting on this phenom-

enon underline that the age of ten years is a turning point in the child's psychology, dividing the earlier period during which the child is still dependent and requires major care from the adult world, from the period when the child is expected to become more autonomous.[33] Related articles and comments place the ritual of 'half *seijinshiki'* between *shichigosan* and *seijinshiki*, underlining that the period stretching between the two celebrations is too long and, therefore, the introduction of another rite of passage in-between is welcome.[34] The event is said to enjoy a growing popularity in schools and this is also reflected in the promotion of photo studios proposing photo services for the occasion.[35]

On the other hand, there are also traditional rites of passage that continue to enjoy popularity today, such as the 'first rites' following the birth of a baby, *shichigosan*, or *yakudoshi* (unfortunate years).[36] Although the so-called 'first rites' used to be more numerous in the past, this has witnessed a growing popularity over the last twenty years (see chapters 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage' and 'Constructing the Ritual: Dress, Photographs, Actors, and Script'). These rituals include the first shrine visit of the baby (*hatsumiyamairi*) (see also below), *kuizome* (食い初め the first solid food),[37] *hatsutanjō* (初誕生 the first birthday),[38] and *hatsusekku* (初節句 the first seasonal festivity).[39] *Yakudoshi*, literally 'unfortunate year', is connected to the belief that certain particular ages in the person's life bring a greater probability of encountering misfortune, troubles, or health problems. In order to escape the negative occurrences, rituals prayers for divine protection are observed (the purification ritual, also called *yakubarai* 厄祓い). Nowadays, many Shinto shrines, as well as Buddhist temples, provide information on these dates displaying calendars in their precincts, and in print or via online materials. Several consumption practices are also involved in this observance. Apart from the purchase of protective amulets, sold by shrines and temples, journeys to distant and famous shrines are normally undertaken.

Change to the Postwar Ritual Calendar

The traditional Japanese ritual calendar consisted of yearly (seasonal) festivities (*nenchū gyōji* 年中行事)[40] and rites of passage, also called life cycle rituals (*tsūka girei* 通過儀礼/ *jinsei girei* 人生儀礼).[41] These rites closely followed the changes in nature and the agricultural seasons, and also reflected Japanese people's views of life and death and on the passages between them. Traditional community, based mostly on an agricul-

tural mode of life, was distinguished by rich ritual culture nourished and supported by the cosmology and lifestyle of the community (see chapter 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage'). From the Meiji period on (1868–), but in particular after the Second World War, the complex transformation of Japanese society and economy altered the traditional worldview and lifestyle, a change that has been addressed in several works by Japanese and non-Japanese analysts. Among these, Japanese folklorists' approach usually focused on the disintegration of the socioeconomic structure that used to underlie traditional ritual culture. It is assumed that over half of the ritual occasions observed in small communities until the 1940s, had ceased to be performed in the four decades that followed the end of the war, while those that remained were changed in form and meaning (Ishii 2009).

As already mentioned, accounts of traditional customs have been documented within the field of folklore studies. In contrast, the number of works that address the transformation of the ritual calendar in postwar Japan is surprisingly low.[42] This can partly be explained by the difficulty in obtaining data documenting this change; statistical numbers are limited to information principally provided by national and private surveys and polls on religious affiliations and practices. Surveys that focus specifically on rituals and observance rates are much fewer in number. One of the few works that give an almost full overview of popular ritual observances in present-day Japan is the study of the religious scholar, Kenji Ishii, *Nihonjin no ichinen to isshō* (The year-cycle and life cycle of the Japanese, 2005), the findings of which will be discussed later in this chapter. A further reason for the lack of interest in modern rituals might be the intricacy involved in the task of interpreting contemporary forms of traditional rituals. The proportionally much greater number of studies that address ritual customs in traditional settings renders difficult the detachment of the student's viewpoint from the classical approaches. Classical folklore studies interpret seasonal and life cycle festivities as occasions for the renewal of the community's vital energies and for experiencing the extraordinary time during the year's cycle, also called *hare* periods. The regularly held festivities not only gave rhythm to the life of the village community, but they also marked the line that divided the busy, active periods, characterized by the notion of *ke*, from the passive periods of rest and festivities, associated with the notion of *hare*.[43] Accordingly, *hare* is interpreted as the positive energy without which the community could not live a productive and successful existence during the year. In contrast, *ke* is thought to indicate the

state when the vital energies of the community have been gradually consumed in the course of the busy period of work and everyday life. When the positive spiritual energy of *hare* was used up, the polluting quality of *ke* accumulated, hence the regular need for renewal in the community's life. An important means of spiritual renewal of the consumed energy was the celebration of rituals, such as *nenjū gyōji*, well-known examples of which are New Year festivities in January, the above-mentioned girls' festival in March, and the boys' festival in May, the Star festival, called *tanabata* (七夕), or *obon* (盆), the festival to honor the dead and ancestors in July–August.[44]

With regard to this classical interpretation, Ishii proposes a parallel between the traditional view and the interpretation of modern seasonal and life cycle rituals in Japan. Ishii sees modern forms of festivities and rituals as occasions that give rhythm to the commercial calendar and mark the periods of sale battles (Ishii 2009, 205). In his interpretation, modern festivities are seen as occasions for surplus consumption in Japan's consumer society, a view that partly coincides with Yang's analysis of the ritual expenditure of surplus in contemporary Chinese rituals and of its role in the local economy, with the important difference that Yang attributes positive significance to waste expressed through ritual (Yang 2000). I agree with Ishii that modern forms of rituals, seasonal and life cycle, are also occasions for consumption in contemporary Japan. Indeed, the marketplace tries its best to exploit these occasions and business enterprises support the popularization of numerous rituals. It should not be forgotten, however, that commercialization has affected festivities from the moment they were discovered by merchants. Kuraishi noted that the festive calendar for the town of Edo in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was influenced more by the activities of merchants than by the predominantly agricultural mode of production (Kuraishi 1990, 266–268). Today, services and goods are, above all, used by consumers as a means of producing meaningful ritual events, and not as ends in themselves. Whereas the market often proposes meanings and interpretations of rituals along its own interests, these attempts are always confronted with, and/or tempered by the response of consumers, as also noted by Ishii when analyzing concrete cases of newly introduced rituals of Western origin. The way this process takes place between the consumer, the market, and the media, will be analyzed through the case study of *shichigosan* in the next three chapters.

Without going into a thorough analysis of consumption in concrete cases of ritual observances, it is often the case that scholarship on changes to the

ritual calendar settle for conclusions that judge the impact of consumption and consumer culture in a negative light. However, modern ritual practice is embedded in a highly developed consumer culture in today's Japan and the analysis of any ritual or cultural practice cannot neglect this fact. Whereas the number of studies on Japanese consumer culture has increased in the recent years, the question of consumption related to rituals and celebrations continues to remain an understudied field. This is probably also due to the fact that for long time ritual had been studied in traditional settings where consumer culture did not play a role, or its role had been neglected by the researchers. Studies of modern ritual practice are heavily informed by the scholarship on ritual in preindustrial social contexts, and a comparison with the past inevitably brings hasty conclusions about the loss of 'authenticity' or of the 'original/traditional' meaning of rituals in the contemporary life. In Japan, this kind of discourse is particularly pertinent since modernization took place in a much shorter period compared to most of the Western world where this phase was more extended. In Japan, memories of past ritual practices are still alive, and not only that, traditional forms of rituals are still practiced in some rural localities; a situation that sometimes too easily calls for comparisons. Therefore, I think it is important to look at contemporary ritual practice from a 'fresh' perspective that is not conditioned by the legacies of 'lost treasures'.

The conventional categorization of traditional rituals as integral part of Japanese religious tradition presents another problem. The world of consumption and information that wraps contemporary forms of popular ritual observances is often regarded as antithetic to religion or to the notion of 'tradition', thus rendering problematic the interpretation of modern ritual practice. On the one hand, it is indeed important to acknowledge that links to religions, (popular Shinto or Buddhism) and/or to a heritage of traditional cultural concepts and cosmologies, are integral to the overall meaning system of contemporary ritual practice (be it rituals with roots in the Japanese tradition or imported and 'domesticated'[45] rituals from the West). On the other hand, it is equally important to integrate factors and elements that influence contemporary views and practices into the general interpretational frame. The angle and scope of analysis must be broadened to include the complex set of factors that underlies modern ritual practices in industrial and postindustrial settings with developed consumer cultures. A few examples of this kind of scholarship in non-Japanese settings have been introduced in the previous chapter. Here I want to proceed with some examples of Japan-specific cases. My aim here is not to give a full list and

description of all festive occasions observed nowadays in Japan, this would be not possible within one single chapter. Rather, I would like to describe a few examples that illustrate the nature of change that has occurred in the ritual calendar of the Japanese since the end of the war. The typology of the celebrations that will be discussed here are principally festivities that Japanese folklore studies list under the two categories mentioned above: seasonal festivals and life cycle rituals. Hence, the large variety of local and public festivals known as *matsuri*, and rituals specific to concrete shrines or temples (although some of the rituals included in the two above-mentioned categories involve a visit to a shrine or temple, including that of *shichigosan*) do not constitute the subject of examination. I also pay particular attention to those works that, in their analyses of socioeconomic factors, take into account the ritual's embedding in contemporary consumer culture.

New Year Celebrations

Ishii points out that the main reason for the loss of traditional rites of passage and seasonal rituals in postwar Japan is the overall transformation of local community life and household structure (Ishii 2003). After the end of the war the traditional family system, known as *ie-seido*,[46] has gradually been replaced by the nuclear type of modern family, *kazoku*, and so traditional rites have lost the substratum that once nourished their practice and significance. More precisely, this substratum was to be found in the close-knit lifestyle of mostly agricultural communities as well as in the cosmology that encompassed the views on life and death of past, present, and future generations of the household. Ishii stresses that this did not bring about a mere change in the form of rituals, but it resulted in an entire transformation of their meaning (2003).

Changes in customs connected to the celebration of New Year (*shōgatsu* 正月) exemplify this kind of transformation. The New Year celebration is still the most popular observance of the Japanese ritual calendar, followed by *obon* (Festival of the Dead—festival season of memorial rites for the ancestors). Year after year, on the first day (or the following two to three days) of January millions of Japanese make their first visit of the year to shrines (and temples) throughout the country, the numbers of which are documented and widely reported by the media. New Year has always belonged to the most complex ritual events in the Japanese calendar, comprising lengthy preparations in the two weeks prior to January and with continuing ritual observances for two more weeks afterwards. Whilst there existed a rich

variety and regional differences in customs, Japanese folklorists defined the meaning of this complex series of rites along two major lines. First, New Year was (and it still is) one of the two major ritual events that framed and structured the calendar year, the other being *obon*, observed between July and August. These were the two most important occasions when members of the *ie* interacted with the souls of the departed members of the household during the limited period of the duration of the festivities. The human soul was believed to be part of a realm that encompassed all souls and deities, and from which humans were born and to which they returned. In Kunio Yanagida's interpretation (the founder of Japanese folklore studies), this view found its embodiment in the *ie-system* that was conceived as a continuing entity comprising the present, past, as well as future household members (Yanagida 1946). Second, New Year festivities bore powerful symbolism for the Japanese. Every activity performed during this period indicated the outcome of the year to come. Therefore, it was the period of 'first doings' that, consequently, were to be carried out with great attention and care. Also, in many places fortune telling took place, a custom practiced even today. At New Year, the deity of the New Year (*toshigami* 歳神/年神) was awaited and welcomed in each house and family. It was believed that the deity of the New Year guarded over agricultural production, the future harvest, and over good luck of all sorts. Festivities usually started on the thirteenth day of the twelve months (according to the lunar calendar in use until 1872) when a period of purification (*monoimi* 物忌み), which began with activities such as general cleaning and wiping of the house, with the Shinto altar (*kamidana* 神棚) at its center. The 'cleaning' also had a symbolic meaning as souls and hearts needed to be purified to prepare the self for welcoming the New Year's deity. Specific meals with symbolic meanings were prepared and offered to *toshigami*, which were then consumed by the family.

Whereas in the past, the shrine to be visited on the occasion of the year's first prayer (*hatsumōde* 初詣) was the shrine of the community's tutelary (guardian) deity (*ujigami* 氏神), today the most well-known shrines (renowned for their history or beautiful environment, and/or located centrally) throughout the country concentrate the largest number of visitors for the New Year's prayer. Ishii notes that this takes place at the cost of a sharply declining number of worshippers in other minor shrines and temples (Ishii 2009). A similar trend is observable with regard to *shichigosan*. When choosing the shrine to visit for the *shichigosan* prayer, families usually opt for centrally located shrines or for shrines that possess other attractive characteristics,

such as, for example, a pleasant natural environment (park, garden, or convenient parking space). This trend, among others, demonstrates that the *ujigami* belief has lost much if its relevance in the life of the modern Japanese.[47] In this regard, Ishii notes that today, the recreational space provided by some urban shrines and temples represent a symbolical sacred space for modern Japanese urbanites. The green realms surrounding shrines and temples are often the only peaceful spots in the busy metropolitan areas. Time spent here is experienced as time set apart, thus lending a sacred dimension to these environments that can complement or even entirely replace the sacredness that used to be provided by solely the ritual action. The powerful symbolism of life renewal embedded in New Year festivities can thus be seen as transferred to the shrine's green space where modern Japanese "seek for a sacred area in which to pursue life's renewal" (Ishii 2000, 10).

It is not only the preferences of shrine that have changed in New Year customs when compared to the past. Today, most of the traditional activities are no longer observed or they are carried out in changed forms, abbreviated and simplified. The 'wiping out' or cleaning activities once loaded with ritual symbolism, have been replaced by the end-of-year general house cleaning. Also, many of the traditional foods are today bought in supermarkets and traditional decorations are used in a much-reduced size that is also conditioned by the limited space available in modern urban housing. Most companies and state institutions close in the days before and after the first day of the year and the period is generally viewed as work-free holiday time, a view that underlines the period's recreational character. Amusements parks, ski slopes, and hotels expect large numbers of visitors during this time. Ishii argues that the media (in particular television programs for New Year) in many homes replaces the real ritual performance, concluding that New Year has almost completely lost its original associations in the eyes of the Japanese (2009).

Christmas

The diffusion of the Christmas celebration has also affected the way Japanese people view the New Year period. Since the timing of Christmas coincides with the traditional New Year period, in certain aspects the two festivities have partly overlapped. Today Christmas occupies a stable position in the ritual calendar of the Japanese. The very origin of the celebration of Christmas in Japan goes back to the sixteenth century arrival of Christian missionaries. Nevertheless, it was only in the Meiji period

(1868–1912) that the custom of Christmas started to sound familiar to the Japanese. A few famous stores at the time did use Christmas decorations and imported goods connected to Christmas (e.g. Christmas cards) as early as the 1900s, which demonstrates the early utilization of the celebration for marketing purposes by commercial institutions (Ishii 2009).[48] Ishii considers the use of Christmas decorations by the marketplace as crucial to the popularization of the festivity in Japan. By introducing Christmas items into their assortment, urban department stores targeted the traditional end of year gift-exchange custom (*seibo* 歳暮) with the aim to encourage further purchases.

One of the first studies by a Western observer that reflects on the cultural meaning associated with the then newly adopted festivity, Christmas, comes from the early 1960s by David Plath. In his 1963 study, Plath compared the meaning Christmas bore for Americans and Japanese, and found that there were significant differences between the two. In American culture, Christmas was first of all about material well-being, a value that came to be seen as the symbol of the American way of life. In the figure of Santa Claus, the Americans saw a gift-bringer whose import reached beyond the world of children and domestic affection. As a symbol of abundance of material goods, it conveyed an optimistic view of life, which Plath, using Barnett's terms, referred to as the optimistic secular faith (Barnett 1954 in Plath 1963, 315).[49] On the other hand, according to Plath, a different image of Santa Claus and Christmas prevailed in Japan in the 1960s. Santa Claus and Christmas were not primarily regarded as symbols of the new affluence brought about by postwar economic growth. Instead, the popular custom of Christmas was perceived as a symbol of modernity, more precisely a way to cope with modernity, increasing consumerism, and industrialism. For symbols of newly acquired affluence, rather than looking to Christmas, the Japanese reached for historical and legendary sources from the mythological past of Japan, the so-called Age of Gods. Plath quotes examples from the Japanese media that referred to the period of the economic upsurge of the mid-1950s, as 'Jimmu boom' (*Jimmu būmu* 神武ブーム), Jimmu being the legendary first Japanese emperor (Plath 1963).[50]

Ishii offers a somewhat different analysis of the meaning of Christmas in postwar Japan (Ishii 2009).[51] He argues that Christmas has been always vested with the image of happiness in the eyes of the Japanese. The content and form of happiness has changed over the decades, and with it changed the meaning that Christmas represented for the Japanese. So, for example,

in the postwar years of economic hardship, Christmas gifts emerged as charity gifts distributed by charity organizations (mostly of Western origin) to the poor, and as such it bore positive associations in the minds of the Japanese. Later, during the years of economic recovery, Christmas started to be linked with notions such as 'peace' and 'wealth', both thought to be brought to Japan by the Occupation Forces. It was only at this point that consumption as such became associated with Christmas, as consuming began to be seen by the Japanese as a means to wealth and happiness. The 1960s added to the content of 'happiness' the idea of 'my home' or, in other words, the ownership of the family home (*maihoomu shugi* マイホーム主義) along with the growing value placed on private life (*shiseikatsu shugi* 私生活主義). Christmas became perceived as an occasion to spend time together in the family. Later, a further shift in custom was the spread of the fashion to eat out at Christmas.[52] Ishii underlines that consumption connected to Christmas during the history of the celebration "was conceived as the shortest way to happiness" (Ishii 2009, 120).

Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day is another case of imported celebration that enjoys huge popularity in contemporary Japan. It is customary for women to give chocolates as gifts to men (boyfriend, colleagues, superiors), which is then reciprocated one month later on the occasion that is named 'White Day'. In a study on the development and transformation of Valentine's Day in Japan, Minowa et al. examined the history of the Japanese Valentine's Day through shifts in the content of advertisements (2011). The authors define the Japanese Valentine's Day as a hybridized and commercially constructed holiday ritual representing one of the gift-giving occasions in the elaborated gift-exchange culture of the Japanese. Indeed, gift-giving is a persistent cultural practice in Japan, highly ritualized and playing a central role in the constitution of social relations (Rupp 2003).[53] Through gift-exchange, existing relationships are cemented and new ones established. Gift-giving also often occurs as part of rituals, both in newly adopted rituals, such as Christmas and Valentine's Day, or in traditional ones, such as the end of year *seibo* (mentioned above), mid-year *chūgen* (中元),[54] weddings, funerals, and other less formal occasions.

Regarding the adoption of Valentine's Day in Japan, Ishii, however, argues that its successful integration into the ritual calendar of the Japanese was not primarily due to the efforts of the gift industry. Other

Western gift-giving occasions, such as Easter, Secretaries Day, or Bosses Day, have never put down roots in Japan (Ishii 2009). In fact, industries and department stores attempted several times to introduce Valentine's customs to Japan: the first such attempt occurring in 1936, then again in the 1950s. The intention of department stores was to establish an event that would follow the *hina matsuri* (雛祭り girls' festival) sale in March, thus securing a flow of continuous sale occasions. However, it was only at the end of the 1960s and, in particular, after the oil shock of 1973, that the custom finally took hold.[55] Both Ishii and Minowa et al. (2011). agree in arguing that the consumers' role, more precisely the female consumers' role, was decisive in the occasion's growth into a popular gift-giving ritual—thus proposing a gendered view of the ritual. Around the end of the 1970s, female students in junior high and high schools discovered Valentine's Day as an occasion to confess their intimate feelings to a chosen boyfriend in the form of a chocolate gift. Ishii states that as a ritual occasion Valentine's Day is principally managed by women, standing in opposition to other traditional gift-giving occasions such as *chūgen* and *seibo*, which both belong to the male-oriented culture. Significantly, the direction of gift-giving is 'from woman to man', moreover, Valentine's Day is conceived as the only occasion when—within a socially accepted form—women can confess romantic feelings toward men; an idea that in the past did not enjoy social approval in the Japanese culture.[56] The history of Valentine's Day's adoption is also an illustration of the domestication process, using Tobin's term (Tobin 1992), through which imported cultural forms are integrated into the receiving culture. During the process, new layers of meaning are created, thus producing a socially meaningful cultural practice in the given society. In this regard, Ishii also places importance on the Christian origin of Valentine's. He argues that in the mind of the Japanese this origin creates a link to another popular Christian ritual, the chapel wedding. This contributes to strengthen Valentine's association with romantic bonds that are not based on the relationship between two families, as it used to be in the traditional view of marriage. Instead, that emphasis is placed on the relationship between two autonomous individuals. In this sense, Ishii proposes to see the custom of Valentine's Day as an expression of the improved position of women in Japanese society (Ishii 2009, 56–57).

As for the development of the Valentine custom, Minowa et al. identify five stages, all of which closely follow the economic cycles of boom and recession in Japan's economy (2011). So, for example, the years of the

bubble economy prosperity (1980s to the early 1990s) became reflected in the growth of the popularity of conspicuous gifts and in the increased complexity of gift-exchange customs. This development can also be recognized in *shichigosan*, as it was a period when *shichigosan*-related commercial services began to proliferate and extravagant expensive festive clothes became popular within families (more on this in chapter 'Business Sector, Media and Religious Institutions'). The escalation of products and services and an intensified interest of various industries in *shichigosan*, characterize this period of prosperity and optimism.[57] The most recent phase identified by Minowa et al. in the development of Valentine's Day in Japan, is referred to as 'recovery and diversification' (2003–2007). Compared to the previous periods, when women typically gave gifts to men, the 'multimodal mode' of contemporary Valentine's Day includes gift-giving between women (girlfriends), self-gifts (women spending money on themselves), and men giving gifts to women (Minowa et al. 2011, 51). The diversification of celebration modes is also recognizable in the case of *shichigosan*. A much greater variety of options in celebration manners are viewed today as socially acceptable and approvable. This development can be seen as a reflection of a greater acceptance of pluralism and of a trend toward individualism in present-day Japanese society. The way the marketplace seeks to satisfy this new trend, by offering diversity and a variety of services and products to observers/customers, will be discussed in chapter 'Business Sector, Media, and Religious Institutions'.

Other Case Studies of Rituals

A very recent work by Yūko Taguchi addresses four rites of passage connected to the female life-cycle: *anzan kigan* (安産祈願 prayers during pregnancy for safe delivery),[58] the first shrine visit (*hatsumiyamairi*), *shichigosan* and *yakudoshi* (see also above) (Taguchi 2015). The author states that today, several rituals hardly fit the conventional definition of ritual as these are either preserved only in form and name, being 'emptied' of their original meaning and role, or they have been transformed into events. However, as the author herself admits, actors are enacting these rituals as events that mark important thresholds in their life, hence, they effectively view these 'events' as rites of passage. Summarizing the spheres where the greatest change has occurred with regard to rituals, Taguchi points to three major fields: the diminishing social role of contemporary rituals, the altered views on human life, and the changed perception of the divine

presence (*kami*, Shinto deities) within rituals. The first sphere of change concerns the capacity of ritual to bestow the actors with social acknowledgment (Taguchi 2015, 189–191, 300–303). In Taguchi's understanding, this role has been lost completely as today the observed rituals do not typically involve an interaction with the wider community and are observed in the exclusive sphere of the family. Social affirmation is provided by agents, such as health centers, to which, after the birth of their child, mothers regularly turn for services and advice, thus establishing new contacts with fellow mothers. With regard to this argument, it must not be overlooked that even in the past, social recognition was not provided solely by the performance of the ritual. Social relationships were established in the context of everyday life and occasions of ritual performance often served—among others scopes, of course—as highlights of already established relationships. This echoes the view of the renowned psychologist, Erik Erikson, who, contesting theories that interpret rites of passage first and foremost as transformative agents, argued that true transformation occurs in everyday conduct. Rites of passage should be seen as public announcements of the new status rather than as a device to accomplish it (Erikson 1982). The social life of the Japanese has changed significantly in the past five decades and without doubt, the sphere of interpersonal networks has shrunk significantly. Today, families in urban areas do not necessarily rely on close contacts within their neighborhood. However, this does not mean that modern rituals do not involve interaction or do not entail the power of social recognition. The transformation of the social context of Japanese families, as well as of the structure and constitution of personal relationships, is a natural process that closely follows and has been a result of other more general changes affecting Japan in the course of its modernization. It would be peculiar to search for forms and functions of rituals that used to be typical of traditional close-knit community life as these ritual forms responded to the contemporary social conditions at the time. What is important to consider here is how modern popular rituals successfully integrate altered needs in society and how their changed forms mirror the way in which these needs are responded to.

The second sphere of change in Taguchi's analysis regards traditional cosmology, in particular, views relating to the soul as the central element in the cycle that reaches over life and death (Taguchi 2015, 15, 300–307).[59] Beliefs about the soul play an important role in the folklorists' interpretation of Japanese rites of passage. Accordingly, in the past, a child's soul was thought to be unstable during the period following birth. Thus, rites

of passage had the function to affirm the position of the child's soul on earth. Views of life and death have, however, changed in modern Japan, at least with regard to the conscious level of thought. Taguchi stresses that the relevance of traditional views of the child's soul no longer play a role in the popularity of rituals such as the *shichigosan*. Rather, it is the particular phase in the growth of the child, associated with the *shichigosan* ages, that acquires importance. *Shichigosan*, in the author's view, is above all about the occasion to record this early phase in the child's life, and photos (and, indirectly, photo studios) play a crucial role in this. Indeed, rituals and, in particular, family rituals are significant in the family life, because they also provide occasions to mark the moment that is then recorded through photos and videos. I would argue with this conclusion, pointing out that there exist other equally apt occasions in the social life of the Japanese that can be used to record the child's growth. The following three chapters will hopefully unfold the greater complexity of factors underlying the continuity of *shichigosan*.

As for the petition for divine protection, the third sphere of change in Taguchi's analysis, the author draws attention to the fact that today this, too, holds little relevance for observers. The continuing centrality of the shrine (or temple) visit at *shichigosan* has not so much to do with religious feelings, as it is the product of the historical development in the Taisho-Showa prewar period (1912–1945) (Taguchi 2015, 314–316). During this period, a standardization of shrine worship took place as part of the national political movement. As a consequence, shrine visits became seen as a standard part of rituals, such as weddings, New Year's ritual, and *shichigosan*.[60] This development certainly had an impact of the popularization of shrine worship as stable parts of the listed rituals, however, it must not be overlooked that the urban pattern of *shichigosan* had already entailed a shrine visit in the eighteenth century, a theme further discussed in the next chapter.

Apart from the above listed works, there are also earlier surveys carried out by Japanese scholars that do touch on the effect of modernization processes on the ritual calendar. A survey from 1983, for example, examining the impact of high-speed economic growth on family life, included inquiries into the observance rates of a number of rituals and festivities (Sadamura 2005). The target of the analysis was mothers of small children living in a Tokyo neighborhood.[61] The survey found that the four most popular observances at the time were New Year, children's birthday, Christmas, and *shichigosan* (all reaching over 85% of observance rate). Rituals that centered on children and involved a home based party figured

among the most popular. Another survey from the 1980s, by Tadahiko Kuraishi, investigated the everyday conduct of households in a housing apartment complex (*danchi* 団地) in Nagano prefecture (Kuraishi 1990). He found that many of the life cycle rituals and seasonal festivities have faded away, the reasons for which include the restricted living space available in modern apartments and the geographical distance from the birth household that usually acted as preserver and transmitter of traditions. Among the first to decline were rites connected to agriculture. With regard to rites of passage, the highest degree of observation was, again, documented in celebrations connected to children. Nevertheless, Kuraishi notes that these, too, have become uniform in pattern and the rich variation that characterized them in the past, was gradually disappearing. The *shichigosan* observation rate was over 50% among residents and with this, it belonged to the most popular rituals, surpassed only by *hatsumiyamairi* (first shrine visit of the baby). Kuraishi also discussed the role of women in consumption, identifying them as principal actors of consumption. In the author's view, women's preferences and desires represented the main motivating force for most of the consumption that took place in the family. In the author's words, housing apartment complexes were transformed into "worlds of consumption" (*shōhi no sekai* 消費の世界) where women's participation in a competitive consumption of clothing, furnishing, and child-rearing were central issues to their lives (Kuraishi 1990, 182).

Beginning in the 1980s, several ethnographic accounts of urban weddings and funerals have been produced by Western researchers.[62] These studies almost all inevitably touch upon themes such as the impact of commercialization and consumerism on rituals. Walter Edwards documented changes in weddings organized by professional wedding parlours (1989). Today, weddings are the most significant and profitable ceremonial occasions in Japan. The rise of the commercial wedding industry between 1950 and 1960 has contributed to gradually transforming the wedding ceremony into a highly elaborate and sumptuous event.[63] Whilst the author's main scope was to interpret the social and cultural values reflected in the modern wedding ritual, the work also offers some important insights into the commercial aspects. Edwards draws attention to the intense and dialectic interaction between customers of the parlor and ritual specialists—organizers and providers of wedding services. This interaction became particularly manifest in the introduction of new innovative elements into the program of the event. The successful adoption of these new elements

directly depended on a positive response from the customer, and this response was informed, above all, by social values and norms.

The postwar development of *shichigosan* as a ceremonial occasion shows notable similarities with that of the wedding. The rise of the service industry in the 1970s, noted already with regard to Valentine's Day, had a significant impact on the development of the patterns of both rituals.[64] Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni's study (1997) of the wedding business examines the production of the ceremonial occasion from the perspective of the producers. Within this, the author focuses on the process during which the bride is 'produced' and 'packaged', placing this particular cultural production into the realm of the 'invention of traditions' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) as part of the construction of the Japanese self in the consumer market. Consumption, in Goldstein-Gidoni's interpretation, means consumption of both culture and meaning. Customers not only purchase services, they "buy images and representations", as well (Goldstein-Gidoni 1997, 153).[65]

Apart from wedding, the urban funeral rite is another highly commercialized rite of passage in present-day Japan. Hikaru Suzuki's study (2001) analyzes the phenomenon and, based on fieldwork conducted in a funeral parlor, she presents a detailed account of the funeral industry in Japan.[66] The professionalization of death-related customs, once the responsibility of the household and community, has affected funeral ceremonies in a similar way that it affected weddings.[67] In the recent years, many changes have taken place in death rituals, documented and analyzed in accounts by Japanese and non-Japanese researchers.

'Lost Traditions' Versus 'Continuity'?

Ishii notes that in the past, traditional community used to have the control and binding power that enforced rituals and customs equally on all its members (2009, 204–205). This compelling force was supported by a shared worldview and communal lifestyle that also meant that the life and prosperity of the individual was inseparably connected to, and depended on, the life and prosperity of the entire community. This is the reason why many of the rites of passages were celebrated not only by the individual family, but also by the entire community. Upon modernization, the binding power that held communities together in the past, diminished and with it, local customs and their original meaning and role underwent transformation. Ishii argues that, whereas rituals continue to be performed in present-day Japan, communities and groups (schools, work places, clubs, and

so on) no longer possess the power of implementation over their members. Hence, the participation in ritual performances, such as *seijinshiki* (coming-of-age rite), *shichigosan* or *hatsumiyamairi* (first shrine visit after birth), has become optional. Furthermore, rituals such as the *seijinshiki*, today hold no power to affirm a real adulthood upon the actors, and the *shichigosan* and *hatsumiyamairi* rituals do not mark a transition but, instead, have become mere occasions for the affirmation of family happiness.

Indeed, diversity of choice, be it life-path choice, or whether to follow this or another pattern in celebration, is becoming socially widely accepted in present day Japan. There is an increasing tendency toward individualization and plurality; the Japanese today enjoy much more freedom of choice in their decisions regarding life pattern or views. However, regulating norms and rules are still at work even though not to the extent they were in the past. Cultural concepts, even though in changed circumstances, continue to inform the way of thinking of modern Japanese people and to influence the way important things in life are approached. Several studies show that groups and communities in Japan still have their own operational mode that holds considerable power over their members (Torsello 2009, 2013). Although participation in the rites might formally be voluntary, nonparticipation or overt refusal of the internal rules of such groups may bring negative consequences for the individual member. Today, economic survival might not be at stake in communities and groups—as it used to be in traditional communities—but the well-being of individuals still depends on their acceptance by the group and on the proper enactment of the group's norms, customs, and rituals.

Moreover, it should be not noted that rituals did serve different roles and forms in the past. Traditional agricultural communities might have operated according to fixed rules and practices but, as will emerge from the examination of the forms and functions that have been vested in *shichigosan* during its history, rituals were indeed subject to change as much in the past as they are in the present. Different social contexts engaged different ritual practices, reflecting the particular needs of the members of the social group. Groups with greater access to economic resources and, for example, to an urban market, were already taking part in consumption in the eighteenth century when the specific socioeconomic circumstances gave rise to sophisticated urban culture and to initial forms of modern consumption.

As for the role of the marketplace in contemporary ritual practice, Ishii also draws attention to the fact the Japanese people today are left alone in their search for the meaning of rituals because old meanings are

no longer valid, and new ones are mostly suggested by the marketplace (2009). However, it must not be overlooked that consumption in Japan is an arena where social life takes place, is manifest, and through which social phenomena are construed. It is more than understandable that the marketplace plays an essential role in contemporary ritual practice as it provides the Japanese observers with a platform, as well as with the means to create ritual events and to mediate meanings that are pertinent to the observers. This does not lessen the significance of these events for the lives of the observers. Consumption as such may give space to excessiveness, as might any other practice, nonetheless, it still remains, first and foremost, as an instrument in the hand of individuals. Even if this instrument offers plenty of possibilities for use, it is always the individual who decides for what purpose and in which modality to use it.

Notes

1. For a critical view of this scholarship see, for example, Trentmann 2004, Goody 2006, and Lemire 2012.
2. To mention a few examples, in China examples of conspicuous consumption already existed back in the Ming period. See also Craig Clunas' *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China* in Trentmann 2004, 378.
3. For a discussion of this scholarship and list of major works, see also Katarzyna Cwiertka's Review of *The Japanese Consumer: An Alternative Economic History of Modern Japan* (review no. 1109) http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1108
4. Francks' work, *The Japanese Consumer* (2009a), gives a wide-ranging account of the historical development of consumption and examines the sociohistorical conditions that stood at the birth of consumer culture in Japan.
5. In this regard, Trentmann notes that the formation of the consumer society in nineteenth-century Europe was typical to certain regions and cities, and it was hardly a general phenomenon. Consumption was increasing but it was still not a consumer society and individuals did not define themselves as 'consumers' (Trentmann 2004, 382–383).
6. On the role of department stores in the social life of the Japanese, see, among others, the studies of Creighton 1992, Kerrie L. MacPherson (ed.) *Asian Department Stores* (1998), and Brian Moeran's essay "The Birth of the Japanese Department Store" in MacPherson (ed.) (1998).
7. See more on this in chapter 'Business Sector, Media, and Religious Institutions'.

8. The Japanese farmers still constituted 41 % of the population in 1940 (Gregory 1975).
9. See also Minowa et al. 2011.
10. For detailed data on real per capita consumption expenditure, see also Francks 2009a, Appendix Tables 2 and 4.
11. On the value of possession of electric household devices (washing machine, television set), seen as an indicator of 'modernity' later in the 1960s, see also Vogel 1963.
12. In 1958, Ezra Vogel, in his study of a Tokyo neighborhood, described the middle-class lifestyle as based on the life model personalized by *sarariiman* (salary man, i.e., white-collar employee of big companies) and his family (Vogel 1963).
13. See also Chua Beng-Huat (ed.) *Consumption in Asia: Lifestyles and Identities* (London: Routledge, 2000), and Patricia Maclachlan and Frank Trentmann 'Civilising Markets: Traditions of Consumer Politics in Twentieth-Century Britain, Japan, and the United States' in Frank Trentmann and Mark Bevir (eds.) *Markets in Historical Contexts: Ideas and Politics in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 170–201).
14. Not only birth rate, but the number of marriages, too, is diminishing along with an increasing rate of divorce (Fuess 2004).
15. Another, even more important factor, is the delayed marriage age, which brings about the postponing of childbirth. Consequently, there is less probability of giving birth to the desired number of offspring due to the correspondence between the age of women and their fertility levels (see also Yoshizumi 1995). In 2006, the average age for marriage was 30 years for men, and 28.2 years for women (Assman 2011, 167).
16. The first McDonald's opened in Ginza in 1971 and Tokyoites started to enjoy Sunday strolling in downtown (Watson 2006 in Minowa et al. 2011, 46).
17. See also White 1994. Galbraith notes that the figure of *shōjo*, meaning literally 'young girl', can be regarded as the symbol of this period as this figure symbolizes the 'pure consumer' who consumes for pleasure and joy, hence consumption representing a playful activity (Galbraith 2011, 151).
18. 'Parasite singles' is a term first used by Masahiro Yamada, Japanese sociologist, in 1997 to label young adults sharing homes with their parents without contributing financially to household expenses. Tran notes that Japan has the highest ratio in the world of single young adults living with their families (Tran 2006 in Collins 2011, 93).
19. Studies in the edited volume by Haghirian (2011a) include detailed analysis of this particular consumer group and behavior.

20. Merry White's *The Material Child: Coming of Age in Japan and America* (1994) offers a cross-cultural study of Japanese and American teenagers and the particular consumption behavior patterns typical to the segment.
21. Hentschel 2011. A most recent example is provided by the case of mobile Internet which is said to majorly contribute to the advancement of information society. Many campaigns are today launched via mobile phones in Japan.
22. It has been argued that in Japan, consumption is an important instrument for creating and upholding social relationships. Social networks and communities are often developed by consuming together and by sharing consumer information (Skov and Moeran 1995a).
23. Miller notes that there exists a contradiction entailed in the existing popular images of housewife, entailing, on the one hand, images associated with modesty and denigration and, on the other hand, critical views targeting their role as consumers (Miller 1995).
24. See Haghirian's study (2011c) for an analysis of this sector in Japan.
25. In her analysis, Minowa applies the methodology of folk epistemology (theory of knowledge).
26. Knowledge and belief underlying these attitudes are often tacit, or little conscious, also because they are contrasted by powerful forces in present-day society, such as pragmatism, materialism, disdain for institutionalized religions, or value placed on individualism (Minowa 2012). Minowa identifies the philosophical concept of *ki* as central for the persistence of some cultural practices in Japan, such as rituals. *Ki*, being the translation and adoption of the ancient Chinese philosophy *qi* or *chi*, was imported in Japan from China together with Chinese writing, Buddhism, Taoism, and yin-yang philosophy. It has various meanings in the Japanese language, such as spirit, mind, energy, breath, air, and others, indicating its diffusion as philosophical concept in the Japanese culture.
27. Among others, see, for example, Hendry 1986 and van Bremen and Martinez 1995.
28. On this theme, see also White 1987 and Goy-Yamamoto 2004.
29. In other words, a child born in November can turn two the following January according to the traditional age-counting method.
30. Peter Cave argues that school ceremonies are perceived in Japan as modern rites of passage that aim at marking the passage that change of institutional attendance and status entails (Cave 2007). See also Hendry 1986, Rohlen 1989, and Peak 1993.
31. Also called *nibun no ichi seijinshiki* (2分1成人式、1/2 coming-of-age rite) or *totose no iwai* (十歳の祝い celebration of ten years of age). Source: http://www.news-postseven.com/archives/20141122_285283.html and www.totosenoiwai.jp. In 2012, the seventh of March has been registered as

the Day of the Celebration of the Ten Years of Age, by the association for the diffusion and promotion of the celebration (Totose no iwai fukyū suishin kyōgikai十歳の祝い普及推進協議会). However, the day of the celebration is not settled on any particular day, even though it is quite common to hold the event in schools during the months of January, February, and November.

32. It is also a common practice to make children write a thanksgiving letter to their parents.
33. Source: http://www.news-postseven.com/archives/20141122_285283.html (article Sapio 2014 December, News Post Seven).
34. See, for example, the texts of the website mentioned in Note 31 (www.totosenoiwai.jp).
35. Among others, Studio Alice or Happily Studio. The proposed dress for the occasion of photographing, similarly to other rites of passage, is the Japanese-style dress.
36. *Yakudoshi* comprises beliefs about certain ages in human life regarded as unlucky. Although there is no clear agreement about the ages, usually the twenty-fifth and forty-second year for men, and the nineteenth and thirty-third year for women are seen as critical. The year preceeding and following the concrete *yakudoshi* year is also believed to represent a risky period, even though to a lesser degree than the main year. It is thought that around these ages, one's probability of encountering difficulties, troubles, or illness in everyday life increases. Therefore, special precautions need to be taken. These can be rituals to beg for divine protection. Among these rituals the purification rite is offered in most Shinto shrines (called *yakubarai* 厄祓い), or pilgrimages are carried out to distant and famous shrines. For a discussion of the phenomenon, see Taguchi 2008, 2015, in English see, for example, Edward Norbeck's *Yakudoshi: A Japanese Complex of Supernaturalistic Beliefs* (1955) and *Years of Calamity: Yakudoshi Observances in Urban Japan* by David Lewis (1998).
37. *Kuizome* used to mark the period when the baby started to take its first solid food, practically this indicates the weaning period. Today it is not necessarily associated with weaning even if the timing of the celebration may coincide with it.
38. On the first birthday of the baby, usually marking the time when the baby starts to walk, a variety of divination practices were observed in an attempt to foretell the future of the child. For a variety of local customs connected to the traditional form of the ritual, see in English language Sofue 1965.
39. The seasonal festivals here refer to the traditional Girls' Festival—*momo no sekku* 桃の節句 or *hina matsuri* 雛祭り, and the Boys' Festival—*tango no sekku* 端午の節句 or *koinobori* 鯉幟. The first time they are observed in the child's life is called *hatsusekku*. Children on these occasions receive their first

set of traditional items (*hina* dolls for girls, and samurai warrior arms for boys) that are put on display on the day of the festival. In the past, these were usually sent by maternal grandparents. On the cultural meaning and its role in the education of children of this practice, see Hendry 1986, in Japanese Ōtō 1968.

40. *Nenchū gyōji* have roots in the Chinese ritual calendar where they used to be tightly connected to agricultural and religious festivals. Their introduction to Japan took place around the Nara (710–794) and Heian (794–1185) periods, initially adopted by the imperial court and later diffused to the rest of the society. In the course of the time, the observances acquired specific patterns and meaning under the influence of the Japanese belief systems (see Ishii 2009).
41. Different categorizations of rituals are in use in the Japanese literature. For an overview, see Taguchi 2015.
42. The lack of interest and the low number of studies carried out on the change of ritual culture in postwar Japan has been noted, among others, by Ishii (2009) and recently, by Taguchi (2015). Also, concerning life cycle rituals, Taguchi notices that studies on rituals related to 'death' (such as funeral practices and views on death) greatly outnumber those on life-related rituals (2015).
43. The dichotomic concepts of *hare* and *ke* are widely applied in the interpretation of the cosmology of traditional agricultural communities in Japanese folklore studies (Akata 1979).
44. In the course of the twentieth 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), Kunio Yanagita's *Nenchū gyōji oboegaki* (1969), Tsuneichi Miyamoto's *Minkan reki* (1970).
45. The term 'domesticated' has been adopted by Joseph J. Tobin in his *Re-Made in Japan. Everyday Life and Consumer Taste in a Changing Society* (Tobin 1992).
46. The *Ie*-system (*ie seido* 家制度) was stated as the legal basic unit of society by the Meiji Civil Code in 1898. It was based on a feudal Confucian hierarchical family model where the male head held all authority over the other members of the household and where kin relations were not necessarily based on blood relations and could include wider kinship, too. The model lasted, at least legally, until the end of Second World War. In 1946, the new constitution abolished and replaced it with the nuclear family as the legal unit of the society, defined by the conjugal relationship and offspring. Although several authors point to the persistence of traditional structures and to the continuing relevance of the ideology linked to the *ie* system in rural areas (see, e.g. Hendry 1981, 1986, Kato 2013).

47. According to Taguchi's findings, not solely the belief, but the term '*ujigami*' itself is known to few Japanese (2015).
48. The decorations typical for this time, including Christmas tree and the figure of Santa Claus, remained more or less the same today.
49. James H. Barnett: *The American Christmas: A Study in National Culture* (1954).
50. Another word for the same phenomenon was *Jimmu keiki* (神武景気), lit. Jimmu prosperity. In a similar vein, the 1960s were also labeled as the 'Rock-door prosperity' (*iwato keiki* 岩戸景気), referring to the mythological story of the feast offered by the Japanese gods to Amaterasu Ōmikami, the Sun Goddess, to attract her attention and lure her out of the cave. The Three Imperial Treasures, the sword, the mirror, and the jewel of the Imperial regalia (*sanshu no jingi* 三種の神器) were instead used in the media as counterparts of the three consumer durables: car, refrigerator, and cooler. In other interpretations, the three items were television, washing machine, and refrigerator.
51. On the Japanese Christmas, see also Brian Moeran and Lisa Skov's 'Cinderella Christmas: Kitsch, Consumerism, and Youth in Japan.' in *Unwrapping Christmas*, ed. Daniel Miller (Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 105–133); Junko Kimura 'Kōchikushugi no shōhiron: kurisumasu shōhi wo tōshita purosesu bunseki' (Consumption theory based on Constructionism: Analysis of process through the Christmas consumption) (2001); Junko Kimura and Russell W. Belk 'Shōhi bunka no juyō katei no saikentō : Nihon no kurisumasu shōhi ni miru bunka no saiseisan. (The re-examination of the demand process of consumption culture: The reproduction of culture observed in the Christmas consumption in Japan) (2004); Junko Kimura and Russell W. Belk 'Christmas in Japan: Globalization versus localization.' *Consumption, Markets and Culture*. Vol. 8 (September) (2005).
52. The latest trend is to spend Christmas day in a couple, with one's boyfriend or girlfriend, explained also by the increasing individualization in society.
53. Being familiar with the gift-giving etiquette is viewed as essential for being able to participate fully in the social life of Japan. On this theme, see also Chieko Minami (1997) *Gifuto maketingu* (Gift marketing) (1997), Yuko Minowa and Stephen J. Gould 'Love my gift, love me or is it love me, love my gift: A study of the cultural construction of romantic gift giving among Japanese couples' *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 26 (1999), also Befu 1968, and Hendry 1993.
54. *Chūgen*, today observed on July 15, is a celebration originally adopted from the Chinese ritual calendar with Buddhist origins. It is one of the so-called *sangen* (三元) occasions which mark the fifteenth of the first month (*jōgen* 上元), the seventh (中元), and tenth month (*kagen* 下元). With time, the occasions became known and observed in Japan principally in the form of a

gift-giving ritual, and the middle one, *chūgen*, became viewed as the mid-year gift-giving rite corresponding so to *seibo*, the end-of-year gift-giving occasion.

55. During the 1950s–1960s, department stores, seeing in the celebration an occasion to exploit for gift sales, had a prime role in the popularization efforts of Valentine's Day. Also, during this period, chocolate was not promoted as the main gift for the occasion, but several other items appeared in advertisements (Minowa et al. 2011). Ishii adds a second theory on the first introduction of the custom, that in 1958 the president of Mary's Chocolate (メリーチョコレート) company allegedly misinterpreted the European custom and started to promulgate chocolate as a Valentine gift given by girls to boys (Ishii 2009, 48 referring to an Asahi article from 1988).
56. See also Millie R. Creighton '"Sweet love" and women's place: Valentine's Day, Japan style.' *Journal of Popular Culture* 27(3), 1–19 (1993).
57. Another parallel development, though in the case of *shichigosan* with a later date, is the emergence on the market of Valentine gift items for pets. In the last decade, the media have reported on the growing popularity of *shichigo-san* observance for pets in shrines. See, for example, reports in Nihon Keizai Shinbun 2013/11/9 or in Ichigaya Kezai Shinbun 2013/8/22.
58. The prayers include the *obi-iwai*, a traditional observance performed in the fifth month of pregnancy for safe pregnancy and delivery (see also chapter 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage' on this subject).
59. For a short description of this traditional cosmology see also above (views on age and aging), and for a longer analysis of the subject, see chapter 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage'.
60. Taguchi is here referring, in particular, to the work of Iwamoto (2008) on national rituals.
61. The target group of the survey was a group of 200 women, all mothers of children between the ages of two and ten.
62. A detailed account of marriage and wedding ceremonies in the 1970s rural setting in Kyushu is offered by Joy Hendry (Hendry 1981).
63. In 1982, the average cost of a wedding was 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).
64. The main traits of this development and the growth of the ceremonial industry will be discussed in chapter 'Business Sector, Media, and Religious Institutions'.
65. The author interprets images and representations in terms of Baudrillard's definition of signs and symbols (Baudrillard 1981 quoted in Goldstein-Gidoni 1997, 153).

66. On memorial services and funeral customs in English, see also Robert Smith's *Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan* (1974). On more recent works in Japanese language, see, for example, Mutsuko Nakagomi's *Ihai saishi to sosenkan* (2005), Ajio Fujita's *Tera, haka, sosen no minzokugaku* (2004), Shinya Yamada's *Gendai Nihon no shi to sōgi* (2007), and Satbyul Kim's study on a new funeral pattern called *shizensō* (自然葬) (scattering of ashes in the nature) 'Shizensō no tanjō: Kindai nihonteki kachi no kyohi' (The Birth of Shizensō [scattering of ashes] as Rejection of Japanese Modernity'*Sōkendai bunkakagaku kenkyū* 8 (2012). In English language, see also the contribution of Hirochika Nakamaki in the collection of the edited volume by van Bremen and Martinez (1995) that offers important insights on modern memorial rites performed by the Japanese companies (Nakamaki 1995).
67. The author argues that this development has important implications, among others, on the concept of death in the Japanese worldview (Suzuki 2001).

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Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage

The ritual of *shichigosan* as one of the childhood rites of passage has been described mainly by the Japanese folklore literature. The bulk of these accounts, principally based on data collected in rural settings by generations of Japanese folklorists, date back to the interwar years stretching to the 1960s–1970s. These works are important especially because they inform on the interpretational background of traditional rites of passage and on the cosmology surrounding these rites. However, it must not be forgotten that the contemporary ritual form of *shichigosan* owes its development in a big part to the rise of the urban society in the eighteenth-century Japan and the evolution of this pattern represents in many respects a distinctive path since then. When trying to understand the reasons for the popularity of the *shichigosan* today, as well as to interpret both the phenomenon and the meaning that it represents for the families, it is necessary to pay attention to both paths: the one tracked in the rural communities that probably reflect the historical forms prior to the modernization of Japan, and the development of the ritual pattern in the urban context starting in the early eighteenth century. For scopes of an easier understanding, I will refer to the two paths of development with two terms: rural pattern and urban pattern.

The data material of this chapter come from various sources. On one hand, I refer the secondary literature including historical written sources that mention some description of ritual observations (tenth to early

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nineteenth centuries). On the other hand, the abovementioned folklore literature constitutes another valuable source of information, which, however, is of a later date, principally from the twentieth century. Even though the data gathered by the folklorists illustrate the state of the things as the data of collection, rural communities—the main object of these studies—preserved a fairly traditional way of life for long after the start of the modernization in the nineteenth century; therefore, we can assume that these accounts reflect earlier patterns and customs too. For understanding the urban development in the period between 1868 and the outburst of the Second World War, I undertook a survey of the print media of the period in question. Here I relied on electronic databases of the main newspapers that provided access to materials of the very first issues coming from the period between 1880s and 1890s. I also consulted available printed versions of a few periodicals from the interwar period.[1] The survey proved fruitful since practically no research has been done on the urban development of the *shichigosan* ritual during this particular period.

Early History of the Ritual

The ritual today known as *shichigosan* originally comprised more than one rite of passage, all celebrated in early childhood between two and seven years of age. These rituals make part of two categories of rituals in the Japanese folklore literature. One is called in Japanese *san'iku gyōji* (産育行事), which indicated the group of rites that are related to child-rearing. The second category is *jinsei girei*, called also *tsūka girei*, generally interpreted as life-cycle rites, or rites of passage.

Age-related celebrations, rites of passage, were diffused in the pre-Meiji (–1868) Japan. There existed an immensely rich variation in the patterns and denominations, as well as in dates of observation. The unification of patterns as well as the birth of the common name *shichigosan* was the product of a later and gradual development. The number of variations and lack of standardization of ritual patterns and customs was not typical only to the ritual in question, but it concerned almost all rites of passage. With regard Lindsey notes that the patterns of wedding rites, too, were "[…] flux, likely variegated with locality and class, […]" in the early periods (Lindsey 2007, 51). Ritual practice varied not only by region and historical period but also by social class belonging. In the Heain 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 hairstyle. For example, hair-doing of girls before their coming-of-age ceremony and after its completion was different (Na-Young 2006). Thus rites of passage often centered around the change of hairstyle combined with the change of dress.

Descriptions of childhood age rites emerge in several annals of upper social class families from the very early periods of written history.[2] Sakurai argues that the ages of three, seven, ten, and twelve were regarded as thresholds already by Japan's ancient law system (*ritsuryō*) created in the eighth century (Nara period 710–794).[3] In the document called Ryō no Shūge 令集解 (ninth century) which provides explanatory notes on these laws, the two ages of three and seven were utilized as age limits for a number of regulations (Sakurai 1938, 121).[4] Another historical document from the eleventh century, the Eiga Monogatari, includes a comment on the *hakamagi* (袴儀, literally the rite of *hakama*[5]) 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).[6] The renowned Heian period novel, the Genji Monogatari describes the *hakamagi* rite observed by the then three-year-old hero, Hikaru Genji.[7] A historical pattern of the ritual observed according to an aristocratic custom has been preserved until our days by the ceremonial etiquette of the imperial house. See, for example, the celebration of the *hakamagi* rite (called also *chakko no gi*) of the five-year-old imperial princess, Aiko, in 2006, as a recent example of this kind. Another example is provided by the contemporary etiquette school of *Ogasawara* (小笠原流), heirs of the clan whose members served as official ceremony masters of the Tokugawa shoguns.[8] This school preserves today in an almost unchanging form customs that include ritual observances of the then ruling class, the samurai. Today, it regularly organizes public demonstrations of rituals performed according to the old etiquette, among them also *obitoki* (帯解き) and *hakamagi*, two rites comprised in *shichigosan*. Rites were also often appropriated in different historical periods by different social classes, such as the 'middle rite' of the three *shichigosan* rites, the *hakamagi*. *Hakamagi* was with much probability popular among high-ranking court noble families in the eleventh to twelfth century. Later, when the warrior samurai class rose to political power and gained higher social status, the custom had been gradually appropriated by the samurai class. The adoption of customs and etiquette manners of the previously ruling class by the new ruling class is a common process in history. A similar process occurred in the feudal period when

the samurai class seized power and high-ranking samurai families started to emulate the etiquette of the imperial court (Tsuboi 1976, 166–170). A number of rituals had been firmly inserted into the fairly complex and rigid social status system of the samurai society. Dress code and hairstyle were an important external mark of the individual's social position both in the imperial court and the samurai society (Tanida and Koike 1989). Rites of passage that highlighted the affirmation, demonstration, and perpetuation of social standing acquired a central role in particular in those social groups that attributed increased importance to these aspects.

Thus, the rite of *hakamagi* was adopted by samurai families for male children, as part of the series of coming-of-age rites guiding the child toward adulthood in general, and on his way to becoming a faithful vassal of his shogun, in particular. In the hierarchical value system of the warrior class, with Confucian values clearly placing male members of the society over females, sons were endorsed a higher position than daughters, and this created a particular need to gain acknowledgment of this status by the wider society (Sasama 2001, 102). Indeed, the rite served also to acknowledge—and publicly demonstrate—the social standing of the samurai son and, through it, of the family. The ritual indicated that the samurai son from that moment on was allowed to put on his first formal-crested garment.[9] Indeed, the ritual consisted of the act of dressing ceremonially the child into a formal crested kimono combined with *hakama*, an attire called also *kamishimo* (裃). On this occasion, the son often received his first set of weapons as part of the adult samurai wear.

Today, the Ogasawara school performs *hakama-gi* for five-year-old boys. The child is helped into a formal crested kimono by an elder person who plays the role of the guarantor.[10] The figure of the guarantor often emerges as an important element of the rites of passage.[11] The guarantor was the person that ritually assisted the child during the rite and acted symbolically as its tutor and protector. The guarantor commonly was a respectable person of a social standing equal or preferably higher than the one to which the family of the child belonged (Tsuboi 1976, 166–167).[12] Also, it was common to invite several other members of the wider family and other nonrelative but respectable acquaintances to the celebration of the ritual as their participation assured the desired social recognition of the status (Sugawara 2007, 232).

Ōtomo underlines that social groups always gave their own imprint to the ceremonial observances, including seasonal rites, the so-called *nenchū gyōji*, and rites of passage (Ōtomo 2000, 53).[13] In the samurai society, the

celebration of the seasonal festivities entailed most often a formal visit to the shogun's court when, in the form of a formal audience, the vassals presented their seasonal greetings and gifts to the lord. The samurai son, before gaining the official status of the vassal, as already mentioned above, needed to be introduced to the lord in the form of a first official audience, and this usually occurred in the age between ten and fifteen years. The completion of his coming-of-age rite, called *genpuku* (元服) was an important condition foregoing this audience. Hence, the function and role of ritual observances, be they seasonal festivities, rites of passage, or ceremonies at the shogun's palace, were often closely interlinked in the samurai society.[14]

Numbers and Their Meaning

The three numbers contained in *shichigosan*, seven, five, and three, comprise one of the best-known three-number combinations in Japan. To associate particular meanings with numbers and interpret certain events of human life according to the numbers to which they are linked has been popular since ancient times in Japan and, over time, this has been enriched by other symbolic meanings informed by the Chinese tradition.[15] The old calendar system, used until the beginning of the Meiji period, also had important indications regarding numbers. The lunar calendar and the agricultural production greatly affected the yearly festivity calendars provided by temples and shrines, for example. These calendars regulated the rhythm of rituals and worship, thus assigning a decisive role to the local *kami* (Shinto deities) in the community's life. Spiritual and economic survival was determined by the rhythm of observances laid down by the calendar. Particular days combined with a specific number were believed to be auspicious (or, on the other hand, inauspicious) for a given activity. The basis for the interpretation was provided by a blend of beliefs deriving from popular Shinto, Taoism, and Buddhism, combined with elements of less clear origins.

The exact origin of the auspiciousness of the three *shichigosan* numbers is not known either. Historical documents and collections of ancient laws (*ritsuryō*) indicate that the ages of three and seven have long been considered as important thresholds from a legal point of view (Sakurai 1938, 121). Before the age of three (two, following the modern way of age counting, see the chapter 'Consumer Culture and Changes to the Ritual Calendar in Postwar Urban Japan'), the child was labeled as an infant. Ten was often the age prior to which

children were not regarded as responsible for crimes, and so were not punished before that age (Yamaji 2005). Other theories about the origin of the three numbers look at the Taoist tradition, in particular, the philosophy based on yin and yang principles. This philosophy, called in Japanese *onyōgogyō* (陰陽五行), entered Japan from China around the fifth to the sixth centuries.[16] The rules inherent in the system of *onyōgogyō*, 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 in Japan. Among others, they were used for divination to discover days that were auspicious for particular activities, to define lucky and unlucky spatial directions, or to investigate the reciprocal compatibility or incompatibility of potential spouses. A large number of traditional Japanese festivities are thought to have been impacted by this belief system. While its use today has considerably diminished compared to the past, the system is still popular in the present day.

Within *onyōdō*, numbers are divided into auspicious and inauspicious ones. Odd numbers are believed to have a yang character and are thus thought to bring luck.[17] Even numbers are yin, and therefore, inauspicious. Accordingly, days with odd numbers were believed to be more appropriate and lucky for auspicious events, such as festivities, ceremonies, and travel. In the same line of thought, ages with odd numbers were believed to be more fortunate. 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), when the yin principle turns again into yang. This made the eleventh month into a particularly auspicious month for celebrations. The fifteenth day, on which the official date of *shichigosan* settled (November 15), besides being an odd-numbered day, also fell on a full-moon day (*mochi no hi* 望の日) in the lunar calendar. Full-moon days were believed to be fortunate, and therefore, suitable for auspicious activities such as celebrations. The divinatory technique of *onyōgogyō* was so popular in the twelfth to the thirteenth centuries that, in aristocratic families, it became customary to rely on a specialist before deciding the exact date for an auspicious and important event, such as the celebration of a rite of passage.[18]

The inclination of the Japanese to attribute symbolic meanings to numbers is also shown by the present day popularity of theories that aim to explain the three particular ages of *shichigosan*. A website specializing in advice on the 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).[19] The expert explains that *shichigosan* unifies

the spiritual and vital energies of the cosmos which, accordingly, exercises its influence on the child. The theory makes use of the classic ying–yang associations. The number five is linked to the five forces of wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. Seven is achieved by the addition of two further elements, the sun and the moon. *Shichigosan*, thereby, should be seen not merely as an expression of the parental loving bond, the experts conclude but also as an occasion to celebrate the formation of the child's character by the above-listed cosmic forces. This, and similar popular theories, illustrate the concern the Japanese have for numbers and similar issues.[20]

There are also theories which explain childhood rites of passage in terms of *yakudoshi* belief (chapter 'Consumer Culture and Changes to the Ritual Calendar in Postwar Urban Japan') (Wakamori 1976). There are regions where the ages marked by these rites were simply considered unlucky years during which increased awareness and attention was required if misfortune and illnesses were to be avoided. In some areas of the Kōchi prefecture, the rite observed at seven years was called *yakunuki* (厄ぬき), literally 'rite to prevent *yaku*' (danger, misfortune), indicating clearly its association with the notion of *yakudoshi* (Ishizuka 1978, 52–53).

Childhood Rites of Passage in the Rural Tradition

The researcher wishing to investigate to the subject of rituals and relating customs in the rural traditional world, has an extremely rich material at his or her hand as Japanese folklore scholarship has paid much attention to the subject. Folklore studies grew out from the study of material and nonmaterial culture of a specific segment of population, which means that most of the collected material reflects the lifestyle and life-view of the lower stratum of the society. Though, it is important to keep in mind when analyzing this material that the Japanese rural society was much more differentiated than it might appear from these studies. The Japanese village as such has never been completely homogenous with no social stratification. The second half of the Tokugawa period 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. However, unfortunately the folklore literature rarely accounts for these changes and often overlooks the possibility of the existence of diversity embedded in the social reality.[21] 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 twentieth century, Japanese folklorists guided by Kunio Yanagida and his disciples mapped an until then little-known area of the Japanese rural society and produced a vast body of literature dealing with folk culture. Prior to their work customs of common folk, in particular, those living in rural areas, they found only occasional and indirect expression in written documents.[22]

As already described in chapter 'Consumer Culture and Changes to the Ritual Calendar in Postwar Urban Japan', in the interpretation of Yanagida, exposed particularly in his work, *Senzo no Hanashi* (1946), the human soul emerges as part of a continuant process reaching from birth to death, and again to a subsequent rebirth. For Yanagida, this view found its concrete expression in the household system of Japan. The human soul was 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. He regarded the continuity of the household members as an entity including the present generation, the unborn, and deceased family members. Yanagida's theoretical approaches profoundly influenced the later systematization of Japanese rites of passage (Suzuki 1998, 206). His view of ancestral belief has been further developed by subsequent generations of Japanese folklorists. The complex belief system constituting an all-embracing concept involving nature, afterworld, and the human world, was labeled later with the term *reikon shinkō* (霊魂信仰) (Suzuki 1998, Inoguchi 1978).

Shōji Inoguchi and Hirofumi Tsuboi have been particularly involved in studying rites of passage in Japan. Inoguchi interpreted rites of passage in the context of the traditional belief system in which passages in life are understood as opportunities to renew the soul or spirit (Inoguchi 1978).

Tsuboi created a circular interpretative map including rites of passage observed in the past into this map (Tsuboi 1976). The circle 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* 祖霊化, lit. becoming an ancestral soul) finishes with the completion of the thirty-third memorial rite. Lastly, the fourth phase (*soreiki* 祖霊期, lit. the period of being an ancestral soul) terminates with the rebirth 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 phys-

ical shelf 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, it is the ritual of wedding that marks the borderline which 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 enters the realm of divinities. This view organized in a cyclic pattern is sometimes called in the literature *junkanteki seimeikan* (循環的生命観), 'circular or cyclic life-view' (Itabashi 2007, 288–291).[23]

In brief, rites of passage in the Japanese traditional cosmology had the important role to accompany the individual, respectively its soul, through this complex process of subsequent phases. As seasonal (or calendar) rites (such as New Year, *tanabata*, *hina matsuri*) observed yearly in the same period of the year gave rhythm to the community's life during the calendar year and marked the change of seasons, 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 their correspondence in the changes of nature, in particular in the division of four seasons. These interrelated worlds are also called 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 were seen as being in a continuous interaction and mutually influencing one another.

The celebration of rites of passage started already during the months of pregnancy, when the state of the woman became evident. Though, the most immense period of rituals initiated after the birth of the child when a long series of rituals and taboos were implemented to accompany the growth of the child during the first months and years of its life (Ishizuka 1978, 122–126). 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 loose 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 (Iijima 1991, 42–73). Also, birth was believed to bring about ritual contamination, first of all to the mother, but in a limited degree to the infant, too. 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 huts. Even in places where this custom did not exist, houses usually hosted a separate room for childbirth (Ishizuka 1978, 126–128).

As a sign of the end of the taboo-clearing period (*imiake* 忌明け), the child was taken to the shrine of the local patron deity of the community, called *ujigami*. At this first visit, called also *miyamairi*, the baby was ritually presented to the guardian deity whose admission and protection was sought and prayed for during the ritual.[24] The form or date of the observance as well as the name of the ritual varied greatly from one region to the other, or sometimes even from one village to the other village. 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 (Ōtō 1983, 17). *Miyamairi* was often the first occasion when the baby was formally introduced 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.[25] Baby boys were often wrapped in a crested kimono, 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 four or five 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, literally kimono made of one hundred pieces). Old kimono used earlier 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 malignant forces. In the prefecture of Iwate, the child was not dressed in a new kimono before its first birthday.

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 years, 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. 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, having important implications also regarding numbers and the meanings associated with them. Yasui argues that this belief might have affected the choice of ages connected to several rites of passage observed in Japan (Yasui 2000). 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 'until seven the child belongs to the *kami*' (Yagi 2001, 24–25).[26] 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), that is, '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).[27] Iijima also underlines that the beliefs and customs related to this period of childhood mirrored the view that children perceived as 'incomplete beings', a concept connected to the liminality 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).[28]

The reaching of age of seven also meant that the child had crossed the most dangerous phase of his growth and the probability of illness threatening its life was not high any more. Especially in rural areas of pre-Meiji Japan, mortality of infants and young children under seven years of age was fairly high (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 (Hayami 2010, 186).[29] Merry White argues that this factor also shaped the view that saw children as a "scarce resource" (White 1987, 13). In many places, children who passed away 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 rite.[30] 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).[31] Numerous examples of customs show that the burial of small children and the rite accompanying it was usually much simpler.[32] The burial took place, for example, under the floor of the family home, at road crossings, outside the village, or in rivers (Itabashi 2007, 257–261). Ōtō adds that this custom was supported also by the fact that formal registration of children upon birth into the official population register (*ninbetsuchō*[33] 人別帳, later *koseki* 戸籍), often occurred at one of the *shichigosan* ages, that is, at three, five, or seven, after completion of one of the rites of passage, hence not immediately upon birth (Ōtō 1968, 242).[34] The custom that was diffused throughout Japan still in the Meiji period, rendered later the assessment of infant mortality very problematic, as many children who died as infants, never appeared in the official registers.

To summon up, the three ages comprised in the ritual of *shichigosan*, three, five, and seven, had been seen as particularly significant from early times in the Japanese history. Without listing all variations of rites of passage connected to these ages, I will introduce those patterns that can be seen as characteristic to many rural communities in the past. Around the age of two or three, the rite called *kamioki* (髪置, also *kamitate* 髪たて) was celebrated.[35] 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.[36] There was no clear 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* 深曽木 (or *kamisogi* 髪削ぎ) and took place usually around the age of four or five.[37] The date and modality of the observance depended much on local customs. A change in the hairstyle served as a visible symbol that communicated a definite change is status. The use of this symbol was also common at life stages when the maturity of the person was to be communicated to the public world.

The ritual of *hamakagi*, 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 (Ōtō et al. 2008, 529). During the Tokugawa period, it was mostly popular among samurai families who adopted the custom from the court noble etiquette during the Kamakura period (Suzuki 2000, 62). The seventh year ritual, *obitoki* 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.[38] During this rite, a kimono called *mitsumi* (三つ身), worn usually until the age of three to four, was changed into *yotsumi* (四つ身) (a small size kimono used until ten years of age). 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 *yotsumi* kimono indicated that the simple cord was dropped and the child's dress could be tied with a proper *obi*. *Obi* was seen as symbol of adulthood and according to popular belief diffused in some regions in Japan, it was also believed to prevent the soul from running away from the child's body. 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 the importance of this threshold. Usually an aunt, or another female relative

brought a loincloth as a present to the girl as 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.[39] 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* (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 toward its social integration.

The above-described rites often—but not always—entailed a visit in the shrine of the tutelary deity of the community, where protection and recognition was sought for from the *ujigami* (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* (赤飯 red rice), *mochi* (餅 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* (年祝い age celebration) were held on fifteenth 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).

In many places of Japan it was also common to ask a respectable older person to act as a guarantor for the child on the occasion of its rites of passage (Ōmachi 1976, 140–142). 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 its life (Inoguchi 1959, 206–208). Several types of social parent are known. *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.[40] With regard to puberty rites, Hōri underlines that the social father or the social parents had such a strong role in the future adult life of the child that could reveal itself to be even more influential than the one offered by actual parents, at least in the public life. The guarantor was also often asked to act as the go-between at marriages (Hōri 1968).[41] On

the other hand, Ōtō emphasized that childhood rituals served to transmit the main principles of child-rearing from mother-in-law to bride, as it was often the mother-in-law who carried or accompanied the child through the village to the shrine (Ōtō 1990).

Even from this short description it becomes clear, that there existed many variations not only regarding the pattern and denomination of rites of passage in use in rural areas, but also in the function and role that these communities attributed to these rites. Nonetheless, it is possible to discern 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
2. request of divine protection and guidance
3. religious affiliation
4. social integration into the community and into the wider human world
5. affirmation of kinship bonds
6. ritual purification
7. enculturation
8. transmission of knowledge

While these themes are fundamental for the understanding of the interpretational frame of traditional rites of passage in Japan, for the understanding of the contemporary meaning of the *shichigosan* ritual the pattern that evolved in the urban context of the eighteenth century Japan, in particular in the area of Tokyo (then Edo), can have an even bigger implication. A big number of rites of passage, in particular the regional variations observed in the rural pre-Meiji society, have been faded away as a result of the modernization processes over the last 150 years. A few of these continue to be observed in small communities, sometimes as an attraction for tourists. Puberty and coming-of-age rites have almost completely disappeared and been replaced by a nationwide communal 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. Therefore, in the next part I will examine the path along

which childhood rites of passage evolved not in the rural context, but in the flourishing urban culture of seventeenth- to eighteenth-century Japan.

The Rise of the Urban Pattern

Regional patterns of age celebrations had persisted for long in the rural parts of Japan, in particular in isolated communities. Local versions of the rituals comprised in the *shichigosan* and inspired by old customs, 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 contemporary form of *shichigosan*, and neither can they explain the popularity of the observance in present days Japan. I argue that it was the urban context that gave a clear imprint to the celebration pattern of present days. The beginnings of the development of the *shichigosan* urban pattern are the result of a historical process, namely, the sociopolitical transformation of the Tokugawa era (1603–1867) and in particular, the urbanization that affected the central areas of Japan. The pattern in this period evolved principally in Edo (old name of Tokyo), then the political capital of the shogunate. Also, one of the contemporary salient features of the ritual, the overwhelming presence of consumption, has its roots in the Tokugawa period, as well. After the end of the nineteenth century, this pattern has gradually spread to other urban areas of Japan, finally affecting the celebration form in all of Japan.

In order to understand the circumstances that led to the development of this pattern, let us examine the period's socioeconomic and cultural context. The newly founded Tokugawa shogunate in 1603 placed its main administrative and political seat in Edo. From a political perspective, this act served to further distance the state power from the old ruling class, the imperial house, and the aristocracy, residing since early times in the old capital of Kyoto. The political and economic changes brought about by the new system of governance gave a new importance to the cities and to the infrastructure supporting the communication between the cities and the rest of the country. The new regulations, an instrument of political control, required from the feudal lords, vassals of the shogun, to respect the rule of the alternate attendance (*sankin kōtai* 参勤交代). This meant that a big part of the year they were expected to spend in the capital and thus, to maintain two houses with everything it entailed for this social class (Rozman 1974).[42] This system and the requisites of the accompanying life style led to the expansion of Edo and turned it into a vibrant town.

Particularly during the first period, large numbers of construction workers flowed into the capital to construct residences and palaces and there were opportunities for vast numbers of craftsmen, merchants, and other service professions (Francks 2009).

Another factor that fostered the urbanization process was the economic policy adopted by the government. Following the rigid status system, the society was divided into four classes where the samurai class was placed onto the highest level. This class was however a nonproductive class, relying entirely on an income and taxation of lands owned by them and cultivated by the peasant class. All economic transactions necessary for the functioning of the economy were in the hands of the merchants who occupied the lowest level of the official social scale (Sýkora 2005). This structure implied the existence of a vast nonproductive and economically passive population, the warrior class, which—in the long peaceful reign of the shogunate—was first of all a consuming class, in need of being provided for by the other classes (Francks 2009).[43] This meant also that cities where the feudal lords and their vassals resided were in quest for craftsmen, merchants, and servants of all levels to satisfy the everyday life of the ruling class. The new capital, Edo, witnessed an unprecedented demographic growth during the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries; it soon grew into one of the largest cities of the world (over million inhabitants) (Kornhauser 1976, 65–71).[44] Thousands of persons from near and distant regions of Japan migrated to the cities that offered work and a wide range of opportunities. The urbanization has reached unprecedented degrees for that period and Japan found itself among the most intensely urbanized countries in the world. The urbanization brought about the birth of a particular urban culture during this historical period of relative peace and political stability. Living standards were rising in particular in cities and in a lesser degree in rural areas. The urban culture was ruled first of all by the emergent new class of the epoch, the merchants (Gordon 2009, 2–28).

Merchants gradually accumulated a significant economic power in their hands, which, however, was not accompanied by a political power or appropriate social standing. This peculiar situation exercised a significant impact on their culture and shaped their customs and manners. The always more prosperous merchant class felt the need to render visible the means that were available to its members. The customs of the elite classes had been gradually emulated by the wealthy merchant families. Consequently, fashion and an emphasis on external appearance acquired an increasing importance for this particular segment of the urban population (Akiyama 1992). Shrine and

temple festivals became occasions to display and purchase and to consume special dishes and drinks (Robertson 1994). Early forms of 'consumerism' are viewed as one of the striking characteristics of this period (Tada 1993).

The urbanization exercised its impact on the customs, among them celebrations, too. People arriving to the towns from their native communities brought with them a variety of local customs. The heterogeneity of the population as well as of its customs produced soon the need for more uniformity in many aspects of life. While rural communities led a life quite segregated from the surrounding world, that helped the preservation of local versions of celebrations and customs, the urban pattern of life required a higher degree of standardization and conformity. The urban ritual of *shichigosan* offers an example of a customs that probably born out of a need to create a uniform and simplified ritual pattern that would unite the heterogeneity of childhood rites of passage and that would suit the changed needs of the urban population. The three age rituals (*kamioki*, *hakamagi*, *obitoki*) that had been so far observed separately and with great local differences in date and pattern of the celebration, became united and later also given a common name, *shichigosan*.[45] 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 fifteenth of the eleventh lunar month, which was believed to be an auspicious date according to the popular belief.[46] The fifteenth day was believed to be, according to the old calendar system, a *kishuku nichi* (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.

According to the popular tale, the first 'true' urban *shichigosan* was celebrated in the end of the seventeenth century. The story, that is today often reproduced in various media, popular as well as scholarly texts, says that the fifth Tokugawa shogun, Tsunayoshi, decided to celebrate the rite of passage, probably the *hakamagi*, for his five (or three)-year-old son in the year of 1685 (Nakae 2007, 54–58).[47] Other versions say that it was the third shogun, Iemitsu, to organize the celebration and the year of the celebration was around 1650. Both tales however agree that the celebration was organized in a particularly splendid manner and the reason for it was the gratitude and joy of the father over the growth of his son, who was said to be of poor health as an infant. Part of this celebration was a formal visit of the shogun's family to one of the capital town's well-known shrines, the Hie shrine. This shrine was enshrining the Tokugawa clan's guardian gods and thus was seen as the tutelary shrine of the Tokugawa

clan. The shrine was situated within the shogun's castle territory since the times when Ieyasu, the founder of the Tokugawa shogunate, decided to make Edo the political center of the country. In 1607, it was destroyed by fire and the shrine was rebuilt outside the castle territory. Compared to its previous location, the new seat of the shrine (today in the Akasaka district of Tokyo) was in a space approachable also for the public; consequently, it was more accessible to the commoners living in the town. The celebration of the shogun's family, which entailed a visit to the tutelary shrine of the clan, was probably followed by town people, stirring thus public attention. Throughout the eighteenth century, the Hie shrine figured among the most popular shrines in Edo for the *shichigosan* worship, thought other shrines too received high numbers of observant, such as the Kanda shrine.[48] Today the shrine of Hie claims with considerable pride the right of being the site (or 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* (see more on this in chapter 'Business Sector, Media and Religious Institutions').

It is thought that the celebration of the three age rites (*kamioki*, *hakamagi*, *obitoki*) started its evolution into one unified pattern after this event. Wealthy families started to give more importance to the outer features of the celebration, including into the celebration a visit to the town's popular shrine in the form of a procession accompanied by family members, servants, and sumptuous dresses. 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 important new elements to it, which will be discussed below. One of the most significant developments was the standardization of the scattered patterns of the rituals.

There are only few historical documents that would demonstrate the path of this development. Among them we find the documents called *saijiki* (歳時記) which were a sort of glossaries or diaries on popular customs, rituals, and festivals.[49] Old documents such as the Kokkei Zōdan (滑稽雑談, 1713), provide descriptions of children's rites of passage (*kamioki*, for example), though the word '*shichigosan*' is not yet mentioned.[50] An almanac from the beginning of the nineteenth century called Tōtosaijiki (東都歳時記, 1833), includes *shichigosan* already among the popular observances of *chōnin* (町人 townsmen) in Edo.[51] The document describes it as a lively celebration and mentions the name of the shrines that were among the most popular ones for the observance. It also includes a note

that says that it became common to buy a new dress for the child for the occasion. In general, it describes the celebration in a way which in big lines is very similar to the pattern diffused in present days. The document also contains a reference to an older document, Edo Sunago (江戸砂子), which presumably included a description of the celebration of *kamioki* in 1732 (Kagiwada 1981, 123).

Another source of information on the changes in the ritual pattern of *shichigosan* is presented by a popular poetic genre of the epoch, the so called *senryū* (川柳).[52] 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 are unknown, the best ones were periodically collected and published at the time.[53] Some of them illustrate quite precisely the growing popularity of *shichigosan* among the 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)[54]

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 this period, the rite of *hakamagi* was more associated with the samurai etiquette while the rite of *obitoki* with the commoners. At the same time, it speaks also about the popularity that the *obitoki* rite had 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 the rite of *hakamagi* represented for the ethical education of samurai sons.[55] The importance of the age of five is here underlined by linking it to the five Confucian virtues that stood at the base of the samurai philosophy: benevolence, justice, courtesy, wisdom, and sincerity (*jingireichishin* 仁義礼知信). The following poem demonstrates that *obitoki* was perceived as a threshold in the life of girls:

Obitoki, and girls start to get hold over men (帯解は男を尻に敷きはじめ).[56]

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).[57]

Although to estimate the exact value of *ryō* at the time would be difficult, the amount was a fairly high sum and only families with considerable wealth could afford to spend so much.[58] 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 well-being.[59]

Another source of information on the *shichigosan* pattern of the epoch are the illustrations known as *ukiyoe* which were woodblock prints popular in the Tokugawa period. Some of these depict celebrating children heading to the shrine and accompanied by their families and servants. A picture from the collection of Hiroshige Utagawa[60] from the end of the early nineteenth century shows a family observing the ritual of *shichigosan*: a little boy in *hakama*, and his sister in a sumptuous kimono.[61] The family is accompanied by servants, whereas the little girl is carried on the shoulder of one of the male servants. The custom to carry girls on the shoulder by the father or a servant on the way to the shrine for the *shichigosan* worship became popular in the Tokugawa period (Inagaki 1992, 77). It is thought that this was because it was feared that the costly kimono worn by the girls for this occasion might be soiled by walking on feet. The kimono used for the occasion in case of seven-year-old girls was usually a piece of a regular adult size dress with long sleeves, hence normally too long for a seven-year-old child. If walking on its feet, the festive and often very expensive dress would become easily dirty and to prevent this, little girls were often carried on the shoulders of the father or of servants. There was also a custom to hire a fireman for the occasion. It probably also added lavishness to the procession. The custom was quite common as another *senryū* of the epoch illustrates:

At *obitoki*, only half of a man is walking (帯解は半分人が着て歩き)

The poem describes the sight of a child with kimono that hangs down and conceals nearly half of the figure of the adult person carrying the child.[62] The term 'shichigosan' appears also in the title of a colored woodblock print, 'Elegant Shichigosan' (風流七五三), from around 1772–1780 (Hanasaki 1997, 187).

The new festive dress as the principal external attribute of the celebration grew in importance in the course of the eighteenth century. Various records demonstrate that celebration manners were becoming increasingly lavish already in this period. It is demonstrated also by sumptuary laws that aimed at limiting the excessive spending and use of display during the celebration (Yanagida 1957, 266).[63] 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 the 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 hairstyle, and *hakamagi* and *obitoki* focused on the change in dress style. On the other hand, it must not be neglected that the dress as such possessed a very significant place in the 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 rules of social class division set by the Tokugawa politics, this advancement in economic terms was not coupled with a possibility of social or political advancement. Lacking political power and status merchants developed alternative methods of showing off their growing economic wealth and gaining social acknowledgment (Shively 1964). Ikegami noted that changes in clothing customs, an increased sensitivity to fashions, new materials, and styles, were "employed to relay the shifting styles of social and cultural communities" creating so an "aesthetic world" (Ikegami 2005, 255). Ikegami pointed to the rise of popular fashion, based on industrial and technological progress, as one of the chief achievements of this period. [64] Cotton was vital to this development as it was easily processed and dyed.[65] New technologies made 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 classes, as it used to be in the past, but to a broader segment of the population, as well.[66]

In brief, the urban class developed a distinctive culture and with it, its own aesthetics, expressed majorly through clothing and fashion (Ikegami 2005, Francks 2009, 31–34).[67] The Tokugawa period gave also birth to

one of the symbols that since then continued to be a distinctive sign of the *shichigosan* celebration, the traditional candy-gift, *chitoseame* (千歳飴), the name of the candy means 'thousand years candy' and it alludes to the wish of long prosperous life for the celebrated child. The candy is normally sold only in the period of the celebration (November) and it often makes part of the gift set distributed by the shrines.The candy has been invented by candy merchants in the Tokugawa period.[68] The author of popular stories (*gesaku* 戯作), Ryūtei Tanehiko (1783–1842), mentions in his work called *Kangon shiryō* (還魂紙料, 1825) the story of a candy seller of Asakusa, a quarter in the town of Edo, who, according to the legend, around the Genroku period (1688–1704) introduced a special kind of candy and named it *chitoseame*.[69] Candy (*ame*) was a type of sweet typical for the *chōnin*, the townsmen, of the epoch, and was commonly sold during the festivals in the vicinities of popular shrines and temples. *Ame* was used also as offerings to gods, and later as auspicious gift to be distributed among relatives and friends for occasions such as *miyamairi* and *shichigosan*. The candy-seller wished to offer something special for families that were visiting the shrine for the celebration of the *shichigosan*, something that would underline the auspiciousness of the occasion and at the same time 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 white color in the Japanese culture.[70] The need of inventing something special for the celebration proves also the rising popularity of the observance in the town. It can be presumed that there must have been sufficient numbers of families observing the rite in Edo 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 abovementioned Hie shrine procession of the shogun's family. Today the legend on the origins of *chitoseame* is often reproduced in the media and in marketing materials of candy companies involved in the production or/and sale of the festive sweet.

Standardization of the Edo Pattern and Its Diffusion

Shichigosan was not the only festive observance to go through standardization and subsequent commercialization in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries. Several other festivities in big towns, such as seasonal festivals and shrine/temple festivals began to be accompanied by fairs, where food,

drink, and other items were put on sale. Festivals also represented important occasions for demonstrating the wealth of the ever more powerful merchant class, in the form of fashionable kimonos and accessories, or sumptuous consumption of food and drink. Shrine and temple festivals also became occasions for purchasing amulets and souvenirs. 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 the *shichigosan*. Other traditional children festivals have received the impact of the rising commercialism, as well (Ishii 2009, 64–74). It was this period when the nowadays still popular Girls' Festival, the *hina matsuri* (雛祭り, called also *momo no sekku* 桃の節句), started to be observed by the display of lavish multi-scaled *hina*-doll shelves, a sign of economic well-being in towns. In the fifth month, when the *hina* celebration was traditionally held, a trade of *hina* dolls took place (Nishiyama 1975, 482).[71] Francks notes that this kind of induction of children into the consumer culture occurred in Japan much earlier compared to the Western part of the world (Francks 2009, 39).[72]

The Meiji Restoration (1868) brought a vast range of changes onto all levels of the life of the Japanese who had lived until then in a relative isolation from the events occurring in the other parts of the world. Rapid modernization and industrialization launched by the new government was changing the overall landscape of the country. The urban way of life and the associated culture until then flourishing mainly in the principal towns of the country, started to diffuse to a greater extent to the less urbanized areas of Japan, too. New forms of dissemination of information emerged in this period of intense modernization. The printed media first with newspapers, later with magazines, books, the reform of the educational system that was producing a growing part of the population capable to read and write, the improved transportation infrastructures, all added to spreading of new customs and lifestyle throughout the country. It was the start of a process that would later resulted in an overall unification of lifestyle in Japan. Also, urbanization and industrialization brought about an intense migration from rural places to the towns, which, on the other hand, altered the household structures of rural families. 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).[73] Market economy that began to penetrate into villages already around the end of the Tokugawa period, has further contributed to the

loosening of traditional ties existing within the village communities. The transformation of lifestyle, customs had made openings for the adoption of new customs and practices on every level of life.

The evolution of the *shichigosan* pattern during the Meiji epoch reflected the above outlined changes. In Tokyo and its surrounding area, where *shichigosan* was already a more or less established custom, its popularity grew further in degree. The epoch's publications often mentioned the celebration. So, for example, Yukichi Inoue in his records on life in Tokyo, described *shichigosan* as a celebration observed on the fifteenth of November with the scope to "invoke the God's blessing upon the child" (Inoue 1911, 229). The author added also that the celebration was principally an occasion for showing off the wealth of the family through the dress of the child and the lavish celebration modes. However, a greater diffusion of the 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.[74] Also, the use of the denomination, *shichigosan*, was in use at the time first of all in Tokyo. Nonetheless, sumptuous patterns of the celebration of childhood rites of passage were not unheard of outside Tokyo. In the prefecture of Saitama has been for long a tradition to observe the seventh year's rite of daughters of good families in lavish ways. Etsusaburō Shiochi quotes examples from around 1870 of showy and gaudy celebrations of the *obitoki* rite of merchants daughters in the town of Warabi (Saitama prefecture) (Shiochi 1986, 62). Families often ordered the festive dress of the child appositely from famous and expensive kimono shops in Tokyo.

Local patterns of age celebrations have continued to be observed in several areas of Japan to more or less unchanged manners until the postwar decades. Though, in numerous places local variations suffered the changes in the socioeconomic structure of the country. In the past, age celebrations, especially the seventh year's rite, 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* (子供組み).[75] However, during the Meiji period these groups gradually lost their function in the community, some of their roles being overtaken by the state and the new educational institutions.

Urban Pattern as Reflected in the Epoch's Dailies

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the print media started to exercise a growing impact on the everyday life of the Japanese.[76] By the beginning of the twentieth century, major dailies such as the Yomiuri, Mainichi, and Asahi, reached a relatively wide readership. In 1924, both the Mainichi and the Asahi arrived at a circulation over a million (Gordon 2007). Periodicals, too, were widely read. The newspapers and journals published in major towns, first of all in Tokyo, Osaka and Kobe, mirrored mainly the urban lifestyle in big cities and they became the principal source of information of this lifestyle for the rural population. The media thus contributed significantly to the gradual blurring of regional and urban differences. Moreover, with the rise of the advertisement industry, print media were soon discovered by the commercial sector. The first advertisements with photographs appeared as soon as 1906 and posters started to appear regularly after 1905 (Yamamoto 1984 in Moeran 1995, 12). Retail shops and department stores began to commission the advertisements of their products and services in the principal newspapers.

A close observation of the content and number of articles on the *shichigosan* celebration in the epoch's print media can give a more precise picture of the path the ritual underwent in this period. Also because there are almost no other sources to rely on for tackling the evolution of its pattern and of its popularity from the period reaching to the outburst of the Second World War. The two most widely read dailies of the period were the Yomiuri Shinbun and the Asahi Shinbun. Yomiuri started to be published in 1874, while Asahi a few years later in 1879.[77] Both dailies soon acquired an important readership not only in Tokyo but also in other parts of Japan. In my survey, I examined articles and advertisements that appeared in the examined span of time with the subject of *shichigosan*. These articles were either commentaries on practical matters, such as the choice of an adequate festive cloth, the preparation of the festive meal, articles explaining the origins of the custom, reports on the actual observance in the Tokyo shrines and temples, and other writings with more general matters. In advertisements, apart from their content, I also recorded the frequency and the date of their appearance in the papers. From a close observation of the content and grade of the presence of the subject of the celebration, the reader can deduct some tendencies and their changes over the

examined period, as well as the main lines along which the celebration pattern evolved. The survey has been complemented with an exam of photos published in the Mainichi in the period between 1929 and 1943, where a total number of twenty-two photos and accompanying commentaries were found. As the result of the development of the photographic technology, photos featuring families and children at *shichigosan* as illustrations accompanying newspaper articles, rose in number during the 1920s and 1930s. The total number of articles, photos, and advertisements that appeared in the two dailies in the examined period appear as following:

Yomiuri Shinbun (1874–1943)[78]	
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
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* appeared in the Yomiuri Shinbun on the fifteenth of November of the year, 1879. This article spoke about the role of fathers, whereas it underlined the duty of fathers to provide the new festive dress for their offspring. Accordingly, the acquisition of a new dress was thought to be an important part of the celebration. On the other hand, it also indicates that the fathers were those who were regarded as the principal providers of the expenses of the celebration, which partly contrasts the ethnographic findings according to which the festive dress of the child was commonly sent as a gift by the maternal grandparents. After 1888, the Yomiuri published

at least one article per year with the subject of *shichigosan*. Most articles from these years dealt with the shrine worship as part of the celebration. The articles usually listed shrines in the town that were viewed as the most popular sites for the *shichigosan* shrine visit. Shrines emerging as the most popular ones were: the Hie shrine (日枝神社), the Kanda shrine (神田明神), the Meiji shrine (明治神宮),[79] and the shrine of Suitengū (水天宮),[80] all situated in Tokyo. Also, the articles often spoke about the manufacture laboratories and retail shops that were involved in the production and sale of the children's formal festive attire. In the Meiji period, before the establishment of the major department stores, it was a common practice to order the festive dress for *shichigosan* from a sewing studio. Newspapers commented on the busy period these studios approached in the period prior to the date of the celebration. There were studios which only with difficulties and prolonged working hours were able to satisfy all orders. In an article from 1882 (Yomiuri, November 15), the journalists with surprise commented on the fact that in spite of the economic recession taking place in the country at that time, the festive dress sector seemed not to be affected seriously.

Several articles brought reports about the Tokyo's traditional end-of-year market where customarily *shichigosan* accessories were sold since the times of the Tokugawa period.[81] Also, it was common for journalists to go to the popular shrines on the day of the celebration to personally judge the popularity of the observance. They counted single families turning up for the ritual as well as registered changing trends regarding fashion in festive outfit. These trends were then duly commented in the articles. On the fifteenth of November of 1885, according to an article in the Yomiuri, 467 families came to the shrine of Hie (Yomiuri 1885, November 18). This number concerned, however, only the families which participated in the formal Shinto purification rite. The purification rite was at that time, as it is today, available in major Shinto shrines on request. However, as it is the common practice also presently, not all families visiting the shrine at *shichigosan* requested this part of the rite. Many opted only for the simple shrine visit combined with an individual prayer instead of the formal purification ceremony. This fact was often the subject of harsh critics by the journalists who saw in it a proof of the decrease in the religiosity of the Japanese. Regarding the real number of the *shichigosan* observers in the two abovementioned shrines, it can be presumed that the actual number of *shichigosan* visitors was most likely significantly higher than the number quoted by the journalists. Indeed, another article from 1909 brings much

higher numbers: about 5000 families in the Kanda shine and 3000 in Hie (Yomiuri 1909, November 15). While these figures do indicate that at that time the celebration of *shichigosan* was fairly popular among Tokyoite families, 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.

On the other hand, the fact that journalists' attention was almost exclusively turned to the major popular shrines in Tokyo, tells also about the then already affirmed tendency among families to give preference to famous shrines when observing the *shichigosan* ritual. This also implies that the role of the tutelary deity (*ujigami*, see above) became to be underplayed already at that time, at least among Tokyoites (see also chapter 'Consumer Culture and Changes to the Ritual Calendar in Postwar Urban Japan' on the decline of the *ujigami* belief). Folklore studies usually draw a close connection between the childhood rites of passage and the folk belief associated with *ujigami*. As already mentioned above, the child's integration into the parishioner (*ujiko*) community is interpreted as having an important place in the interpretation of the role of childhood rites of passage in the traditional communities. However, considering that articles from the examined period almost exclusively focus on popular shrines, together with 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*.[82] The common practice among celebrating families (in and outside of Tokyo) of choosing one of the popular shrines instead of the tutelary shrine is often seen on one hand as the demonstration of a discontinuity between the contemporary and the previous or 'traditional' patterns, and on the other hand as a lack of 'authenticity' of the contemporary pattern of the ritual.[83]

The examination of the newspaper articles in the prewar decades shows, however, that already in the first decades of the twentieth century, the decision to which shrine the family should go on the occasion of the *shichigosan* was based first of all on 'profane' considerations, rather than on considerations regarding the given family's *ujiko* belonging.[84] While the *ujigami* belief continued to have its importance in the rural areas, urban families soon preferred the 'famous' shrines for the observance. The most popular shrines were mostly centrally located, surrounded by shops and restaurants, which apart from being practical, also assured public visibility to the family. The shrine was already felt at that time as an integral element

in the process of assuring an elevated status for the ceremonial event, families probably thought that the shrine to visit on the day of the *shichigosan* needed to be appropriate to this status. The urban pattern highlighted the external and often showy features of the celebration, characteristics that evolved in the Edo urban context over the eighteenth century.

Whereas articles until around 1910 were principally commenting on shrine visits and clothing manufactories, after 1910 they began to include more details on the preparative activities of the celebration. Comments on the choice of the dishes appropriate, on prices of dresses, or advices on the ways to adapt used dress for the occasion, emerged frequently. The potential of advertisements was soon recognized and the department stores began to use spaces available in newspapers and magazines to commission their adverts. These did not appear only in newspapers but also in the form of color posters. 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. Famous stores, among them Mitsukoshi, Daimaru, and Matsuya, also issued posters advertising *shichigosan* children dresses.[85] In the 1920s, the number of advertisements in the newspapers targeting *shichigosan* families grew and in a short period it reached eight to ten adverts, reaching sixteen to eighteen adverts a year in the Yomiuri between the years 1927–1932.

Trends in the Fashion of Festive Wear in the Interwar Period

Long before the rise of the advertising industry, textile industry had been already benefitting from the celebration of the *shichigosan*. Before the advertisement industry would have been able to influence its development, the emphasis on the dress had been used for long by retail shops and manufacturers as a good sale occasion. In the beginning of the twentieth 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). Famous retail shops commissioned advertisements of their *shichigosan* festive dress models, both for the child and the mother, in major newspapers. Also, they launched special *shichigosan* sales of festive outfits and accessories, and these sales were advertised well ahead the

official date of the celebration. The purchase of a new festive dress was becoming available to a growing number of families.

After 1910, articles commenting on the latest fashion and trend in the *shichigosan* outfits increased to a significant degree. The department stores were disseminating information about fashion and trends and this regarded the *shichigosan* fashion, too. Advertisements and print media contributed to increase customers' sensitivity to the latest trends. Articles regularly reported on the actual fashion in *shichigosan* dress style, which in this period meant principally the Japanese traditional style. Although, the impact of Western culture on the clothing of the Japanese was gradually growing. Indeed, it was not long that the Western-style dress appeared in the *shichigosan* fashion.[86] 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.

In the interwar years, the word *ryūkō* (流行, fashion, trend) emerged regularly in articles on *shichigosan*, both in relation to Western and Japanese style. Trends continued to be tracked by journalists in popular shrines of Tokyo. In 1927, an article in Asahi (November 15) distinguished two styles of *shichigosan* outfits: the classic style (*kotenshiki* 古典式) and the modern style (*modanzu shiki* モダンズ式). Distinction was also made between the *yamanote* (山の手) and the *shitamachi* (下町) style. The two terms indicate two districts of Tokyo and in the past it was common to attribute two distinctive lifestyles to the inhabitants of these districts. The difference was a product 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 sticking more to traditions and to the old lifestyle. *Yamanote* (lit. foothills) was formed as the main residential area of the *daimyō* (feudal lords) and their families in the Tokugawa period (Bestor 1989). Later in the Meiji era, this area was inhabited by state officials, that is, the upper social class, and today it comprises the residential areas of Tokyo inhabited by white-collar (*sarariiman*) company employees. The inhabitants of this area have been traditionally considered as more 'modern' and 'rational'. The two denominations were used by the journalists 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, the Hie and the Meiji), and *shitamachi* families were reported to prefer the traditional Japanese garments (observed in the shrines of Kanda and Fukagawa) (Asahi 1927, November 15).

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 lavishness and irrational consumption (see more on this in chapter 'Constructing the Ritual: Dress, Photographs, Actors, and Script'). Criticism of the celebration manners regarding the *shichigosan* ritual emerged time by time during its history. The turn of the twentieth century was marked by strengthening efforts of social reformers who tried to reform child-rearing practices as part of their strategy to create a new ideology of the modern family (Jones 2010) (see more on this in chapter 'Constructing the Ritual: Dress, Photographs, Actors, and Script'). Typical to this ideology was the placing of the moral above the material. The political environment of the interwar period influenced, too the tone of articles. The Japanese government preparing its industry for the war, initiated campaigns to control consumption levels and foster savings, and for this aim it used the potential of civil groups, among them housewife associations (Mertzel 2004). In 1925, an article in Yomiuri informed about a course organized by a housewife association (associated to the Asakusa temple) to educate mothers and housewives on the proper ways to celebrate the *shichigosan* ritual, which basically was a celebration mode without going to an excessive spending (Yomiuri 1925, October 14).[87] Articles criticizing the lavish modes of celebrations started to appear with higher frequency around 1924–1925. While being inspired principally by the official propaganda of savings, these critical voices often alluded to the view that excessive consumption in celebrations somehow undermined the authentic meaning and role of these celebrative events.[88]

Nonetheless, the celebration in fact caused headache not to few families. The heaviest expense imposed by the celebration was the purchase of the child's festive attire, and many could not afford it. The practice of adapting a used dress and transform it into a festive attire was widespread as the numerous advices appearing in the articles reveal it. An article from 1924, termed *shichigosan* the 'war/battle of dress' (*hareki no sensō* 晴れ着の戦争) (Yomiuri 1924, November 9). The expression pointed in an ironic way to the battle that arose among the celebrating families with regard to the lavishness of the festive dress. Although, 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'. The authors of these voices argued that the celebration had become a mere show, something that served solely to demonstrate one's financial means to neighbors and relatives, and therefore it was in need of reform and bring back the 'original' and 'traditional customs'. However, as the subsequent development shows these critiques and reforming attempts have not substantially influenced the direction of the development of the *shichigosan* pattern.

In brief, the growing number of articles on *shichigosan* in the examined period of time demonstrates the increasing degree of the popularity of the observance. From the end of the 1910s, articles were becoming more informative, the coverage of the event rose to five to six articles per year in the Yomiuri in the 1920s. While until the early 1920s little or no 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 in Tokyo, 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 1936, an Asahi article reported on a new phenomenon that regarded the Christian churches in Tokyo (Asahi 1936, November 15). These decided to introduce a newly invented ritual among its religious rites that would address children in *shichigosan* age. It was intended to stand as an equivalent of *shichigosan*. 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. 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.

The number of advertisements focusing on items used in the celebration grew as well in the interwar period. Besides, the date of the publication of adverts started to shift to always earlier data, well ahead of the

actual date of the celebration (November 15). In the early 1930s, the first advertisements started to appear as soon as September. In the later postwar decades, the preparative period, that is the period preceding the day of the shrine visit and celebration, came to be considered as important as the celebration itself, and as a necessary condition for achieving a satisfying ritual experience. Nowadays, a thorough and timely preparation is believed to be a condition for the successful outcome of *shichigosan*.

The activity of the department stores, too, contributed to the popularization and at the same time, to the commercialization of the celebration. The practice to set up thematic exhibitions became a favorite promotion move of major department stores after the turn of the century. These exhibitions were important platforms to educate the public into the material culture of modernity (Jones 2010, 97). One of the first exhibitions of the kind was organized in 1909 by the Mitsukoshi and soon was followed by various others in the following years. Childhood as such figured also among their themes. Children's exhibitions set up by Mitsukoshi 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). Followed by other stores across Japan, the exhibitions focused on a wide range of themes around childhood, from goods such as clothes, toys, magazines, and furniture, to children's celebrations, including *shichigosan*. In 1916, the Mitsukoshi exhibition represented infancy divided into periods marked by seven important moments: birth, first seasonal festival (*hatsu sekku* 初節句), kindergarten, *shichigosan*, entrance into elementary school, arranging the child's own room, and school athletic meetings (Jones 2010, 80–85). Each moment and corresponding phase was illustrated by the display of a range of goods 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 scientific approaches and thematic associations. Moreover, the fact that *shichigosan* was judged by the organizers as one of the hallmarks of childhood indicates the importance attributed to this celebration at the time (see more on this in chapter 'Constructing the Ritual: Dress, Photographs, Actors, and Script').

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 afflu-

ence of the Japanese families. 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 spread throughout the country in the postwar decades.[89]

The approaching war had its influence also on the celebration modes of the families. The photos in newspapers depicting families visiting the Yasukuni shrine,[90] a national symbol of patriotism, little boys dressed as soldiers for *shichigosan*, with the Japanese flag in the background, all played part of the pro-war campaign (see, for example, Yomiuri 1937, November 15). Prior to 1937, children dressed in military uniforms appeared only occasionally. 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 November 15, in the precincts of the popular shrines, sales of wartime bonds took place using the event of *shichigosan* 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.

Whereas the approaching war interrupted many of the trends evolving in the interwar years, the direction of the development set first by the eighteenth- to nineteenth-century urban society, later by the modernizing urbanized life style of the capital, defined the path of the evolution of the celebration pattern in the postwar decades. The flourishing urban merchant society of Edo town gave its peculiar imprint to the celebration, and the form that came into being had spread in subsequent centuries to other regions too. This pattern offered sufficient space for the expression of the multitude aspects of the newly emerging urban culture. And while the ritual continued to embody multiple layers of meanings entailing also ancient beliefs related to views on the human soul, more 'profane' aspects arose as important parts in the formation of a distinctive urban pattern of the celebration as early as the eighteenth century. It was also 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 (1868–1925), 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 Second World War, 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.

Notes

1. The newspapers and periodicals I consulted come mainly from their Tokyo edition. The rise and the popularization of the urban pattern of the ritual in question initiated in the Edo/Tokyo (Edo the old name of Tokyo) area and it is from here that the pattern spread to the rest of the country. Nonetheless, I consulted some early issues of the Osaka edition and the outcome proved my assumption that at the studied period of time the popularity of the urban patterns was still mainly limited to the Tokyo area.
2. 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 fifteenth century (quoted in Sugawara 2007, 229, see also Sugawara 2000, 47–51).
3. The principal collection of law was the Yōrō Ritsuryō (養老律令), called also Yōrōryō (養老令) (see also Yamaji 2005).
4. The document quoted by Sakurai is the ninth volume of Ryō no Shūge compiled during the ninth century.
5. *Hakama* is a pants-like garment in the traditional Japanese outfit. It was originally a skirt-like loose trouser worn by court nobles of both sexes. Later it became part of the ceremonial wear of the samurai.
6. For a list of other historical documents mentioning childhood age-related rituals observed among noble and samurai families, see Tsuboi 1976. See also *Seiiku girei no rekishi to bunka. Kodomo to gendā* edited by Sanae Fukutō et al. (2003).
7. Genji Monogatari, Part 1 'Kiritsubo', quoted in Kagiwada 1981, 124.
8. Members of the Ogasawara family have acted for centuries (for thirty-one 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). The school organizes demonstrations of rituals, among these also childhood age rites, performed according to samurai etiquette preserved in historical sources written by member of and in possession of the family (among others the eighteenth century's Teijō zakki (貞丈雑記). The school sustains that these demonstrations are true reproductions of rituals observed by samurai families in the Tokugawa period. See also Kiyotada's article on traditional childhood rites of passage in 'Kodomo no seichō to kimono', 2009, Vol. 3 September (Zenbu shiritai shirīzu). For the official website of the school see: www.ogasawara-ryu.gr.jp. For other examples of etiquette schools in the Edo period see Szabó 2015.

9. The crested formal garment 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 the celebration of *shichigosan*.
10. In addition, children during the ritual are asked to step on a *go* board (*goban* 碁盤), a pattern followed also in the imperial court. The popular game of *go* used to be viewed as a symbol of human life which was conceived as a battle marked with victories and defeats. To play and to win in *go* requires wit and intelligence, and therefore the game suited well the symbolism of the rite of passage during which similar qualities were wished for the child. Paralleling the game of *go* to the struggles human life requires, the child is encouraged to jump off the board vigorously, in the same manner as it will have to face battles and troubles in its own life. The board of *go* can be still found on display in a few shrines during the celebration period of *shichigosan* (for example, in the Hie shrine in Tokyo).
11. For more on this subject, see below.
12. For concrete examples of these rites observed among high-standing families in the period between the thirteenth and sixteenth century, see also Sugawara (2000, 2007).
13. See also chapter 'Consumer Culture and Changes to the Ritual Calendar in Postwar Urban Japan'.
14. Similarly, the observance of the *hatsumiyamairi* (the first shrine visit of the baby) owes its popularity to the development in the samurai society (Taguchi 2015).
15. Thomas Crump argues that the Japanese have significant creativity in the use of numbers (Crump 1992, 60).
16. Another name for this system is *onyōdō* (陰陽道).

17. A meticulous description of the use of numbers within this context can be found in Crump's study (1992). See also Yasui 2000.
18. See, for example, the document of *onyōdō* masters, the Tsuchimikadoke Bunsho (土御門家文書) from the Heian period (Sugawara 2000, 47).
19. Source: www.allabout.co.jp (last accessed 15th January 2015).
20. References to the three *shichigosan* ages sometimes emerge in commercial texts not related directly to the celebration. So, for example, an advertisement in the daily of Asahi Shinbun in 1999 (September 12) promotes the purchase of family house by linking the single developmental phases in the growth of the child to the growth of the family home. The advert adds that *shichigosan*, apart from being a significant threshold in the child's life, is also closely connected to the family, and the image of family is symbolically contained in the family house.
21. For a critical view on Japanese folklore research, see Schnell and Hashimoto 2003.
22. For a detailed overview of works on traditional customs regarding childhood and child-rearing, see Kami 1989.
23. Recently, this theory, and in particular the conventional use of terms such as 'lifecycle rituals', has been criticized in the scholarly literature. Itabashi, for example, has called into question the applicability of the term 'lifecycle rituals'—originally defined within the interpretative frame of 'circular life-view'—to modern contexts (Itabashi 2008 in Taguchi 2015, 12). Suzuki has argued that this theory should be seen as one possible approach to interpreting rites of passage (Suzuki 1998).
24. Indicating this function, in some places the ritual was also called *ujiko hairi* (氏子入り), literally, admission of shrine parishioner.
25. See also Yanagida's *San'iku shūzoku goi* (1935), Tsuneichi Miyamoto *Kakyō no ku. Aijō wa kodomo to tomo ni* (1967), Kiyoko Segawa *San'iku* (1958), Inoguchi (1978), and in English language, Hendry 1989.
26. *Nanasai made wa kami no ko* 七歳までは神の子.
27. 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 literally, 'one whole portion of an adult person') was used.
28. On the use of liminality in modern urban contexts and the possibilities to broaden Turner's concept, see Fotini Tsibiridou's 'Social Poetics, Emotional Engagement and Cultural Critique in Istanbul: When Liminality Matters in the Social Movements' (*Urbanities* 4/1, 2014). See also Italo Pardo's *Managing Existence in Naples. Morality, Action and Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996).
29. Interestingly, the Taisho period recorded higher rates in infant mortality than the Meiji period (infant here counts children up to the age of one). For comparison, in 1899, the infant mortality rate was around 158 deaths for

1000 births, in 1920, it raised to 165. After a temporal stagnation in the first postwar years, the rate fell dramatically to four 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). 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 of the gravity or significance attributed to these occurrences was often intentionally underplayed in Japan (Itabashi 2007, 256).

30. See a further discussion of the theme in Iijima 1991, Suzuki 1998, and Kuraishi 2000. 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).
31. 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).
32. It was also believed that children under seven could not attain Buddhahood after death. If the child did not receive a proper burial it was thought that it could be reborn quickly (Sakamoto 1985 in Chen 1996, 34).
33. *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.
34. Quoted from a pre-Meiji survey in Ōtō 1968, 242.
35. Many other denominations exist varying by region and local dialect.
36. 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. In families belonging to the upper social classes, the custom to shave children's head was gradually abandoned and often the first trimming rite called *fukasogi* or *kamisogi*, replaced the *kamioki* (Inoguchi 1959).
37. 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).
38. For a list of local variations of childhood rites of passage and related customs divided by prefectures see Ōtō et al. 2008, 529–537.

39. Moreover, children of these ages were seen as representing the will of *kami* and used as medium for divinatory practices (Miyata 2007a, 33–38). Children-medium (*shin'i no daibensha* 神意の代弁者) were beautifully dressed and painted for these occasions. In present days, too, at *matsuri* (祭り festivals) processions children are often assigned important parts.
40. In many places, the midwife continued to keep a significant role during the first seven years of the child's life. In some places it was also believed that children until seven were under her direct protection (Miyata 2007b, 59–60).
41. See Tokuzō Ōmachi *Konrei* (1962), Jirō Kamishima *Nihonjin no Kekkonkan* (1969), Tsuo Emori *Nihon no Kon'in: Sono Rekishi to Minzoku* (1976).
42. See also Gary Leupp's *Servants, Shophands, and Laborers in the Cities of Tokugawa Japan* (1992).
43. With this high proportion of a nonproductive and consumer population, Edo was far ahead of the major European capitals (Tada 1993).
44. Osaka's and Kyoto's populations approached those of London and Paris at that time (Nakai and McClain 1991 in Francks 2009, 12).
45. Taguchi (2015) provides another example of a development in which several rites of passage were combined into a single form for a single occasion. Today it is common to observe the pregnancy prayer associated with safe pregnancy (*anzan kigan*) on the day of the dog (the eleventh of the twelve zodiac animals, traditionally considered particularly favorable to pregnancy and safe birth). The occasion is also commonly used to observe another pregnancy rite, the *obi iwai*, when the pregnant woman receives or purchases a ceremonial sash (*obi*) in the shrine. *Obi-iwai* traditionally marked the fifth month of the pregnancy, when a special *obi,* which would be worn until the moment of delivery, was tied on the pregnant woman. Historically, it was not common to observe both rites together. Taguchi suggests that the media are the driving force behind this development.
46. 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* 霜月祭り).
47. See also Ishii 2009, 142.
48. The Hie shrine's popularity continues even today, although there are other, more popular shrines in Tokyo in our days, such as the Meiji Jingū 明治神宮.
49. For a list of documents from Edo mentioning the custom, see Shinichirō Watanabe's *Edo no shominseikatsu, gyōji jiten* (2000).
50. Kagiwada 1981, 122.
51. *Chōnin*, lit. townsmen, is a collective denomination use to call urban commoners of the epoch which comprised artisans and merchants, that is, the non-samurai population residing in towns.

52. *Senryū* is a three-line unrhymed Japanese poem structurally similar to a *haiku* from which it developed in mid-eighteenth 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).
53. For other *senryū* reflecting everyday life of townsmen in Edo, see, for example, Satō 1992.
54. 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* related to *shichigosan*, see also Kagiwada 1981, Hanasaki 1997, and Satō 1992.
55. Kagiwada notes that as a result of restrictions issued by sumptuary laws in the Tenpō era (1830–1844), the samurai class for a while probably abandoned the custom of observing this rite (Kagiwada 1981, 123).
56. The poem comes from a collection of *senryū* called Yanagidaru (柳多留) compiled every year starting from 1765 until the end of the Tokugawa era (see also Hanasaki 1997).
57. Nakae 2007, 66.
58. 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*.
59. Another example of a poem with the same meaning is: *Obi* and *hakama* together at the retail shop for 12 *ryō* (帯と袴で呉服屋へ十二両) (from the Yanagidaru collection, quoted in Hanasaki 1997, 189).
60. Utagawa Hiroshige (歌川広重, 1797–1858) was a well-known *ukiyoe* artist in the Tokugawa period. Among his most famous works are the 'Fifty three views of Tōkaidō' (東海道五十三次).
61. From the *ukiyoe* collection of Utagawa called Meisho Edo Hyakkei (名所江戸百景) reproduced in Nakae 2007, 65.
62. Another example deriving from the eighth edition of the Yanagidaru collection with the same theme: Jūgonichi, Edo de arasoo kataguruma (十五日 江戸で争う 肩車). The poem speaks about the custom of carrying the child on the adult's shoulder for the fifteenth (the day of the celebration).
63. Although Yanagida does not mention the exact year in which this particular law was issued, the issuing of the mentioned sumptuary laws probably fall into the period of reforms of Tenpō, that is, between 1841 and 1843. Sumptuary regulations, as in every social context where these were issued (China, Europe, and Japan) aimed at restraining social change especially among the emergent urban merchant classes (Hunts 1996, 24–25 quoted in

Lemire 2012, 314). See also Shively 1964 on sumptuary laws in the Tokugawa Japan.

64. New types of textiles, such as cotton, revolutionized the manufacture of clothes. Cotton was more easily processed than traditional textiles, which helped raise levels of household production. In turn, the emergence of the concept of fashions in clothing also stimulated local production and consumption much as it did in other parts of the world (Lemire 2012, 316).
65. See also Kayoko Fujita 'Japan Indianized: The Material Culture of Imported Textiles in Japan, 1550–1850' in G. Riello and P. Parthasarathi (eds.) *The spinning world: A global history of cotton textiles 1200–1850*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2009).
66. Lemire argues that cotton, the 'new luxury', represented comfort and pleasure and was easy to produce, in contrast to 'old luxuries' such as jewels, furs, and precious metals which were associated with the old hierarchies. As such, cotton soon acquired an important role in the communication of cultural meaning, permitting reciprocal relationships among participants in consumption (De Vries 2008, 45 in Lemire 2012, 315–316).
67. The well-known writer of the Tokugawa period, Ihara Saikaku (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).
68. *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).
69. The document mentions the name of the candy seller: Shichibei. Genroku is regarded the peak of the Tokugawa reign when the political power of the Tokugawa house was affirmed and an economic boom brought about the blooming of arts and urban life.
70. White is the symbol of purity in Shinto tradition.
71. Traders soon recognized that setting a seasonal trend in the style of goods helps to increase sale figures (Dunn 1969, 150, 167–168).
72. On the way consumer culture altered children's celebrations in twentieth-century North America, see Pleck 2000, 141–161.
73. On the continuing relevance of the ideology of 'groupism' in contemporary Japanese society, see, for example, Torsello 2013.
74. 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).

75. These age groups were active in many traditional rural communities in pre-Meiji Japan. *Kodomogumi* was made up by the youngest members of the hamlet. The participation in its activities was considered important for the child's education; here children were taught about values of the group, they were assigned tasks during village festivals and in minor community labors (Iwata 1999). For an English-language account of these age groups and their place in the social structure of rural communities, see Fukutake 1972, 96–116.
76. See also Papp 2013.
77. Asahi Shinbun started to be published in Osaka in 1879, its Tokyo edition was started a few years later.
78. During the last two years of the war, no article on *shichigosan* had been published.
79. After its foundation in 1920.
80. The deity venerated at Suitengū is known as the protector of safe birth.
81. End-of-year markets were popular in the Tokugawa period and *shichigosan* accessories were sold there among other items related to festivities and celebrations.
82. In spite of this, discussions on the link of *shichigosan* to the *ujigami* belief is still central to studies addressing contemporary *shichigosan* (Ishii 2009, Taguchi 2015).
83. The presence or lack of the *ujigami* belief in the present lives of the Japanese also appears in contemporary scholarly surveys among the indicators of the religiosity of the modern Japanese. In a recent survey on the religious consciousness in contemporary Japan, *ujigami* belief is listed among the possible indicators of the religious commitment of the modern Japanese (Kokugakuin 2006). The results of the survey, though, showed that the *ujigami* belief has only a little relevance in the lives of most of the present Japanese.
84. The tutelary deity belief was tightly connected to locality. The person who lives in a given territory is automatically placed under the protection of the local tutelary god (*ujigami*).
85. To my knowledge, the earliest example of advertisement poster on *shichigosan* in the Advertising Museum of Tokyo comes from 1928.
86. On the changing trends in *shichigosan* wear see also chapter 'Constructing the Ritual: Dress, Photographs, Actors, and Script'.
87. A total of 650 women participated in the course. On the official ideology that accused Japanese women as chiefly responsible for excessive consumption and hence for the economic recession, see Mertzel 2004.
88. Critical attacks at the practice of lavish consumption in the celebration manners were not unique to Japan. In the Western context, too, the practice of excessive use of goods, buying and spending at celebrations often met harsh

critiques. Pleck and Schmidt in their separate studies on the history of the American festivities, list numerous examples for similar attacks (Schmidt 1995; Pleck 2000). These voices 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). For other examples of critiques of consumption in Japanese celebrations see Minowa et al. 2011.

89. There are certain traits of resemblance between the celebration patterns of *shichigosan* and that of the wedding. These parallels were also noted in the print media of the epoch. Also, advertisements on festive dresses, accessories, and photo services often addressed, simultaneously, both rituals. For a detailed description of the history of the wedding ceremony pattern in the twentieth century, see in English language Hendry 1981, Edwards 1989, Smith 1994, Goldstein-Gidoni 1997, also Shida 1999. For a Japanese-language account, see, among others, Ishii 2005.
90. 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.

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Business Sector, Media, and Religious Institutions

The previous chapter described the historical process that produced the current form and meaning of the *shichigosan* ritual, the time span of the analysis reaching the end of the Second World War. Although the traits of many of the idiosyncrasies within the contemporary celebration can be found in the prewar period, the widespread popularization of the urban pattern began only in the decades following the end of the War. *Shichigosan*'s evolution throughout the economic growth of the postwar decades represents an interesting example of a process in which a typically pre-urban traditional practice became transformed and adapted within a highly urbanized and industrial society, which is also one of the most developed consumer cultures in the world. In the decades of intense industrialization and high-speed economic growth, the evolving market and service sector together with the changing urban lifestyle highly affected the celebrations of the Japanese society. The individual actors of the celebrations emerged quickly not only as simple observers but also as modern consumers.

Before proceeding with my analysis concerning the *shichigosan*'s evolution throughout the postwar decades, I think it is important to underline that my focus remains on the development of the ritual mainly in the Tokyo area. By doing so, less attention is paid toward the variety of rural patterns that continue to be observed in some parts of Japan. These rural patterns usually bear a greater continuity with local traditional customs compared to urban patterns, and as such, they represent interesting examples of pre-urban

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customs. However, most of them also include several elements of the urban pattern which I will describe below. Since the scope of my work is to elucidate the meaning of ritual practice in the modern urban context, my analysis focuses on the urban ritual pattern developed typically in Tokyo, which then spread reaching other metropolitan areas in Japan.

Postwar Diffusion and the Beginnings of Commercialization

Until the Second World War, the urban pattern of *shichigosan* was mainly limited to Tokyo, but within two decades, it spread to other parts of the country. Industrial growth, wider access to goods, and the development of the advertising industry all contributed to the popularization of the urbanized form of *shichigosan*. Its commercialization proceeded hand in hand with the developing media, advertising, and textile industries. Newspaper articles reporting on the ritual during this period illustrate this process in a very clear way. The two newspapers mentioned in the previous chapter, Yomiuri Shinbun and Asahi Shinbun, continued to comment on the *shichigosan* observance of Tokyoite families in the years following the end of the war. The very first related articles and photos celebrated the return of peace in the country. After the gloomy years of the war, the mere sight of children dressed in their best for *shichigosan* were perceived as a clear sign of the return to normality in daily life. In November 1945, just a couple of months after Japan's capitulation, Mainichi's newspaper published several photos featuring American soldiers holding hands with Japanese children dressed for the celebration. Comments under the photos were written in a gay tone, overjoyed for the fact that at this very first postwar *shichigosan*, 'even American soldiers are smiling'.[1] Clearly, these images, among others, were utilized by editors as part of their campaign to foster positive feelings among the population toward the occupying forces. In addition, for a while, American military uniforms became trendy in male children's wear for the *shichigosan* occasion. Actually, in 1945, only few families could observe the ritual, partly due to the evacuation of the population, partly because of the missing urban transportation services that had been damaged during the war.

The years immediately following the end of the war, however, were 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 plain sweet potatoes.[2] However,

the number of *shichigosan* celebrants was slowly rising. In 1948, 30,000 families visited the shrine of Kanda to pray for *shichigosan*: a number that, for the first time after the war, exceeded the prewar peak. The growing number of observers was interpreted by journalists as a clear sign that life in Japan was returning to regularity.[3] During those years, the word 'peace' appeared frequently in articles.[4] Images of families and children dressed up in gay clothes for *shichigosan*, promenading in town and in shrines, stood as a symbol of a long-desired peace as well as of the well-being of a nation that had gone through hard times, as phrased by a journalist.[5]

During the 1950s, the economic situation of Japanese families started to significantly improve. Together with an increase in the expenditure levels for the consumption of goods and housing, the Japanese started to spend more on leisure, education, and childcare.[6] The market's development around *shichigosan* was evolving in close connection to the rise of the market revolving around the child in general. This development was also due to the changes occurring in the way children were viewed. In the decades after the Second World War, the child—and consequently schooling—gained increasing importance in the families' value system. By the end of the 1960s, costs related to children's education, and to child-rearing in general, were growing (White 1987; Tsuru 2005). Spending on children was becoming socially accepted as well as desired. At the same time, the media presented critical comments targeting the excessiveness of the celebration modes. The often opposing feelings that *shichigosan* evoked were perceivable also in jokes published in newspapers on the subject. One particular ironic joke, taking the disguise of an 'opinion poll', commented on popular attitudes toward *shichigosan* in the following way: 'It's futile, isn't it?...50%. Anyhow...50%.'[7] In spite of the ironic voices, the popularity of the celebration rose steadily in the Tokyo area. The celebration on behalf of high numbers of families was reported from the two most popular shrines in Tokyo, the shrines of Kanda and Meiji. In 1953, Kanda reached a peak in the number of visitors in its postwar history: 35,000 families went to observe the ritual.[8] In 1959, the number of visitors in the Meiji shrine arrived at 10,000. 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 the Meiji shrine. The journalist compared it to the custom when in Edo, the old name of Tokyo, fathers, or hired servants carried children on their shoulders to the shrine.[9] To stress the parallel between these two images, a comic short poem was included in the article: 'Riding (in car) to the gods at *shichigosan*."[10] During the early 1950s, only wealthy families

possessed cars, nevertheless, it soon became a fashionable thing to use a car for the shrine visit—if not by one's own car, at least a rented one.[11] 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 mother and child: 'Child: "Mom, why can't I celebrate my *shichigosan* this year?" Mother: "Because your father is not willing to buy me a new dress."'[12]

Criticism and Reform Campaigns

Voices critical of conspicuous modes of celebration had a presence in the media during the prewar and postwar years. Criticism was targeted not only at *shichigosan* but also other celebrations. As the commercialization of rituals intensified criticism spread from social commentator to consumers, but without, as Minowa et al. noted with respect to Japanese celebrations of Valentine's Day, affecting the popularity of the ritual (Minowa et al. 2011, 45). In the immediate postwar years, criticism regarding *shichigosan* often pointed to the differences that existed between 'fortunate' children (i.e. children who were offered a *shichigosan* celebration by their own families), and the 'less fortunate' children (i.e. children in poor families or war orphans) who had no possibility to celebrate or no money to spend for the celebration.[13] In 1954, the central organization of Shinto shrines (Shintō Honchō) asked shrine authorities to reflect on the 'original' underlying principle of the *shichigosan* celebration. They encouraged shrines throughout the country to organize celebrations for orphans and the poor.[14] As a result, a few shrines in the prefectures of Kobe, Fukuoka, and Miyagi set up municipal *shichigosan* celebrations offering the children a meal, games, and gifts. The beneficial activities for orphans and poor children continued for a while, but this pattern of celebration did not become diffused in the long run.

The most expensive item of the celebration was still the child's festive dress, followed by the mother's festive attire. In 1953, a festive *furisode* (long-sleeved kimono) for a seven-year-old girl was advertised at 15,000 Yen, but it could reach also 25,000 Yen. For comparison, in 1952, the average monthly income of an employee in a town was around 20,000 Yen.[15] Critics often pointed out 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.'[16] The expensive festive dress was affordable only for families in a good economic situation, leaving the poorer incapable of lining up. The media often commented

on the fact that by looking at the family members' outfits, the differences of the economic status emerged immediately. *Shichigosan* was labeled as a 'clothing contest' (*fuku no konkūru* 服のコンクール) using a term reminding the expression appeared in a prewar article and mentioned in the previous chapter ('the war/battle of the festive dress' *hareki no sensō*). Social critics called for a 'renewal' in the celebration of *shichigosan*. Not unlike the prewar years, these commentators considered that spending money on a celebration devalued it, emptying it of its 'original' and 'true' value and meaning. Nevertheless, for most families the celebration was not the right time to seek for frugality.

Sporadically, newspapers reported on municipal *shichigosan* celebrations, mostly in rural areas. A reportage in 1961 described a municipal celebration of seven-year-old children in a rural community in the prefecture of Saitama.[17] The celebration took place in the local school and the initiative was commented on by the journalist in a very positive tone. The article mentioned that the community had introduced this form of celebration two years earlier with the scope of preserving the local traditions. In the past, according to the local custom, the celebration for the seven-year-old children was offered to firstborn sons and daughters, thus acknowledging the higher social position attributed to the firstborn. Nevertheless, in 1959, when the celebration was reintroduced, the community invited all seven-year-old children to the municipal celebration, without making any differences in their birth order; younger children were not included. The article pointed out that by inviting all seven-year-old children, the authorities wished to manifest the 'call of the times' and the need for more democratic views. The case of Saitama is also a good illustration of a pattern according to which regional local customs were giving gradually way to new forms of celebration.[18] The celebration form introduced by this rural community can be regarded as a step toward the standardization of the *shichigosan* celebration pattern. While the traditional local pattern emphasized the status of the firstborn within the social structure of the family and community, the changes in the postwar society produced new requirements and the local authorities made an attempt to respond to these changes. However, at the stage described by the abovementioned article, the pattern still represented a halfway phase: although all seven-year-old children had been invited, it was decided to maintain the communal form of the celebration. While I have no concrete data concerning the future development of this particular celebration, it can be very likely assumed that during the follow-

ing decades, the communal pattern gradually gave way to the standard one which expresses more individualistic modes.

At the time of the reportage, the introduction of these communal patterns of celebration were fervently supported by the promoters of the so-called New Life Movement,[19] a movement initiated in 1955 by a national association called Housewives Association,[20] in collaboration with the Youth Organization.[21] Their main scope was to contribute to the postwar reconstruction of the country. Among their efforts, they listed the rationalization and simplification of the traditional ceremonial etiquette. Traditional celebration manners were judged as time- and cost-consuming, and hence, inadequate for the requirements of the time. They disapproved the often intricate customs of the traditional wedding celebration and called for the creation of new modes that would save time and money in the sign of modernization and economization. Nonetheless, their debates regarding *shichigosan* often contained controversial aspects. On the one hand, they condemned excessive spending and called for the need to reshape the form of the celebration. On the other hand, they called for the 'bringing back of tradition' to the celebration as a way of rendering the ritual 'meaningful'. However, their interpretation of 'tradition' was highly selective; they simply wanted to see the elimination of conspicuous consumption and ostentation.[22] The promoters of the movement made concrete proposals, and communal celebrations were judged to be the best method of preventing spending and display. In the same period, along the efforts for the 'rationalization' of *shichigosan*, various initiatives tried to establish fifteenth of November as the children's national holiday. In the end, the Boys' Festival (*tango no sekku*), celebrated on fifth May, won the 'battle' and since then it has been the children's national holiday. In the meantime, the communal celebration of the ritual did not gain popularity, and in the end, *shichigosan* was affirmed as a ritual to be observed in the family circle.

Spending on *shichigosan* continued to be criticized, especially during periods when economizing was a national priority. For example, at the time of the first oil shock in 1973, the prevailing 'saving mood' in Japan was reflected in an increase in media criticism directed at 'wasteful' spending on children's festive dress. That year the same saving mood caused a drop in purchases of new festive dresses and according to a survey by the Shimizu Academy, sales of Western-style garments outstripped those of Japanese-style garments in all age categories.[23] This trend soon dissipated, however, and the Japanese-style dress returned to be the most popular style at the celebration. In brief, in spite of the efforts to eliminate

consumption from the ritual and to rationalize and economize the ritual pattern, *shichigosan* has continued to evolve first of all in compliance with the actors', that is, the families' changing values, needs, and preferences.

The Rise of the '*Shichigosan* Industry'

During the two decades of the 1950s and 1960s, the advertising industry grew stronger. This is evident also in the increasing amount of advertisements in the print media. In fact, advertisements on *shichigosan* reappeared in newspapers soon after the end of the war. In 1948, there were fourteen *shichigosan* ads in the Tokyo edition of Yomiuri Shinbun, and the number continued to rise even afterwards. A new item appeared in the ads, that is, *chitoseame*, the typical sweet presented to children at *shichigosan*. While before the war advertisements on *chitoseame* were only occasional, after 1948, its commercialization took off quickly. However, the main target of the advertisements continued to be 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, the children's clothes started to gain on quality and gayness.[24] The availability of financial means in the average Japanese families was gradually increasing, and this had its effect also on the marketing strategies of the department stores. In fact, department stores continued to act as messengers of modernity, a role adopted already in the decades prior to the war. News on novelties, on desirable lifestyles and information on new commodities were disseminated by these commercial centers, which acted also as leisure centers and educators in consumption (Francks 2009b, 160). Famous department stores, such as Mitsukoshi, displayed mannequins dressed in the latest models of the *shichigosan* festive wear. The first fashion shows with children models introducing the latest trend in festive 'shrine visit' clothes, in both Japanese and Western styles, were set up as soon as 1953. The show was installed a month prior the actual date of the celebration. The tendency of launching the promotional campaigns with an always earlier date started back in the interwar years. In the 1950s, the beginning of the promotion campaigns slowly moved to earlier dates. Today, campaigns start as early as May and June, that is five to six months prior to the date of the actual event in November.

In the 1950s, the dresses on display in Mitsukoshi were still beyond the reach of most families. Nonetheless, they were available to be seen and to generate desires. Parents were encouraged to envisage their children in

these sumptuous outfits.[25] The promotional campaigns, apart from showing the latest trends in the ceremonial fashion, also educated mothers concerning 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 witnessing the big revival that the Japanese kimono would be living in the following years.

Around the end of the 1950s, a new branch in the *shichigosan* industry joined the market: in fact, the toy industry started to claim its share. From 1961 on, the number of advertisements offering a variety of toys as presents to give for *shichigosan*, slowly increased. Several companies offered gifts to kindergartens upon the approaching of *shichigosan*. On the long run, though, the toy industry apparently failed to conquer the market, as toys have not become a significant and necessary element of the *shichigosan* celebration. Today, toys may be given to children as a gift for the celebration, but it usually remains optional. However, shrines sometimes include smaller toy items in the *shichigosan* sets they offer to the children participating in their purification rite.

The ideals of frugality, modesty, and rationalization did not end up influencing the manner in which families wished to celebrate. On the contrary, surrounded by the condition of a steadily rising quality of lifestyle as a result of the Japanese economic miracle, the Japanese started to find virtue in consumption.[26] Trends in the *shichigosan* dress style began to imitate fashion in adult clothing. High-quality materials emerged and famous retail shops commissioned kimono designers for their *shichigosan* dress collections.[27] Popular historical drama television serials of the 1960s, such as the 'Heike Monogatari',[28] rendered historical designs—often extravagant—fashionable and raised the attractiveness of luxurious and pompous dresses. Little girls dressed in *jūnihitoe* (a ceremonial dress of the Heian period court ladies) or in miniature wedding dresses; boys in formal suits or tuxedo were often seen in shrines while celebrating their *shichigosan* ritual (Shimizu 2005). The change in attitudes toward Japanese clothing has also been reflected in pricing. The superior quality of materials used for Japanese dress made it expensive when compared with simpler Western-style clothing. Vogel noted that in the 1960s, the elevated prices of the kimono meant that middle class families used it as a way of displaying wealth and status (Vogel 1963, 83). The rise of Japanese-style clothing for ceremonial wear was—and still is—fueled by the interests of the textile industry. For a long time, the textile schools, which are closely connected to the textile industry, were the only bodies to conduct regular surveys on

trends in *shichigosan* clothing (they have done so since the prewar years). The results of these surveys occasionally appeared in the newspapers (see also chapter 'Constructing the Ritual: Dress, Photographs, Actors, and Script').[29] In the postwar period, the Clothing Association undertook similar surveys, publishing the findings in its journal (*Journal of Clothing Association*, 衣服学会雑誌) (Dōke 1960).[30] More recently, in the 1990s, professional textile associations such as the Cultural Association of Kimono (Nihon kimono no bunka kyōkai日本きもの文化協会) collaborated with schools such as the Kimono Academy (きものアカデミア) to carry out occasional surveys on clothing fashions for the celebration of *shichigosan*.[31]

With regard to the festive meal, the celebration 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, it became popular to go out and celebrate at some of the many available restaurants. The custom of eating out had belonged to the urban culture since the Tokugawa period (1603–1868), but in the years of the economic bubble, it grew into a leisure activity affordable to all Japanese, both in urban and rural areas. Moreover, changes in housing conditions, in the family structure, and in the economic situation of the population as a whole, all influenced the way important events in an individual's life were perceived and celebrated. While traditional family dwellings were usually of a size that enabled to host ceremonial meals with numerous invited guests, modern housing conditions had serious space limitations, particularly in urban areas. This made the arrangement of the feast within the family home problematic, thus enhancing the attractiveness of restaurant banquets. Common restaurants were later joined by grand hotels which quickly recognized the potentiality hidden in ceremonial occasions. Already back in the prewar decades, big city hotels had discovered ceremonial occasions, such as weddings, as a valuable source of income. Moreover, in 1964, numerous luxurious hotels were built for the occasion of the Olympic Games in Tokyo, and after the end of the Games, these hotels searched for new occasions of commercial exploitation. By this time, many urban weddings were already being organized in grand hotels. Thus, it was the turn for *shichigosan* to be 'discovered'. Indeed, the number of hotels offering special courses for the celebration slowly increased. In brief, the 1960s can be viewed as the period in which the urban pattern of *shichigosan* spread throughout the country at a high speed. This development was fueled by rapid urbanization as well as the standardization of a lifestyle divided between the urban and rural areas in Japan.

The decade of the 1970s was the period during which the service industry began to claim a growing share from the national economy. The growth of this commercial sector was, according to Marilyn Ivy, closely linked to the trend that saw culture as something to be received passively, that is, in the form of services (Ivy 1993, 252). This development had an impact on the celebration of *shichigosan* as well. A variety of new services was introduced in the celebration: professional photography, the rental of the festive dress, and professional assistance with dressing and beauty service. These elements gradually became standard parts of the *shichigosan* packs offered by several commercial agents.[32] In the late 1970s, also the sweet industry's share increased. After Christmas, Valentine's Day, and Girls' Festival, the month of November became the fourth busiest period of the year for candy sellers. The earnings coming from the sale of *chitoseame* represented an important source of income for the sector. Fujiya, with its 50% of market share, was among the most important sweet sellers in Japan at the time, and claimed an income of 200–300 million Yen deriving from the sale of *chitoseame*. Including cakes and other sweets purchased for the celebration (consumed and distributed among relatives and friends), the total income reached thirty hundred million Yen for the entire sweet industry.[33]

The popularity of professional photo studios increased as well. During the 1980s, it became a fashionable to visit a professional photo studio for the ceremonial photo of the child dressed up in festive wear. November was the month in which photo studios all around the country made their highest profits. According to the data provided by the Japanese Association of Photograph Culture, as soon as 1980, the income pouring into photo studios during the month of *shichigosan* helped to balance the poor sales figures of the rest of the year.[34] Toward the late 1970s, with the aim to attract more clients, studios started to cooperate with popular shrines in creating special *shichigosan* packs that would combine the services of the shrine with those offered by the photo studios. [35] Similarly, dress rental studios also started to cooperate with photography studios; this added considerably to the appeal of the service (Orihashi 2008).

Urban luxury hotels joined the trend of creating convenient sets, as well. The Tokyo Grand Hotel's *shichigosan* special plan, for a price of 35,000 Yen included a rented Japanese- or Western-style festive dress, the purification rite in a shrine, photo service, small gift items for children (e.g. crayons), and assistance with the dressing up. The plan was extremely successful and the most targeted Sundays around the fifteenth of November were quickly sold out.

The Celebration Costs

Throughout the 1970s, the festive dress worn for *shichigosan* continued to remain at the center of the journalists' attention. Articles usually commented on the latest trends, fashionable patterns, and colors. Professional female schools, with interests in the textile and wear industry, occasionally undertook surveys focusing on the shifting trends in popular dress styles. In 1977, one of these surveys was published in the weekly of Yomiuri.[36] The survey, carried out by an unnamed professional kimono school, targeted families observing the celebration. In the survey, 250 mothers were interviewed on issues related mostly to children's wear, as regards style, price, and the modality of acquisition (purchase, rental, inheriting). According to the results of the questionnaire, 60% of families purchased a new dress for the occasion, which compared to present day when dresses are usually rented out, can be considered a high rate. It also indicates that in 1977, there were still few rental studios providing dresses and commercial services for the celebration. Regarding styles, the most popular was the Japanese traditional style (76% for children, 88% for mothers). Nowadays, the traditional Japanese wear, kimono for girls, *hakama* for boys, is the most visible and acknowledged symbol of the celebration. The survey also showed that almost 40% of the families spent sums not exceeding 100,000 Yen. However, it is important to note that those who spent more than this figure reached almost 40%.[37] Income levels had considerably risen by this time, but this sum can still be considered surprisingly high in the 1970s.[38] In 1980, major department stores in Osaka and Tokyo reached a peak in their sales of *shichigosan*-related items.[39] The authors of the above survey also inquired concerning the source 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 critical way, they usually 'did their best'.[40]

The sums that Japanese families were willing to sacrifice for the event gradually increased. Dresses became more and more expensive, and mothers often complained in their letters to newspapers about the financial burden that the celebration represented for their households' budget. As expressed by these mothers, after the birth of the child, *shichigosan* was the first really expensive event in the family's life.[41] The price for a kimono for a seven-year-old girl could easily reach 200,000 Yen, and including all necessary accessories (sash, handbag, etc.) the sum was even higher. In spite of the price, according to Kyoto's oldest traditional textile asso-

ciation,[42] exclusive high-quality dresses continued to be popular among families.[43] 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 kimonos for 400,000/500,000 Yen could find their customers. In the department store of Daimaru in Osaka, the annual profits from *shichigosan* sales were expected to reach hundred million Yen in 1980, which was two-thirds more than the sale figures of the previous year. Also other department stores expected a 70% increase for that year. The growth was explained partly due to the rise in prices and partly for the fact that in 1980 the children belonging to the baby boom generation reached *shichigosan*-age. In 1973, the birth rate arrived to its last peak in Japan's postwar history. After that year, the number of births started to decline slowly but steadily. In 1980, the children born in 1973/4 had turned six/seven years of age. The number of children who turned five or three in 1980 was already lower than the number of those born in 1973. [44] According to the data, in 1980 there were approximately three million children in *shichigosan*-age, and it was assessed that half of this number actually observed the ritual.[45] Unfortunately, in lack of other national opinion polls on *shichigosan* observation rate, there is no possibility to verify this estimate. However, the popularity of the celebration can be assessed as confirmed, given the big interest of the market, as well as the fact that in 1980 the involved industries and commercial activities apparently made an attempt to ride the wave of the last baby boom generation with the scope of exploiting the occasion as much as possible.

With the intention to compete for the families' attention, advertising campaigns were often launched already in May or June. Major department stores started installing special corners for the exhibition of *shichigosan* outfits. The sale battle concentrated in particular on the seven-year-old girls' segment. Partly because the festive outfit of older girls was more complex, and hence more expensive. Fifty-sixty percent of all *shichigosan-related* purchases fell on the kimono of six-/seven-year-old girls (according to an estimate of several store managers in Tokyo and Osaka).[46] This trend characterizes the current situation as well. Moreover, girls of this age are already old enough to exercise their own influence on the choice of the festive dress, and therefore they are usually actively involved in the decision-making process concerning the particulars of the celebration. Hence, marketing strategies often target this particular age segment.

Another survey conducted by a Kyoto professional school, shows that by the mid-1970s, the diffusion of the standardized pattern of the cel-

ebration had reached all of Japan's urban regions. *Shichigosan* became a stable part of the domestic festive calendar of Japanese families. In 1977, the Hakubi Kyoto Kimono Professional School undertook a survey on the custom in Kyoto. The results were published in the weekly of *Shūkan Meisei*.[47] The survey found that 42% of the interviewed families with *shichigosan-age* children observed the ritual. Considering that the celebration did not belong to the customs traditional to the Kyoto area, this rate can be considered fairly high.[48] The described form of the observance reminded, broadly speaking, the Tokyo pattern. The sums single families spent on the celebration were comparable to the results conducted in Tokyo. 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 the Tokyoite families. In Kyoto, the majority of the children dressed in Japanese style, and 60% of the 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 the Japanese-style dress among Kyotoite mothers. In Kyoto, 88% of mothers wore the traditional style for the celebration, a proportion significantly higher compared to other areas in Japan.[49] This preference can be explained by the greater tradition-kin spirit of Kyoto residents. The article commenting on the survey mentioned in a critical tone that the celebration was showy and that commercialization apparently heavily affected the celebration mode.

In brief, the emergence of convenient packages increased affordability for many families who were happy to be able to celebrate in an appropriate way without a supersized spending. It can be argued that the service sector responded to a demand on the side of the families. A large part of the Japanese families seemed to back up the popularization of *shichigosan*. At the same time, the availability of convenient packaged services advertising campaigns and new services offered by the department stores and photo studios further fueled the popularization of the urban pattern of *shichigosan* throughout the entire country. Not only, they also undoubtedly contributed to an 'escalation', and terms such as fashionizing, *shichigosan-boom*, and *shichigosan*-fever[50] emerged frequently in the epoch's print media, illustrating that social commentators themselves were aware of this development.[51] Families willing to spend exorbitant sums were described by the media as foolish, silly, or vain.

The rising expenditure for the celebration had to do with the increasing tendency in society to indulge children. A number of terms invented by the media illustrate this trend. Expressions such as the 'five-pocket child'

(sometimes also called 'six-pocket') describe the child—an only child or with one/two siblings—as spoiled by gifts and affection in the family and enjoying the 'pocket' of all the adults of the wider family circle (parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles) (Creighton 1994, 78–80).[52] Between 1981 and 1999, the average annual expenditure on a child within the family doubled (increasing from 164,000 to 378,000 Yen), whereas birth rate fell from 0.89 (in 1981) to 0.54 (in 1999).[53] Expenditure levels of goods and services related to child-rearing grew substantially in the 1980s, and since then, the children's market has become one of the most profitable in Japan (Creighton 1994). This phenomenon is also closely connected to a change in priorities of the young generations growing up in the years of the bubble economy. This generation, called also *shinjinrui* (lit. new human breed), grew up embraced in affluence and therefore, developed a more relaxed attitude toward work and leisure (Goy-Yamamoto 2004).[54] This generation indulges their offspring into the same well-being to which they themselves are used to.

Estimating the average cost of the celebration today is not simple. Various surveys which ask questions about expenditure produce different estimates, but it seems likely that the average cost is somewhere between 30,000 and 40,000 Yen.[55] In 2011, according to a survey by the Media Interactive Corporation, 21.7% of respondents said they spent around 30,000 Yen and 18.9% spent around 50,000 Yen. The proportion spending more than 30,000 Yen on the celebration hovers around 56%.[56] The existence of financial services to spread the cost of the celebration confirms that it represents a financial burden for families. These mutual aid organizations function as saving institutions and have a relatively long history in Japan. The first such organizations were founded in the postwar years of economic hardship in order to sustain low-cost weddings and funerals, and this is still their main function (Edwards 1982, 42–43). Typically, members pay in monthly installments over a long period, and in return, they have access to the organization's services. Today, several *gojokai* (互助会) cater not only for weddings and funerals, which represent their main interest, but also for other life-cycle ceremonies, among them *shichigosan* and *seijinshiki*. Families saving for *shichigosan* can use the saved money for the child's festive clothing, for accessories, or for the mother's dress. The organizations also negotiate members' discounts with selected photography studios. [57]

Diversification and Plurality

The latest developments in *shichigosan* could be best characterized by the term 'diversification' and 'plurality'. New types of services and goods continue to be invented and introduced by the market in order to satisfy clients' needs. Photo studios, department stores, hotels, rental shops together with major shrines and temples promote their own *shichigosan* sets which include complex set of services for more affordable prices, an important aspect in times of continuing economic recession. Publicity leaflets for these packages often arrive directly at the homes of families with small children. On the other hand, in the recent decade, along with standard service packs, extravagant options began to appear as well. Vacations to Hawaii, photographing in a studio imitating the atmosphere of Hollywood, celebrations in amusement parks (such as Disneyland or Puroland) are but few examples of the options available to be combined with the celebration of *shichigosan*. These options highlight the entertainment aspects of the celebration, a trend noted also with regard to other festive events as well as to tourism (Graburn 1993).[58]

There are a number of reasons for the proliferation of these services. First, the market is increasingly competitive; the falling birth rate means that services are competing for a smaller pool of customers. Department stores and independent retailers selling festive outfits launch their *shichigosan* range as early as July or August. There is still demand for sumptuous dresses; more recently, famous brands have become popular, and there is growing interest in outfits by famous designers (often in extravagant styles). The prices for an outfit range from 30,000 Yen to expensive designs at 780,000 Yen. Including accessories, the total cost of a sumptuous, traditional festive outfit can be as much as 1,500,000 Yen. The frequent appearances of the term 'luxurious *shichigosan*' (*gōka shichigosan* 豪華七五三) in the media in the 2000s provides evidence of this trend. As in the interwar and postwar years, media coverage combines irony with encouragement.

Parents who indulge their children are labeled as 'doting parents', yet their conduct is justified on the grounds that *shichigosan* is a unique, once-in-lifetime celebration. An article under the heading of *oyabaka shichigosan* (親馬鹿), describes special *shichigosan* packages with 'extraordinary' options and presents photography studios that offer a special ambience, a setting where children can imagine themselves as models or movie stars.[59] Special packages include trips abroad or overnight stays in hotels and spa centers. In recent

years, celebrating *shichigosan* abroad has become popular.[60] There are several travel agencies providing *shichigosan* trips to Honolulu. The managers of one of these agencies explained that demand for these options was fuelled by the increasing financial means of the parents, in particular in families with only one child. The price of a tour is around 325,000 Yen for a family of three (two adults plus one child); this covers the principal requisites of the celebration: shrine purification rite, dress rental, and *chitoseame*. Hawaii is seen as the ideal place for ceremonies such as *shichigosan* because it is also beloved by Japanese couples as a honeymoon destination and for the wedding ceremony.[61] The popularity of Hawaii for *shichigosan* is also boosted by the presence of two Shinto shrines with Japanese-speaking staff.[62] The article included a comprehensive list of tourist agencies offering the 'Hawaii *shichigosan*' and, concluded: 'The time will arrive when we will go abroad to even eat sushi' (*Shūkan Shinchō* 2005, September 8).

While a growing number of families demand and enjoy these extravagancies, the majority of Japanese families opt for standard, convenient *shichigosan* service packages.[63] The proportion of families spending more than 100,000 Yen fell from 26% in 2005 to 18% in 2008. [64] Families usually spend much more than they intend.[65] The festive dress aside, photography is the biggest expense. Major studios offer an assortment of festive outfits, but these are usually only available for the photographs.[66] The assortment of outfits offered by photography studios is usually diverse, ranging from luxurious Japanese style to princess-like Western outfits and anime character costumes. Photography studios usually allow children to try on a number of different dresses free of charge and although the customer is only charged for the photographs selected, parents lured by the sight of several cute photographs of their children usually end up purchasing more than they had initially intended.

With regard to the festive meal, the usual pattern is to take the meal following shrine visit in a restaurant. Starting from the 2000s, a trend emerged for holding the feast in the parental or grandparental home.[67] However, consuming the festive meal in the family home does not necessarily mean that the festive menu will be fully prepared at home. In recent years, there has been an increase in the use of catering services that deliver selected menus directly to the home. The privacy of the family home has clear advantages; it offers comfort and a relaxed atmosphere for an unlimited time which can be a priority considering the young age of children.[68]

The plurality of life options is reflected in the plurality of interpretations of the ritual. Families or individuals may attach different meanings to the celebration, emphasizing different components, or aspects of the celebration; the importance attached to the celebration also varies. The diversification of celebration forms and services is congruent with the changes currently taking place in Japanese society. Plurality is acknowledged as one of the salient feature of modern Japanese family life, and there is a growing tendency to individualization and pluralism in contemporary Japanese society (Ishii 2009).[69] The market is reacting to this by diversifying. The variety of celebration options means that there is no single acceptable or proper form for *shichigosan*; this means that today services exist to accommodate the individual needs and preferences of families and reflect their specific values and priorities.

The Role of the Media

Japan is often labeled as an 'information society' because it is characterized by the saturation of the media and a vast advertising industry (Clammer 1997). Information is available through a variety of sources, such as magazines, Internet, and advertising, which not only exercise stimuli for further consumption of goods and services but also generate and promote 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). Current sociocultural changes are mediated and disseminated through the media and then appropriated by consumers.

Magazines, print, and the Internet, play an active role in the dissemination of information concerning the celebration of *shichigosan*. They serve as the main source of information on child-rearing issues and exercise a major impact on views on and practices of child-rearing, including those related to celebrations concerning children and/or the family (Matsuoka 2003; Taguchi 2015). The ways media influence the transmission of ritual knowledge, and shape the ritual script, will be addressed in the following chapter, therefore, here I will focus on its role in the popularization of the celebration.

The impact of the media is sometimes identified as the main factor underlying the popularity (or revival) of the celebrations. In this regard, Matsuoka says that it contributes to the "commodification of child-rearing" (*ikuji no shōhika* 育児の商品化) (Matsuoka 2003).[70] Indeed,

children rituals are a frequent theme emerging in child-rearing and fashion magazines, and this direct and/or indirect promotion certainly stimulates interest toward rituals. However, I would argue with the above conclusions. Although modern Japan has witnessed the commodification of child-rearing and the impact of the media on child-rearing, these developments do not explain the continuing practice and popularity of the rituals. The influence of the media and the marketplace need to be placed in context; other important factors need to be taken into account, including changes to the reservoir of symbolic and physical elements from which families more or less consciously construct the image of self, the changed priorities regarding family life, and changing views on lifestyle.

This is not to say that the nature and extent of the impact of the media on rituals should be overlooked, however. It has been argued that the media strongly influence both perceptions and practice of the ritual. So for example, in the case of rituals broadcasted via television (or radio), for example, enthronement rites or royal weddings, the television takes over some of the functions of the ritual, and at the same time it alters the ritual itself. In the Japanese context, Takashi Fujitani offers a case study in which the mass media affected major public ceremonies, namely the imperial funeral of Hirohito and the marriage ceremony of Crown Prince Naruhito (Fujitani 1992). Television, and in general the media, indeed, is capable to alter ritual practice as well as the individual perception of the ritual experience.[71] Another dimension of this aspect is to be found in the mythologizing effect that the media possess. The media often create narratives and involve spectators to participate in the creation of an emotionally loaded experience (Bell 2009, 245). New ideas and/or interpretations of the existing ones are often proposed by the media, contributing so in the creation of the individual imaginary. Also, Hendry points out that the media act today in Japan as a socializing agent, as well as it plays a role in the homogenization of customs in child-rearing practices (Hendry 1986, 57).

The media affects ritual culture in many different ways. On the one hand, it determines readers' (or spectators') perception of "what is aesthetically desirable and stylistically correct", and thus can significantly modify the aesthetic taste and standards of the readers (Van de Port 2006, 144).[72] On the other hand, by interacting with cultural mediums such as rituals and celebrations, the media actively shape their meaning and pattern. With regard to *shichigosan*, not only do magazines offer new services and goods but also new patterns and interpretations. The

kind of information the editors decide to pick up in the articles, the way in which a certain theme is treated, all affect the readers' perception and imagination. In the case of *shichigosan*, magazines and newspapers have significantly influenced the course of the celebration's development since the emergence of the print media in Japan. With the expansion of newspaper and magazine readership, reports and photos of the celebration contributed in—but were not the primary cause of—the diffusion of the urban *shichigosan* pattern from the Tokyo area to the rest of Japan. Starting from the 1970s, magazine editors began to recognize the potentiality of life-cycle and seasonal rituals. The Japanese print media is known for the smart use of cultural predilections as potential instruments to broaden readership (Skov and Moeran 1995a). Several case studies show the way cultural themes are used by editors of women magazines with the aim to raise advertising sales as well as to satisfy readers' taste (Skov and Moeran 1995b). The 'unique sense of seasonality' is said to be exploited not only by the media, but generally speaking, also by the marketplace in order to enhance domestic consumption (Daniels 2009). In addition, I already mentioned Ishii's argument about the role of the Japanese festivities in defining the commercial calendar of the department stores as well as of several industries (Ishii 2009, 204–206). The rhythm of the calendar year is given by the arriving and passing festivities mirrored in department store's displays and shelves in the form of seasonal commodities.

Several magazines undertake surveys on *shichigosan* on a regular base, addressing families (more precisely mothers and grandmothers) with *shichigosan-age* children. The results of these questionnaires, with the editors' comments (or analysis), are then made public and serve so as to inform the readers. The COMO survey, for example, has become a regular business. Every September, an overall report containing exact data is published in the magazine to inform readers about the latest trends and tendencies in *shichigosan* celebration manners. Numerical data deriving from the questionnaire are always complemented with personal accounts of families and their photos. These accounts usually include the detailed description of the family celebration, the meticulous time schedule followed by the family during the planning phase, a list of costs, and other details. Apart from this, special inserts collect advice from a number of etiquette specialists, fashion experts (both for the Japanese traditional wear and Western-style ceremonial wear), lists of recommended restaurants, as well as names and descriptions of

popular Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. Readers thus obtain a big amount of firsthand experience which helps them in their own decisions concerning the celebration.

Consequently, it can be said that magazines play a twofold function: first, they introduce new services, goods and commercial opportunities, thus play an important role in promotion of new trends. Second, by publishing a large number of personal accounts of individual families (these accounts are only formally edited), the editors offer a platform where mothers—the main organizers of the event—can share their experiences concerning the celebration. The demand for ways of sharing this kind of experience and individual views on it is also demonstrated by the fairly large number of private individuals' home pages and blogs providing a variety of information on *shichigosan*, space for discussing related matters, space for questions regarding forms of celebration, etiquette, shrines, dress, and so on.[73]

The media's role in disseminating information about the history of the ritual should also be mentioned. One of the frequent themes regarding *shichigosan* that appears with regularity in the media is the history of the ritual. Every year, approximately the same set of key information is provided: a brief note on the meaning of the three age rites that stand on the origin of *shichigosan* (*kamioki*, *hakamagi*, and *obitoki*, described in the previous chapter), and a detailed explanation of the traditional garments and accessories that build up the children's festive wear. Common knowledge on the historical roots of the ritual is poor; therefore, this piece of information can be of interest to many.[74] On the other hand, it is important to note that media refer to the celebration's centuries-old tradition and historical precedents on the observance with patina, and thus create a sense of continuity with the past. The association with remote history gives the ritual a touch of authenticity, and blending these information into articles on goods and services, helps legitimate the new elements introduced by the commercial sector into the celebration. Indeed, themes relating to tradition and history are smartly combined with notes on new services, goods, and trends. Thus, references to the 'past' or 'tradition' have the power to vest even the most 'untraditional' options or the newest trends with a sense of 'authenticity'. The readers' quest for nostalgia, referring almost always to the allegedly distant past, renders this strategy fairly successful.[75]

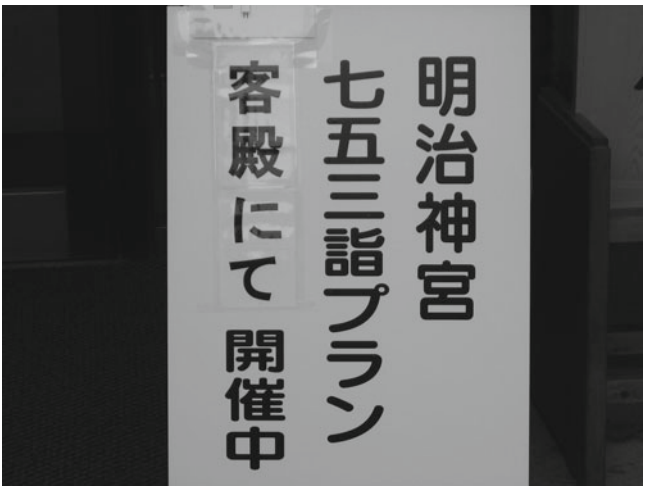

Fig. 1 Meiji shrine *shichigosan* opening

Fig. 2 The pamphlet of the Meiji shrine *shichigosan* service pack

Fig. 3 The three *shichigosan* dress models

Fig. 4 Welcoming clients in the Meiji shrine dress rental studio

Fig. 5 The traditional Japanese dress for a three-year-old girl with accessories

The Multiple Function of Religious Institutions

The role of the religious institutions and of the *shichigosan* worship observed in the shrine or temple has been addressed so far only in part. As already mentioned, the religious institutions traditionally associated with the celebration are the two main religious institutions in Japan: Shinto shrines, and to a much lesser degree, Buddhist temples. While *shichigosan* traditionally belongs to the domain of Shinto, there are several Buddhist temples that are actively involved in the celebration.[76] This occurs especially in temples which have a reputation of safeguarding fertility-related life events.[77]

The shrine (or temple) ritual at *shichigosan* can occur in two ways. The more simple and common one is the shrine visit that consists of the usual form of individual prayer without the assistance of religious specialists. Those who want more can apply for the purification rite which is conducted by the priest. While the simple shrine visit prayer is free of charge, there is a charge for the purification ritual and it is performed for group rather than a single family. The shrine visit (in either form) is regarded by the majority of families as integral to the ritual. First, I examine the role of the religious

institutions in the development of the *shichigosan* ritual, and then I consider the various possible interpretations of the worship part of the ritual.

After the separation of religion from the state defined by the 1947 Constitution, the number of worshippers became crucial for the religious institutions in Japan. They needed to cover their financial needs independently and therefore they had to seek for support in alternative ways.[78] Worshippers' contributions in the form of offerings (and for amulets and charms) and fees paid for the rites represented, and still represents, a major income source. Accordingly, major shrines and temples adopted diverse and multifold strategies in their endeavor to attract more visitors.[79] *Shichigosan* occupies an important place in these efforts.[80]

With regard to the *shichigosan* worship, the major social trends affecting the postwar Japanese society have had their impact on religious institutions as well. One such example is the continuously decreasing or stagnating birth rate that not only makes the market more competitive but also pushes religious institutions to compete for visitors, and in case of *shichigosan*, for children, always fewer in number. In the 1980s, when the drop in childbirths brought about a decline in the number of visitors for *shichigosan* observance, many shrines decided to set up their own *shichigosan* service packages; this was an initiative which had never been thought necessary before. Shrines that chose this direction mostly copied similar service packs offered by photo and rental studios. The elements that distinguished (and still distinguish) their pack from the commercial ones was the purification rite, and sometimes a small set of gifts for children. However, the 'commercial' elements of the packs (rental of dress, professional photo service) enhanced the attractiveness of the shrine in the eyes of the observer families, simultaneously contributing to increase the shrine's finances.

Today, the shrine visit continues to be regarded by the *shichigosan* observers as the central part of the celebration, closely followed by the visit in the photo studio (Taguchi 2015). This is also proved by the high rate of observance documented in several surveys (over 80% of *shichigosan* families visit a shrine or temple). When exploring into the meaning of these trends and in particular, what the shrine visit represents for the *shichigosan* families, one must first understand the role that religious institutions play in the lives of Japanese people. Nelson says that Buddhist and Shinto priests alike are viewed as ritual specialists in Japan. They 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". (Nelson 1997, 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, the religious institution offers its interpretation of what should be regarded as appropriate or important and what is of minor importance. This activity may contribute to a certain degree to the popularization of the listed rites, or at least, it can legitimate the rites listed. In the case of another rite of passage, that is the one connected to the unfortunate years in the adult life cycle called *yakudoshi*, major shrines set boards in front of the gates of the shrine displaying birth years of those in the year believed to bring bad fortune, or at least at high risk. Taguchi points to the fact that people often become aware of the need to observe the *yakudoshi* rite when they happen to see their birth year on the board (Taguchi 2008).[81]

As for the purification ritual available for *shichigosan*, until the early 1980s, the fee was on a voluntary base, but then an increasing number of shrines introduced the practice of requiring a precise sum for the rite. This occurred partly to meet families' wishes since—as the period's media wrote—families coming for the rite often felt puzzled when facing the decision over the appropriate amount to give. A shrine representative's words were quoted in a weekly in 1980, explaining that 'mothers of these days regard faith as a material thing, hence something that has its due cost'.[82] Indeed, nowadays, the purification rite is considered by the Japanese not only as a simple religious rite but also as a regular service, which is demonstrated also by the fact that there are families that complain over its 'quality'. There are parents who complain that in spite of the fee paid, they were asked to join several other families to receive the blessing, instead of receiving it on an individual base. These complaints indicate that there are families which 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 the religious institutions as service providers is also strengthened by the media. Magazines often publish as part of their *shichigosan* special, detailed summaries of pros and cons of a list of selected shrines. Readers are advised to check out several shrines before deciding the most suitable one to visit for the celebration. 'Before deciding, see which shrine gives you the most pleasant impression.'[83] In 2008, the Kansai Walker published a guide of shrines and temples of the Kansai area providing the *shichigosan* purification rite.[84] Readers received detailed information on the popularity of the selected shrine or temple, on the basis of the number of visitors for *shichigosan* during the previous year.

The information included the amount asked for the purification rite and the availability of the rite throughout the year (convenient for those who wish to observe the ritual out of the usual period, which is the month of November). The guide also created a list of the top places, based on indicators such as the assortment of gifts offered to children, the presence of an appealing natural setting (park or other green area), and other favorable circumstances concerning the premises.

To illustrate the above-described trends, here follows a case study carried out on one of the most popular and famous shrines of Tokyo, the Meiji Jingū.

Case Study: Meiji Jingū

This shrine, though being of a relatively recent origin, was built in 1920 to enshrine the souls of the deceased Emperor Meiji and his wife, Empress Shōken. It occupies a central place in the hierarchy of Shinto shrines in Japan.[85] The shrine enjoys an incessant popularity also owing to its central location in the Shibuya district, and its adjacent vast green area (700,000 square meters) covered with an evergreen forest which provides a pleasant setting as well as a recreation site for visitors. These characteristics made the shrine a popular place for the *shichigosan* worship.

Through the 1960s–1970s, the number of visitors for *shichigosan* was high and therefore the shrine did not feel the need to actively promote the observance.[86] In the years of the baby boom, the 1970s and the early 1980s, thousands of children came to the shrine every year for the *shichigosan* worship and/or for the purification ritual.[87] In those years, long queues were often formed by families waiting for their turn to enter the ceremony hall and receive the blessing in form of the purification rite. The situation started to change in the second half of the 1980s when the declining birth rate began to show its effects.[88] Around the beginning of the 1990s, the Meiji Jingū, not unlike many other shrines throughout the country, started to register a sharp decline in the number of *shichigosan* observers. In these years, the fee for the formal purification rite was still given by individual contribution. Nevertheless, the sum deriving from these contributions represented an important entry for the finances of the shrine. Accordingly, the declining number of *shichigosan* visitors, due to the falling birth rates, affected the shrine's finances significantly. At this point, the Meiji Jingū decided to organize promotional materials with the aim to attract more families to its premises. For many years, this promo-

tion did not take the form of a service set. 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). Today, it comprises a number of services ranging from beauty assistance, professional photographer, and the rental of outfits. The entry on the list that distinguishes the shrine plan from what offered by commercial institutions is the shrine worship and the formal purification rite available at the shrine.

The promotion of the *shichigosan* set occurs by means of several forms. One is the monthly bulletin published by Meiji Jingū, entitled Magokoro. Once the date of the celebration is near, the bulletin includes news about the *shichigosan* services offered by the shrine. In 2009, the first information concerning these services appeared in the August number. The information provided a brief explanation of the three traditional age ceremonies associated with *shichigosan*. Families were invited to celebrate and pray for good health and their children's growth. Apart from this bulletin, there are other publications that provide information on the observance. For example, there is a leaflet that lists all the occasions for which purification rites are offered at the shrine, such as domestic safety, individual safety, business prosperity, examination success, and of course, life-cycle rituals. Life-cycle rites include all significant events of the Japanese course of life, from birth to death.[89] In this way, the shrine aims to offer a complete cycle of significant events regarded as important thresholds in the life of the individual as well as 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 also provides a special pamphlet featuring solely the details of the *shichigosan* service pack. The style of the text reminds, in many ways, texts used in promotional materials of the media and business sector. The price of the pack starts from 36,000 Yen which comprises the prayer ceremony, *chitoseame*, small gifts for children, rental of dress, makeup, hair set, and professional assistance for the kimono.[90] The price does not include the cost of the photo service, neither does it include decorations and accessories part of the child's formal attire. Extra leaflets inform on the single parts of the *shichigosan* plan, such as the photo service. There is also a restaurant within the area of the shrine where the special *shichigosan* menu is available in the period between October 10 and November 29, for a fixed price.[91] The time schedule of the event as described in the pamphlet is[92]:

1. 40 min of hair arranging and makeup (professional artists)
2. 40 min of dressing up (by assistants)
3. 40–60 min photo service
4. Prayer

The promotion of *shichigosan* at the Meiji Jingū officially starts the first days of the month of August when an open day (information event) is held at the shrine's premises. A large number of families effectively arrange their bookings during this day when the indoor rental studio opens its doors in order to present its latest collection of *shichigosan* dresses. The studio is otherwise closed during the year. The collection of *shichigosan* dresses (counting more than 460 models[93]) is refreshed every year in order to follow changing trends in fashion and taste. Japanese-style ceremonial dress can be rented out for the parents, as well. 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 also abound in the texts referring to *shichigosan*. The pamphlet underlines that its collection of *shichigosan* dresses boasts numerous garments inspired by Japanese history. These are, for example, ceremonial outfits typical of the samurai class from the Tokugawa period, or garments bearing Heian imperial court patterns. Aristocratic aesthetics is emphasized in the descriptions of the dress models. This fuels nostalgia for the past. An extra leaflet promotes a special pack that combines two sets of Japanese-style festive dresses, a more common one for the morning prayer, and a more sumptuous one for the afternoon photo service.[94] Information is provided not only in print form but also on the official website of the shrine.[95] This gives detailed explanation of the proper dress code for the celebration, subdivided by the child's age and gender, with due explanations of the historical significance of the single garments.[96] The recommended dresses all belong to the traditional Japanese style, and special attention is paid 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*), offers advice on how to decide the proper age for the celebration, and explains the difference between the old traditional way of age counting and the modern age counting.

The ceremonial prayers (purification rite) offered by the shrine to the public are hosted at the shrine's ceremonial hall, the Kaguraden. Before proceeding to the hall, parents are asked to fill in the application form

for the *shichigosan* purification rite: the child's name, age, gender, and address. In case of *shichigosan*, the fee amounts to 10,000 Yen, but higher sums can be offered as well. All children who apply for the purification ceremony receive a memorial medal and the traditional sweet, *chitoseame*.[97] In 2006, 830 families opted for the *shichigosan* plan, a number continuing to grow year after year. The total number of families visiting the shrine for the *shichigosan* prayer is of course much higher than those purchasing the entire *shichigosan* service pack.[98]

Shichigosan is the second most frequently requested purification rite in the Meiji Jingū.[99] The number of applicants reaches its peak during the months of October and November. The *shichigosan* purification rite is usually performed for small groups of families which enter the ceremonial hall by application and payment of a fee. During the most popular weekends (around November 15), it occasionally happens that the shrine office has to turn down applicants because of their excessive number. Nevertheless, advance applications are not normally accepted. In contrast to the purification rite offered throughout the year, the *shichigosan*-pack comprises several services offered only during a limited period of time prior to November 15. Nonetheless, a trend to anticipate the beginning of this period can be noted. This is also due to the fact that in recent years, more and more families tend not to respect the traditional date of the observance.[100] Occasionally, families observe *shichigosan* in January or July. Families residing overseas and returning for the winter (or summer) holidays might find it more convenient to celebrate in these periods instead of the traditional period throughout October to November.

The above description can be seen as typical, broadly speaking, to other major urban shrines in Japan. There are shrines that apply diverse strategies to strengthen their position among *shichigosan* visitors. The Hie shrine in Tokyo, for example, bases its reputation on the fact that it is the place of the first historical performance of *shichigosan*.[101] The shrine is also known for prayers for safe pregnancy and birth, the so-called *obi iwai*. By linking more than one childhood rite of passage, the shrine manages to enforce its image as a shrine catering for specific needs, thus securing its popularity. Furthermore, families often decide to celebrate their children's *shichigosan* in shrines or temples with which the family had already established connections in the past. Such connection can be the celebration of the wedding rite, or of the *obi iwai* (pregnancy prayer). The accumulation of auspicious events observed in the same place can effectively enhance

the symbolical significance of these events for the family. In this case, the religious institute is rendered, witnessing the family's happiness.[102]

On the other hand, it has to be also acknowledged that social changes affect religious institutions in the same manner they affect any other institution in society. Religious institutions in Japan recognize that they need to maintain a continuous relevance as regards modern life conditions in order to avoid decline. Nelson maintains that the capacity to embrace changes and remain close to the needs of everyday life might be one of the explanations why religious institutions in Japan continue to be present in the lives of the Japanese to a greater extent compared to Western societies (Nelson 1997). The case of *shichigosan* clearly shows how religious institutions carry out this work.

'Religious' Ritual Versus 'Secular' Ritual?

It is unquestionable that in the promotion of ritual occasions such as *shichigosan*, shrines and temples use a rhetoric fairly similar to that used by commercial agents. They also exploit many of the elements added by the commercial sector in the last decades. Thus, not only do they act in their role of spiritual guide but also provide services for fee. It is also important to understand that in Japan, the secular and the sacred are not so clearly separated, and the two concepts are not seen as antagonistic, as is common in the West.[103] Several authors have pointed out that in Japan, and in Asia more generally, secularization theories often break down.[104] There are numerous secular elements to the activities of religious institutions, just as the secular domain encompasses several elements which would be viewed as 'religious' in Western culture. Several studies struggled to give a satisfactory account of this overlap between the secular and religious spheres and the involvement of Japanese religious institutions in activities for 'this worldly benefits' (*genze riyaku* 現世利益).[105] This discourse falls outside the scope of this work. My understanding is that the ritual named *shichigosan*, and its meaning system, is the product of complex interactions involving among several players: families, commercial actors, religious institutions, and the media. The ritual experience is created from elements belonging to what Western culture would regard as the 'religious' and 'secular' domains, but this distinction may not be important to a Japanese person observing the ritual. Observers makes use of services, goods, and spaces without regard for the domain to which they belong, in order to create a rewarding, compelling ritual event which reflects the val-

ues, priorities, ideals, and social relationships of the family, and which have significance above all because of their capacity to keep the ritual 'receptive', to use Grimes' term (1982).

The interpretative challenge posed by *shichigosan*, other rites of passage and seasonal observances (*nenchū gyōji*, descrived in chapter 'Consumer Culture and Changes to the Ritual Calendar in Postwar Urban Japan'), is the more intriguing when one considers the surveys on the religiosity of Japanese people which are carried out regularly by various institutions in Japan. These surveys use the rates of observance of rituals such as *shichigosan* as indicators of religiosity and religious attitudes. For a long time, surveys on religiosity were based on Western models and thus included questions about belief, faith, religious feelings, and commitment to religious groups and institutions. In Japanese samples, data from such surveys are hard to interpret given the complexity of the religious situations in the Japanese history. In Western countries, reported membership of a religious group, for example, may be viewed as an indication of religious commitment but it does not have the same connotations in Japan. In an effort to obtain data which would capture Japanese attitudes to religious matters more accurately, the Kokugakuin scholars decided to include additional questions on 'religious' practices, for example, participation in 'religious' activities (rituals, festivities, purchase of amulets, and so on) and value judgments relevant to religion (Kokugakuin 2006).[106] The authors defined Japanese religiosity as "a set of beliefs of religious character that, rather than having to do with the individual's consciously chosen religion, are affirmed within the sphere of everyday life" (Kokugakuin 2006, 20), but they did not define what they meant by the term 'religious character'. The results of these surveys showed that although only an extremely small proportion of respondents declared that they 'believed in Shintō',[107] the New Year shrine visit was the most commonly observed 'religious' practice, followed by the combined category including the three rituals of childhood: *shichigosan*, *meimei* (name-giving ceremony), and *miyamairi* (first shrine visit of the baby) all of which also involve a shrine visit. Moreover, while most traditional observances declined between 1996 and 2006 with the exception of Shinto shrine visit at *seijinshiki* (increased from 12.7% in 1996 to 15.3% in 2006)[108] and the childhood rites category (increased from 52.2% to 53.1%), in general, there was a slight increase in participation in rites connected to the passages of the life cycle. The Shinto shrine wedding is in decline, however, also due to other factors at play here, for example, the growing popularity of chapel weddings.[109] While Shinto has

traditionally been closely linked to lifecycle events, as described in chapter 'Consumer Culture and Changes to the Ritual Calendar in Postwar Urban Japan', other social factors, such as the declining number of children and the privatization of family life also influence trends in observance of traditional rites. The above-described trends in observance rates reflect changes in the hierarchy of values and the increased importance attached to rituals linked to the family, a phenomenon which is discussed further in the next chapter.

The surveys also highlight the problems caused by different interpretations of terms such as 'religious activity'. The case of *shichigosan* not only illustrates the difficulty of such interpretation but also points to the uselessness of dividing the ritual into 'religious' and 'secular' parts. Timothy Fitzgerald addressed this issue in his commentary on the uncritical use of terms such as 'religion' and 'faith' in scholarly literature (Fitzgerald 2003, 2004). He argued that, at least in the Japanese context, it is not helpful to divide rituals, such as weddings or funerals, into religious and secular parts. Fitzgerald argued that it is the expression and the presence of core values and deeply held convictions that matter when assessing single parts of a ritual event,[110] citing examples by Edwards (1989), Hendry (1987, 1995), Van Bremen and Martinez (1995), and others.[111] Whether these values and convictions are expressed through means provided by religious institutions, such as a shrine or temple, or through commercial institutions, I think, is a secondary issue.

I think, however, that it would be overstating the case to argue that in Japan shrines and temples are simply service providers. It is important to recognize that these institutions represent a physical and symbolic structure for most Japanese. They provide a spatial and conceptual context (infrastructure, knowledge, and services) for a number of rituals in present-day Japan, regardless of whether the observers associate their performance of the ritual with belief in Shinto deities or not, and regardless of whether they regard their act as 'religious'. Religious institutions also play a more significant role in Japanese life because of the value attached to traditions and national culture in contemporary Japan. Shrines and temples are associated with cultural traditions and hence represent 'authentic culture' and continuity with the past.

I agree with Taguchi that the reason Japanese people consider shrine worship an important component of the *shichigosan* celebration is that shrines (temples) represent a powerful connection between modern Japanese people and their past. Taguchi argues that the significance of

this bond is heightened by the rapid pace of change in contemporary life, which leaves individuals searching for something stable and trustworthy; in other words, something with universal value that would convey a sense of permanence (Taguchi 2015, 315–316). I would argue, however, that Japanese families' tendency to turn to shrines cannot be explained simply as a search for tradition and sense of stability. Shrines are more than a symbol of traditional culture, although this association is certainly strong. Among the commonest reasons given for observing the *shichigo-san* ritual is a desire to express gratitude to the *kami* (Shinto divinities) for the growth of the child and to petition for the child's future.[112] All popular texts on the ritual emphasize that its aim is an expression of gratitude for the healthy growth of the child as well as of a wish that the child should be happy and healthy and grow well. The extent to which observation of the ritual is motivated by a desire to address Shinto deities or any other supernatural being, is, in my opinion a very individual and personal matter. The ritual, however, can be effective and compelling regardless of whether or not observance is underpinned by a belief in supernatural entities.

In summary, I would argue that there are a number of complementary motivations for visits to religious institutions as part of ritual observance and their relative importance varies between families and individuals. The emphasis placed on specific elements of the ritual may vary, as may the motivation for performing them. Also, motivations for the shrine visit can vary from being a matter of faith to a vague sense of nostalgia and a desire for a sense of cultural experience. Moreover, social pressures should not be disregarded. Etiquette manuals, information issued by shrines and temples, commercial promotional material, media texts, and, not least, the long historical tradition of the shrine or temple visit in the history can exert strong pressure on individual families to adhere to the custom, in particular in Japan, where social pressures are intensely felt and powerful.

I think that performance of the ritual of *shichigosan* in general, and the visit to the symbolic and physical space of the shrine or temple (with or without the purification rite) in particular, enable adults to connect with their deeply felt desire to promote the welfare of their children. Whether this desire and emotion is associated with supernatural entities depends on the individual's worldview and beliefs. But desires and emotions related to the welfare of one's children can be also expressed in ways other than shrine worship. In the next chapter, this topic is explored in more detail,

through an analysis of the layers of meaning and functions of the elements which contribute to the *shichigosan* ritual, including the festive dress, photographs, festive food, and *chitoseame* (candy-gift).

Notes

1. Mainichi Tokyo, 1945, November 15. Nevertheless, the 1952 *shichigosan* was called the 'first independent *shichigosan*,' pointing at the end of the Allie Forces' Occupation in Japan (Mainichi Tokyo 1952, November 15).
2. Shimizu 2005.
3. Mainichi Tokyo 1949, November 16.
4. *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.
5. Yomiuri Tokyo 1950, November 15.
6. See chapter 'Consumer Culture and Changes to the Ritual Calendar in Postwar Urban Japan' for Dore's analysis (1958) regarding expenditure levels in Tokyo in those years.
7. *Muda ja…50%, demo ne…50%* (無駄じゃ…50%。でもね…50%) (Yomiuri Tokyo 1952, November 10).
8. These are only approximate numbers assessed by journalists during a limited duration of observation.
9. Yomiuri Tokyo 1953, November 16. See also the previous chapter for details.
10. *Shinzen he kuruma de mairu shichigosan* (神前へ車で参る七五三).
11. In 1960s, cars became more widely available. The first year of the so-called 'My Car Era' dates back to 1966 when the number of cars in Japan exceeded ten million (see also Plath 1990).
12. Yomiuri Tokyo 1956, November 15.
13. *Shichigosan* was not the only ritual to be criticized because of excessive expenditure. For example, critics also targeted the wedding ceremony.
14. Newsletter of Jinja Honchō 1959, November 29.
15. Source: www.shouwashi.com/transition-salary.html (accessed 2013, May 24).
16. Yomiuri 1953, November 15.
17. Yomiuri 1961, November 16.
18. A local *shichigosan* pattern centering around lavish modes of display is still observed in the Saitama and Chiba prefectures. The so-called *shichigosan* reception (*shichigosan hirōen* 七五三披露宴) in the past used to be held only for the future heir, the firstborn child of the family, is an event that takes

place in the form of a big feast. The peculiarities of the local social structure—the presence of big landowners—probably gave rise to this socially significant custom. Until the 1960s, however, it is said that the event usually was set up in the common hall of the community, where food was mainly prepared by female members of the wider kinship. In the 1970s, it became fashionable to organize the event in a hotel and to rely on the services of an indoor restaurant. The costs of these receptions average between 100 and 150 thousand Yen, but can also reach 200 thousand. However, half of said amount returns in form of gifts and cash presented by the invited guests. The event is said to serve so as to formally introduce the future heir to the members of the community, and is sometimes compared to a wedding reception (The event can host even hundred invited guests.) 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). Recently, an informant, himself the eldest son, told me about the reception organized for his seven-year-old daughter (in 2011) upon the grandparents' strong request.

19. Shinseikatsu Undō (新生活運動).
20. Fujinkai (婦人会) is a common denomination of a number of organizations that have been present in Japan, with more or less continuity, from the Meiji period (1868–1912) up to present day. In the interwar years, these associations were used by political authorities for scopes pertaining to the military government.
21. Seinendan (青年団) were nationwide organizations which gather young adults in their twenties and early thirties.
22. See also Papp 2015.
23. Source: Asahi Shinbun 2014/11/8. Source: http://shimizu.ac.jp/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/4b37ef04ebdf8466a84c8f5e5713741d.pdf
24. Shimizu 2005.
25. The imperial wedding which took place in 1959 is thought to have been behind the rise in the popularity of glamorous, aristocratic designs (Taguchi 2015, 141). The 'Mitchi boom' was named after the empress Michiko, who enjoyed wide popularity among the population. The wedding was widely televised and watched by millions.
26. A popular slogan of the time often appearing in the media was: consumption is a virtue (*shōhi wa bitoku* 消費は美徳).
27. A renowned kimono designer of the period, for example, was Toki Shimizu.
28. Heike Monogatari (Tale of Heike), a popular war tale from the thirteenth century that narrates the conflict which arose between the Taira (or Heike) and Minamoto (or Genji) families, known also as the Genpei War.

29. Unfortunately, most of the original documents went destroyed during the war.
30. 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 were usually carried out between 10 am and 3 pm on a single celebration day, 15 November.
31. Shimizu 2005. These were meticulous investigations into the details of the festive clothing, recording the exact composition of the dress worn by each family member; the type and color of footwear and head coverings; and the pattern, design, and color of the textiles used.
32. The traditional Japanese outfit was by this time relegated mainly to ceremonial use. Today, most mothers do not feel familiar with this garment and they usually need help when putting it on.
33. Source: weekly *Shūkan Gendai* (週刊現代) 1980, November 20. This number of the weekly published an extensive analysis of the latest trends regarding the celebration of *shichigosan*. Much of the information in the following paragraph derives from this article. The analysis focused in particular on the commercial sector, giving—where possible—data on sale figures of various business actors.
34. *Shūkan Gendai* 1980, November 20. Not all photo studios started the '*shichigosan* service' in this period. Toyoko Orihashi's findings in the Shibuya district of Tokyo show that local photo studios included *shichigosan*-packs among their services only around 2000 (Orihashi 2008).
35. The effects that photography has on the ritual will be addressed more in depth in the next chapter.
36. *Shūkan Yomiuri* (週刊読売) 1977, December 3.
37. The expenditure was calculated on the sum spent for the child's festive dress. Seventeen percent of families spent between 100,000 and 150,000 Yen, and 23% spent over 200,000 Yen.
38. In 1977, a town employee earned around 280,000 Yen (source: www.shouwashi.com/transition-salary.html, accessed 2013, May 25).
39. The cost of the festive meal, photographs, and other items, excluding the dress, was about 45,000 Yen. In 1977, families spent around 173,000 Yen on *shichigosan* on average. For comparison, some estimates suggest that today if a new dress is purchased for the child between 100,000 and 200,000 Yen is spent on the seventh year's celebration (the maximum in the hundreds of thousands of Yen) (source: http://www.zengokyo.or.jp/life/reward/03.html, site of the mutual aid company Zengokyo). Today, however, the popularity of dress rental services means that costs can be considerably lower. See below.
40. *Shūkan Gendai*, 1980, November 20.
41. *Shūkan Gendai* 1980, November 20.
42. Kyōto Orimono Oroshishō Kumiai (京都織物卸商組合).

43. *Shūkan Gendai* 1980, November 20.
44. In 1974, one million girls were born, and they reached the age of six/seven in 1980. Additionally, there were 980,000 boys in the five-year-old age group, and 850,000 girls in the three-year-old segment (1980 statistics of the Ministry of Health 厚生省人口動態調査) quoted in the weekly of *Shūkan Gendai* (1980, Nov. 20).
45. The estimate was carried out by renowned ceremonial etiquette specialist Yaeko Shiotsuki (塩月弥栄子), author of several manuals, quoted in the weekly of *Shūkan Gendai* (1980, November 20).
46. *Shūkan Gendai* (1980, November 20).
47. *Shūkan Meisei* (週刊明星) 1977, November 20.
48. The traditional childhood rite of passage typical in the Kansai region is the *jūsanmairi* (十三参り), a rite observed at 13 years of age (see Naoe 1994).
49. For comparison, while in 1960, 74% of mothers wore kimono in Gifu and Aichi areas, this rate fell to 33% in 1988 (Sano et al. 1990, 15).
50. *Fasshonka* (ファッション化), *shichigosan būmu* (七五三ブーム), *shichigosan fībā* (七五三フィーバー).
51. See, for example, *Shūkan Gendai* 1980, November 20.
52. Another example is the term *ichiji gōkashugi* (一児豪華主義) that could be translated as 'luxurious one-child-ism'. The phenomenon is comparable to the situation in China where the one-child policy of the government, launched to control population growth, brought about the so-called 'Little Emperor' syndrome referring to excessive forms of indulgence with which Chinese children are treated by the family.
53. General Affair Department, Sōmuchō, Survey on household economy (source: http://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/zensho/, accessed 2015.09.03.
54. See also chapter 'Consumer Culture and Changes to the Ritual Calendar in Postwar Urban Japan'.
55. In 2014, 22% of the 180 respondents to a survey by *Enfant* child-rearing magazine planned to spend around 30,000 Yen, nearly the half of the respondents said they would spend less, and 29% more (source: http://enfant.living.jp/mama/mama-data/186087/). In 2011, a similar survey suggested an average spend of around 40,000 Yen (source: https://www.sankeiliving.co.jp/news/upload_pdf/20100820175803.pdf). It should be noted, however, that these estimates do not usually take into account the cost of the festive meal or the mother's festive dress.
56. Based on a survey of 500 women aged between twenty and forty-nine years. The report also concluded that the proportion spending less than 30,000 Yen will probably increase owing to the increasing number of companies offering discounts for early booking and on photography and clothing rental services. Source: https://www.i-research.jp/report/report/r_20111115.pdf (accessed 2015, September).

57. The '*shichigosan* program' of Ceremonia, for example, asks for a total of 100,000 Yen (paid in monthly installments of 1000 Yen) for which members get rental of a child's dress complete with all accessories, beauty, and dressing assistance and, with some additional options, for example, *chitoseame* (http://www.ceremonia.co.jp, see also zengokyo.or.jp).
58. Entertaining aspects are often judged as 'less elevate' in the ritual experience, and thus, less important. Examples for such approaches come in big numbers from both popular writings and scholarly literature (Belk et al. 1989). 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 calls for the need to return to the past 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 Boissevain 1992, and in the Japanese context Graburn 1993.
59. DIME 2005, November 17.
60. *Shūkan Shinchō* 2005, September 8. In Kinki area in 2005, there were families leaving for a *shichigosan* trip to Hawaii nearly every day during the two months of October and November.
61. 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, accessed 2011, May 20). 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 retake the custom of traveling (http://sundaykodomo.blog92.fc2.com, accessed 2011, May).
62. The Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha shrine is offering the *shichigosan* rite since 1994.
63. According to the COMO survey, the average family spend on the event in 2005 was less than 100,000 Yen (Como 2006, September). The surveys which are available are typically carried out by parenting magazines and online sites and are not based on large samples.
64. COMO 2009, September.
65. In the 2009 COMO survey, 62% of families declared that they had planned to spend no more than 50,000 Yen on the celebration, but in practice, only half had managed to stick to their budget.
66. Rental studios offer *shichigosan* dresses for a period of days.
67. In the COMO 2006 (September) survey, 34% of families stayed at home, 44% opted for a restaurant.
68. Families who have the festive meal in a restaurant prefer to hire a private room which is more comfortable with small children.

69. See also White 2002, 2003.
70. Matsuoka 2003. See further discussion concerning this survey and its findings in the next chapter.
71. See also Ishii 2009 on the effect of television on New Years' ritual in Japan.
72. Mattijs Van de Port's study (2006) shows how in the case of a particular religious event, broadcasting, and the modalities chosen by the particular broadcasting agent can contribute to the upgrading of religious events. See also Moeran 1995.
73. One example is a site started a few years ago by a father who—by his own account—wanted to create a site that would collect together a comprehensive range of information after having witnessed the difficulties his wife encountered when planning their child's *shichigosan*. Today, he runs a website which provides not only basic information about the ritual itself but information on commercial enterprises located in various places of Japan providing goods and services for *shichigosan*.
74. Taguchi notes that thanks to the media sometimes 'lost knowledge' is reacquired. One example is the belief connected to *ujigami* (guardian god of the local communities; see chapter 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage'). Media articles explaining the traditional association of rites of passage to the *ujigami* belief probably raised the level of knowledge about it, even if not the level of belief (Taguchi 2015, 112–113).
75. See a further discussion on this topic in chapter 'Constructing the Ritual: Dress, Photographs, Actors, and Script'.
76. In the Japanese religious context, single ritual events are not always strictly appropriated by one religion or another.
77. One such example is Nakayama-dera in the Kansai region, described by Reader and Tanabe, a Buddhist temple that capitalizes greatly from s*hichigosan* (Reader and Tanabe 1998, 206–207).
78. Nelson 1997, 700–703. A significant number of rites (wedding rite, *shichigosan*, baby's first shrine visit) are offered to the worshipers and conducted for a fee by Shinto and Buddhist priests.
79. 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 worldly needs of the population (see on this theme also Reader and Tanabe 1998).
80. In some cases, the ritual of *shichigosan* is also used as a fund-raising event. See the example from 1984 given by Jennifer Robertson in the case of *Shinmei-gū* in a bed-town of Tokyo (1994). In his study on Shinto shrines, John Nelson gave a fairly precise estimate of how much the income from *shichigosan* contributes to the finances of the examined shrine (Nelson 1997, 700, Note 10). According to information obtained by Nelson, it represents

approximately 2.5% of the yearly income of the shrine. His study was based on data from the 1990s, which means that this income represents only fees paid for purification rites and offerings by the *shichigosan* visitors; at that time, the shrine did not provide a *shichigosan* service pack.

81. On the meaning and custom of *yakudoshi* see also chapter 'Consumer Culture and Changes to the Ritual Calendar in Postwar Urban Japan'. For an analysis of factors contributing in the growing popularity of the *yakudoshi* observance in the recent years in Japan, see Taguchi's study (Taguchi 2008).
82. *Shūkan Gendai* 1980, November 20.
83. COMO 2006, September.
84. Not all shrines in Japan provide regular service of rites.
85. The word *jingū* commonly indicates within the system of Shinto shrines that the shrine is connected to the imperial house.
86. The account was constructed mainly based on the interview with Mr. Daimaru, resident priest of the Meiji Jingū. An interview with the employees of the indoor rental studio of shrine was carried out as well. Precise numbers of observers can be also obtained from the publications of the shrine, such as the Meiji Jingū gojūnenshi (1979) (明治神宮50年誌).
87. The actual number of families applying for the purification rite was lower.
88. The total fertility has never gone above 2.0 since 1973, and it has continuously decreased since then. In 2010, it arrived at 1.3 (Source: www.mhlw.go.jp, accessed 2011, January 20). See also Yoshizumi 1995, 4.
89. Life-cycle rites list the following occasions: naming ceremony (*meitsuke* or *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* (60th birthday celebration).
90. The price of the pack seems not to have changed singificantly between 2009 and 2015.
91. The information refers to 2009. In 2009, child menu cost 3150 Yen, and adult menu 9000–7000 Yen.
92. The indications refer to 2015. For comparison, in 2009 the time set for these activities was shorter, 30 min for each.
93. Data refer to 2009.
94. This service was offered in 2009. The details of services, as well as the explanations provided in the pamphlets (print and online) can change year by year.
95. www.meijijingu.or.jp. For services, see also http://www.meijikinenkan.gr.jp/ (last access 2015, October 10).
96. For example, there are detailed explanations of patterns and colors used on the kimono sash (*obi*) as part of the seven-year-old girls' outfit.
97. In 2006, 830 families opted for the *shichigosan* plan, a number continuing to grow year after year. In 2007, 921, in 2008, 970 (Hansen 2009).

98. It would be difficult to estimate the total number of *shichigosan* families visiting the shrine during the period of October and November, but the number of applications for the purification rite can be also indicative. According to Hansen's estimate, in 2006, this number amounted to 6700, and in 2008, it amounted to 7300, clearly showing an increasing trend (Hansen 2009).
99. The first place is occupied by *yakudoshi*, the purification rite to avoid bad luck during the unfortunate years.
100. Hansen 2009. See also Ishii 2009, 148–149.
101. Hie Jinja (日枝神社), situated in the Akasaka area of Tokyo, claims to be the place where the 'first *shichigosan*' (in other words, the first urban Edo *shichigosan*) was observed by the members of the Tokugawa family at the end of the seventeenth century. According to the shrine's official website, this occurred in 1681.
102. Regarding this issue, Taguchi's findings do not offer evidence of the repeated visits to the shame religious institutions. The authors says that the shrine or temple to be visited seems to be chosen according to the ritual occasion and usually the chosen site differs every time (2015).
103. Fitzgerald notes that "[L]ike "economics" and "politics", "religion" has been disembedded historically into a distinct sphere of western ideology in a way that, arguably, is not characteristic of Japan". (Fitzgerald 2003).
104. See among others Davis 1992, Van Bremen and Martinez 1995; Reader and Tanabe 1998; Fitzgerald 2003, 2004.
105. For instance, in a recent study, Galen Amstutz argued that materialism and commerce have been part of Shin Buddhism since at least the early eighteenth century (Amstutz 2012).
106. Nonetheless, questions addressing faith of respondents figure still among the principal questions of the surveys. This, authors of the Kokugakuin survey explain with the prevailing importance of this type of questions in religion-related surveys worldwide. As a matter of fact, the results of the two opinion polls carried out by the Kokugakuin group showed a very low rate of affirmative responses to questions about faith (in both surveys less than 30% of respondents claimed to have faith) (Kokugakuin 2006).
107. According to the Jinja Honchō survey in 2007, it was somewhere between 3% and 4%. Buddhism was the faith most commonly endorsed by respondents, but the proportion of believers declined from 38% in 1996 to 27% in 2006. In the 2009 NHK survey: Shinto 3%, Buddhism 35% (www.nhk.or.jpbunken/summary/resarch/report/2009).
108. A shrine or temple visit is not commonly seen as part of the *seijinshiki* event, which was established as a public ceremonial event in 1946, by the town council of Warabi (Saitama prefecture). The custom spread throughout Japan and the municipality usually organizes an event for all residents who

have reached twenty years of age. In 1948, January 15, the central day of *koshōgatsu* (small New Year) in the traditional festivity calendar, was made an official holiday, *seijin no hi* (adult's day). Since 2000, the official holiday falls on the second Monday in January. The fact that in recent years a growing number of persons choose to visit a shrine on this occasion warrants further investigation.

109. Chapel weddings are wedding rites designed along the lines of the Christian marriage ceremony; in most cases, no religious affiliation is required and only the external trappings of the Christian ceremony are present (chapel interior, decorations, white bridal dress). Often, chapel wedding is performed without a priest.
110. See also Hendry (1987), the essays included in the volume edited by Van Bremen and Martinez (1995), and Baffelli, Reader, and Staemmler (2011) for discussion of the problematic use of the category of religion in the Japanese cultural context.
111. See also Hendry (1987), the essays included in the volume edited by Van Bremen and Martinez (1995), and Baffelli, Reader, and Staemmler (2011) for the problematic use of the category of religion in the Japanese cultural context.
112. See also the survey carried out by Taguchi (2015).

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Constructing the Ritual: Dress, Photographs, Actors, and Script

So far I have described the historical development of the ritual form starting with the rise of its urban pattern in the Tokugawa period, through the diffusion of the pattern to the rest of the country, and the following impact from the commercial sect or and media in the postwar decades. Chapter 'Business Sector, Media and Religious Institutions' also addressed the role of religious institutions as well as the significance of the shrine ritual within the *shichigosan* practice. While the observers of the ritual emerged as actors taking an active role in the development of the ritual, the main focus remained on the forms and practices of the ritual changing with the period's socioeconomic conditions. Also, the material requisites of the celebration (dress, photo, accessories, food) emerged, thus far, as goods and services on the market. In this chapter, I am furthering the discussion by focusing on the single observer (child, mother, father, grandparents) and their role in the ritual in a temporal perspective, and by exploring the shifts in the meaning of the components of the ritual, including the festive dress, food items, the candy gift, and last but not least, the photo.

As demonstrated in the previous two chapters, the construction of a ritual experience that is compliant with the family's own imagery occurs with the help of objects. Objects convey symbolic meanings and these convey messages to the actors as well as to their surroundings. The presence of symbols is one of the distinguishing features of the ritual mode of expression, and represents an important element in the overall interpretative framework of the ritual. The communicability of these symbols

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is central to ritual enactment and the communicability, or receptivity (Grimes 1982), of symbols largely depends on the particular social and cultural environment which provides the reservoir of meanings for the particular symbol (McCracken 1986). Changes in the socioeconomic conditions often cause shifts in emphases and alterations of contents, and may also bring about the need to adopt an appropriate symbolic system in order to ensure the viability of communication. Therefore, any analysis of meanings needs to be placed within a temporal frame (Douglas 2003). Moreover, symbols always have multiple meanings and serve multiple purposes; therefore, attention needs to be paid to the layers of meaning that a given symbol may represent during a ritual event (Geertz 1957).

Objects used in a ritual context are distinguished from other ordinary objects by their capacity to convey or communicate symbolic messages (Douglas and Isherwood 1984). The ritual has been interpreted as one of the means by which ordinary objects can be transformed into symbols. These objects are usually food and drink consumed during the ritual event, or objects that accompany the event, such as festive garments and gifts, among others. Some of the objects may acquire special symbolic meaning communicable only to a particular individual or group, such as a garment inherited from the grandfather can symbolize family continuity for the young generations. In these cases, the objects are treated as 'sacred' whereas the term 'sacred' is not used here with any particular reference to religion, but—following the use of the term of Belk et al.—'sacred' refers to things or notions (experiences, times, places) that people feel and consider as extraordinary and extremely important, as something that qualitatively differs from the everyday (Belk et al. 1989). Similarly, objects that express or represent core values and norms can emerge as powerful symbols in the ritual; so, for example, photographs that represent memories of extraordinary and important events for family life are preserved with special care in the future. Not only do tangible objects convey symbolic meanings, but intangible ones as well, such as the numbers in *shichigosan*—discussed in chapter 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage'—which refer to 'tacit knowledge' rooted in traditional cosmology.[1] Also, objects, or artifacts, tangible and intangible, can differ from each other within the ritual regarding their grade of importance; nonetheless, together they make up the overall complexity of the ritual's meaning. They form an intricate system of symbols which contributes to a meaningful and compelling ritual enactment.

Several objects in contemporary *shichigosan* were already present in its past patterns (festive dress, traditional gift of *chitoseame*); nonetheless, their meaning and role in the ritual have undergone important alterations over the course of time. As indicated in chapter 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage', two themes have emerged frequently with regard to childhood rites of passage in Japan centering around the progress of the human soul in the life cycle, and the display of social status, in other words, the reaffirmation of social ties that the household sustains within its social environment. Over the course of history, these two themes have received varying emphases depending on factors such as social class, local customs, and economic situations. In pre-Meiji Japan, ritual patterns differed and changed mainly along the lines of social membership, and 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 happened, for example, when the warrior class seized power and moved up on the social scale. The military class adopted a number of customs from the court aristocracy as well as a significant portion of its etiquette. Later, changes in the structure of economic power during the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries led the merchant population to embrace the ritual etiquette of the elite classes in a similar manner.

Today, a majority of the ritual objects come from the market. Indeed, it is through these objects (or services) that the marketplace actively partakes in the creation and shaping of the ritual form and meaning. Dennis W. Rook in his analytical framework distinguishes four components on which rituals generally rely: ritual artifacts, ritual script, ritual performance roles, and ritual audience (Rook 1985).[2] Whereas Rook adopts this framework to analyze rituals and ritualized behavior principally in consumption contexts, it can be applied to the analysis of the ritual in general. The identification of the above-listed four components can be helpful in the individuation of the single elements of the ritual event and in organizing related data.

In the case of *shichigosan*, some components have already been mentioned and will be further analyzed below. As for ritual scripts, these are usually manuals (etiquette), in other words, written or non-written rules of proper conduct, the right sequence of actions during the ritual, or the appropriate way to use ritual artifacts. Rituals can differ in the degree of rigidity concerning these rules (Rook 1985). Ritual roles are roles performed by single actors directly involved in the ritual. The role of actors can be strictly defined and formalized but can enjoy relative freedom, too, depending on the ritual in question. Lastly, the ritual audience is one that

while not directly involved in the performance of the ritual, that is, is not playing an active ritual role, does give testimony to the ritual by attending and/or watching it. Whereas in the case of public mass rituals it is usually easy to point out the target audience, in the case of family rituals the audience is not clearly definable. Ritual actors themselves can play at some point during the event the role of the audience, as for example in *shichigosan* when family members attending the celebration are enacting the role of audience by watching the child adorned in a festive outfit observe parts of the ritual. Also, the public audience can consist of persons witnessing and viewing, actively or passively, the event. Mothers often take pride in the sight of their embellished daughters. The appraisals offered incidentally by people also comprise part of the satisfaction felt about the ritual. These feelings are echoed in mothers' words, for example: 'I really was delighted to hear the many praises uttered by people watching my daughter in the shrine'.[3] In addition, relatives or friends taking part in the celebration indirectly (by receiving a gift or photos of the celebration) comprise part of the audience giving testimony as well as recognition to the celebration.

All four components unfold the multilayered aspects and meanings of the ritual as well as the process by which the celebration is being constructed by the actors. Ritual roles unfold the social dimension in the most marked way as their enactment is firmly embedded in the social environment and alterations in this environment imply changes in meanings as well as interpretations enclosed in ritual roles (Rook 1985). Family ideals, norms, and views on children all define, to a great extent, roles individuals are expected to play in the ritual. Lastly, a close examination of the ritual script sheds light on the changing sphere of influence that ritual experts hold. It also has important implications on the ways knowledge about the ritual is being transmitted. In contemporary *shichigosan*, shrine priests together with etiquette experts and the media play a crucial role in shaping ritual scripts by means of not only proposing new elements but also acknowledging and legitimating changes occurring in the ritual.

Multiple Meanings of the Dress

Today the festive dress, in particular, the Japanese traditional style, is the most visible and important symbol of *shichigosan*.[4] Dress, ornaments, and makeup often figure as symbols in rituals worldwide. Douglas argues that this kind of adornment of the body can be regarded as a form of bodily control and communication toward the external world and puts the

prevalence of symbols of bodily control within a given culture in connection with the degree of social constraints existing in the examined context (Douglas 2003).[5] It is, however, important to examine the meaning of them within a temporal frame as meanings transform over the course of history. So although the children's festive dress has always been present as an important feature of the celebration during its history, the domains enclosing its meanings have undergone numerous changes over time, some details of which are discussed below.

Clothing in the past used to be a clear marker of status, gender, and age in Japan. Much of the symbolism of rites of passage in the past was associated with visible changes in the dress code and hairstyle. Any change in status or age entailed a visible change in dress code, and often hairstyle (Tanida and Koike 1989).[6] In Tokugawa Japan, for example, the division between single social classes was regulated by the *bakufu* government by a strict dress code to be adopted by every class. A well-defined social scale was created, where every class was assigned its own sphere of responsibilities, duties, and etiquette code. The *bakufu* government strictly monitored these rules, and the frequently issued sumptuary laws had the aim to outlaw inappropriate behavior and manners, among others with regard to the use of dress.[7] The dress code of a given social class influenced also the ceremonial use of garments; hence, clothes worn during rituals differed along the lines of social class. When the *hakama* started to be worn mainly by warriors, the *hakama-gi* (*hakama* rite) became a ceremony typically observed for samurai sons. The crested formal wear 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.

Clothes also differed according to the way people used them. There was a clear division between clothes worn for everyday use and those for festive events. A distinction was made between *hare* (*haregi* 晴れ着) wear and *ke* (*kegi*褻着)[8] wear.[9] The *ke* wear was further subdivided into labor wear and garments worn inside the house. *Haregi* (literally, 'festive dress') almost always accompanied the significant occasions of the human life course, and became strongly associated with the symbolism of transition.[10] The importance attached to the wearing of garments is also notable in numerous folk customs connected to the act of the first wearing of a new garment.[11] In many places, the moment when a newly prepared kimono was worn for the first time was seen as a special occasion and was marked with a ritual observance.[12] Often a prayer, called *shinchō no aisatsu* (新調の挨拶, literally, greetings of the 'newly made'), was offered in the village shrine. It

was also common to select a special day for this occasion; this was usually an auspicious day, such as a wedding or other celebration. To put on a new kimono for a funeral was regarded as highly inauspicious. The first occasion pointed to the next occasion, and thereby, unlucky, unhappy events were to be avoided. In addition, in many places, it was a custom to recite special words or chants during the act of putting on the new dress.

Similarly, magical beliefs were often associated with the first dressing of a newborn baby.[13] In several places in Japan, it was thought a bad omen to prepare the dress of the child prior to their birth. The newborn baby was, therefore, usually wrapped into an old piece of cloth belonging to one of the parents.[14] People attributed magical potential to this old piece of cloth and believed that this would protect the child against malignant forces and ensure its healthy growth. The first kimono of the baby, called *ubugi* (産着 or 産衣), was usually completed during the first days following the birth by the grandmother or midwife. It was often the 'third-day rite' (*mikka iwai*三日祝い) or the 'seventh-day rite' (*oshichiya*お七夜) when the baby was put into its first dress.[15] The shape of the *ubugi* could differ by region but, in most cases, it was white, symbolizing purity, and was the size of a *hitotsume* kimono (see above) without sleeves. There were places where the first kimono was made out from an old used garment of the father, believed to have magical protective powers (Ōtō 1989).[16]

Symbolical meanings attached to the Japanese dress continue to comprise part of the complex meaning attached to the ritual of *shichigosan*. As already mentioned, today the most appropriate and popular dress code for children at *shichigosan* is the traditional Japanese-style wear. The latest surveys have shown that 90% of three- and five-year-old girls and over 50% of five-year-old boys wear the Japanese style for the *shichigosan* shrine visit (Taguchi 2011). Information and promotional materials (print and online), provided by shrines and magazines, often provide detailed explanations on the single components making up the festive Japanese dress, differentiated by age and gender. This knowledge is believed to be lost and therefore several sources provide detailed information and instructions. For example, the set of information provided by the Meiji shrine in its print and online materials offers detailed advice as to the appropriate dress code and methods for wearing the garments in a proper manner.[17] Boys are advised to wear family crested garments, while the central piece of girls' seventh year rite (*obitoki*) is the ceremonial sash called *obi*.[18] The *obi* is a piece of clothing that was added only gradually to the Japanese wardrobe; however, in the Tokugawa period, it was already regarded as

an integral part of the clothing. *Obi* used to be also associated with adulthood and auspiciousness. Little children's dress, until the completion of one of the age rites between three and seven, was commonly tied with a simple cord (called *himo* 紐) and not with the regular sash (*obi*). The ritual also indicated that the simple cord could be dropped and replaced by a proper *obi*.[19] The *shichigosan* rites thus indicated a change in the dress code of small children. Many of the proposed garments are inspired by the wardrobe typical to the upper samurai class of the Tokugawa era. This emphasizes the celebration's link to a glorious past and suggests that by dressing children in a style typical to the upper ranks of samurai society, families may add a sense of glamour to their celebration. The descriptions strengthen the association of the shrine with the aristocratic and elite culture, mingled with notions of local exclusivity. In other words, they allow for allusions that the Meiji shrine *is* the place where an elegant and 'aristocratic-like' ritual experience can be achieved.

Nevertheless, the Meiji shrine is not the only one to forge associations between *shichigosan* and the notion of historical elite classes. Kimono patterns proposed by kimono rental studios and retail shops for the celebration often imitate styles typical to particular historical periods. Trendy designs are often reproductions of patterns typical to the imperial court of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The 'added value' of these garments is also manifest in the elevated price of the models.[20] Articles in print media contain numerous notions of the fact that patterns and colors inspired by glamorous historical periods raise the overall appeal of the celebration. The full-page photo of a *furisode* model of a seven-year-old girl—costing 340,000 Yen—designed by a famous artist who adopted patterns in use during the Heian imperial court (794–1185) speak to this theme.[21] Even more importantly, messages communicating associations of the celebration with particular and distant historical moments and contexts reinterpret and often blur and mystify the historical origins of the ritual.

Dress and the Notion of 'Tradition'

It needs to be underlined that although the traditional Japanese dress is viewed as one of the symbols of the celebration today, when the Western wear entered the wardrobe of the Japanese, the Western-style dress became part of the available options for a festive outfit.[22] At some moments during history, the two styles enjoyed equal popularity, even

if this was mostly restricted to the male outfit. This was the case, for example, in the interwar years, when the Western male attire became very popular.[23]

Generally speaking, it can be said that changes in the festive dress style have followed shifting trends in the everyday clothing customs of the Japanese. The most significant shift occurred in the Meiji–Taisho period when the Japanese traditional wear began to gradually penetrate the wardrobe of the Japanese, as a result of the impact of the Western culture. The Western male wear was not only viewed as modern but also as simpler and more convenient compared to the Japanese wear. On the other hand, changes in women's clothing were slower and more gradual. Whereas men in the cities had already adopted the Western-style suit around the end of the nineteenth century (it was also supported by the official Meiji politics propagating modernization), 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 (Dalby 1993). Accordingly, the Western style in *shichigosan* dress was more preferred for boys. Indeed, the popularity of the Western festive dress for male children, usually consisting of a formal suit, was growing during the 1920s. In 1932, a journalist in Yomiuri counted 537 boys wearing Western and 133 wearing the Japanese traditional dress on their *shichigosan* shrine visit at the Kanda shrine (Tokyo).[24] In those years, voices promoting the Western dress as the proper *shichigosan* outfit emerged with frequency in the media judging the Western dress as more practical and simple, hence more suitable for little children compared to the Japanese garments. These opinions, though, had probably more to do with the epoch's reform movements aiming to create and propagate the ideal of the 'modern family'.[25] An integral part of this ideology was to reform child-rearing practices and together with it, the celebration patterns of the modern family. The proposed proper patterns were those of placing the child—around which the ideal family centered—into focus of the celebration (Jones 2010).[26] On the other hand, in the years when the Western-style clothing was still a rarity and novelty in children's everyday wear, *shichigosan* was sometimes seen as a rare occasion to dress the child in the curious Western attire, as an article from 1929 notes (Yomiuri 1929, November 15). Interestingly, today the exact opposite is emphasized when magazines and child-rearing web sites describe *shichigosan* as an important and unique occasion for children to try on the traditional Japanese garments that disappeared from the everyday clothing of children.

In sum, the 1920s marked the turning point when Japanese wear became separated from everyday use. At the same time, it was also the moment when Japanese wear started its move to the realm of 'tradition' and as a result, it became relegated to specific and formal occasions (Dalby 1993; Ashikari 2003). However, in the interwar period and in the immediate years following the end of World War II, differences between urban and rural customs persisted both regarding celebration manners and clothing customs.[27] In rural areas, the Western-style clothing made its appearance in the everyday and ceremonial customs only in the postwar years.

After the upheavals of the years following the end of the war, the country's economy was launched into a phase of high-speed growth, and famous department stores in Tokyo, such as the Mitsukoshi, started to include the *shichigosan* festive models in their first fashion shows.[28] In the 1950s and early 1960s, for a while, Japanese and Western style seemed to be equally popular, though the Western style was chosen more often for the male attire. In 1955, a survey conducted by a women's college in Gifu reported that whereas most girls wore the Japanese kimono for the celebration (90%), 80% of boys dressed in the Western- style outfit.[29] Surveys from the following years showed a slowly rising rate toward the Japanese-style wear for both sexes. In 1960s, the Japanese-style dress already outnumbered the Western one in both male and female children's wear.[30] It can be said that starting from this period, the Japanese dress started to definitely be associated with the notion of cultural traditions.

The trend that saw the return of the Japanese formal wear for both sexes was closely linked to a general trend toward the re-evaluation of traditional customs thought to be lost upon modernization. High-speed economic growth in Japan accelerated the transformation and standardization of life style in both urban and rural areas. This development evoked feelings of nostalgia for things that—seemingly—got lost in the midst of modernization. Traditions and old customs, among these celebrations with roots in the past, started to be viewed with feelings of romantic nostalgia. This quest for tradition has also been labeled the 'nostalgia boom' and its wider social implications have been addressed in a number of studies.[31] Being relegated to festive ceremonial occasions, the Japanese traditional dress, too, entered the realm of 'cultural heritage'. Accordingly, special value started to be attributed to the Japanese traditional wear. The complexity of the link between the notion of tradition and Japanese wear has been studied in different contexts. Goldstein-Gidoni noted that the traditional Japanese clothing has associations with ceremonialism, solem-

nity, tradition, and above all with Japaneseness (Goldstein-Gidoni 1997, 27).[32] Indeed, contemporary Japanese view the Japanese dress as one of the symbols of traditional culture as well as an important constituent of national identity.

In brief, it can be stated that an additional layer of meaning has been conferred to the Japanese festive garment of children. It is not only to signify a formal festive attire expressing the subsequent grade in the child's growth, as it used to be before modernization had affected the clothing customs of the Japanese, but also stands as a symbol for Japanese culture, identity, and traditions. Once the notion of tradition becomes inseparable from the celebration itself, the Japanese-style dress acquired the role of the main conveyor of this notion. It is important to underline, however, that this development regards first of all the festive dress of the child. As for the festive outfit of the accompanying adults, the postwar decades witnessed an increasing propensity for the Western style. Surveys conducted by professional textile schools during the 1960s recorded a declining rate of the female adult Japanese-style outfit at *shichigosan* (Sano et al. 1990).[33] The trend continued and by the end of the 1980s, women preferring the Japanese outfit for the *shichigosan* ritual became a minority.[34] The difference in trends between the adults' and the children's festive outfit can be explained by the fact that the celebration continues to focus on the child as the central figure of the celebration, a fact that challenges critiques targeting the alleged vainness of Japanese mothers using the celebration for their own display (see also chapter 'Business Sector, Media and Religious Institutions'). Surveys have shown that an overwhelming number of mothers opt for modest outfits in subdued colors (including the Japanese-style wear), with the aim to allow the child to emerge as central during the celebration (Shimizu 2005).

Currently, changing trends in *shichigosan* wear are followed with attention especially by the textile industry. The Japanese dress is promoted as the most appropriate outfit for the *shichigosan* celebration, both for children and adults. *Shichigosan* occupies an important place within the series of occasions promoted by the textile industry as occasions to clad the Japanese wear. By the 1970s, income deriving from the sale of dresses used for the celebration of *shichigosan* occupied a significant share within the sale of all Japanese traditional style clothing. Around the end of the decade, this was 10% of the total income.[35] Several factors have contributed to this result. By the end of the 1970s, the urban pattern of

shichigosan was known across almost all regions of the country where it replaced or filled in the space left by vanished local customs, or became an option along with persisting local customs. Moreover, the notion of tradition became inherent to the celebration by this time and children's festive attire appropriated the role of the principal conveyor of this notion. Lastly, the improved economic means of families made it possible for the market to promote and introduce exclusive Japanese-style garments that raised the appeal of the Japanese dress in the eyes of many families.[36] The importance of the *shichigosan* traditional festive wear for the industry has also been acknowledged by The Japanese Trade Organization of Kimono (社団法人全国日本きもの振興会) when in 1966 it selected the eleventh of November as the 'Day of Kimono' (*kimono no hi*). The date was selected in consideration of the traditional date of the *shichigosan* observance, the fifteenth of November. The leaders of the organization recognized *shichigosan* as a par excellence celebration that simultaneously represented two important cultural traditions: the age-old celebration of children and the Japanese national garment. Additionally, the fifteenth of November became known in the textile industry as the day of 'the celebration of the silk' (*kinu no saiten*絹の祭典) (Shimizu 2005, 29).

Today, media, commercial sector, and religious institutions make efforts to reinforce the link of *shichigosan* with the notion of 'tradition', and along with it, the traditional Japanese wear. As already mentioned above, the celebration occupies an important place among the rites promoted as occasions to wear the Japanese-style dress, including other occasions such as *miyamairi* (the first shrine visit), *jūsan mairi*,[37] *seijinshiki* (coming of age ceremony), university entrance and graduation ceremonies, weddings, and funerals.[38] Media articles and advertisements transmit the idea that the traditional Japanese dress has the capacity to add glamour and solemnity to ceremonial events. The articles often use expressions such as 'soulful life', 'courteous way of celebrating', 'kimono expressing heart and mind', reinforcing positive images attached to the kimono. Moreover, the association of kimono to the notion of national cultural heritage is emphasized by the use of expressions 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 wearing ceremonial kimono in front of well-known shrines and popular *shichigosan* sites, for example the Hie Shrine (the site of the 'first *shichigosan*') or the Meiji shrine.

Dress Patterns and Colors

The visual elements of the Japanese dress used for the *shichigosan*, such as the decorative patterns and the colors of the fabric, also have symbolical meaning. In the past, the quality of fabrics and the use of patterns and colors were primarily determined by social class membership and by the financial means available to the families. However, popular patterns, while following prevalent tastes, often reflected the sensitivity of the Japanese to the changes in the nature. Each season has its typical and popular motifs, such as, for example, winter months saw bamboo and pine, the spring months sakura (cherry blossoms) and butterflies (Dalby 1993; Daniels 2009). Regarding children's festive wear, in the past (prior to the westernization of the Japanese wardrobe), the festive dress of a child was basically a new dress—if financial means enabled it. This new garment was then used and readapted for the subsequent festive occasions. Today, the festive traditional dress is distinguished by the presence of a few popular patterns, such as the *takarazukushi* (宝尽くし), a classic auspicious patterns comprising seven objects traditionally believed to bring good luck.[39] These include magical objects, such as *kakuregasa* (隠れ笠) (magical umbrella) or *kakuremino* (隠れ蓑) (magical straw raincoat), both believed to render the person invisible, and both standing as protection from danger. Another object *chōji* (丁子), the fruit of the clove imported from the South to Japan in the Heian period, symbolizing health and longevity, peach blossoms, and other seasonal flowers, such as the chrysanthemum (referring to the autumnal period) or cherry blossoms, or patterns of plants that grow quickly, such as bamboo leaves (Matsuyama and Fuseya 1995).[40] The listed objects incorporate a wide range of meanings that the celebration itself represents: auspiciousness, wish for a happy and long life, good health, well-being, success, vigorous growth, and blessings.

Their association with Japanese traditions often emerges in the media, as seen in the following text from a periodical: 'Even though times change, feelings of parents towards their children do not alter. The patterns of the festive *shichigosan* dress never fade: crane, peach, plum, bamboo. These patterns preserve the spirit of Japan and the treasure box of our culture. The message we wish to transmit to children of the twenty-first century, is expressed and represented by the *shichigosan* festive dress'.[41] The text smartly mingles references to the notion of tradition with feelings of nostalgia and references to family values, creating a complex set of messages that may appeal to wide segments of the population.

Finally, the Western-style festive dress needs to be addressed, as well. As already noted, the Western-style dress witnessed shifting levels of popularity in the course of the twentieth century. In the recent decade, Western-style outfits are becoming popular again as a result of the diversification occurring in the services offered by rental and photo studios. Rental dress collections today include a variety of styles that include the Western one. Apart from the classic Japanese-style garments and the formal Western wear (suits and one-piece dresses), several studios provide costumes of play figures and 'cosplay' (anime) costumes. This, indeed, points to the strengthening of the playful and entertaining aspects of the celebration.[42] In the convenient service sets combining professional photographing with the service of dress rental, children have the possibility to try on different costumes and enjoy a carnival-like atmosphere during the photographing. As the number of shots, thanks to the digital technology, is practically unlimited today, children and parents may enjoy the play of disguise in the photo studio. Photos of children dressed in funny clothes or princess and hero outfits are taken along more 'serious' photographs in classic ceremonial outfits. Photo studios normally rent out their garments only for the time of the photographing, which means that the dress for the shrine visit is usually different from the one used in the studio.[43] Sometimes, a difference in the parents' attitude can be noted depending on the occasion. The shrine visit tends to be considered as calling for a more formal festive dress (Japanese or Western style), while the assortment offered by photo studios came to be seen as a unique occasion to have the child photographed in various styles that are not common in everyday life.[44]

Dress and the Notion of 'Family'

The dress can not only symbolize 'tradition' but it can also represent important family norms and values, comprising family cohesion and continuity. The issue of continuity concerns both the family line and child's life course. The Japanese dress of the three- and five-year-old children is often the dress purchased for an earlier ritual occasion, namely the first shrine visit of the baby (*miyamairi*). The babies on this occasion are usually wrapped in a kimono of a three-/five-year-old size as they are too small to wear a proper dress. This garment is used later for the subsequent ceremonial occasions, including *hatsusekku* (first seasonal festival), *kuizome* (first solid food eating), *hatsutanjō* (first birthday), and finally *shichigosan*. This mode of repeated utilization of the same dress can create a sense of flow

of events; in other words, 'continuity' and the dress acquires in this case a symbolic value in the eyes of the family.

The notion of continuity emerges also with regard to the family line. In families where the festive garment is inherited from mother to daughter, or from father to son, the dress symbolizes the continuation of the family. The utilization of an inherited garment contributes to the upholding of family traditions. The family crest, too, stands for the perpetuation of the family line as it accumulates the symbolical significance of the importance attached to the line. The use of a crested kimono is characteristic of families that give high value to the perpetuation of family heritage (spiritual and/or material). However, it is necessary to underline that the notion of family line has a different meaning compared to the past when it was interpreted almost exclusively within the hierarchical system of the *ie* household structure. Today, in the era of nuclear families, it rather takes the form of affections accumulated within the family, in particular toward the offspring. A telling example is the case of a mother who prepared a collage of photos combining old photographs taken on the occasion of her own and the husband's *shichigosan* twenty years ago, and the photo taken recently of their daughter's celebration. The resulting photo grouped two generations of family members all dressed in *shichigosan* attire.[45] The photo became 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 importance of the perpetuation of the family line with regard to the festive Japanese wear was also revealed by the 2007 survey of the MikiHouse child-rearing research group. Here, several respondents underlined that they viewed *shichigosan* as part of their family tradition. 'I wish that the kimono that I wore for my own *shichigosan* might be worn by my child, and later by his/her child', said a mother from the prefecture of Saitama.[46] The wish to hand down the festive dress over generations points to the potential of the celebration to act as a symbol of family traditions by creating a link bridging generations. In this perspective, the festive garment arises as a salient symbol standing for the transmission of family traditions.

Chitoseame, the *Shichigosan* Gift

Chitoseame, the white colored candy in a long and narrow shape, has been accompanying the celebration since the rise of its urban pattern in the Tokugawa period. The long shaped white candy embraces the

family's wish for a happy and long life for the child. Not only its shape, but also its name (literally, 1000 years candy) stands for happiness and longevity.[47] Its color, pure white is associated with purity and auspiciousness in the Shinto cosmology. The legend of the origin of *chitoseame* is often reproduced by the media as well as by candy producers and sellers. The symbolism encapsulated in *chitoseame* is further reinforced by the motifs used to decorate the bag into which the sticks are placed. Popular motifs evoke auspicious themes, such as happiness, health, and longevity. Usually, they consist of a set of three trees, called *shōchikubai* (松竹梅), pine tree, bamboo, and *ume* tree (Japanese apricot tree), all believed to be propitious.[48] Animal motifs, too, appear on the bags of *chitoseame*. The most beloved are the crane and the turtle. Crane (*tsuru*鶴), also called *chitosedori* (千歳鳥) (literally, 'bird of a thousand years'), has associations with longevity and is believed to be a lucky omen. Turtle (*kame* 亀) (or 'thousand years turtle' *sennen kame* 千年亀), is a symbol of longevity and it was used for divination in the past. Nowadays, most shrines offer *chitoseame* as a gift to children applying for the formal purification rite in the shrine's premises. A few shrines also commission the work of designing the bags of *chitoseame* to famous designers as part of their effort to render the shrine more appealing to families and, thus, to attract more visitors.

Chitoseame today is viewed as inseparable from *shichigosan*. Most adults when remembering their own celebration recollect memories of having received *chitoseame* with nostalgia and emotion. Its special character owes also to the fact that it is normally not sold outside the period of the celebration which today stretches from mid-October to the end of November. Also, several shrines wrap candies by themselves, work in which maidens in the service of the shrine (the so called *miko* 巫女) are in charge. Reports on this activity regularly appear in the media. An example is provided by the online Sankei news site which reports every year on the activity of Kobe's major shrine (Ikuta Jinja生田神社) concerning the preparation of *chitoseame* bags by the shrine's *miko* maidens.[49]

The Festive Menu and the Rite of *Goban*

Food

Food is a typical accompanying element of family rituals throughout the world. Indeed, these often center around the festive meal consumed and shared together. The preparation of the food prior to the festivity still plays

an important role in family festive events throughout the world. Almost all celebrations of the family require a family meal, for example, in the Western context Easter, Christmas, or birthdays. Communal food can symbolize shared community when, through the act of eating together, membership in a given group is acknowledged and/or reaffirmed (Pleck 2000). Family members and friends create bonds by taking part in the consumption (and in the preparation) of a festive meal.

In the Japanese cultural context, meal has always been an important part of rituals. The offerings to the deities in the form of food and drink are a central part of the Shinto and Buddhist rituals and the subsequent consumption of it indicates a communion with the spiritual entities.[50] 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, as well as by social class, it usually included foods such as sea bream (*tai* 鯛)[51] with its head, boiled and seasoned food (*nimono* 煮物), *sekihan* (赤飯 glutinous rice steamed with red beans), pickled vegetables (*tsukemono* 漬け物), soup (*shirumono*汁物), or rice cakes (餅*mochi*). In several parts of Japan, it was common to offer parts of the festive menu during one of the childhood rituals to the divinities, either by placing it onto the *kamidana* (Shinto household altar) or bringing it to the local shrine and offering it to *ujigami* (the guardian deity of the community).

Today, the single components of the above-described menu may be included in the *shichigosan* festive menu, but it is not obligatory. A few restaurants offer the traditional menu in November, but mostly the *shichigosan* menu for children does not comprise the traditional items and is based on modern dishes. Parents usually prefer to satisfy the child's desires and opt for meals and restaurants that best suit his/her tastes. Advice from etiquette experts, too, advise parents to keep in mind the preferences of the child when selecting the festive menu. The above listed traditional foods are recommended by experts for those who 'care for traditions'. The custom of consuming homemade traditional festive meals has been in decline at least since the 1970s when the tendency to eat in restaurants started to grow. This tendency is documented in numerous surveys also with regard to the *shichigosan*. Traditional recipes are not passed over from mother to daughter as a number of traditional food items (such as *mochi* and *sekihan*) are purchased today.[52]

Goban no gi

The rite of the *go*-board (*goban no gi* 碁盤の儀), although not representing a standard part of the *shichigosan* celebration, is offered as an additional rite in a few shrines throughout Japan. Among these is the Hie Shrine in Tokyo, for example. The *goban no gi* used to be popular among samurai families and was probably observed in the manner performed by the Ogasawara etiquette school described in chapter 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage'. In the Ogasawar style, the rite constitutes part of the *hakama-gi* performed by five-year-old boys. During the ritual, children are asked to stand on a *go* board (*goban* 碁盤) and then vigorously jump down while facing a lucky direction. Symbolic meanings associated with 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 of twelve months, and the two colors, black and white, are seen as the distinction between day and night (W.W.N. 1890). In a similar way, the popular game of *go* was to symbolize human life conceived as a battle marked with victories and defeats. Moreover, as playing *go* requires wit and intelligence, the 'philosophy' of the game well matched the symbolism contained in children's rites of passage. *Go* was paralleled with the struggles to be fought in the course of life. During the rite, the child is expected to jump off the board vigorously as he/she will have to face battles and troubles in the real life.

In several shrines throughout the country, the go-board is put on display during *shichigosan*. The rite is performed without excessive formality. The lucky direction into which the child jumps is commonly 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 mentioned, Hie Jinja advertises itself as the place of the very 'first observation of the *shichigosan* ritual' and, by offering the *go*-rite, the shrine probably makes an effort to uphold this tradition, evidently emphasizing that it is referring to the samurai culture. It can be said that the shrine, in this way, also attempts to create a particular image by upgrading its position with respect to other popular shrines in Tokyo.

The Emergence of the Photograph

The photographing technology that appeared around the turn of the twentieth century and started to be used broadly by professional and later by amateur hands changed in a substantial way the manner in which memories are constructed and preserved. It soon became an inseparable part of most family and public rituals having a great impact on celebrations. The practice of photographing influenced the perception of family celebrations comparable to the ways broadcasting on television influenced public rituals.[53] The nature and extent of this impact on ritual patterns and meaning have attracted much scholarly attention since then.

In Western scholarship, the prominent French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, was among the first to draw attention to this phenomenon. Bourdieu noted that photographing the family function almost always receives priority before aesthetic or other functions. In other words, decisions such as what and when will be photographed, in which context and form, depend on the actors' values and norms (Bourdieu 1990).[54] Moreover, photographs have been described as means to capture the fleeting experience of significant occasions, be it family rituals, significant moments in the individual's life, or visits to once encountered places (Belk et al. 1989). Photographing can also be viewed as a process through which important moments are singularized (Kopytoff 1986). The importance and value that photographs represent for people is demonstrated by the care with which photo albums are created and preserved. Photographs emerge as the tangible link that connects the individual's and the family's present to its past.

In the Japanese context, the affinity of the Japanese to the act of photographing and to photographs in general has been noted by several commentators.[55] Pictures and visual images occupy an important role in the perception of the everyday reality and are omnipresent in present-day Japan, and this also influences the way photographing is used in ritual contexts. Ben-Ari, examining the way photographing affects a rite of passage in a small community, argues that photographs and modern recording technologies influence the perception of the ritual event because the presence of photo devices can alter behavioral patterns of participants during the performance of the ritual (Ben-Ari 1991).[56] The use of these technologies can transform the entire process of remembering, as well. Using Sontag's thesis on the function of family photos, Ben-Ari sees the significance of photos taken by family members above all in their capacity to strengthen 'family continuity and connectedness', thus playing an important role in the process of creating family histories (Ben-Ari 1991, 92; Sontag 1977, 8).

Indeed, from its very beginning, photographing has been closely connected to the important moments of family life. Bourdieu used the term 'solemnization' to describe the process through which the practice of photographing qualitatively adds to the formality or solemnity of important events (Bourdieu 1990, 6). 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 appeared at wedding ceremonies around the beginning of the twentieth century. The practice of photographing was then gradually introduced into other major events regarding the life cycle of the individual and the family. Bourdieu saw a correlation between the order of the introduction of photographing at family rituals and the social importance of these events. Indeed, photos emerged first in those events which were deemed to be of major interest and significance. In this line of thought, the fact that photographing appeared at the celebration of *shichigosan*, at least in Tokyo, as soon as the interwar period, indicates the importance with which actors/families understood the event already in this period. At the same time, it also indicates that the celebration was deemed worthy of an attempt to promote the services of professional photographers. Advertisements on the festive dress, accessories, and photo services often addressed simultaneously the two celebrations, wedding and *shichigosan*.[57] In 1937, in dailies from Tokyo, several photo studios were offering their services to families planning *shichigosan*. Among these, the most innovative ones introduced service packs that comprised the service of photographing combined with beauty salon services and kimono assistance, foretelling a pattern that would become diffused later in the 1970s–1980s. Although the war interrupted the popularization of these services, in the 1960s, due to the boom in the photographing technology, photograph machines became available for private use, as well. Indeed, individual photographing was the first to become integral to the celebration and for a long time families were content with privately taken photographs.

Photo Studios and the Fragmentation of the Ritual Event

With the rising popularity of photo studios among families celebrating the *shichigosan*, private photographs taken by family members did not cease to exist. Today, most families opt for combining the two methods. Professional indoor photos feature the child in the *shichigosan* outfit not

necessarily joined by the other family members. On the other hand, private photos taken during the shrine visit and festive meal usually feature the other family members too. The introduction of the services of professional photo studios into the standard pattern of celebration has resulted in the fragmentation of the ritual event. Today, the standard pattern consists of two distinctive parts: the photo studio session accompanied with beauty (such as hairdresser and makeup) and dress assistance, and the shrine worship followed by family gathering and feast. With the increasing popularity of professional photographs, the session in the studio acquired an importance of its own. Presently, an overwhelming number of families turn to professional studios for *shichigosan*.[58] In a certain sense, the studio session gained autonomy within the celebration, growing to a rite of its own. Often, the two parts take place on two separate days, and as a result the celebration has been transformed into a complex set of events where each part, while interconnected, has its own sense and occurs in its own space and time.

Initially, studio photographing was regarded as a complementary service to individual picture-taking at *shichigosan*. However, several socioeconomic factors favored the rapid popularization as well as amplification of the professional service. Included among these factors is the increasing financial availability in the hands of the Japanese families, changes in views on children, the improved technology (digital) of photographing, and an overall shift in the value priorities of the individuals. The service pack offered for *shichigosan* resembles in a number of ways the pack offered for a wedding. The professional wedding photo service was offered long before the introduction of the professional photo for other life-cycle ceremonies. Orihashi says that—at least regarding the photo studios examined by the author in the Shibuya district—among the factors underlying the successful introduction of photo services into life-cycle ceremonies (such as *shichigosan*, *seijinshiki*, *miyamairi*, and graduation ceremonies) was the addition of the so-called 'photo-only wedding' or 'weeding for only two' options (Orihashi 2008). These options targeted couples who did not want to spend money on a real wedding ceremony and reception, but at the same time did not want to renounce on having a memorial photo taken in bridal dress. It also addressed couples who desired more elaborate photos and to avoid the stress of having to perform the wedding ceremony and the photographing both on the same day. The service became fairly popular, and according to the author, it served as a pretext for the temporal separation of the act of photographing from the real

ritual event (Orihashi 2008). Consequently, it created the possibility to offer the photo service for other life-cycle ceremonies, as well.

On the other hand, it needs to be added that professional photo studios had considerable income from *shichigosan* already in 1980 and this indicates that the proliferation of services cannot be explained solely by the result of the above described process. The development was backed up by other factors, such as the growing importance of family- and, in particular, child-centered celebrations. Also, starting from the early 1990s, studios specializing in photographing children emerged responding to the growing demand for children's photos.[59] At the same time, the photo studio session for *shichigosan* was becoming increasingly intricate and thus, requiring longer times. It can be said that the preparative procedure (hair arrangement, makeup for girls, and putting on the garments) has been in a certain sense ritualized, and grew to a ritual within the ritual. Several photo studios offer today the equivalent of 'photo-only wedding', the so-called photo-*shichigosan* (写真七五三) which is a *shichigosan* observed solely in the photos. In practice, this means that the family decides to omit all parts of the celebration (shrine worship, meal, and family gathering) but the professionally taken photographs. The photo-*shichigosan* can take place during any period of the year with no regard to the conventional date of the observance. The emphasis is on the visual image of the child and on the photograph that preserves this image. There can be many reasons for choosing this pattern. One reason is when the family does not have the time to visit the studio at the time of the celebration and therefore, it postpones the photographing to a later date. However, a combination of difficulties with timing, with a certain degree of indifference toward the rite in the shrine is typical. Like for example in the case of a Japanese mother, married and living abroad, who usually returns to Japan only a couple of times during the year. She decided to do the photo-*shichigosan* for her nine-year-old daughter and six-year-old son during their holiday in Japan in July.[60] She viewed the celebration simply as an occasion for seeing her children wearing the Japanese traditional wear and for preserving a memory of it in the form of photographs. She also noted that it was a good occasion for the kids to try on different costumes. The celebration of *shichigosan* served probably only as a pretext. The photographing was not accompanied with the shrine visit, nor was the father present at the occasion. Besides, the ages of the children were not the conventional *shichigosan* ages, either. The words of the mother placed emphasis on the entertaining aspect of the occasion, rather than on its capacity to represent

cultural traditions or family cohesion. Nonetheless, the very fact that she considered it important to arrange this event indicates that in some way she wished to share this part of her cultural traditions with her children.

Today, child-rearing magazines and online forums all strongly recommend selecting a separate day for the photo studio visit. The temporal distance between the shrine ritual and the studio session can exceed even a couple of months.[61] The elaborateness of the photographs produced by the studios requires a considerable time for the preparative. First, the dress of the child needs to be selected from a large collection of models. Second, the Japanese-style dress asks for adequate accessories, and in the case of girls, appropriate hairstyle and makeup. Professionals assist the child during all phases of the preparation which can take a couple of hours. In the last twenty years, there has been a notable escalation of standards of judgment of what is considered a perfect and desirable *shichigosan* photo. *Shichigosan* photos of children are often perfectly arranged miniatures of adult models, and this is true for both the formal Japanese style and the Western style. During the preparation, children go through a transformation from a normal looking little child into a fairytale-like princess, lady clad in gorgeous kimono with wig and makeup, or little perfect samurai. Following the most recent trends enabled by the improved technology of digital photographing, numerous photo studios offer the possibility to try on and to be photographed in as many outfits as desired for the same price. Photos are chosen then upon viewing the complete collection of photos in digital form; the final number of prints is usually higher than what was planned initially.

Furthermore, the escalation of aesthetic standards led a few photo studios to ride the wave of demand. Among the diversified strategies to attract more clients, 'beauty contests' targeting *shichigosan* families seem to enjoy popularity. Upon registration, the most 'beautiful' photos of children are chosen and the 'winners' are put on display on the web sites of the studio. These options may be seen as extreme cases. Orihashi interprets the popularity of professional photographs for life-cycle rituals in Japan with the capacity of the professional photo studio to convey the idea of extraordinary time (2008). The author says that when the private cameras became part of the everyday life and everyone became used to them, people 'discovered' the professional photo studio as part of their life-cycle ceremonies. By going to the studio people aim to obtain a memory of these significant events in a tangible form of the photograph, and accordingly, this helps transform the experienced into an extraordinary time, in

a way celebrations used to represent *hare* time in the past (Orihashi 2008, 29).[62] The author also adds that today people as well as studios tend to replace the real rituals, and all it entails (regarding its function and meaning), with the photo and/or with the visit in the studio. While this theory has some very important indications, I think that it needs to be developed further. On the one hand, the studio visit lived as an 'extraordinary' time—and as inherent part of life-cycle ceremonies today—can be among the reasons for the popularity of trends, such as the star-like *shichigosan* (when the child is photographed in a media star-like setting, mentioned in chapter 'Business Sector, Media and Religious Institutions'), *shichigosan* 'beauty contests', or *shichigosan* in Hawaii (or in any other place distant from home, such as a spa or hotel). These options emphasize the 'extraordinary' nature of the event by rendering the time spent in the studio, or in the place of the celebration, even more special and unique. These practices can enhance the celebration's value in the eyes of the families. However, I do not agree with the assumption that these practices would entirely replace the 'real' ritual, even though there are cases when they do replace it. 'Photo-only *shichigosan*', while existing, does not represent the majority of families, and often this option is selected only as a delayed part of the actual celebration.

On the other hand, the activities taking place within the studio can be seen as reflecting some of the salient aspects of rites of passage, namely their transformative capacity. One of the roles of rites of passage is to facilitate transition, ideally from one social role to another, and guide their subjects through transformation of a kind. Even if in a different way, the act of photographing, too, may be acknowledged as a degree of transformative quality. Although it might not produce a thorough transformation of the self, the photograph itself transforms the object it reflects. 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 that instructs the child what kind of pose to take, accordingly the external look of the child is highly controlled. The hours spent preparing for dressing, makeup, and hair arrangement all serve to crystallize the very moment of the photographing. The glamour, artificial poses, or in some cases the fairytale-like atmosphere that transpires from many professional *shichigosan* photos, lend an almost unrealistic look to these photographs that would be difficult to reproduce in private photos. The transformation that children go through on this occasion might not

be recognized as a 'transition' in the scholarly sense of the definition, but in the eyes of the family members who see their little child gradually change his/her look and expression, this event may represent a transition. The little child dressed in formal, adult-like attire for the first time in his/her life, anticipates the look of the future, grown-up child. Indeed, girls are often compared to little brides on this occasion, and not only because of the adornment received.

Lastly, the latest trend pointing to an increased value placed on the self and on individualism, and the related cult for idols and media stars, results in an increased demand for individual 'artistic' photos and photos used for auditions. More and more studios cater to this demand and this trend certainly has its influence on the appeal of the studio photo in the case of the *shichigosan* as well.

Memories, Photograph, and Kinship Relations

Photos taken on the occasion of the ritual, be them private or professional, are preserved in albums or on CDs with great care and occupy an important place in the symbolical reservoir of the family life. Susan Sontag, in her study on the significance of photography, argued that photographing is "a rite of family life" in a sense that it records the achievements of the family and its individual members, and it symbolizes connectedness and continuity (Sontag 1977, 8–9). Importantly, Sontag also noted that family albums are often the only place where the family still appears as an extended family. In contemporary Japan, the model of extended family—apart from specific cases—is vanishing, and it seems as though with the diminishing number of extended families, the symbolic importance of photos would have increased. The family album is often the place where distant relatives, grandparents, and cousins make their appearance in the family life. Besides, *shichigosan* photos of the child are commonly sent to relatives who did not participate in the event. This occurs either following the event, or in the form of greeting cards, for example at New Year. Relatives can thus indirectly partake in the experience, as well as being compensated in this way for their absence. The photo thus contributes to the reaffirming and strengthening of kin relations. Sending/giving a photo of the celebration as a gift is a common practice not only in Japan but also in other cultures. Bourdieu noted that already in the 1930s France, it was common to give photos of the baptism of the baby to family relatives and friends (Bourdieu 1990). Similarly, Sakamoto observes that

in Japan, sometimes photos of *shichigosan* or of children's birthdays are sent as a New Year's card (Sakamoto 1999). Referring to Bourdieu's thesis on the meaning of photograph as a symbol of family solidarity, Sakamoto argues that in Japan photos of children act as a symbolic vehicle for family unity. When incorporated in greeting cards, they fulfill two functions at the same time: formal greeting, and testimony of family growth and harmony (Sakamoto 1999, 123).

Also, photos are unique devices by which fleeting moments can be grasped and fixed, and thereby they can give the impression of stopping the flow of time. They also provide evidence that the event really took place (Sontag 1977).[63] Celebrations which were not photographed are remembered as missing something crucial. 'I am told by my parents that I observed *shichigosan*. However, no photos were taken on that occasion. In our family album I see the photos of my brother's celebration, but not mine, as if my celebration would have not been that important', stated by a mother planning the celebration of *shichigosan* for her daughter.[64] Along with 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 out the desire to enhance the experience by photographing it (Sontag 1977, 24). Along 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 in Japan has been ritualized to a degree that celebrations serve primarily to provide occasions for photographing rather than the other way round (Sakamoto 1999, 196). I think that Sakamoto's conclusion is somewhat overreaching. I agree regarding the increased importance of photographing in the lives of the Japanese, in particular with regard to celebrations. Similarly, I agree with the assumption that photographing has been ritualized to some degree. However, it has to be underlined that—at least regarding *shichigosan*—for most families, the photo, and the visit to a professional photo studio, is seen as integral to the whole ritual event, in other words a part of the ritual experience, and of the subsequent elaboration of the experience into the form of lasting memories. The important question to ask here is what scope these memories serve. Among the fact that photos are a tangible and lasting form for preserving memories, it is also an object through which the family creates its own imagination and reaffirms its identity as a family. It is a symbolical reminder of the importance, or in other words 'sacredness'

of the ritual of which memory and significance will be preserved for the next generations; it will be enshrined in the homes, often as part of lavish photo albums. Photos, in general, and photos of significant family events such as the ritual, in particular, preserve the image of the family for the future generations, and contribute in the reproduction of its ideals, norms, and continuity.

The word 'memory' is one of the words emerging most frequently in mothers' accounts of the *shichigosan* experience. In the interviews conducted by Taguchi, for example, in their impressions after the celebration of *shichigosan*, mothers mostly addressed the kimono of the child, the photo, and the family. They underlined the ritual's importance in providing an occasion to create memories (*kinen ni nokosu* 記念に残す), and to celebrate the child's growth in the company of grandparents (Taguchi 2015, 182–183). These themes frequently emerge also in blogs and readers' accounts published in magazines. Taguchi argues that the focal point of the notion of 'memory' is the transient nature of the particular moment in the child's growth. According to the author's argumentation, the *shichigosan* photo, as well as the celebration itself, serves above all to capture the memory of childhood, that is a stage in the growth of the child that does not return, and therefore, of which the families find important to create a record. *Shichigosan* thus has ceased to mark a step in the growth of the child, and become an instrument with which it is possible to create lasting memories of the early years of the child's life (Taguchi 2015, 183). Indeed, the celebration's function in creating a memory of a particular stage during the child's growth is undoubtedly significant. However, it is also important to interpret why it is *shichigosan* that is used as the 'perfect' occasion to create this kind of memory, if occasions to take photos of children are numerous otherwise (e.g. various kindergarten events, and other rites of passage of childhood). The complexity of the ritual meaning and function becomes apparent in the multiplicity of layers of meanings. Creating memories through the ritual, and particularly through photos, constitutes one significant layer of the overall interpretation of the *shichigosan* celebration. The importance of creating points to the desire to keep a memory of the early years of the child on the one hand, as well as points to the role of the memory in the symbolical construction of family unity and cohesion for both the present and future generations on the other hand. It has an important role in the process of the symbolical construction of the family identity.

Ritual Roles: Mothers, Fathers, Grandparents, and the Child

The ritual's embeddedness in its social reality unfolds the social dimensions pertinent to the temporal frame of its practice. In present-day Japan, *shichigosan* is celebrated in the form of a family festivity, and as such, it reflects social relations and values both of the family and wider kinship. In the course of the twentieth century, social relations, family structure, and family norms together with views on children in society have undergone major change, and this change has had an important impact on the pattern and meaning of *shichigosan*.

In every family ritual, each member has a more or less clearly defined role and shares in the celebration. Whereas for ritual roles we conventionally intend roles played out during the performance of the ritual, equally important are those roles and tasks which serve to prepare for the ritual event. Indeed, no ritual can take place without at least minimal preparation. In the case of *shichigosan*, the preparation phase, as already mentioned in several parts of this book, is of vital importance for the 'successful', satisfactory, and compelling ritual.

Mothers

The importance attached to the preparation phase, as well as the development that leads to its lengthening, hence to an increase of its importance, has already been touched upon above as well as in chapter 'Business Sector, Media and Religious Institutions'. It was also noted that it is the figure of the mother who acts as the principal organizer. Historically, men were primarily responsible for the observance and organizing of rituals. In many rural communities, the so-called *miyaza* (宮座) groups were formed by the (male) heads of the most well-off and oldest families of the village. The members of this group were those who decided all necessary issues regarding the organization of the community's festivities. Women controlled rites connected to the birth of the child, with the mother-in-law, and sometimes the midwife, keeping the main role (Ōtō 1990). Later, during the twentieth century, the overall socioeconomic transformation and, in particular, the changes regarding the institution of family were behind the phenomenon that saw mothers rise to the role of the main organizers of events linked to family life. With the emergence of the ideology of the 'modern family', the centrality of women concerning family life and

its management, and with regard to the task of child-rearing has been affirmed. The relation of the mother to her child received foremost importance as the figure of the child was placed into the heart of the family. With this, Jones says, the creation of the ideal 'modern family' was assigned to the wives/mothers (Jones 2010). Movements aiming at reforming the old family system appeared around the turn of the twentieth century, although the traditional family system, *ie*, remained the legal unit of the Japanese society until 1946 when the new postwar Constitution abolished it.[65] In the early decades of the twentieth century, social reformers called for the need to reform the institution of the family as they regarded the traditional family structure as not suitable to the image of modernizing Japan (Jones 2010).[66] They promoted a new ideal of the family with the child in its affective center and with the mother as principal caretaker. The concept of the modern family was, thus, principally based on the nuclear family model. The popular slogan of the time, 'good wife and wise mother' (*ryōsai kenbo* 良妻賢母) gave expression to the view that defined women's role in the society primarily within the family (Ambaras 1998).[67] The ideal model saw a complete separation of the home domain, represented by the figure of housewife, and the public domain, represented by the husband providing financially for the family.[68] Women had been assigned the task to govern the domestic sphere, to run the household, to take care of children, and last but not least of the husband's needs. This family ideal with the role of women as principal homemaker continued to govern ideal images of the family for a long time even in the postwar decades.[69]

With regard to women's task of organizing family festivities, the phenomenon of women as the main organizers is not unique to Japan. In North America, too, with the emergence of the cult of domesticity around the end of the nineteenth century, the preparation and planning of festivities, such as Christmas and Thanksgiving Day, became fully appropriated by and assigned to women (Pleck 2000, 237).[70] Women's role as organizers was decisive in particular in the era before the service industry would have entered the sphere of ritual occasions. American women's unpaid labor was necessary for rendering the family's festive occasions as perfect and elaborate. However, later, the growing service industry took over women's unpaid labor and preparations which in the past was done at home, and started to be provided in the form of services and goods (such as food, dress, or decorations) by the market. American family festivities in the first half of the twentieth century were also occasions where women, joined by female relatives and friends, could display their creativity and

skills in cooking and baking, in brief, prepare the festive menu and gifts. These occasions provided women with an acknowledgment of their role as nurturers of the family and capable housewives (Pleck 2000).[71]

Whereas in the West, the 'pleasure of domestic occasion' within the female community that these festive occasions helped create (Pleck 2000, 236–237), in Japan due to factors such as the increasing atomization of family and restricted space of urban housing, shared female community were not always provided by Japanese festivities. In the past, these used to be mostly organized by the community, where neighbor and kin relations were principally relied on. In postwar urban Japan, setting up a family celebration does not typically involve gathering of female kin. Small apartments and the geographical distance often dividing relatives have rendered big family gatherings rare. But this is not to say that Japanese women do not derive satisfaction or a sense of shared community from festive occasions. Along with the significance of these celebrations for family life, many Japanese mothers enjoy the tasks that the organizing of similar events represent. Also, media today replaces, even if only partly, the physical community by providing space where mothers and grandmothers can share their experiences and opinions. Child-rearing magazines offer space for readers' views and accounts on *shichigosan* celebration are published regularly. Online media, too, abounds on social sites where photos and/or experiences of *shichigosan* can be shared and discussed.

Today, the celebration of *shichigosan* requires a considerable number of goods purchased on the market. There are a large number of available services and goods, options, and modes. In order to set up a celebration that would have appeal to all participants, mothers need to become good managers, and also 'informed consumers'. The organization of the *shichigosan* has become increasingly elaborate since the end of the 1970s. By then, the urban celebration pattern had spread to all regions of Japan, and together with it, was growing its potential to provide profit for the business sectors.[72] This fueled the introduction of more services which resulted in a wide range of options available to families and rendered the texture of the event richer. Accordingly, nowadays, a whole range of things ask for a decision in advance, and this requires well-timed actions and thorough planning. Indeed, magazines and web sites all highlight the importance of preparing for the event in advance and with care. 'The secret of a successful *shichigosan* is the early start of planning', is the advice that the readers often encounter in the articles and print and online advice literature. In order to *create* a memorable celebration, mothers are encouraged to

set up detailed schedules of all things to do and to think about. There are even samples of schedule calendars provided by the magazines which give lists of things to do, decide, and prepare, with single items distributed under separate headings of months and days.[73] Mothers are recommended to study well in advance the latest trends regarding fashion of festive dress and hairstyle, to choose and check out the shrine (or temple). So for example the chosen shrine should meet the family's expectations regarding accessibility, parking, offered gifts, costs of the purification rite, fame, and ambience. October, the month preceding the celebration (in November), is usually left for booking the restaurant, and for acquiring accessories and shoes. November is reserved exclusively for the celebration. In the September issue of the Akasugu Kids magazine (2009), the nine-page-long special on *shichigosan* was titled: 'The perfect manual for how to avoid failure in *shichigosan*'.[74] According to the magazine, planning and decision taking should preferably start six months prior to the date of the planned celebration. The necessary length of planning and the degree of care to be given to the planning phase depend also on the preferred celebration pattern, a factor important today when there exist a variety of possible celebration modes.

In brief, the two principal modalities from which most families choose is the one that sees single parts of the event held in the course of one sole day, and the second, which separates the day of the shrine visit and family meal from the day of the photo studio session. In the 2008 COMO questionnaire, only 32 % of families chose the first option; an overwhelming number opted for the second alternative.[75] The first option, offering intense emotions as all components of the ritual event taking place during one sole day, is thought to be demanding from the perspective of organization as well as of the child. Photo studios can be crammed on the '*shichigosan* days' (which practically means all weekends in November); therefore, there is a high probability that the planned schedule will not be possible to respect; hence, stress can easily arise disturbing the overall outcome of the event. Indeed, in their accounts, many mothers express their resentment for having chosen this pattern. Accordingly, families who want to avoid stress or the occurrence of unexpected things are advised to go for the second option, with shrine visit and photo studio scheduled on two separate days, supported also by the industry which offers discounted prices for early photographing and booking.

Another issue that represents considerable concern for mothers preparing for the celebration is the festive dress. Given the variety of avail-

able styles, changing trends, and variety of sources providing ceremonial outfits, this part of planning can be time-consuming work. Information gathering takes up a substantial part of the planning process. Information is collected mainly through magazines, internet sites, publicity leaflets, and from fellow mothers. Practical considerations, such as the amount of financial means available to the family, the option of a handed-down dress, the possibility of receiving the dress as a gift from grandparents, are all to be weighed and decided. Not only can economic motivations, but also emotional ones can affect the decision. Families wishing to preserve their child's festive dress as a reminder of the celebration often decide to purchase rather than rent.

The accounts of families as well as the advice appearing in print and online texts, all point to the importance that the ritual event may be spent in a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere. The emphasis is on the quality of the time spent together on this occasion, and this view is echoed also in the advice given by etiquette experts on several forums, magazines, websites, and etiquette manuals. *Seikō* (成功success) and *shippai* (失敗failure) are terms frequently appearing in texts related to the celebration. On the other hand, it has to be noted that the emphasis placed on the 'successful' ritual can also engender considerable pressure on the organizers of the celebration, that is, on mothers. Mothers, as principally responsible for the organization, often feel a weight on them concerning the outcome of the event. They often blame themselves for eventual 'failures', or on the contrary, feel pride if everything went well. In case something went wrong, be it a crowded photo studio, a distant and therefore inconvenient shrine, an imperfectly suited dress, mothers readily admit their responsibility. The 'failure' is mostly explained due to shortcomings in the planning: 'I wish I had prepared things more thoughtfully'.[76] The final outcome of the celebration seems to assess the organizational skills of the mother. Consequently, women invest a large amount of energy and care to the thorough planning of the celebration. In this regard, Taguchi notes that the 'proper manner' or 'proper way of doing things' is crucial in determining the choice of the shrine, which has to be a 'proper' shrine (Taguchi 2015, 236). As already discussed in chapter 'Business Sector, Media and Religious Institutions', preferred shrines are those boasting a certain reputation, popular, or have other characteristics that render them attractive for observers. In Taguchi's understanding, the 'proper' shrine has the capability to give a sort of 'certificate' of permanency and validity which, in turn, provides the participants with a positive image of the self.

The selection of the 'proper' shrine is important, because it is *the* shrine that makes it possible to observe the ritual in the 'proper' manner.[77]

It must also be added that mothers of *shichigosan*-age children are often 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 pick up before the youngest child enters school.[78] This also means that during the first years after the birth of the child, in the years when the child, or the youngest sibling is in preschool age, mothers normally dedicate their time almost fully to household and family. Also, Japanese wives tend to define themselves in the first place as mothers, and only in the second place as wives. The intensity of commitment that Japanese mothers show towards child-rearing and child's schooling has been noted in several studies.[79] Several observers of the Japanese society have 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). Suzanne Vogel underlines that Japanese women consider their task of being full-time mothers primarily as a rewarding and not a limiting experience (Vogel 1996). Within this context, celebrations during the early age of the child, representing one of the most intense periods in the mother's life, can be experienced as moments that highlight the 'results' of their work invested in child-rearing. The mother's work accomplished so far can be rendered visible as well as awarded through the celebration. It has been argued that motherhood has been heavily idealized during the twentieth century in Japan (Uno 1993). It became seen as integral part of the ideal image of middle-class women and the success with which they raise a child is one of the criterion to judge mothers' work (Smith 2013, 133). Celebrations, such as the *shichigosan*, can be perceived therefore as milestones that mark the most intense period of child-rearing, at the same time they render mothers' work visible to the outside world.

On the other hand, the energy invested in search of information and the degree of attention paid to the planning phase of *shichigosan* points to the more general problems regarding child-rearing in present-day Japan. Young mothers often experience anxiety with regard to childcare. This is due to multiple factors, among others the lack of prior experience and the missing or weakened networks of female kin. Mothers today are more isolated compared to the previous generations. Also, in times of a one-child family model, young mothers of their first, and often only child, are confronted with the phase of child-rearing without much prior experience.

The limited availability of persons to whom mothers may turn for advice, combined with the lack of direct experience, often generates high levels of anxiety, which is also perceivable in statements concerning the celebration appearing in blogs and advice sites. In addition, the celebration of *shichigosan* is usually enacted once or twice within the same family, depending on the number of children born to the family. Indeed, the term, 'once in a life-time', though referring to the lifetime of the child, indicates that the celebration is perceived as a unique occasion not only in the child's but in the family's life, as well.[80]

Lastly, the amount of energy and time invested in the planning and organization can also be interpreted as part of the personalization process. Wallendorf and Arnould showed how American women give individual touches to the festive feast of which ingredients today are purchased as mass-produced commodities. The authors interpret this activity of giving a personal touch by transforming some of the ingredients, personalization or decommodifying (1991).[81] Commodities are transformed in this process into ritual artifacts. Thus, the authors argue that in this way "the powerful homogenizing influences of consumer culture" are overcome (Wallendorf and Arnould 1991, 29). In a similar way, the attention paid to the minute details of the celebration by Japanese mothers can be viewed as an act of giving a personal touch to the planning process and to the overall ritual event. They personalize the otherwise standard services and set of goods that are equally available to all observers.

Fathers and Other Kin (Grandparents, Aunts, and Uncles)

In folk variations, early childhood age rites were often an affair for the female members of the household. The child was accompanied to the shrine by his/her mother and paternal grandmother, sometimes midwife or other female members of the family. In the urban Edo pattern, the procession was made up usually by family members and/or servants. The father's role in the urban pattern of *shichigosan* was principally to provide financial assistance for the celebration. He secured the finances to buy the child's (and mother's) dress, whereas in the rural areas it was commonly the maternal grandfather who sent the child's festive dress and accessories as a gift, as described in chapter 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage'. Media articles by the end of the nineteenth century, and also occasionally in the postwar years, commented on this role of the fathers.[82] See for example the joke (quoted in chapter 'Business

Sector, Media and Religious Institutions') which ironically underlined the importance of the father's intention to cover the expenses of the dress in order to make the celebration possible.[83] In 1977, a survey conducted by a professional female school on shifting trends in popular *shichigosan* dress styles (published in the Yomiuri weekly) also included questions related to the source of the finances. [84] Answers indicated that the principal provider for the celebration was the father who often did so in spite of critical opinions concerning the celebration.[85] The journalist in his comments concluded that *shichigosan* was a trying event for the families, nonetheless concluded with the following encouragement: 'Fathers, please do your best!'[86]

The presence of fathers in the celebration started to be seen first as desirable, later obligatory, around the end of the 1960s. The 'newness' of the father's presence at the ritual is echoed in the words of a company manager quoted by Sepp Linhart. The quoted manager complained about the growing number of fathers who asked for a day off from work in order to be able to participate in the celebration of their child's *shichigosan*, previously unseen before (Linhart 1988, 287). In those years, the celebration still was observed on the fifteenth of November. Therefore, in the years when this date fell on a weekday, to enable participation, it was necessary for him to take a day off from work. However, soon this obstacle was solved when the date of the celebration shifted to the weekend days, first of all to Sundays. The introduction of the six workday week, significantly affecting the dates of traditional festivities, shifted the traditional dates of numerous ritual observances to the more convenient Sunday, later also Saturdays. Accordingly, Sunday became the ceremonial and festival day (Smith 1978).[87]

This development was an effect of as well as contributed to reinforcing the celebration's family character. With the nuclearization of the Japanese family, in other words, with the diffusion of the two-generational family unit consisting of parents and children, the presence of both parents at the celebration has become regarded as indispensable. A closely connected phenomenon was the changing hierarchy of values during the 1970s–1980s. The shift saw the private and family life move up on the value scale of the individuals. 'Family' began to always occupy higher positions on the scale of importance in national opinion polls in contrast to earlier surveys when 'work' usually surpassed 'family' in respondents' value priorities (Linhart 1988). Community-oriented values that used to govern lives of individuals within the family and in their wider social con-

texts became gradually—at least partly—replaced by the notion of family happiness, of a more private-like nature. The emphasis on family life was also reflected in the changes of the festive calendar and celebration manners. New imported celebrations centering on the family were gaining popularity, among them for example observances such as Mother's Day, Christmas, or children's birthdays.

Today, with women as principal caretakers of children and organizers of family events, fathers occupy only a marginal role in the preparation of the celebration and are still seen first of all as providers for the necessary expenses.[88] Nonetheless, the figure of the father emerges as important to the image of family cohesion and happiness embodied by the celebration of *shichigosan*. This image is also held up by the media which stresses the importance of father's participation in the event not only in written articles, but also through photos that feature smiling fathers and mothers with their children in gay clothes, offering images with strong appeal.

Last but not least, grandparents' participation is nowadays seen as desirable, too. They often live far away from their grandchildren, and therefore, *shichigosan* is viewed as an occasion where grandparents' presence is expected and when grandchildren may enjoy the company of the whole family. There are also cases when the family returns to the grandparents' home to observe the ritual. But grandparents contribute to the celebration in other ways, as well. First, grandmothers often take part in some of the phases of the planning and preparation of the event. Before the family feast moved from the private homes to outdoor restaurants, grandmothers usually helped in the preparation of the festive menu, or the family feast was held in the grandparents' home (a practice still observed). Grandmothers act as principal repositories of traditional recipes, even if, as surveys show, traditional food items—apart from the *chitoseame* gift—always comprise less of the celebration.[89] This points to another role of grandmothers, regarding the transmission of ritual knowledge, an issue which is addressed below in the chapter. Third, grandparents' help in covering the financial costs of the celebration is significant, too. In many cases, grandparents give money for or fully purchase the festive dress of the child. This practice, even if not always respected, points to the continuity of the above mentioned traditional rural customs when it used to be the obligation of the maternal grandparents to send a gift for the grandchild's celebration, in form of the festive dress or/and contribution to the feast.[90]

Today, however usually any amount from grandparents may help with the expenses. According to the COMO survey conducted in 2006,

when a financial contribution was made by grandparents, there was only a slight prevalence from the maternal grandparents (COMO, 2006, September). Around 60% of families received cash as a present from grandparents.[91] Grandparents' contribution to the expenses may, however, indicate that their views on the pattern of the celebration might weigh more and therefore, need to be taken into consideration by the parents of the child. Similarly, in areas where local variations of *shichigosan* patterns persist (mostly in rural places), the opinions of grandparents might have greater influence on the modes of celebrating. The 2001 survey of Mikihouse concluded that in places with persisting local traditions, usually considerable effort is made by the families to adhere to local customs.[92]

Lastly, the ritual's potential to unite the family is usually acknowledged also in mothers' accounts of impressions regarding the celebration. The extraordinary nature of the moment is sometimes enhanced by combining the celebration with recreational activities, such as a visit to thermal spots or stays in high-scale hotels.[93] Family rituals have been described as a relatively reliable index of family integration (Bossard and Boll 1960; Rook 1985). Within a family unit, ritual practices can cement relationships. While the decision to omit the performance of *shichigosan* is not necessarily indicative of an inferior level of cohesion and unity within the family, the performance of the observance and the memories associated with the ritual experience play an important part in the symbolic construction of the family as an emotional entity.

Child

The role of the child in the celebration has been touched upon so far indirectly through discussions on the festive dress, on changes affecting the family, and on shifting consumption patterns. Whereas the celebration as such has always had the child as its subject, the focus of the celebration went through several alterations during its history. In rural traditional patterns, for example, it was often the community that emerged central to the celebration. Other patterns, such as age celebrations among the samurai class or the Edo urban pattern, focused on display and affirmation of social status and/or economic means of the family. The child as the main figure of the celebration started to emerge in the twentieth century as an accompanying phenomenon of other general changes concerning views on children and family ideals, already touched upon above.

Jones notes that the modern concept of childhood in Japan, placing the child at the center of his/her world, is a relatively recent development in Japan, dating back to the turn of the twentieth century (Jones 2010).[94] However, it is also widely recognized that children were traditionally endorsed with high value in Japanese society (Hendry 1986). In chapter 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage', I discussed some parts of the rich reservoir of folk beliefs and customs containing a singular view on children. Apart from these, the views on children have also been influenced by other 'collective ideas' that saw children upon birth as 'white sheets' and hence, their education in this phase, more than any other stage, required particular attention and care (Hendry 1986, 15–17).[95] According to Iijima, the child that used to be considered as a 'small being' (*chiisakimono* 小さきもの) or a 'weak being' (*yowakimono* 弱きもの) started to receive social recognition as a separate being upon the rise of the concept of *ie* (the traditional household structure) (Iijima 1991).[96] The author dates the affirmation of the concept to the medieval period, around the mid-seventeenth century, when a small-scale agricultural mode of production conducted mainly by family units produced a growth in the population size. Children in this period began to be appreciated not only for their contribution to the family's livelihood in the form of their labor, but also as potential heirs to the family/household (*ie*).[97]

Jones places the rise of the modern image of the child into the Meiji–Taisho period during which diverse child-rearing ideals characterizing pre-Meiji Japan began to undergo standardization. Reformers viewed the modern image of the child, comprising child-rearing practices and celebrations, as an integral part of the modern family ideal, and, Jones argues, it was during this period that the child was placed at the heart of the family (Jones 2010, 92–93).[98] Jones's analysis of the interwar print media shows that celebrations occupied an important place and were seen as instrumental in the discourses concerning the concept of the 'modern family'.[99] Along with the traditional rituals, such as *shichigosan*, boys' festival (*tango no sekku*), and girls' festival (*hina matsuri*), new celebrations, too, were proposed to be integrated into the ritual calendar of the 'modern family'. As a new celebration, for example, children's birthdays were propagated, even if this custom gained popularity only later in the postwar period.[100] Jones notes that underlying the effort to promote childhood celebrations was the view that saw these celebrations as capable of communicating the 'childishness' of the child, a central notion in the propagated new image of the child (Jones 2010).

Propagated celebration patterns, however, were often different from the widely popular ones. The modernization of the family that the epoch's thinkers propagated in the media entailed changes not only in the child-rearing practices, but also in celebration patterns, which included the celebration of *shichigosan*, too.[101] The propagated pattern for *shichigosan* was one that placed the child into focus at the celebration, and other patterns, such as for example those giving space for display were accused of being old fashioned and 'not modern'.[102] Expressions used in the epoch's media were surprisingly similar to words that later, in the 1970s and 1980s, were commonly used in the media and that stressed the family centeredness of *shichigosan*. Among these 'recommendations', critical articles accused families of having the child 'moved out' from the center of the celebration, and thus, ruining the 'original' and 'true' meaning of the ritual. Families were invited to place the child back at the center of the celebration and to turn away from lavish manners, such as spending for elaborate meals, or the 'foolish' custom of spending money on gifts and dresses (Yomiuri 1929, 15 November). The only pattern that was judged appropriate was a modest one focusing exclusively on the child, the only aim of which was to create a pleasant and memorable moment for the child. As one commentator put it: 'What is more important, the kimono or the child?' (Yomiuri 1929, 15 November). Modern scientific principles were also used in support of these views. Thus, for example, the expensive Japanese-style festive dress was claimed to restrict children in their free movement, hence, harmful to their health.[103] In a similar line of thought, the use of the formal sash (*obi*), which served to fasten the kimono of the seven-year-old girls, was said to be a potential source of danger since it could hurt the fragile body of a young child. However, it needs to be underlined that the motivation behind these voices had more to do with the epoch's ideologies rather than with a genuine effort to return to the 'authentic meaning' of the celebration.[104] Whereas the ideas and thoughts appearing in the interwar print media represented the ideas of a restricted group of social thinkers, journalists, and commentators, hence, cannot be regarded as representing nationwide trends, they certainly contributed to shaping views on children in twentieth century Japanese society.

In the postwar decades, within the dramatic changes that modernization brought to Japan, values regarding children were also affected. The decrease in the reproductive rate, which fell dramatically in the course of the twentieth century from 4.24 in 1920 to under 1.5 in 1992 (Yoshizumi 1995) along which changed economic conditions of families, are among

the main factors affecting views on children and on the ideal size of the family. Whereas in the first half of the twentieth century, the ideal was three children per family, in 1990s, the model of a one-child family became widely seen as socially acceptable. The diminishing number of children in the family had an important impact on the constitutions of social relations within the family and among kin. Also, the growing value placed on the child became expressed in the increased emphasis laid on the child's education. Starting from the 1960s, being able to provide for a good-quality education of the offspring was among the priorities of most families and costs for the education of children came to occupy a big share of family budgets (Dore 1958; Tsuru 2005, 69).[105] Lastly, the figure of the child has acquired importance also for the market as a result of a growth in expenditure levels on the side of the families concerning child-rearing and children, in general. This aspect, called also 'the commodification of child-rearing', has already been addressed earlier, in chapters 'Consumer Culture and Changes to the Ritual Calendar in Postwar Urban Japan' and 'Business Sector, Media and Religious Institutions'.

Today, it can be argued that childhood celebrations, particularly *shichigosan*, partake in the enculturation as well as socialization of children. In the conventional interpretation, childhood age rituals used to give social recognition to the child as a new member of the community, assisted the integration of the new member into the religious community, and gave confirmation of the social status of the family. However, today, the incorporation of the child into a close-knit community or religious group is not regarded as necessary any more, due to changed social and economic circumstances in which community and family life are embedded today. Nevertheless, *shichigosan* can still partly fulfill functions comparable, to a certain degree, to past ones. First, *shichigosan*, in its contemporary form, plays a role in the socialization of children into gender roles. Even more so, because the phase of early childhood is a period considered of crucial significance in the formation of gender identity (Smith 1987, 22). The gender division emerges within *shichigosan* on several levels, of which the most visible one is the distinctive dress code.[106] The clear gender-based division of dress code contributes in the socialization of boys into male roles, girls into female. Popular styles in traditional wear (such as the samurai outfit) communicate traditional masculine values to boys, and female ideals to girls. Messages encapsulated in the festive outfit are enhanced by the beauty procedures accompanying the preparation for the professional photo, in particular in the case of girls. *Shichigosan* is often the first occa-

sion when girls receive their first makeup and their hair is arranged in elaborate styles. The procedures of embellishment anticipate times when girls grown up to be adult women will beautify themselves. The ritual can also be viewed as a lesson about the national standards as well as aesthetic ideals. The elaborate preparation, starting from choosing the dress, through the child sitting during the hairdresser's work in the beauty salon, and finally the 'promenade' in the town (shrine premises) 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 external appearance of the female existence, and in this regard, the ritual can be interpreted as a form of early initiation to women's roles. Not accidentally is *shichigosan* sometimes compared to the wedding, little girls to brides. It must also be added that this act of 'embellishment', which follows the rules of aesthetics that is not common or part of children's everyday life, underlines the extraordinary character of the event. The non-everyday setting emotionally reinforces the experience of the ritual, and in a symbolic way it helps separate the everyday from the ritual.

In the case of boys, the male role is emphasized by historical dress designs that communicate traditional masculine values. Cultural interpretations of masculinity, expressed in symbols of the samurai warrior spirit and heroes, are conveyed to children through outfits typical to the historical warrior classes. Also, popular garments express values that point to the nation's glorious male-centered history. The clear-cut division between the two genders also appears in terms adopted by the media when it compares girls to 'ladies and 'princesses' and boys to 'gentlemen' and 'heroes'. Moreover, the festive dress introduces children to Japan's material culture and history. Similarly to other children's rites, such as the seasonal festivals of boys and that of girls (*momo no sekku* and *tango no sekku*), these rituals partake in the enculturation of values viewed as traditional in the Japanese society (Hendry 1986, 147–149).[107] Although not in line with modern ideals of gender equality, these rituals echo deeply rooted cultural values that see the sense of female existence in becoming bride and wife, and of the male existence in bravely fighting the battles of life as heroes do. In this respect, at *shichigosan*, the experience of learning can be even more intense. Whereas in the case of *momo no sekku* and *tango no sekku*, material culture is represented by toys and decorations used for the occasion; at *shichigosan*, the inscription of the experience occurs directly onto the body of the child through the act of putting on the dress and accessories, the embellishment of the face and hair, rendering the experience as 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 experience of walking and moving around in clothes that are often uncomfortable compared to the clothes used in everyday life is often an experience remembered for long after the celebration. Indeed, one of the greatest concerns of mothers regards the ability of the child to endure this part of the celebration.[108]

The educative function of the ritual is not limited to the dress, but it is present at the shrine visit, as well. Often, *shichigosan* represents the first occasion when small children are taught etiquette concerning visits to religious spaces. They are not only taught about the proper way to pray on this occasion, but often it is the first time when children actively participate in a formal religious ritual performed by a priest. Given the character of Shinto and Buddhist religious practice, these formal rituals are available to observers only on a few occasions. The significance of *shichigosan* as an opportunity to teach young children about Shinto etiquette frequently emerges in the texts of etiquette experts, in magazines, and on information materials provided by religious institutions. Similarly, though not obligatory in this case, small items, usually photos of children, or cash in return for the received money gift, are exchanged between the family and close relatives on the occasion of the celebration. Advice to use this occasion to teach children about this important social and cultural practice appears in related writings. Last but not least, by observing rituals such as the *shichigosan*, children are also taught about ways to approach significant moments in life. They have a firsthand experience of what is considered to be the proper attitude; in this respect, too, *shichigosan* partakes in the transmission of cultural knowledge as well as practice.[109]

Parents viewing the celebration of *shichigosan* as a landmark in the child's development is evidenced by their concerns about the maturity of the child, in other words concerns whether the child will be able to properly observe the ritual. This is true, in particular, for the first celebration that takes place between two and five years of age, depending on gender and on the preferred age-counting system (discussed in chapter 'Consumer Culture and Changes to the Ritual Calendar in Postwar Urban Japan'). This is a relatively young age when the physical and mental maturity of children show large individual differences. As a rewarding ritual experience is the most desired outcome for the majority of families, an issue such as the child's maturity to enjoy the event and even more importantly, to endure the lengthy procedures during the celebration (dressing,

wearing unusual garments) are carefully weighed. At the same time, once the celebration terminates, the ability of the child to have been able to perform single parts of the celebration without big problems is viewed by the adults as a successful accomplishment of this particular step in the child's development. In a different way, the seventh year *shichigosan*, too, marks a step in girls' lives. As described above, older girls receive their makeup and are adorned in an adult-like manner.[110] Moreover, girls, old enough to be able to have preferences and express their views and individual tastes regarding the festive dress, are often given space to state their opinions, rendering their participation even more active. The notion of passage is strengthened also by the fact that there are two significant events that take place around the ages for *shichigosan*. The age of three usually marks the entrance of the child into its first preschool institution starting such an attendance which eventually lasts nearly for two decades.[111] This also indicates that the child moves out from the sphere of the family's direct control and that from now on it will be the school that will guide his/her socialization. With the start of grammar school, around the age of seven, the separation of the child from the family is even more marked.

Associations with passage and transition evoked by the celebration are reflected in comments from mothers, such as, for example: 'It was so moving to see my son 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 will become a proper little person'.[112] Accordingly, for many parents, the celebration highlights the single steps achieved by their child in terms of 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).

Ritual Script and the Transmission of Ritual Knowledge

Ritual script, in other words, manners and patterns deemed as proper, together with the changes that have occurred over history, have been discussed in several parts of this book. Pattern and manners used largely

depend on social class, economic situation, and local customs. In the Tokugawa Edo town, a big change occurred in the script, as described in chapter 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage'. In the postwar decades, the script was often subject to change influenced by the marketplace. The commercial sector indeed continuously proposes new services and objects to be used in the ritual context. Their integration into the script, however, depends on the positive acceptance on the side of the ritual actors.

An important factor in assessing change in ritual is the way ritual knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation, and in particular the changes that have taken place in these ways. In Japan, general patterns of transmission of knowledge have undergone major transformations during the postwar period. Until the early decades of the twentieth century, knowledge, skills, and etiquette were normally passed on by the older generation. The authority of the mother-in-law used to be incontestable in the issues concerning the care of children (Tsuru 2005). However, the socioeconomic changes of the postwar decades have altered traditional organizational modes of households and created a gap in the lifestyles between old and young generations. Young couples moving to suburbs established their own nuclear family, where traditional customs and traditional ways of doing things lost much of their validity. Being informed on the quickly changing trends about modern technologies and the latest patterns of consumption came to be seen as essential for a modern way of life (Dore 1958). New channels of information were provided by the media, first print, later joined by the electronic one. These offered information about new methods concerning housework and childcare that, for a large part, were unknown for the generation of grandmothers. Between 1950 and 1960, women's magazines were gaining wide readership especially among urban housewives.[113] Almost half of the housewives interviewed by Dore in 1951 said that they looked for information regarding household and family management principally in magazines and/or in radio (Dore 1958). While the media was not always able to fully replace the missing interpersonal relations and the advantages of the direct transmittance of knowledge and experience, it can be said that during the postwar decades, print and electronic media have undoubtedly grown to be considered the most important sources of information by young urban housewives. In this regard, Taguchi notes that even today the older generations continue to be thought of by the younger generation as a less appropriate source to rely on for various matters concerning everyday life issues (Taguchi 2015).

In a society where the latest information is valued as the foremost priority and where things are in constant change, knowledge from the older generations is not valued or sought after.[114]

The growing influence of print media in the dissemination of information is also shown by the increased amount of advice literature. A large number of publications (books, magazines, special issues, and so on) offer advice on matters ranging from etiquette manners to celebration patterns, including life-cycle events (Daniels 2009). The influence that magazines exercise on views and practices regarding child-rearing has been demonstrated in several surveys. For example in a study from 2001, it was shown that in the period from 1970 to 2000, the number of child-rearing magazines on the market grew six times in spite of the sharply decreasing birthrate during the same period.[115] The report explained this phenomenon with the difficulties of mothers to get advice on child-rearing issues in their direct vicinities. Persons with whom to discuss doubts, troubles, or other issues arising during the period of child-rearing were fewer in number compared to the past. Other surveys from 2001 found out that more than 65 % of mothers consulted newspapers, magazines, and other publications (including online sources) on matters related to child-rearing. Sixty-four percent obtained advice from friends and other acquaintances, and around 50 % of mothers turned to either fellow mothers or own parents.[116] A more recent survey confirms the significance of print media, together with online media, as sources of information about child-rearing.[117] From all these surveys, it becomes clear that a variety of sources are simultaneously used and that the media (print and online) occupy an important place in the range of options.

Along with the role of transmittance and dissemination of knowledge, the media also provides a platform where women can share their problems and concerns with other fellow mothers. This occurs in diverse forms: Women's magazines organize events accompanied with promotional activities on a variety of themes related to women's life and childcare.[118] They also give space on their pages for narratives of personal accounts—helping readers to share experience and views (see examples from COMO). Quoting personal accounts by readers are common features of Japanese female magazines. They lend a feeling of shared experience among readers (Skov and Moeran 1995a). Moreover, magazines conduct regular surveys on a variety of subjects, results and comments of which are made public on the pages of the magazine (print and online). In the last ten to fifteen years, surveys on *shichigosan* are regular affairs in child-rearing

magazines and online sites, today carried out among readers (and site visitors) mostly online.[119] The COMO survey's most valuable part is the one inquiring into the readers' experience of the celebration from the previous year. The questionnaire includes questions on practical matters, such as the particulars of the planning, the preferred pattern of celebration, eventual failures and dissatisfaction, or recommendations for future observers. The final report documents not only the statistical figures on expenditure, dress style, location of the festive meal, among others, but it also includes individual accounts often illustrated with photos. The results and comments are usually published in the August issue, in time to be used by families planning their ritual in the current year. These reports serve as important sources of information for mothers planning the celebration in the ongoing or in one of the following years. In this regard, Matsuoka points out that child-rearing magazines reflect a distorted image concerning childbirth and child-rearing (2003).[120] The images they offer make these periods and events appear in bright colors comparable to a desired commodity. Accordingly, the less bright sides of child-rearing, such as illnesses and difficulties of everyday life, become easily underplayed. By reading these magazines, the reader can "[…] gain the impression that buying this or that item or spending money for this or that ritual, can assure easy delivery or a healthy and happy child" (Matsuoka 2003, 33).[121]

The media certainly does significantly influence readers in their imaginations as well as actions; however, I do not think that readers should be viewed solely as passive receivers of information. Readers use information provided to them selectively, in accordance with their needs and desires. They choose patterns that are most suitable to their own expectations. Also, media, while giving promotional information, acts as a public platform where readers' comments, experiences, and views can be expressed. In the last decade, online media has been acquiring a growing importance both as a source of information and a social platform. Numerous web sites offer information and advice corners, among them general child-rearing sites designed for mothers with young children, information sites for etiquette manners, web sites of kimono shops, photo studios, and shrine homepages, as well as specific sites for matters related exclusively to *shichigosan* either set up by commercial associations or by private individuals. Popular sites offer advice on minute details, such as the right timing of the preparation, or what to do if the child gets tired during the event; they propose small tricks to make children used to walking in traditional shoes or to wear the traditional dress. Apart from the above listed sites, blogs,

too, act as a valuable source of information. Here, mothers can 'meet' and chat with other fellow mothers and discuss matters of a diverse nature. It is a platform where more sensitive issues can be treated, as well, confidentially and anonymously, such as for example differences in opinions on celebration modes between wife and husband, or disputes of generational character between parents and grandparents. In brief, popular print and online media compensate in part for the lack of ritual knowledge and the limited availability of kin networks.

The media today, together with other actors, such as business enterprises, religious institutions, and etiquette experts, has an enormous impact on the changes of the ritual script. New elements, patterns, including new services, goods, and fashion, are proposed by the commercial sector, disseminated through the media, in the form of advertisements, articles, and photo images. Some of these new elements find positive responses on the side of the customers, and are integrated in the ritual script—for a longer or shorter period of time. Other elements fade away. In the case when a new element finds its way into the ritual pattern, it has to fit the value hierarchy and needs of the individuals and families. In this case, again, the media contributes to the dissemination of the new pattern (or part of it). In this way, it helps legitimate changes that have proved to fit observers' expectations, needs, and values. Indeed, readers rely on the information provided by the media and follow scripts described as 'proper' and 'popular'. Therefore, it can be said that the media not only has overtaken the role of transmission of ritual knowledge, but also assists in the creation of the ritual event as a meaningful occasion.

Notes

1. See chapter 'Consumer Culture and Changes to the Ritual Calendar in Postwar Urban Japan' for a discussion of Minowa's argument about tacit knowledge and Japanese cosmology.
2. For this aim, Rook adapted Goffman's use of metaphors in human social intercourse (Goffman 1959 quoted in Rook 1985, 253).
3. Source: www.happy-note.com/research (accessed 2011, December 12).
4. The latest surveys show that the majority of children wear Japanese style dress for the *shichigosan* shrine visit (Taguchi 2011).
5. In the history of Japan, as already mentioned in chapter 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage', there are numerous examples of social control exercised through a strictly determined use of dress code.

6. In the past, magical beliefs were associated with hair, which was also believed to be a religious object (similar belief existed in Korea, too) (Maeda quoted in Na-Young 2006, 81). In the Heain period, the imperial court etiquette had a complex system of dress order ranks where each position and function were assigned a particular style (Dalby 1993). Belonging to a distinct age group was also a fact determining the individual's dress and hairstyle. Hair-doing of maidens before and after their coming-of-age ceremony was different, for example (Na-Young 2006). Not only age rituals in early childhood but also the coming-of-age rites centered on change in hairstyle combined with change in dress.
7. The *bakufu's* concern toward 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).
8. The term *kegi* ceased to be used starting from the Meiji period.
9. On the the dual concept of *hare* and *ke*, see chapters 'Consumer Culture and Changes to the Ritual Calendar in Postwar Urban Japan' and 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage'.
10. Nakamura 1989. See also Kiyoko Segawa's *Haregi kō* (1948).
11. Before the industrial mode of production moved the production of kimono from household manufacture to the factories, the fabrication of clothes was a time- and energy-consuming labor, performed principally by women. From the preparation of the thread to weaving and sewing, each phase necessitated attention, dedication, and hard work.
12. There exist apposite words for this occasion, such as *kizome* 着初め (Fukuo 1984, 66–67).
13. Children's wear had visible marks of age. Children up to the age of two wore a simple kimono called *hitotsumi* (一つ身). This was then changed into *mitsumi* (三つ身), worn until the age of three or four. After four to five years old, a kimono called *yotsumi* (四 つ身) was used, usually until the age of ten. These denominations indicated the length of the kimono that gradually altered with the growth of the child. In some places in Japan, the festive dress worn by a child at their seven years old rite was called *yotsumi no haregi* 四つ身の晴れ着 (literally, '*yotsumi* festive cloth') (Suzuki 2000, 62).
14. Female babies were usually dressed in the dress of the father, and boys in the mother's (Ōtō 1989). For other customs connected to childbirth see Yasui 2014.
15. Both the mentioned rites are among the first ritual occasions celebrated after the birth of the baby.
16. Interestingly, some parallels can be noted between the garments worn on the two major events of the human life, birth and death, for example the preferred color of the robe, white, or the pattern without sleeves. Ōtō argues that this parallel indicates the same reservoir of views informing the traditional Japanese worldview on the transition of the human soul (Ōtō 1989, 4).

17. So for example, five-year-old boys are advised to be 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). This is the ceremonial robe once typical to the samurai outfit. As an alternative, a *hakama* of black or brown color with *haori* is proposed. A meticulous description of seven-year-old girls' wear includes recommended patterns and colors for the kimono and sash (information on the site as of 2011).
18. In the samurai society of the Tokugawa period, the seventh year ritual was observed also for boys. 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).
19. The first clothes of the infant, *hitotsumi* and *mitsumi* (see above), used to be tied with a cord. This was changed into a sash (*obi*) when the *yotsumi*-sized dress started to be worn.
20. Prices can even exceed 500,000 Yen.
21. The photo appeared in the 2010 autumn issue of a fashion periodical containing a twenty-page-long special on *shichigosan* (Sesame 2010, September).
22. A total of 82% of the respondents in the Media Interactive survey (2011) said that the main activity of the celebration was to dress the child in a kimono (along with the shrine visit, 83%) (source see above).
23. See more on this in chapter 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage'.
24. In the case of girls (the segment of six–seven-year-olds), the proportion between the two styles was 166–506 (Yomiuri 1932, November 16).
25. For a discussion of the concept of 'modern family' in modern Japan see Jones 2010.
26. See below also.
27. With the approaching war, a gradual decline in the festiveness can be noted. 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 of war times, such as the *monpe* working trousers or military uniforms (signs of patriotism).
28. See also chapter 'Business Sector, Media and Religious Institutions'.
29. The survey was conducted with a sample of 2423 children. Nippon Ifuku Gakkaishi 1990.
30. Nippon Ifuku Gakkaishi 1990, Dōke et al. 1990.
31. Among others, see the works by Robertson 1994 and Kelly 1985.
32. In her study on professional wedding parlors, the author points to the difference between the different dressing rooms serving brides during their preparation for the ceremony. While the Japanese style dressing room (preparing 'Japanese style brides', i.e. brides cladding the Japanese style ceremonial kimono) is characterized by solemnity, a serious and severe

atmosphere, the Western-style dressing room has a take-it-easy, relaxed atmosphere (1997).

33. A total of 90% in 1955, 67% in 1961.
34. A total of 33% in 1988, according to the survey quoted in Dōke et al. 1990.
35. Data provided by the Kyoto's oldest traditional textile association (京都織物卸商組合), quoted in Shūkan Gendai 1980, November 20.
36. The cost of which could even amount to 400,000 Yen (Shūkan Gendai 1980, November 20).
37. A Buddhist rite of passage celebrated at thirteen years of age in the Kansai area.
38. A survey by Sankei Living in 2009 found out that 40% of adult women wore a kimono for ceremonial occasions (541 respondents). *Shichigosan* comprised 15% of this (www.sankeiliving.co.jp, accessed 2012, May).
39. They include magical objects: *kakuregasa* (隠れ笠) magical umbrella, or *kakuremino* (隠れ蓑), magical straw raincoat (giving invisibility and standing as symbol 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.
40. Symbolizing the growth of children.
41. Advertisement in the fashion periodical Sesame (2010, September).
42. This aspect is also manifest in the custom of using the '*shichigosan* plan' set up by amusement parks, such as Disneyland or Puroland. On the rise of the entertainment elements in shrine-related events, see also the volume by Nelson H. Graburn 'To Pray, Pay and Play: The Cultural Structure of Japanese Domestic Tourism' (Graburn 1993).
43. The dress for the shrine visit is either rented out from a rental studio, or purchased and inherited (passed down). However, recently, photo studios have started to offer the possibility to rent out dresses for the shrine visit, too.
44. A few families prefer to use the same dress for both moments, the shrine visit and the photo studio. Though, even in these cases the possibilities that the occasion offers can play their role, as the following words of a mother demonstrate: 'We opted for observing the shrine visit on the same day as the studio photographing since we wanted to have the photo of our daughter dressed in her festive kimono. Although, later, several days following the celebration, we returned to the studio to have photos of her also dressed in Western wear. After all, this is a unique occasion in life'. (Como, September 2009).
45. Source: http://sundaykodomo.blog92.fc2.com (accessed 2011, March 15).
46. Source: MikiHouse survey, www.happy-note.com/research (accessed 2011, June 18). The MikiHouse research group has been conducting regular surveys (every three years) on *shichigosan* in the last fifteen years.

47. The number of candy sticks in the *chitose* bag is also indicative. Usually the bag contains as many sticks as the age of the child. The symbolism contained in the numbers is discussed later in this chapter.
48. These motifs are probably of Chinese origin, as pine and bamboo in China were traditionally linked to the winter period and appeared as frequent motifs in traditional paintings featuring winter themes. The *ume* is one of the first trees to bloom after the end of the winter and therefore marks the start of spring. In Japan, the motif of the three trees has been transformed into symbols of auspiciousness and their branches are still used as decorations during festivities. Also, the pine tree is venerated as a sacred tree and it stands as a symbol for longevity and endurance concerning human nature.
49. Since 2010, every year the shrine prepares 3000 bags.(Source: http://www.sankei.com/west/news/151011/wst1510110055-n1.html (accessed 2015, October).
50. Naorai (直会) is the term used for the banquet following the Shinto or Buddhist rites.
51. Sea bream is traditionally regarded as an auspicious food in Japan because of its shape among fishes (it is also called the king among fish) and because of its name, '*tai*', is part of the word *omedatai*, signifying auspicious or happy.
52. Nihon chōrika gakkai tokubetsu kenkyū hōkokusho 2008–2009.
53. See chapter 'Business Sector, Media and Religious Institutions' on this.
54. The lesser importance of aesthetic standards when photographing significant occasions of the individual's or family's life was confirmed by Ben-Ari in his study of a traditional rite of passage in a Japanese rural community (Ben-Ari 1991).
55. See more on the theme in Ben-Ari (1991) and Sakamoto (1999). See also Tōru Anami's 'Shashin no fōkuroa'. Kindai no minzoku (写真のフォークロアー近代の民俗ー') in *Nihon minzokugaku* 日本民俗学 175 (1988, pp. 69–95).
56. The rite in exam was a coming-of-age rite (*seinenshiki*) performed according to the local traditional custom on the 15th of January for two twenty-year-old youth members of the community.
57. Certain traits of resemblance between the celebration pattern of *shichigo-san* and that of the wedding ceremony were also noted in the print media of the epoch. See also chapters 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage' and 'Business Sector, Media and Religious Institutions'.
58. In the survey by KurashiHow in 2007, 83% of families used photo studio services. Other surveys produced similar results (MikiHouse 2010, COMO

2010, September, Sankei Living 2011) (see also chapter 'Business Sector, Media and Religious Institutions').

59. Studio Alice is one of the most well-known and thriving photo studios specializing in child photography with shops all around the country. It was the first in 1992 to offer services specialized for child photography. See more on the economic aspects of professional photo studios in chapter 'Business Sector, Media and Religious Institutions'.
60. Source: interview 2010, August 30.
61. Many studios offer discount prices if booked prior to the November peak date of the celebration. Early booking and an early photographing are offered for convenient prices.
62. I discussed the dual concept of *hare* and *ke* in chapters 'Consumer Culture and Changes to the Ritual Calendar in Postwar Urban Japan' and 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage'.
63. In this regard, Sontag quotes the writer Zola, 'you cannot claim to have really seen something until you have photographed it' (Sontag 1977, 87).
64. Source: www.na-na.no.blog.jp (accessed 2011, June 20).
65. The 1898 Civil Code gave a legal validation to the traditional family model known as *ie* which has developed along the lines of the Confucian principles of hierarchically organized relationships in the Tokugawa samurai society. By this act, the Meiji government expanded the family model typical in pre-Meiji Japan above all to the samurai class, to all levels of the society. The male head of the family was given absolute authority over family members, he approved and disapproved of marriages and controlled inheritance. Traditionally, the relationships in the *ie* were defined on the basis of the length of the person's permanence in the household (Hendry 1981, 14–26). In certain circumstances the traditional household structures is still preferred (arts, rural settings, and so on) (Hendry 1986; Kato 2013). For a discussion of the peculiarities of the nuclearization process within the Japanese context, see Kato (2013).
66. Reformers were mostly members of the established elite who published their ideas and views in the epoch's print media, such as for example the periodicals Fujin no Tomo and Fujin Sekai. The target readers of these magazines were women. For a detailed analysis of this movement, see Jones 2010.
67. Even though propagated principally during the period leading to the war, this ideology had a significant impact on the views regarding the social role of women in modern Japan. As a consequence, for example, the public role of Japanese women in the society gradually became underplayed. Its legacy can still be found in the way Japanese society conventionally looks upon women.

68. Jones notes that this ideology was inseparably connected to the development that saw the rise of the modern middle class in prewar Japan (Jones 2010, 156–157).
69. Currently, even though this view is gradually changing and Japanese women are actively taking part in the labor market, women continue to be publicly perceived mostly as mothers and wives, without regard to whether they undertake full-time or part-time employments. Tasks related to childcare fall to a great extent to mothers. In a survey from 1992, the percentage of fathers who participated actively in child-rearing was slightly over 1%, the bulk of the work fell on mothers (Akiyama 1995, 27). See also Hendry 1986, Imamura 1987, Lock 1988, and White 2002.
70. As Pleck says, "[R]itual can survive without women, but it cannot be elaborate" (Pleck 2000, 237).
71. For a discussion on women's role in contemporary ritual activity in Italy, see among others Pardo 1996, 31–33.
72. For detailed account of this development, see chapter 'Business Sector, Media and Religious Institutions'.
73. In the schedule calendar of COMO (2009, September), preparation at the latest must begin 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'—suntanned skin is traditionally not considered aesthetic in Japan. Although planning of the celebration sometimes can start even earlier. In 2008, 31% of respondents started preparations before August, usually between June and July (COMO 2009, August).
74. *Shichigosan, shippai shinai kanpeki manuaru* (七五三、失敗しない完ぺきマニュアル).
75. There are various reasons to choose the first option. Those who prefer to have a more intense experience prefer to have it all within one single day. The presence of grandparents can also move families to have a professional photo taken of the entire family: 'We wanted grandparents to be in the studio photo, therefore we decided to perform all parts of the celebration in one sole day' (COMO, 2009 September).
76. For a list of possible troubles occuring during the planning and celebration, see for example the voice of mothers on http://www.mamitan.net/voice/029/ (last access 2015, September).
77. The author adds, also, that by observing the ritual in a 'proper' manner, parents receive an affirmation of their parenthood (Taguchi 2015, 236–237).
78. Source: www.stat.go.jp (accessed 2012, October 15).
79. See for example Hendry 1986 and White 1987, 1996. The importance placed on the education by society also produced the phenomenon of the

so-called *kyōiku mama* (教育ママ), 'education obsessed mother', a term that indicates the amount of energy and time invested by mothers to sustain the school performance of the offspring.

80. For many parents, the celebration might be the first experience of the kind. First, because thirty years ago when the generation of parents was in the *shichigosan*-age, the diffusion of the celebration was still not equal in every part of Japan, meaning that there are adults who did not celebrate it in their childhood, or more probably, they celebrated it in a different manner. The pattern of the celebration has changed since then toward increased elaborateness.
81. Modern individuals in this way try to mitigate the negative sides of the modern economic system which have separated production from consumption (Wallendorf and Arnould 1991).
82. See chapter 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage' for the Meiji period article discussing the celebration of *shichigosan* underlining that it is the father's duty to provide for the new festive dress of the offspring (Yomiuri Shinbun, 1879, November 15).
83. Yomiuri Tokyo 1956, November 15.
84. Shūkan Yomiuri 1977, December 3.
85. Shūkan Gendai, 1980, November 20.
86. *Otōsan, genki dashite ne* (お父さん、元気出してね).
87. Robert Smith provides an example of this shift in dates from his field site in Kurusu. Here in 1953, most rest and festivals days were still scheduled by the old lunar calendar. In 1971, however, the majority of rituals and ceremonies had already been moved to Sundays instead of the proper/traditional day indicated by the ceremonial calendar (Smith 1978, 220).
88. The father's website (collecting information on *shichigosan*-related services items and information), mentioned in chapter 'Business Sector, Media and Religious Institutions', might be seen as an exception to this practice. However, also in this case, according to a father's own words, the preparation for his daughter's *shichigosan* was made by his wife alone. Also, it has to be added that starting from the 1960s, with the popularization of photographic devices, fathers have assumed the task of recording the major events in the family's life.
89. Nihon chōrika gakkai tokubetsu kenkyū hōkokusho 2008–2009.
90. 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. The role of maternal grandparents used to be important in several rituals of childhood. The bride left her family upon marriage to move into the household of the husband where she became a member of the new household. Therefore, ties with the maternal household needed to be perpetuated and regularly affirmed, and this also

occurred ritually, in the form of gift giving on ritual occasions connected to grandchildren. See also chapter 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage'.

91. Source: KurashiHow survey 2007 (222.kurashihow.co.jp/markets/3017. The average sum that was given by grandparents, according to the COMO survey (2006), was around 35–42,000 Yen (paternal: 36,000 Yen, maternal: 43,000 Yen). Although, cases when 300,000 Yen was given were registered, too. In KurashiHow survey, the average sum received from both sides in 2007 was around 64,000 Yen.
92. Source: www.happy-note.com/research, www.55192.com (accessed 2010, April).
93. 'My daughter was so very excited to enjoy the company of the family and her grandparents. I am really happy that we organized it in this way!'—words of a mother describing the *shichigosan* celebration of her daughter taking place in combination with a stay in a thermal spot in the company of grandparents (source: www.happy-note.com/research, accessed 2010, October).
94. The first legal definition of individual ages, for children, comes from the ancient collections of laws, *ritsuryō* (律令) (seventh century) that contained a separate section focusing on family registrations. Young persons under the age of twenty were defined as not yet full-fledged adults. The period under twenty was further divided into periods: up to three years of age (*ryoku* 'infants'), between three and sixteen (*shō* 小, 'small'), and between sixteen and twenty (*sō* 少, lit. few) (all ages calculated according to the traditional age-counting system) (Yamaji 2005, 343). Age definitions served to delineate individuals' duties toward payment of taxes or other labor force obligations.
95. The view that sees children as 'white, unspoiled sheets' is also connected with the Shinto belief which does not look at the concept of sin as part of the newborn upon its arrival to earthly life. Sin in Shinto is seen as something accumulated over the course of life and which can be purified by rituals and regular observances.
96. Iijima reconstructed the important milestones in the development of the view on children in Japanese history following the work of the French historian, Philippe Aries on the history of childhood in Europe (see also chapter 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage') (Iijima 1991). The traditional view of children finds some parallels in the Western concept of childhood in the medieval period. Aries argues that the modern concept of childhood in Europe started to arise in the seventeenth century. Before this, children were viewed as 'small adults' rather than children. The author identifies the age of seven as a threshold that separated early childhood from the phase when children were expected to start to contribute with their work to the community's livelihood. Children were regarded as 'small adults' after seven and this phase served to gradually remove the child from the sphere of the family and integrate it into adult society (Aries 1962, 347–353).

97. The perpetuation of the family line was seen with utmost importance in the *ie* for material as well as spiritual aims. Children's potential succession to the position of the head of the *ie* rendered them necessary as guarantors of the continuity of the household.
98. Jones says that children during this epoch became the subject of the so-called 'descendant worship' (*shison sūhai shugi*子孫崇拝主義), referring to a term used in the period's media. This was to replace in a certain sense the traditional ancestral worship which constituted one of the ruling principles of the traditional *ie* model (Jones 2010, 160–161).
99. For a detailed discussion, see Jones 2010, 102–106, 157–159 and Sato 2003.
100. As already mentioned earlier, individual birthdays were traditionally not celebrated in Japan, except the first birthday of the baby (*hatsutanjō*) and birthdays marking anniversaries in old age.
101. See also examples quoted by Jones from the magazines Fujin no Tomo 6.7 (July 1912) or Fujin Sekai 8.13 (November 1913) (Jones 2010, 160–161, as well as in Notes 122, 123, and 124).
102. See for example Katei no Tomo 7.7 (October 1908) in Jones 2010, 161. On the theme, see also chapter 'Shichigosan: The History of a Japanese Childhood Rite of Passage'.
103. Fujin Sekai 8.13 (November 1913) quoted in Jones 2010, 161.
104. Even traditional or rural patterns of childhood rites of passage, while different from the urban pattern, had not always focused solely on the child.
105. See also chapter 'Consumer Culture and Changes to the Ritual Calendar in Postwar Urban Japan'.
106. See also Hendry 1986 for the role of traditional celebration in the socialization and enculturation of children.
107. The toys used traditionally on these occasions all stand for symbols of gender-divided traditional values (Hendry 1986).
108. The web is full of accounts of mothers reporting the 'hardship' they encountered when making their children walk and move in the Japanese style outfit, in particular the difficulties for the three- and five-year-old age segment. Sometime, adults, too, recollected this part of the ritual from their childhood.
109. Matsuoka notes that children are also taught about the dual notion of *hare* and *ke* through these celebrations. The author argues that children's rituals might represent important occasions to experience the extraordinary atmosphere of the holiday time, in contrast to the everyday reality full of school obligations. In other words, rituals are experienced as moments of *hare* (*hare no hi*) that help children to perceive the difference between the common and the extraordinary (Matsuoka 2003).

110. On the cultural meanings associated with the practice of makeup in Japan, see Ashikari 2003.
111. More than 80% of three-year-old children are enrolled in either kindergartens or day nurseries in Japan (2008, source: https://www.nier.go.jp/English/educationjapan/pdf/201109ECEC.pdf).
112. Source: www.na-na.no.blog.jp (accessed 2011, June 20).
113. Dore found out in 1951 that 40% of the interviewed housewives were regular readers and 30% were occasional readers of at least one monthly magazine (Dore 1958, 85).
114. Nonetheless, in Taguchi's survey, there was a small difference in the use of print media as a source of child-rearing information between the periods before and immediately after the birth of the first child, and the later period when the child is already older. The author explains this with the greater network serving mothers in the latter case, as mothers tend to recreate a network of fellow mothers thanks to the shared experience of child-rearing. So for example, for information on the first shrine visit celebration of the baby (*hatsumiyamairi*), mothers mostly turned to magazines; later, for *shichigosan*-related matters, fellow mothers and grandparents appeared as important sources of information along with the print and online media (Taguchi 2015, 73).
115. *Kokumin seikatsu hakusho* 2001.
116. The survey carried out by the Suginami ward of Tokyo is quoted in Taguchi 2015, 74–75. See also the 2001 White Paper on the Life of the Population issued by the Cabinet Office (*Kokumin Seikatsu Hakusho* 2001).
117. Survey carried out by the child-rearing site Baby Come in 2007: internet 87%, print media 71%, friends 69%, family 62% (http://www.babycome.ne.jp/online/research/detail.php). In the 2009 COMO survey from 200 respondents more than half used magazines as their main source for gathering information on *shichigosan* (118 persons, COMO 2010, August). Eighty-nine persons consulted fellow mothers, too. Multiple choices were possible in the questionnaire; hence, the number of mothers who turned exclusively to fellow mothers for information 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.
118. See also Skov and Moeran 1995a on the role of print media on the lives of the Japanese women.
119. See for example the questionnaire surveys of sites such as the Mikihouse (ミキハウス) (results on www.newsrelease.jp/release/life/0110/1023001.html), Happy Note (www.happy-note.com), Babycome (babycome.ne.jp), consumer research group of KurashiHow (www.kurashihow.co.jp/markets), and others.
120. Mothers often follow advice given in magazines word for word. As one of the interviewed mothers stated when describing the celebration of *miya-*

mairi in her family: 'I followed the instructions written in the magazine. At the shrine I asked my mother-in-law to hold the baby when posing for the photo because I read in the magazine that the custom requires this'. (Matsuoka 2003, 26).

121. For examples of disparity between the images of happiness reflected by media and the reality of child-rearing, see also Skov and Moeran 1995b.

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Conclusion: Children, Women, and Families—Creating a Ritual for One and All

Throughout this work, I have traced the history of changes in the pattern and meanings of a Japanese childhood ritual, *shichigosan*. Over time, *shichigosan* has proved capable of adjusting to the shifting requirements of society and absorbing social changes. The ritual that emerges from this study is far from being a static form, although continuity is inherent to the ritual, and a certain rigidity of form is often perceived by the public and by scholars as a sign of authenticity.

The greatest changes to the form and meaning of the ritual were caused by four factors. First, the particular sociocultural conditions in the urban context of the capital, Edo (Tokyo) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries gave rise to the urban pattern of ritual which anticipated its developments in the following two centuries. The subsequent nationwide spread of the urban pattern, was, however, also made possible and informed by native cosmology and the existence of childhood rituals which had been observed in Japan since early historical periods. Second, the transformation of the family structure (from the traditional to the modern nuclear one) along with changing views on children and the value of family life led to the embracing of the urban pattern of the ritual as part of the imagery of family, more precisely as an important instrument in the construction of this imagery. Third, homogenization and standardization of local customs as a consequence of modernizing forces (industrialization, urbanization, media) supported the spread of the urban pattern from Tokyo to the other urban areas between the 1950s and the 1970s. Fourth, as a salient social

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phenomenon of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, consumption had a decisive influence on the form of the celebration.

This work has set itself three main objectives: to track the history of the ritual, to interpret the role of consumption practices involved in the creation of the ritual event, and to explore the reasons for its continuing popularity in contemporary Japanese society. Exploring the background of the rise of the urban pattern was important to me for a number of reasons. I felt that there was a need to counterbalance the majority of studies, which have dealt exclusively with rural or local forms of the *shichigosan* ritual. The contemporary form and popularity of the ritual owes as much, if not more, to this early urban past as to the folk traditions documented in the folklore literature. Setting out the salient features of the eighteenth-century Edo pattern also made it clear that some of the contemporary elements of the ritual, such as the emphasis on the external features of the celebration, are not new inventions or simply the product of excessive commercialization of the ritual; rather they were also present—if in a somewhat different form and extent—in the past. This is not to say that *shichigosan* has remained unchanged since the eighteenth century. There have subsequently been significant changes to its meanings and functions.

Concerning the second objective, I described the 'supply side', in other words, all the parties involved in providing services and goods to observers of *shichigosan*, in order to give a comprehensive picture of all elements involved in the creation of the ritual. Contemporary ritual practice is embedded in a strong consumer culture on which observer-consumers draw to create and embellish the ritual events; interpretations of the ritual are also influenced by this consumer culture. This is not, of course, a one-way process. In proposing 'new meanings' and 'instruments' (goods, services), the commercial sector does not act more independently of the cultural context than it acts independently of customers' needs, preferences, and demands. I would argue that in the commercial world services, goods, information, media, and so on play an active part in creating the ritual event, on both a materialistic and a symbolic level. From the observers' perspective, consumption practices are important because today it would be impossible to set up a compelling ritual without the goods and services offered by commerce, and because consumption is a means of self-expression and differentiation in present-day Japan. The fact that the celebration provides a space for display, leisure, and consumption, contributes to rendering the ritual compliant with the lifestyle of contemporary Japanese people. Modern consumption practices, conspicuous or

otherwise, have become an effective way of creating significant occasions such as rituals not just in Japan but in all industrial societies. There is an emotional dimension to consumption as well as the utilitarian aspect. Consumption can entertain and provide pleasure, and consumption within the context of rituals can take on a special meaning in the eyes of the observer-consumer. In Japan, in particular, where there is a long tradition of consumer culture, consumption may be considered as a cultural practice which is deeply rooted in social life. The consumption element of celebrations should certainly not be thought of as lessening their meaning and significance for the observers or for society in general; I would even argue that it can enhance their value and significance. Today, consumption is an integral part of the process through which families create compelling and satisfactory ritual experience. The variety of goods, services, and patterns available to families means that the realization of the ritual by the consumer-observer can be regarded as a truly creative process. Within the social and economic constraints, observers select elements, goods, and services to suit the needs, preferences, values, and image of their families. In this way, individuals take a selective, creative approach to ritual knowledge, which is mainly transmitted by the media.

The last objective relates to the popularity of the *shichigosan* ritual. The continuity in practice and its popularity in contemporary Japan are strong evidences of the ritual's importance for Japanese families. There are several facets to its importance which should be considered. One is the receptivity of the ritual, in other words, whether the messages that the ritual transmits find receptivity on the side of the observers. In order for a ritual to be 'receptive', or 'compelling', it needs to do so on multiple levels. First, the ritual must reflect the world of the observer; hence, it needs to change in response to changes in the wider social context (Grimes 1982). Second, every single element has its part in the ritual event and helps in rendering the ritual compelling and receptive. From the perspective of the observer, a number of elements are necessary for *shichigosan*: the shrine visit, professional photography, the child's festive dress, and the family gathering. There are differences in the priority given to the various elements. In some cases, not all of them are included, and in some cases, other elements may be added, but essentially, it is the combination of these parts that makes the event a *ritual* in the eyes of the observers.

We should also consider what functions the ritual fulfills. This is a complex issue as the ritual is a highly complex phenomenon with social, cultural, psychological, emotional, and economic aspects. The difficulty of

discerning the functions of the ritual is further complicated by the fact that functions and meanings are rarely expressed overtly by observers. Some of the desired meanings and functions are anticipated, and therefore, created on purpose by actors when preparing or performing the ritual event. Others are not anticipated but later (immediately after the event or in the coming years) recognized as having been important. Fundamentally, however, the question is what is *shichigosan* currently sustaining in the lives of the Japanese? To answer this question, let us see again the main elements constituting the ritual event, taking into account that these play out more than one function and have multiple meanings. While it is almost inevitable that there is a certain hierarchy to the importance of the functions of the ritual, it seems that the multiplicity of functions is an important factor in keeping the ritual receptive and effective.

In summary, I have identified several functions and messages represented by the main elements of the ritual. The festive dress, which for the last forty years has typically been in the Japanese style, represents and transmits messages and values associated with cultural traditions, and is also linked to the notion of national identity, traditional aesthetic standards, continuity of the family line, and values associated with gender roles. Cultural traditions appear particularly important when we consider that they also emerge in other parts of the celebration. The shrine (or temple) visit as part of the celebration is, for example, closely associated with cultural traditions. Apart from educating the observers about issues of cultural identity, the cultural tradition element of the ritual plays a significant role in validating and legitimizing the ritual. The Japanese festive dress together with the shrine visit are the two most visible symbols of continuity with the past, without regard whether this continuity refers to real historical facts or less.

Another element is the photograph, in particular, the professional studio photograph. The history of the development of the photograph into one of the essential elements of the ritual was tracked in chapters ‘Business Sector, Media, and Religious Institutions’ and ‘Constructing the Ritual: Dress, Photographs, Actors, and Script’. The popularity of professional photography services for *shichigosan* has been attributed to the promotional efforts of the business sector, but I do not think this is sufficient explanation of their wide appeal. It has been also argued that the photograph—and the *shichigosan* ritual itself—is important because it provides a tangible record of the child’s growth. ‘Memory’ is indeed a key term in descriptions of the ritual and its meaning, by both observers and media.

The significance of 'memory', however, needs to be placed in the context of more general changes affecting the institution of the family during the twentieth century. The shrinking size of the family together with alterations to family relationships and the transformation of patterns of transmission of ritual knowledge have changed the ways the Japanese family constructs its identity and imagery. The nature of social relationships and the ways in which they are cultivated have changed substantially. The construction of the identity of the family, the expression of its ideals and values, the way its imagery is built up, all are heavily influenced by the immediate socioeconomic and cultural context. In contemporary urban Japan, families do not typically live near their extended family (grandparents and other kin) as they do not live the kind of community life typical of Japan before its modernization. The physical absence of relatives from the everyday life of the nuclear family and the lack of an active network of kinship and non-kinship relations render the nuclear family more vulnerable and in need of new ways to affirm its identity and express its values and norms. Family rituals play an important role in this symbolic constitution of the family.

The emergence of *shichigosan* as a family ritual began in the postwar decades of rapid economic growth when, in the increasingly affluent, consumption-oriented Japanese society, material well-being became one of the main symbols of a middle-class lifestyle. The new middle-class family needed new symbols to express their status and the changes in family norms. It can be said that the urban pattern of *shichigosan* fitted the new middle-class lifestyle well. The popular pattern that had developed in urban Edo merchant culture was close to what was required in the modern urban context. It also aligned well with the ideal image of the family which placed the child at the center and the mother as the main caregiver. Today, for many families, *shichigosan* is *the* celebration of the early years following the birth of the child. The market and media reinforce the idea that the ritual stands for 'happy family life', calling the celebration the 'grand event' (*dai ibento* 大イベント) of the family; *shichigosan* is frequently associated with images of familial happiness created through observing the ritual. Photographs in the media featuring smiling fathers and mothers with their children in gay clothes present an image of the happy family, rich in material and emotional well-being. Although the media and the market select and use these images for their own purposes, the ritual is also viewed as an important occasion by the observers. It is an occasion when the three-generational family unit gathers and fam-

ily cohesion is experienced and, not least, women's work as mothers is acknowledged. The ideal of the three-generation family is realized in the presence of both parents (in contrast to the past when the participation of the father was not obligatory) and grandparents from both sides, if circumstances allow. This is the configuration of the basic kin network in contemporary Japan.

The value of the time spent with the wider family circle is often emphasized by observers and this is picked up in media advice on the importance of the ritual celebrated by the whole family. Much attention is paid to the choice of the date, place, and form of the celebration, all aspects which have been addressed in previous chapters. It should be remembered, however, that for achieving these demands, thorough planning and preparation is needed, which is mainly the responsibility of mothers. Moreover, the recent trend for combining the celebration with leisure activities can also be related to the importance attached to 'family time' as an aspect of the ritual. The commercial development of *shichigosan* packs offering trips to entertainment parks, thermal spa hotels, or a foreign trip is not simply an indication of the creative marketing of the business sector; it also illustrates *shichigosan* observers' desire to spend quality time together as a family—something which is more rare and therefore precious nowadays. Also, *shichigosan* is one of the series of the rituals traditionally observed during the first seven years of a child's life (*miyamairi*, *kuizome*, *hatsusekku*, *hatsutanjō*, and others). Today, observance of these rituals varies, but it can be said that they have particular significance for the formation of the family as a psychological and social entity, and in helping to transform adult into parent and parents into grandparents. These rituals take place in the early period after the birth of the child which coincides with the period during which, at least in the case of the firstborn child, the family as such is formed. While the 'first' rites are modest affairs and rarely involve conspicuous consumption or lengthy preparations, partly because of the extreme youth of the child, at *shichigosan* the child is old enough to participate fully, endure the lengthy program of events, wear the festive dress, and thus, he or she can provide a tangible representation of the family's happiness.

With regard to shrine visit, its cultural traditional value, and hence, value as a symbol of continuity with the past and durability in times of rapid change has been already pointed out above and in chapter 'Business Sector, Media, and Religious Institutions'. Here, I wish to make the complexity of the meaning of shrine worship part of a more general discourse on cat-

egories such as 'religion', 'faith', and 'sacred', thus adding another layer to interpretations of contemporary *shichigosan*. Throughout the book, I have avoided making a distinction between categories such as 'religious', 'non-religious', and 'secular'; in fact, I have avoided these labels altogether. In this I have followed scholars of Japanese society, such as Van Bremen (1995), Hendry (1993, 1995), and Fitzgerald (2003, 2004), who have pointed out that such categories are not useful for analysis in the Japanese context. I have tried to look at ritual as an occasion that is constructed by the participants as an extraordinary event whose principal components acquire symbolic meanings in the eyes of the observers, and an event which contributes to the expression and transmission of ideas and ideals, values, priorities, and views on life. I think that the question of whether the shrine ritual is addressed to any divinities is of secondary importance. The 'presence' or 'absence' of divinities, or any other supernatural entity neither adds to nor subtracts anything essential from the potential significance of the ritual.

Ronald Grimes noticed that "sacred is the name we give to the deepest form of receptivity in our experience" (Grimes 1982, 549), implying that the sacred has no necessary connections with 'religion' or 'religiosity' and does not require the presence of the divine. Individuals may treat diverse objects or issues as 'sacred'; the sacred may be embodied in different objects or acts in accordance with individual differences in attitudes and worldview. For example, a photograph, an inherited dress, or simply the memory of the ritual may be regarded as 'sacred' (in other words, extraordinarily important and precious) by the actor. Therefore, I do not see a fundamental difference between the import and significance of the ritual act performed by an observer who chooses to address supernatural entities during the *shichigosan* shrine visit (in order, e.g. to give thanks for the healthy growth of the child) and the act performed by a mother whose heart and soul are just as full of gratitude, but for whom the divine is not part of the overall meaning of the ritual. For her, the photograph of her child together with the performance of the ritual and its subsequent memory may represent the deepest form of receptivity. In both cases, the feelings and desires evoked touch deep layers of the soul and heart, and find form and expression in and through the enactment of the ritual.

Lastly, the overall performance of a ritual points to a number of functions, and it touches upon multiple levels in human life, including physical, sensual, emotional, and cognitive, just as it has social, cultural, and economic aspects. Many 'effects' of the ritual surface only after it has taken place,

some remain hidden or are present on a subconscious level. This makes the study of ritual a difficult and complex task with regard to both theorizing and studying. Therefore, no study of ritual can claim to be comprehensive in its findings or definitive in its interpretation. Whether *shichigosan* will continue to enjoy popularity among Japanese families, or whether they will find other rites or means of highlighting and expressing issues important to their lives, will depend on socioeconomic processes in the future. What will not change, however, is a need for rituals in people's lives.

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