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## Family Resemblances

### Memorial Images and the Face of Kinship

In some northern Tohoku institutions, a dedicated *hanayomeningyō* (bride doll), infused with the spirit of the bodhisattva Jizō, functions as a spirit spouse for the unquiet soul of a child or youth who died before marriage. Although the figurine used is the opposite sex of the deceased, the doll's face is widely believed to come to resemble that of the dead person. These imputed cross-cutting “family resemblances” (in Wittgenstein's sense) emerge from the enigmatic double life of ritual images, which may simultaneously be experienced as representations of distant beings and as efficacious entities in their own right. By building up an extended web of partial associations among the living, the dead, and memorial images, those who dedicate and pray to *hanayomeningyō* help regulate relations between categorical domains of existence. In “facing” the dead, the living thus mimetically represent and reproduce generative principles of human kinship.

KEYWORDS: memorial practice – ritual images – Jizō – *ningyō* – *kuyō* – *hanayomeningyō*

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[W<sub>E</sub>] SEE A complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing...I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than ‘family resemblances’; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament...overlap and criss-cross in the same way. (WITTGENSTEIN 1973, p. 32)

Before all, [religion] is a system of ideas with which...individuals represent to themselves the society of which they are members, and the obscure but intimate relations which they have with it. (DURKHEIM 1965, p. 257)

*The Problem: “Doubleness” and the Creation of Resemblance*

In this paper I attempt to bring Wittgenstein’s well-known critique of essentialist modes of thought to bear on the classic Durkheimian problem of religion’s capacity to represent “the obscure but intimate relations” between persons and their social world. I do so by concentrating upon an ethnographic puzzle arising from my research in northern Tohoku on the memorial practice of consecrating bride dolls (*hanayomeningyō* 花嫁人形) to the souls of the unmarried dead. During the postwar period, hundreds of families have memorialized the unsettled souls of children or youths who have died before marriage by dedicating bride and groom dolls believed to have been infused with the bodhisattva Jizō. The practice is often referred as a “marriage” between the doll and the unhappy spirit; in many cases, the dead person, unmarried in life, is believed to have pleaded, through a spirit medium, with living family members for a wife

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or husband in the other world (MATSUZAKI 1993; SCHATTSCHNEIDER 2001; VAN BREMEN 1998).

Collaboratively developed by local priests, spirit mediums, and laypersons to comfort the souls of local unmarried men who have died in combat during the Asia-Pacific War, bride doll dedication has subsequently been extended to memorialize children and youths who died before marriage from disease, road accidents, and other causes.<sup>1</sup> At Nishikōyasan (Kōbōji) Temple in Kizukuri, Kawakura Jizō-son in Kanagi, and Entsūji in Osorezan, many hundreds of these consecrated dolls are enshrined, most with photographs of the deceased.<sup>2</sup> Within glass boxes that house the doll and photograph, mourners place offerings that evoke the full life denied to the prematurely dead youth: beer, sake, packaged food, cigarettes, toy cars, and articles of clothing. After a number of years, it is believed, the dead child's soul will finally be released from the liminal void in which it has wandered in pain, and move towards Buddhahood.

The puzzle is as follows: Why do mourners and other visitors insist that the face of each doll over time comes to look like the (opposite sex) face of the deceased in the photograph? This apprehended emerging resemblance between the face of the doll and that of the dead child is cited by virtually all of my informants as proof that the ritual has worked, and that the lost soul has been placed on the proper track towards solace and perhaps ultimate transmigration. Why should this be the case?

This ethnographic puzzle may cast some light on an enduring conundrum in the anthropology of religion, the linked problem of the “doubleness” of images and the “doubleness” of human persons. Theorists of ritual images and icons have noted that such symbolic forms are “double:” they are both representations of an absent element (the god, the ancestor, or other forces) and the thing itself (BELTING 1994, FAURE 2000, FREEDBERG 1998, GELL 1998, RUPERT 2000). The image simultaneously points to an absent thing and *is* that dynamic, active presence. Such images are, in certain respects, both signifier and signified. The precise nature of that “doubleness” may vary dramatically, but perplexing paradoxes

1. For a review of spirit marriage in comparative East Asianist perspective, see SCHATTSCHNEIDER 2001, pp. 855–56. Modern bride doll dedication in Tohoku emerges out of multiple sources, including Jizō memorial stone figurines and *mukasari ema* ムカサリ絵馬, votive tablets through which the souls of those who died unmarried were wed to painted spirit spouses (BLACKER 1975, p. 158, WADA 1988; SCHATTSCHNEIDER 2001; TONOSHIRITSU HAKUBUTSUKAN 2001). The use of dolls in the postwar era was strongly influenced by the common wartime practice of giving *masukotto ningyō* マスコット人形 (mascot dolls) or *imon ningyō* 慰問人形 (care bag dolls) to soldiers going off to battle as protective amulets (*omamori*) (SCHATTSCHNEIDER, forthcoming).

2. Bride dolls are also dedicated at Yamadera in Yamagata prefecture, where they are said to be infused with the bodhisattva Kannon (WADA 1988). Since the early 1980s, hundreds of bride dolls have also been dedicated at Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo (SCHATTSCHNEIDER, forthcoming). As noted below, the faces of the bride dolls at Yasukuni are said not to alter over time.

generated by this uncanny sense of the doubleness life of images emerge in diverse systems of ritual and representation the world over.

From an orthodox Durkheimian position, the “doubleness” of ritual images is basically a function of the doubleness of human existence. Ritual practices bridge the two poles of human existence, our status as both individual and collectively-constituted beings. In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Durkheim approaches the central Australian Aboriginal totem sacred object, the *churinga*, as a double entity. This object of wood or polished stone, upon which is engraved a design representing the group totem, is both a representation of the clan totemic ancestor and is experienced as the ancestor itself. This doubleness, Durkheim implies, is produced by the dynamic relationship between individual and society. A group of individuals acting and feeling in concert project their combined psychic energies into the *churinga*, which therefore appears to them the animate incarnation of the god. Through common veneration of the animated *churinga*, each individual person is therefore filled with the spirit of society itself, and various components of the community are recalibrated with one another.

Leaving aside the many difficulties with Durkheim’s ethnography and his specific interpretation of Aboriginal materials, are we willing to accept the classic Durkheimian insistence that these two forms of “doubleness” are precisely homologous? Is the double quality of a ritual image, as both signifier and signified, simply a product of the fact that each person is both an individual being and a collectively-constituted entity? In apprehending a human-made image as alive or sacred are we simply glimpsing, through an opaque lens, the power of society as a unified entity? Or is the production, circulation, and reception of intimate physical resemblances a more subtle and complicated process, embedded in society but not simply a reflection of society as such? To put it another way, might we, following Wittgenstein, argue that the likenesses produced in these instances are not homologous mappings between self and society, but are rather “family resemblances” in his sense of the term, criss-crossing and cross-cutting partial affinities which, taken as a whole across an extended field or network, produce a sense of common coherence without being reducible to a single specifiable or essential quality? Might the dissonances and dissimilarities cutting across these webs of resemblance further fuel their aesthetic, emotive, and ritual power? Might these relations of likeness and tension, in turn, cast some light on how relations of kinship among the living and the dead are produced and reproduced in Japan?

#### *Doubleness in Japanese Ritual Images: Mitate and the Efficacy of Imitation*

Japan is an especially interesting site in which to consider the “doubled” quality of ritual images. For centuries, Buddhist and Shinto ritual specialists have pondered

the varied paradoxes of resemblance associated with images of the human figure. Japanese theorists of ritual and aesthetics have articulated the principle of *mitate* 見立て, the concept that most efficacious offerings to the gods are necessarily imitations of divine beings. Offerings depend, as anthropologist Masao Yamaguchi has argued, on “the art of citation,” evoking an absent force or being through imitative action precisely in order to bring that being into immediate co-presence with the human worshipper (YAMAGUCHI 1991; see also LAMARRE 2000). Thus, a group of priests seeking to venerate and derive merit from the invisible gods, who reside atop a sacred mountain, will fabricate and present a *tsukuriyama* 作り山, a miniature mountain that is explicitly glossed as a fictive image of the local mountain, which is in turn understood as a representation and incarnation of the world-mountain. In ritual action, this mimetic image comes to function as the mountain itself, and brings the invisible divinities into the immediate precincts of the shrine and its human residents. Not insignificantly, most Japanese Shinto shrines are centered on a mirror that recalls and instantiates the mythic cosmogenic mirror through which the sun goddess Amaterasu was “tricked” out of a cave to restore life to the universe that had been darkened by her willful absence. In this primal mirror she glimpsed an image of herself, which she mistook for a beautiful rival. Life itself is thus founded on an initial illusory act of representation, a potent confounding of presence and absence, merging the imitative image with the represented thing itself (SCHATTSCHEIDER 2003).

This principle of efficacious imitative action has long informed ritual practices of memorializing the dead in Japan. For millennia memorialization has been organized around manifestly artificial images of the human figure, crafted with careful attention to the dynamic relationship between visibility and invisibility. Buddhist wooden portrait sculptures, for example, were long considered living embodiments of honored dead persons; the statues were activated as dynamic conduits between the visible and invisible worlds through careful management of their interior and exterior features. The dead person’s ashes and cloth replicas of their viscera were placed within the hollow trunk of the statue. Particular attention was given to the faces of these images, placing reflective materials in the statue’s eyes and, in one important case, the actual hair of the deceased on the statue’s face and head. Through such practices, oscillating between visible surfaces and invisible interiors, the hollow portrait statue served as an iconic model of the dynamic frontier between worlds. It became a powerful mediator between different realms of existence, enabling miraculous interventions by invisible powers on behalf of the mortal pilgrims who gazed upon it (FAURE 1998 and 2000).

In a comparable fashion, modern bride doll consecration in northern Tohoku depends on the fascinating “doubleness” of the primary ritual icon, the *ningyō* itself. Suggestively, the characters for *ningyō* 人形 can also be read as *hitogata*, a

term which generally refers to paper ritual figurines long used in purification and memorialization rites. Indeed, my informants insist that any *ningyō*, that is to say any object made by human hands to resemble a person, is a potential vessel of *tamashii* 魂 (spirit) and may serve as a substitute for a human being or for important qualities of a person, living or dead. Any “human-shaped” artifact is well suited to ritual acts of healing the living or memorializing the dead because it represents (or doubles) the human form, establishing beneficial links and distinctions between itself, its human donor and its ultimate (usually divine or sacralized) recipient.

The imputed power of the bride doll is illustrated by the changing significance of the photograph of the dead child that is placed next to the *hanayomeningyō* within the glass case. Before the *ningyō* is dedicated, the photograph cannot really be said to function as an effective “doubled” ritual icon. It is primarily a signifier of absence; many family members who have lost a child tell me that it is almost unbearably painful to look upon such an image. One of the most difficult aspects of consecrating a bride doll is selecting the dead child’s photograph to be placed in the glass box with the doll. As one bereaved mother stated before a consecration rite, “I can hardly look at the picture. All I can think is that my son is no longer with me.”

Yet, once the doll has been consecrated and animated with the living spirit of the bodhisattva Jizō, matters quickly change. Soon afterwards, grieving parents and other relatives come to pray in front of the glass box assemblage in the temple building, and may gaze at the photograph of the dead child for long periods of time. Many mourning mothers have pointed out to me particular features of the photograph, murmuring stories about their child’s old likes and dislikes, and expressing relief that the child is now “happily married.”

Why this shift in the bereaved’s attitude towards the photograph? At the manifest level, this change is due to mourners’ often-stated belief that the dead soul is now being comforted by the spirit spouse. “He is not alone anymore,” one mother told me as she pointed to the photograph of the child, adding, “I can feel that now, he is being taken care of. They are a happy couple, I think.” This shift is due, as well, to the general apprehension that the photographic image is beginning to partake of the doubleness of the doll icon, which both *represents* the Jizō-infused spirit spouse and *is* Jizō itself. The intimate contiguity between doll and photograph creates a visual field of intense duplication, so that the doll and the photograph both come to be more than mere representations of the spirit couple, but are tangibly the spirit couple’s living presence. In time, this efficacious incorporation of the child’s photograph within the protective doubleness of the doll icon will be manifested in the doll’s face itself.

This process is modeled on the generally recognized power of Jizō images, through which enduring incarnations of deceased persons may be animated and afflicted bodies healed (READER 1991, pp. 152–53; FAURE 2000, p. 71). Jizō, my informants often note, easily binds himself to the restless souls of troubled

dead children, enveloping them within his capacious robes and transporting them through the realms of creation. This capacity is exemplified by *migawari* 身代わり (substitutive or sacrificial) Jizō, which takes on the pain of the wandering soul so as to ease its spiritual passage. In a similar fashion, each offered bride doll takes on the identity not only of the bodhisattva Jizō but also, in part, of the suffering dead child represented in the photograph. In effect, the Jizō-infused doll functions as a binding agent, giving the once liminal wandering soul a secure material anchor and relieving it of its suffering.<sup>3</sup>

Significantly, ritual specialists insist that the consecration rite—in which the spirit of Jizō is called into the previously inanimate doll—should only be performed once the child’s photograph has been placed beside it within the glass box. The materialization of Jizō, in effect, occurs in intimate conjunction with the image of the dead, unmarried child or youth, initiating the process of gradual identification between the doll and the dead soul. In time, as the doll face comes to resemble the face of the child, the doll finally comes to embody the unity of the spirit couple, and should be respectfully burned in a purifying fire.

Bride doll marriage thus illustrates the Durkheimian insight that effective ritual action depends on the positing of symbolic equivalences between social groups, persons, and inanimate objects. For Marcel MAUSS (1990), solidarity between dissimilar social groups is constituted through exchange, which depends on the capacity of the gift object to embody the essence of the donating individual or group, and for the gift transaction to symbolize the overall social relationship between the donor and receiver. LEVI-STRAUSS (1976) refines this insight to argue that the primary exchange medium was women; a woman’s capacity, in marriage exchange, to stand for the group she originates from is, in effect, the foundation of culture itself, necessitating exogamy and subsequent enduring relations between wife-givers and wife-receivers.

This basic logic obtains in bride-doll-spirit marriage. Once consecrated and infused with the spirit of the bodhisattva Jizō, the bride doll evokes the presence of an entire social unit, the society of the dead. She thus provides a tangible anchor for the hitherto unfixed, interstitial soul of the deceased, wandering along the riverbank between the worlds of the living and the dead. Through the animated doll, the once-lost soul of the child is grafted into the extended community of the dead, and is effectively socialized into a new category of existence. The memorialized youths, previously thought to have been lonely lost souls, are now often said by family members to be playing or conversing with their new *tomodachi* (friends), as the other *ningyō* within the memorial hall are referred

3. This binding process is presumably aided by the dolls’ proximity to conventional Jizō stone figurines at these sites, characterized by extremely simple faces. FREEDBERG (1998, pp. 112–28) argues that the simplest images often are venerated as the most potent and efficacious; their very simplicity seems to reduce their effects to elemental levels and renders their features most open to diverse interpretations by those who encounter them.

to. As I have noted elsewhere, bride dolls enshrined at Kawakura are periodically rotated through the various chambers of the doll-holding memorial hall, in an efficacious mimetic enactment of the soul's hoped-for passage through the six cosmic realms of *rokudō* 六道 (SCHATTSCHEIDER 2001, pp. 867–68).

Significantly, my informants insist that bride doll marriage simply will not work if the consecrated bride doll box is brought back to the home of the bereaved family after the dedication rite. “The couple needs to be in the safe-keeping house, with the other couples,” an elderly *itako* spirit medium explained to me, “for they will be comforted together there.” She added, “After all, the doll is now Jizō, everything will be fine now.” In the presence of hundreds of other dolls, all infused with Jizō's miraculous presence, each doll eases the tragically isolated and individuated soul into the collective society of the dead.

### *The Meanings of the Face: Metonymy and Spiritual Transformation*

Why, then, do informants insist that the shift in the doll's facial features is the preeminent “proof” that the ritual of doll dedication has worked, as opposed to other forms of mimetic transformation? The explanation lies in the peculiar features of facial representations in general and in Japan in particular. In his celebrated essay “The Aesthetic Significance of the Face,” Georg SIMMEL (1959) argues that the high degree of distinctive expressiveness associated with facial musculature leads to the face often metonymically standing for the person as a whole. Inasmuch as the face is composed of a set of intimately connected elements that form a complex whole, a face can potentially be apprehended as having a high-level unity or coherency that lends itself to spiritual or superordinate interpretations. This potential is heightened by the fact that, in contrast to the human trunk or appendages, the face is often apprehended as having a kind of separable status from normal corporeal existence. In Simmel's words, “The impression of spirituality is also strengthened by the fact that the face shows the influence of gravity less than other parts of the body” (SIMMEL 1959, p. 278). The beauty and expressions discernible from the face, or from a visual representation of the face, thus often serve to represent the entire spiritual or moral state of the person.

Simmel further notes that inasmuch as the human face is the most differentiated organ, it serves as a primary focal point of social distinction. Thus, one of the most miraculous kinds of resemblance is that established between an external physical element and a face, the single most complex visible aspect of the person.<sup>4</sup>

Asian Buddhist iconography has long deployed shifting representations of

4. Thus, for example, Christian mystics at times report seeing the shape of a cross on the face of a great teacher or holy person. Visitors to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C. have reported seeing their own reflected faces as well as spectral visions of the faces of the dead superimposed over the names of dead soldiers.



the face of divine beings in order to evoke the miraculous qualities of Buddha nature. The renowned Chinese Buddhist Master Baozhi is said to have had a face that was, “rectangular and gleamed like a mirror, reflecting the faces of those who came before him.” When a monk tried to paint Baozhi’s portrait, Baozhi scratched open his own face, “and from the gashes, one after another, emerged the twelve faces of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara—too extremely beautiful to paint!”<sup>5</sup> A famous Japanese twelfth-century sculpture of Baozhi now in the Kyoto National Museum depicts the icon’s face as splitting open, revealing the face of the Bodhisattva within (FAURE 1998; FOWLER 2000).

Close proximity to facial images, especially masks, often has profound ritual implications in Japan. Being bitten on the head by the lion mask on special ceremonial occasions is widely regarded as protective, especially for children, but participants are specifically enjoined not to touch the mask’s face or gaze into it (SAKURAI 1988). In the “Nijūgo Bosatsu Oneri Kuyō” ceremony in Kyoto’s Soku-jiōin, twenty-five persons, ranging from small children to a senior priest, repeatedly process across a great raised bridge connecting the temple’s *honden* 本殿 (main shrine) to the Jizōdō wearing golden face masks of the bodhisattvas who escort the soul to the other world immediately after death. Wearing such a mask is considered highly meritorious for children and their families, and in turn those masked children are believed to bestow great blessings upon the crowds assembled below the bridge.

In high performing arts, the face, mask, role, and personhood of the performer are juxtaposed and transposed in complex ways. In Bunraku, subordinate puppeteers controlling the body and appendages of a puppet are dressed in black clothing, with gauze covering their eyes. In contrast, the face of the master puppeteer, who alone controls the facial expressions of the puppet, is entirely visible to the audience; his impassive face and the doll’s expressive face, in effect, are intimately merged for the duration of the performance. In Noh, actors playing aged men, children, women, spirits, ghosts, or demons wear carved wooden masks, but actors playing the unmarked category of middle-aged men assume the stylized *hitamen* 直面 (literally, “direct mask”) expressions, a kind of supreme mask formed out of the physical face itself.

Given the long-term importance of masking in Japanese ritual and other performance genres, it is perhaps not surprising that the intimate relationship among mask, face, and personhood is an enduring theme in Japanese film. For example, in Shindō Kaneto’s 1963 film *Onibaba*, an old woman forcibly removes with difficulty an *oni* (demon) mask from the horribly scarred face of a violent general; after she wears the mask to frighten her daughter into submission, the

5. Entry on Baozhi. International Dictionary of Buddhism, <http://www.orientalia.org/dic3.html> (accessed 20 February 2004).

mask becomes welded to her. When it is finally removed she too is revealed to have a scarred, demonic face.

Conversely, in Miyazaki Hayao's *Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi* (*Spirited Away*, 2001) the heroine, Sen, recovers her full personhood through befriending the mysterious outcast and masked figure Kao-nashi (No-face). Marked by the palpable absence of a face, the principle medium of social intercourse, this spectral being is profoundly unsocialized, and violently consumes people. The girl, who herself lacks a name, is accompanied by Kao-nashi as she travels to the home of Zeniba, the doppelganger sister of the frightening matriarch Yubaba, who has imprisoned Sen and threatened to destroy her parents. Sen leaves behind Kao-nashi with the "good" maternal figure, and in so doing leaves behind an earlier, infantile stage in her own psychological development, freeing herself to move towards love for the dragon prince, whose face she had seen as a young girl. Returning to Yubaba's bathhouse, she completes her quest to regain her name and full identity. Significantly, her final departure from the spirit world depends on her resisting the urge to turn her face back towards it; her reconstituted selfhood depends on the lessons she has learned from the other world, but she must emphatically separate herself from it in order to mature within the world of the living.<sup>6</sup>

As these disparate examples suggest, the manipulation of facial images and facial orientations in Japan often enables the productive fragmentation and reconstitution of the person, moving across the boundaries between life and death and between human and the non-human poles. In the case of bride-doll-spirit marriage in northern Tohoku, the developed resemblance between the initially generic face of the mass-produced doll and the dead child's face is a clear sign of the intervention of miraculous powers, establishing profound resemblance where none existed before. The changing nature of the doll's face stands metonymically not simply for the doll but also for the state of the dead child's soul. As the doll face comes to resemble the photograph of the late child, the living family members come to believe that the child's soul is no longer lost and dismembered in the void, but is in fact merged with the compassionate spirit of Jizō and is moving back into conventional integrated status.

Rather like the ancient Buddhist teacher, Baozhi, the faces of the modern bride dolls reflect the faces of beings near to them, and evoke the transformative presence of a compassionate bodhisattva. Through Jizō's miraculous intervention, a previously hidden face begins to manifest itself on the once generic, mass-produced face of the bride doll. This special instance of mirrored representation signals the active presence of the divine, tangibly dramatizing the extraordinary doubleness of the ritual image.

6. Those undertaking asceticism or other spiritual journeys into locales associated with the other world are often enjoined against looking backwards, lest they carry back with them inappropriate forces and beings into this world (BLACKER 1975; SCHATTSCHNEIDER 2003).

*Imaging Social Reproduction:**Bride Dolls and the Developmental Cycle of the Domestic Group*

Why not simply use the less elaborate stone Jizō statues that often memorialize dead children throughout Japan, and which have extremely simple, androgynous faces that might more obviously lend themselves to apparent protean transformations? Why dedicate bride dolls? The explanation partly lies in the history of these mass-reproduced figurines and their standard uses in modern Japanese marriage. Although these bride and groom dolls appear to be “traditionally” dressed in kimono, they are relatively recent innovations. The modern Shinto wedding service that they evoke was only developed in 1900 for the marriage of Crown Prince Yoshihito (later the Taisho Emperor). This event marked the conscious adoption of monogamy and romantic companionate marriage along the Western bourgeois model as the national idealized form of marriage. Before that time, Shinto wedding rites as such simply did not exist. Japanese commoners began to adopt this wedding rite by 1902, and although enormously elaborated over the subsequent century, the basic structure has endured ever since (EDWARDS 1990; GOLDSTEIN-GIDONI 2001).

Bride dolls in their modern form seem to have first appeared in the 1920s, following the widespread adoption of the Shinto wedding rite, and the increasing incorporation of Western doll technologies and form (*furansu ningyō* フランス人形 “French dolls”) in Japan. The kimono clad bride dolls appear to have initially been developed for the international tourist market, as exportable signs of quintessential “Japaneseness.” In time, these dolls became a standard part of the bride’s trousseau, given by the bride to her new mother-in-law and stored in the *tokonoma* display alcove at the house’s center. The bride doll (at times paired with a groom doll) is invariably frozen in a characteristic pose, a convention that partly emerges out of the Kabuki theatre. These dolls emerge out of the eighteenth-century *ichimatsu* 市松 dolls modeled on the famous *onnagata* Kabuki actor Sanokawa Ichimatsu, known for his portrayal of young women. Modern *hanayomeningyō* bride and groom pairs also reflect the growing tendency in early-twentieth-century Japan to photograph the wedding couple.

The enormous sentimental resonance of these wedding dolls rest in their capacity to evoke key features of the middle class female life cycle. As in many cultures, an incoming bride in Japan is classically conceived as a suspect, almost diseased figure; an intermediate, anomalous “stranger” in Simmel’s terms. Over time, in principle, she will become more and more closely identified with her husband’s household and family line, and may eventually become the most important pillar of that institution presiding over a multigenerational household.

The movement of the bride doll from the daughter-in-law to the mother-in-law is in part a projective ritual act, a tangible image of the daughter-in-law’s own eventual passage from in-marrying bride to leading woman of the household.

Just as the new bride doll is located at the symbolic center of the house, the alcove (*tokonoma*), so will the human bride move into a central structural position within the house of her husband, within the space of a generation. The bride doll, in effect, allows the bride to envision herself as eventually reaching the endpoint of the process upon which she is embarking, entering into a superior structural position at the center of her husband's ancestral house. In turn, from the standpoint of the receiving mother-in-law, the bride doll gift dramatizes her own achieved central position within her husband's house. She sees in the face of the bride doll a refracted image of her former and current self, as an in-marrying bride who has completed a structural journey from alien newcomer to respected mother-in-law. The (secular) bride doll thus functions as a mediating operator, establishing a gradual projective identification between the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law.

In a comparable fashion, the bride dolls used in postwar northern Tohoku memorial rituals gradually establish a chain of identities between various beings through the logic of affinity and temporal projection. The isolated dead child, so long deprived of marriage and the comforts of adulthood, is given a tangible glimpse of the fulfillment of married life. The dead soul is given, in effect, a progressive existence. Indeed, in the years following the dedication of a bride doll, family members will often present gifts, such as a school backpack or a suit for a job interview, that celebrate important passages in the dead youth's alternate life. The doll, itself a *mitate* or mimetic representation, enables a mimetic tableau, an efficacious fictive representation of an alternative life cycle within the microcosmic theatre of the glass box. These functions are consistent with the deeper cultural history of bride dolls, which, as noted above, are transformations of *ichimatsu* dolls, historically used to represent a male Kabuki actor, who played female roles in the popular theatre during the mid-Edo period.

The theatrical tableau presented in the glass doll boxes is also deeply engaging for the mother of a deceased son, who in the normal course of events would have eventually received a bride doll from her new daughter-in-law on the occasion of her son's marriage. In the case of spirit marriage, the bereaved mother gains a substitute daughter-in-law, embodied in precisely the token of normal marriage, a bride doll itself. Like the conventional bride doll, which moves into the central alcove in the mother-in-law's house, this ritual bride doll comes to stand for the unity of the newly-married couple. So great is the affinity between the two members of the spirit couple that in time the mother and other mourners come to perceive the face of the dead child manifesting itself on the face of the bride or groom doll. In due time, (in principle, after a thirty-year union) the doll and photograph should finally leave this world together in purifying flames.

*From Trauma to Mourning: Progressive Identification and "Reality-Testing"*

In psychoanalytic terms, the emergence of a fundamental resemblance between the face of the doll and the face in the photograph may be conceived as marking a transition from trauma to mourning. In many of the cases I have worked on, within a year or so after having dedicated a spirit couple, living survivors previously plagued by endlessly repeated, static images of the dead and of their untimely death begin to recognize and accept gradual changes in the status of the dead. Many report heart-warming dreams of the dead child beginning to "grow up" and make friends in the other world, moving into a form of alternate adulthood. As one man told me, several years after having dedicated a doll, "I miss my son terribly, of course. But I can see he is content there; he is not alone there, we can see." As the father said this, he rearranged food offerings with the glass box, gently touching the photograph and the kimono-clad bride doll.

These dynamics call to mind Freud's well-known observation in *Mourning and Melancholia* that the work of mourning demands a repeated testing of reality:

In mourning, time is needed for the command of reality-testing to be carried out in detail, and that when this work has been accomplished his ego will have succeeded in freeing its libido from the lost love objects.

(FREUD 1961, pp. 244–45)

This testing requires painful and piecemeal re-encounters with each and every powerful memory and orientation associated with the deceased, from which the libido must be specifically detached.

Appropriately, bride doll marriage establishes gradual separation between the living and the dead through long term compensatory giving to the dead child. Visits by parents to the bride doll boxes center on repeated tactile encounters with the toys, food, and clothing objects most associated with the dead child—and with the parents' frustrated expectations of the child's eventual adulthood. With each visit to the doll box, the bereaved cleans and touches the miniature offerings associated with the dead child, gazes at the kimono-clad doll spouse that embodies the expected married adulthood denied the child, and often gently touches the child's photograph. Evidently, the bereaved ego is engaging in a form of long-term "reality-testing," gradually detaching itself, piece by piece as it were, from memories of the lost one.

Bride dolls are especially appropriate media for this process. As we have seen, in normal life, they enable progressive identification between various parties in the marriage process. In the special case of spirit marriage, the dolls in principle enable progressive identification between the dead child and its spirit spouse, sequentially differentiating the living survivors from the deceased.

*The Promise and Perils of Doubleness: Two Case Studies*

In practice, however, matters do not necessarily proceed so smoothly. The ambiguous potentials of the double quality of ritual images are especially evident in the following two cases, in which mothers seek to comfort the souls of their dead, unmarried children.

Case One: About eight years ago, Mrs. Tanno found herself suffering from acute anxiety and financial worries. Consulting a spirit medium, she learned her difficulties were caused by the unquiet soul of her daughter, who had died two weeks after birth, two decades earlier. Speaking through the medium's voice, the dead daughter requested a spirit marriage to a groom doll, a request to which Mrs. Tanno readily assented.

In recent years, her dead daughter, who has grown into a beautiful, self-possessed young woman in the other world, has visited Mrs. Tanno in dreams. In one dream, the daughter explained that she was getting blisters on her feet as she "shopped" for the other children memorialized in the temple. Mrs. Tanno thus bought her sandals, a scarf, and lipstick in preparation for attending a "party" with her deceased companions. Through such gifts, the daughter is gradually moved towards structural adulthood and into the stable community of the dead.

Several years ago, Mrs. Tanno decided not to give her daughter and spirit doll son-in-law a child doll of their own, as that would engender a new round of obligations, for the child itself might someday want a spirit bride. She thus, almost imperceptibly, began to step back, allowing a necessary separation between the living and the dead.<sup>7</sup>

Case Two: Recently, at an annual doll memorialization ceremony at Nishikōyasan, I encountered a somewhat more complicated case. Six months earlier, Kenji, the twenty-six-year-old son of Mrs. Morita, had died unexpectedly of a heart attack. The bereaved Mrs. Morita quickly dedicated a bride doll box. (Significantly, she took this action on the advice of her mother-in-law and an *itako* spirit medium.)

At the conclusion of the ceremony, Mrs. Morita took her son's memorial box down from the large temporary altar to refresh its offerings, and added new packages of undershirts and jockey shorts. She explained to me that now that Kenji was "married" to the spirit doll (who bears the same name as his living girlfriend) she, as his mother, feels a special obligation to wear his clothing whenever possible.

During the ceremony, Mrs. Morita wore her late son's favorite red sweatshirt as well as his watch, although it was far too big for her small wrist. Indeed, she recalled that a month earlier, a neighbor had seen her in the sweatshirt and

7. A more detailed account of this case is given in SCHATTSCHNEIDER 2001, pp. 860–62 and 869–71.

momentarily thought she had seen Kenji himself. In contrast to Mrs. Tanno, Mrs. Morita is reluctant to allow any distance to be established between her and her lost son. In explaining why she must wear Kenji's clothes, she told me, "I *am* Kenji."

Psychoanalyst Doi Takeo (1981) argues that in Japan, the birth of a son is profoundly empowering for women, giving them a highly valued capacity to act forcefully upon the world. In Mrs. Morita's case, Kenji's clothing would appear to have become a tangible manifestation of that empowering capacity. Instead of sending him on his way, she strives towards an imaginary fusion with her deceased son. In her words, "Every day without fail we go together, me and my son." Her tendency each day to dress up in her dead son's clothing has begun to trouble members of her family, and may suggest that the trauma of his death is being repeatedly, compulsively re-enacted.

Clearly, both mothers have been deeply affected by the double quality of the doll image, which represents absent persons while functioning as a living instantiation of those persons, or at least of significant aspects of those persons. Yet, the impact of this doubleness is strikingly different. Mrs. Tanno, who at some level understands that she is engaged in a set of representational processes, apprehends both proximity and distance between signifier and signified. Buying a doll child, she knows, would engender a corresponding set of ramifying obligations, binding her to the spirit couple. But Mrs. Morita has not yet achieved that sense of necessary distance between signifier and signified. She is pleased that she has been mistaken for her son Kenji. She cannot yet relinquish the immediate identification between herself and her dead son, who tangibly "lives" within the enshrined doll complex.

*The Face of Kōbō Daishi: Negotiating Affinity and Generation through the Image*

The potential of bride doll memorial dedication to renegotiate self-other relations in the context of the domestic developmental cycle are poignantly illustrated by another case, in which the presentation of a memorial doll allowed a larger family social drama to play out.

Several years after the death of an unmarried twenty-year-old man, Saitō Tsuyoshi, his extended family journeyed with a female spirit medium, Kudō Hisako from their home up to Entsūji temple at Osorezan, perhaps Japan's most prominent Sainokawara 賽の河原 (lit. banks of the underworld river Sai). Some months earlier, Kudō Hisako had transmitted to the family the dead youth's request for a bride doll, which they had purchased, and carried with them to Osorezan. The medium placed the doll in its case on the altar of the memorial hall, along with a photograph of the dead young man. The family spent considerable time gesturing toward the doll box and discussing how

beautiful the bride doll's delicate face looked, "just like a bride on her wedding day." They then participated in an extended Buddhist memorial service in which, the priest later explained, the miraculous power of Jizō had been activated within the bride doll; Jizō, in the form of the beautiful doll, would now serve as a loving companion and spiritual guide to the dead Tsuyoshi.

After the services, the medium led the family group in an hour-long reverential circuit through the rocky paths of Osorezan; they periodically prayed at designated spots and stooped to make small piles of stones, an action held to ease the predicament of dead children who, in the afterlife, strive to build miniature stupas in order to honor their families, only to see these piles repeatedly torn down by demons.

In front of a new large statue of Kōbō Daishi at the far end of the main rocky field, the medium paused, gazed up at the statue's monumental face, and began to chant.<sup>8</sup> Her voice suddenly changed pitch, and she began to speak in the voice of Tsuyoshi, to whom the bride doll had just been dedicated. After thanking his family for obtaining a beautiful bride for him, the young man then declared that there was someone else present with him. The medium's voice shifted into that of Tsuyoshi's deceased paternal grandfather, the father-in-law of Mrs. Saitō, the mother of the dead youth. The dead grandfather remonstrated with his daughter-in-law (Tsuyoshi's mother), with whom he had quarreled terribly in life, for not praying for him at the family *butsudan* (Buddhist memorial altar) during the years since his death. Insufficiently memorialized, he had been lingering around the house and causing her and her sisters to become ill. "Please forgive me," he pleaded, "and please pray for me to become *jōbutsu* (a Buddha)."

Crying profusely, Tsuyoshi's mother agreed that she would pray for her late father-in-law to achieve Buddhahood. The other family members joined in her pledge, and returned home convinced that their health problems would ease.

Among other things, this episode poignantly illustrates the frequent tendency, often observed in Japan and elsewhere, to mobilize the solidarity between alternate generations in order to defuse tension between adjacent generations: the father-in-law and daughter-in-law, for so long locked in cycles of anger and mutual recrimination, are reconciled through the figure of the dead grandson, whom was intimately bound to both of them when he was alive. For our purposes, it is striking that this renegotiation of kinship relations is achieved through a series of encounters with charged visual images, centered on human-made representations of the face. Over the course of the morning the family

8. Many northern Tohoku *kamisama* spirit mediums enter into communication with dead souls while praying in front of images of Kōbō Daishi, usually placed on their central altars in their homes and shrines.



party moved from the memorial hall, in which they were intensively oriented towards the face of miniature bride doll and the adjacent tiny photograph of the youth's face, to the six-meter-high statue outdoors. As she began praying, the medium looked intently up into the carved face of Kōbō Daishi, in which she seemed to discern some sort of hidden transformation. The séance might be thought of as a very early phrase in the gradual convergence between the dedicated bride doll and the face in the photograph, a progressive identification that is necessary for the memorialization of the youth's soul and for the ultimate restoration of order and peace to his house. Aided by the transformative powers of Jizō, incarnate in small and gargantuan figurines, the youth was now able to speak to his parents in a way that began to untie a central knot of the family's predicament, opening up a bridge to communication between his parents and grandfather, and encouraging the living to memorialize the resented dead patriarch. Appropriately, this critical reconciliation took place under the gaze of a statue of Kōbō Daishi, a saint renown as the maker of miraculous, animate Jizō statues that eased the sorrows of living and dead persons alike.

*"Distributed Personhood" and the Dynamics of Gradual Convergence*

These dynamics may be conceived of in term of Alfred Gell's discussion of "distributed personhood," the capacity of objects to be animated by overlapping, and often divergent qualities of persons and person-like capacities (GELL 1998; PINNEY and THOMAS 2001). Without proper memorialization, the unsettled dead person has a multifaceted existence, divided into divergent trajectories that may fleetingly, unsteadily, and disturbingly manifest themselves in a range of objects, locales, human bodies, animals or states of being. As a *muenbotoke* 無縁仏, an unquiet soul may occupy a house, or a part of relative's body or even a landscape feature, manifesting itself in dangerous, uncontrolled ways as a specter or affliction. The goal of proper memorialization is to move these divergent aspects of the deceased person—that would otherwise wander in a chaotic manner on the bank of the river between worlds—into a productive, contained field of social relations, and eventually to consolidate a substantial component of the person into a coherent singularity that can be subjected to measured, controlled passage into the other world.

Over time, at Kawakura, Nishikōyasan, and Osorezan, more and more aspects of the dead person come to rest in the dedicated doll itself. This process does not happen of its own accord. Repeated memorial services, scheduled rotations of the dolls through the chambers of the doll holding buildings, correct prayers, and offerings all help to cohere the late person within the confines of the glass box that holds the doll, the photograph, and associated memorabilia.

The state of affairs whereby doll comes to look like the dead person is thus a positive achievement, one in which many families take considerable pride and

from which they derive great solace. The convergence of doll and photograph, like all the processes of *kuyō*, needs to be achieved through dedicated human labor, repeatedly and regularly undertaken. Ultimately, this process culminates in the inter-related artifacts being reduced to complete sameness. On the final day of the annual Jizō festival at Kawakura, each deconsecrated doll and photograph are together consigned to a purifying fire, collectively reduced to smoke and ash. In such a way, priests explain, the soul of the dead is finally released from this world and may finally move towards Buddhahood.<sup>9</sup>

The contrast to Yasukuni shrine, where hundreds of memorial bride dolls have been dedicated since the 1980s to dead soldiers and sailors, is instructive. At Yasukuni, priests and lay worshippers emphasize, the doll faces do not change over time, and dolls are neither burned nor destroyed. After the initial dedication of the doll, family members are not permitted to make offerings directly to the dolls, in the form of clothing, food or drinks or anything else. (They may make subsequent offerings to the shrine as a whole, but these are reckoned non-specific offerings to all the *mikoto* or divinities enshrined at Yasukuni.) Sacrificed to the nation, the spirits of the dead have been, in principle at least, permanently separated from their families. From an orthodox, neo-nationalist Shinto perspective, the dead soldiers are not in a Buddhist state of flux and transmigration, but have apotheosized into national divinities, eternal and unalterable (NELSON 2003). As such, the faces of images dedicated to them should be equally fixed and constant.

### *Conclusion: The Ritual Efficacy of “Family Resemblances”*

In laying emphasis on “family resemblances” Wittgenstein holds that, rather than reducing any category to a singular common denominator, human kinship is a far more helpful model for grasping likeness among the seemingly disparate elements that nonetheless form an extended set or system. To this insight, we may add that aesthetically pleasing, human-made groupings of visual elements—through which apparent dissimilarities are repressed and ultimate likenesses are foregrounded—help strengthen the actual bonds of human kinship, among the living and between the living and the dead.

When first dedicated, each *hanayomeningyō* box in northern Tohoku presents a spectacle of fundamental gendered opposition between doll and photograph. This gender distinction at one level is comforting to the family, for it indicates the dead child has at long last attained a conjugal bond with an opposite sex partner

9. Ritual specialists are insistent that the photograph has to be destroyed along with the doll and other items in the glass box. At the summer 2003 festival at Kawakura I proposed preserving a striking, original photograph of a soldier from a doll box that was about to be burned, but the priests insisted that it would have been dangerous for all concerned not to burn the photograph along with the doll.

that he or she was denied in life. Yet this distinction is also, at a less overt level, troublesome, for it indicates that the dead child has not yet fully merged with Jizō, who is incarnate in the doll, and has not yet transcended his or her gender-specific mortal status. In learning over time how to apprehend subtle, overlapping correspondences between the facial features of the dedicated doll and the opposite-sex face discernible in the offered photograph, bereaved families come to sense a greater intimacy between the lost child and the lines of familial continuity and remembrance that are exemplified by Jizō, who transcends conventional distinctions of gender and ordinary existence. By gazing into the changing, absorptive face of the doll, that takes into itself all manner of difference, they are reassured of the ultimate capacity of the family itself to encompass all of its dispersed members, in this world and the other world.

In this sense, *hanayomeningyō* dedication evokes some of the paradoxes of conventional conjugality: founded on fundamental difference between its constitutive partners, a marriage nonetheless binds its partners, in principle at least, into a unified unit and propels them towards the common status of being parents. An unmarried dead person, deprived of an opposite-sex partner to whom he or she may be bound, runs the risk of being frozen in a perpetually static position. The ritual of *hanayomeiningyō* dedication, juxtaposing images that are simultaneously dead and alive, static yet transforming, effectively propels the lost soul back into motion, catalyzing a productive trajectory that will lead towards Buddhahood.

While we may hesitate to follow the Durkheimian reduction of the double power of images to the doubleness of human existence, there is thus clearly a potent affinity between the paradoxes of images and ongoing paradoxes of social life. The enigmatic multiplicity of relations possible between beholder and image are “good to think” with about the multiple orientations and role possibilities open to any social actor at any given moment. Hence, for example, the usefulness of a conventional bride doll in negotiating affinity, as an incoming bride is suspended between the structural role of outsider and the potential future role of ultimate insider. By presenting or receiving the doll, a bride simultaneously signals her subordinate position as daughter-in-law while looking forward to eventually occupying the honored mother-in-law position.

The uncanny qualities of images are especially useful in managing kinship relations between the living and the dead, as the living strive both for intimate connections to the lost and for productive separations between this world and the other world. In the case of spirit marriage in northern Tohoku, the living, animate qualities of the doll act as a kind of ritual magnet for the lost persona of the prematurely dead child. As the doll closely draws the dead soul into its dynamic penumbra, the child’s face becomes visibly manifest on the doll itself. The once formless, liminal lost soul is thus given tangible living presence in the other world and can, in principle, be apprehended by the living as gradually detaching itself from their realm. As the Saitō case suggests, this process may even be extended to other troubled dead

souls beyond the one being formally memorialized, easing them towards ultimate release and Buddhahood.

To be sure, the capacity of visual signs to constitute and reproduce proper kinship relations is by no means automatic or predetermined. As the case of Mrs. Morita reminds us, the double life of images can easily have unpredictable consequences, enabling unexpected forms of identification and projection, at times binding living and dead kin in potentially traumatic or pathological ways. “Family resemblances,” after all, are potentially limitless, and must be limited or repressed to some degree if sanity and family life are to continue.

The mysterious qualities of representational forms are not ends in themselves but are simply the building blocks of ritual practice, constantly incorporated into the ongoing bricolage of symbolic action, evoking and redressing the paradoxes and contradictions in the lives of persons and of collectivities. In the enigmatic life of images—and perhaps especially in the compelling faces of human-made images of the dead—we are offered powerful and productive glimpses, in Durkheim’s evocative phrase, of our own “obscure but intimate relations” with society. These glimpses are not, as we have seen, to be thought of as the orthodox Durkheimian apprehension of society as a discrete unit in toto. Rather, these glimpses are best to be understood as imaginative forays into a dense web of potential “family resemblances,” into the emerging social processes and symbolic forms that constitute a dynamic sociocultural order. By facing the dead and giving face to the dead, we come to recognize the dynamic, mutual constitution of self and other, person and society. Such acts have neither unitary causes nor referents, but are, rather, ongoing efforts to comprehend and resolve the enduring mysteries of social and cultural life.

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