

Family, Ancestor Worship and Young Adults: The Obon Festival in
Contemporary Japan

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Abstract

This thesis is an ethnographic work about young Japanese adults in their 20s and 30s and the Obon festival. It is based mainly on fieldwork conducted in Tokyo and Osaka during July and August 2019. The primary goal of this research is to explore how young Japanese adults view and participate in the Obon festival. Through this a better understanding of the interconnectedness of family and ancestor worship is possible. This exploration is achieved primarily through the use of participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Eleven interviews were conducted during the two-month period. How young adults view the festival varies greatly. Some view it as a very important time of the year while others do not care about it at all. Many factors such as work and school impact how young adults participate in the festival. The most influential of these factors in shaping how an individual views and participates in the festival is family.

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Introduction

Introduction:

Every year in Japan, millions of people travel back to their hometowns for one week in August. They do this because of the Obon festival which for most people in 2019 took place from the 13th to the 15th of August. The Obon festival is a major summer festival in Japan. It commemorates the dead or more accurately, one's ancestors. During the Obon period, people all over Japan participate in different ways on the festival with some going to large community festivals and others staying home and having a small celebration. This celebration, big or small, is to commemorate the return of their ancestors who come back home for a short period.

The Obon festival is very present in Japanese society appearing in popular media such as manga, anime, and movies. It also makes the news for reasons such as the transportation issues it causes. Despite this very present nature and yearly impactful occurrence, there has been limited exploration of the Obon festival in recent academic works. Many different institutions and ways of interacting in Japan are changing, for example, young workers' relationship with their work (Slater 2011). This raises the question of how the Obon festival is changing and in turn how family is also changing. This is because the Obon festival is part of the ancestor worship which historically has been an important practice in Japan. With many cities in Japan growing, and more people moving for work, how does the Obon festival, which causes people to return to their hometown, change? More specifically for this thesis, how is the festival potentially changing for the younger generation of workers or soon to be workers?

As the Obon festival continues to be so present as a summer event, the relationship that the younger generation has with it is a question that would be of interest to examine. In the coming introduction, I will lay out more specifically how I am choosing to examine the Obon festival and what are the main factors of my research in a practical sense. These include my research question, an abridged literature review, my research location, my methodology and my theoretical framework.

Research Problem:

The main research problem I will be examining is “How do Japanese people in their 20s and 30s think of and experience the Obon festival?”

The Obon festival is one of the major festivals that occur in Japan. Of these, Obon is the main festival in which people commemorate their ancestors. As it is about one's ancestors, the festival is an aspect of ancestor worship. Ancestor worship is the practice of commemorating and caring for one's family members who have passed away. It is not limited to immediate close family but also includes generation upon generation of deceased family. In order to participate, people usually go back to their hometowns. When this occurs varies depending on when their hometowns are celebrating the festival. This is because their ancestors and their family graves are located in their hometowns. It is believed that their ancestors will travel back to their family homes for the period of Obon.¹ This festival in Japan occurs during the summer months mainly in July or August. During this period, many people choose to travel home for the festival leading to transportation difficulties. Travelling back to hometowns as well as other travel during this period is a significant phenomenon due to the fact that more and more young adults move for

¹ There is some contention about where ancestors reside and where they visit during the festival.

school and work, with Tokyo being the main city people move to (Japan Today 2019a; Statistics Bureau of Japan 2018; Statistics Bureau of Japan 2019). Despite this yearly phenomenon, there have been limited amounts of English research done on the Obon festival and on how young adults interact with it.

The reason it is important to study this event is because currently it is still a major event in Japan and also because other works covering similar topics have demonstrated that events and cultural aspects such as the Obon festival are continuously changing. One such example is Smith's 1974 work on ancestor worship. Smith's book explores changes to ancestor worship in Japan, with a focus on Tokyo. The work revealed that individuals are changing their views on ancestor worship with fewer people thinking that it is an important practice to maintain. This relates to the Obon festival as it is an aspect of ancestor worship. Additionally, if individuals were caring less about ancestor worship already in 1974 it may suggest similar sentiments about Obon more than 20 years later. Despite this Obon still appears to be a major event in Japan.

Another work demonstrating how society in Japan is changing with an emphasis on younger people is Salter's 2012 chapter "Social Class and Social Identity in Postwar Japan", which examines how young workers are changing their relationships with their work. This study helps to demonstrate that the opinions and experiences of younger adults in Japan continue to change and that what these young adults value changes how they live their lives. This is important to note as Smith's work demonstrated that ancestor worship is changing and in combination with Slater's work it would suggest that young adults' views and opinions on the Obon festival presently could also be changing. This is due to the fact that it can be demonstrated that general opinions on ancestor worship have been changing and that young adults' views on other aspects of their lives have changed as well.

Works such as Allison's "Precarious Japan" also help to demonstrate that there are a variety of phenomena occurring in Japan that may affect how people live their lives. Some such topics that relate more to the Obon festival could be lonely deaths and suicide. What this does for my research problem is help to demonstrate that there are potential aspects of society that could influence how young adults view the Obon festival such as loneliness and individualism. These may potentially shape or change how somebody interacts with the festival.

Despite all of these potential changes and variation, there has been a limited amount of work in English conducted focusing on the Obon festival and even more so specifically looking at how young adults are interacting with it. This allows my research project to fill some of that gap by examining how people who are in their 20s and 30s do think of and experience the festival.

Literature Review:

In this literature review, I will provide information about themes such as religion, ancestor worship, funerary rites, death, family, and space. Many of these categories overlap in some way or other, and one main idea that is present throughout all of them is change. What I hope to do through this literature review is to provide information that is valuable for thinking about the Obon festival as well as to demonstrate the gap in knowledge within the English literature that my thesis aims to provide some information on.

Religion:

There are a wide variety of religious beliefs in Japan as well as a great deal of syncretism. However, the religion that is most linked to death, ancestor worship and the Obon festival is Buddhism. When thinking about Buddhism, one of the first things that many people in Japan will

think of is funerals and death (Covell 2008, 303). Buddhist priests are responsible for many aspects of death. These responsibilities include performing rituals such as giving the deceased a posthumous name and leading the family through the various steps conducted once a person dies (Nara 1995; Covell 2008; Suzuki 2000). Due to this, it is important to have some understanding of Buddhism and what is occurring to it prior to continuing to more specific aspects of it, such as ancestor worship and funerary rituals. One aspect of Buddhism that is especially pertinent for this thesis is the remembrance of the dead and becoming a Buddha (Smith 1974; Allison 2017). The role that Buddhism and its priests have in relation to death and death rites is undergoing a change as people, especially younger generations, are viewing Buddhism's role in death as less important due to a variety of reasons (Cooke 1974; Covell 2008). These reasons include believing that the process of death has become too commercialised and expensive with priests looking to profit more rather than caring about whom they are serving (Allison 2017; Cooke 1974; Covell 2008). Other examples of change from a more historical perspective demonstrate that Buddhism in Japan is not suddenly changing but rather has always been changing, such as specific sects that arise (Rambelli 2006). These changes are not limited solely to religious aspects but also to Buddhism's larger role in society, such as in politics and how people view the emperor (Fisker-Nielson 2012; Krämer 2015; Nakai 2006).

One important change occurring is that people appear to be associating themselves with the religion and its ideals less, leading to people not viewing it as appropriate or worth continuing (Cooke 1974, 19, 33; Covell 2008, 318-319). As a result of people associating themselves less with Buddhism, they are also participating less in rituals related to it, such as ancestor worship (Allsion 2017; Smith 1974). As there are different sects of Buddhism, the changes are also different between these groups and how people choose to participate such as

some being more secretive and isolated than others (Nakai 2006; Nara 1995; Suzuki 2000). As these changes in Buddhism emerge, problems that existed less before also emerge, such as people worrying about becoming “relationless Buddhas” as people die with no one to care for them in their afterlife (Allison 2017, 18). Of course, these problems have also led to changes as people try to create solutions such as developing collective groups that people can join to ensure that they are taken care of when they die (Allison 2017).

Religion in Japan and more specifically, Buddhism is a heavily studied subject with many people examining the changes that it has undergone. They also expand upon these changes to see what greater impacts these changes may have. What this type of research lacks, however, is the specific examination of how these broader religious changes have affected the Obon festival. When the Obon festival is touched upon in any of the works I will be covering, it is done very briefly in most cases.

Ancestor Worship:

This section will look at how ancestor worship in Japan has been studied with more of a focus on the Obon Festival. Ancestor worship is the act of remembering and caring for one's deceased ancestors. As mentioned, there are many variations in how people practice ancestor worship depending on their religious sect and their family. The primary source for information on ancestor worship is Smith's 1974 work "Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan". In this book, Smith explores many aspects of ancestor worship. He focuses on residents of Tokyo and examines how certain practices in ancestor worship are changing. Some of what is found is that the number of people participating in ancestor worship is declining, specifically with the younger generations who view the practice as less important than previously (Smith 1974). There is variation that is found depending on factors such as class and location. Individuals who may not

personally believe in ancestor worship may still maintain their family's practices and objects such as the altar as a way of demonstrating their family's prestige (Smith 1974). With the focus of the book more heavily on residents of Tokyo, there is more emphasis that this change and reduction in ancestor worship is more heavily seen in urban centres (Smith 1974). What is lacking in the study of ancestor worship is that there have been limited studies conducted on it since Smith's work. While ancestor worship is talked about, when discussing it, studies draw upon Smith's work and mainly provide information about ancestor worship prior to discussing some other aspect of death. Such is the case in Boret's (2014) work which examines how tree burials are emerging as an alternative burial method to cremation and family graves. What the current work and understanding of ancestor worship does provide, is the knowledge that ancestor worship and how people think of it has changed, and how people interact with it differs for different reasons (Smith 1974). Other more modern works that cover some aspects of ancestor worship include Kanai et al. 2020 and Inoue 2013. These works, while not as extensive as Smith's work, demonstrate similar findings with ancestor worship declining in popularity. Additionally, they also again demonstrate other changes such as the modernization of pictures and where pictures are placed in the home (I. Suzuki 2013).

As the Obon festival is an aspect of ancestor worship, it is mentioned in certain cases when people discuss ancestor worship. What is often said of the Obon festival is that it is one of the major festivals in Japan in which people go home to be with their family and that out of the major festivals it has the most emphasis on ancestor worship (Smith 1974). While in English there are not many examinations of the Obon festival, when it has been studied, what has been the focus is the relationship between the living and the spirits. While the Obon festival is for all ancestors, it is especially focused on those who have died since the last Obon festival (Kawakami

1988; Yahata and Yawata 1988). This is due to the fact that it is the first major festival since their death that is primarily focused on the spirits. These works demonstrate that the Obon festival signifies a change in relationship and role for many individuals in the family. One such as change is seen with the oldest member in the line of succession taking over the role of caring for the ancestors. However, they do not often examine larger changes to the festival itself (Kawakami 1988; Yahata and Yawata 1988). It is also important to note that the works on the Obon festival are focused more on rural areas rather than urban experiences of the festival.

There can be ancestor worship outside of one's family, more specifically regarding military dead whose spirits are commemorated and honoured (Nelson 2003). This type of remembrance or ancestor worship has a different role than regular ancestor worship, which is a very familial practice, whereas the remembrance of military dead can function as a way of unification, solace, and social memory (Nelson 2003).

Many works that are primarily focused on ancestor worship and the Obon festival are a bit dated with fewer works in English providing more up to date information on these topics. However, these older works do provide some indication of what changes may be occurring. The findings in these older works also do seem to be consistent with the newer works that have been produced. Therefore, they help to demonstrate that many changes occurring now have been occurring for a long period.

Funerary rituals:

In this section, what will be covered is a variety of funerary rituals in Japan and the exploration of how these rituals may be changing or have changed in the past. What this section helps provide is an understanding of other aspects of death that are potentially related to ancestor

worship or the Obon festival. It is important to address this as there may be parallels or potential suggestions of how changes may be occurring.

With death rituals in Japan there are different practices that can cover a wide range of instances, such as specific rituals that occur in order to commemorate the death of a pet as well as the death of objects like sewing needles (Ambros 2010; Kretschmer 2000). For pets, the original purpose of the ritual was done in order to protect oneself from the potential vengeance that the spirit of the pet may want (Ambros 2010). As pets have become more common and how people see their pets has changed, the ritual now focuses instead on remembering a friendly companion (Ambros 2010). For sewing needles, there is a ritual that focuses on providing final rites to it. Unlike the ritual for pets, this ritual is changing more as it is becoming less popular in most places, though in some locations there is an occasional resurgence for rituals such as this instance of the sewing needles (Kretschmer 2000). The reason people do participate in giving final rites to sewing needles and other objects comes from the idea that it is not only humans or animals that have spirits but that objects such as mountains, and tools have spirits too (Kretschmer 2000). These rituals help to reflect different ways rituals around death can change, and for what reasons, such as changing relationships.

There are also many rituals and practices involved in a human's death. For example, there are fourteen steps needed in order to properly take care of the deceased, the first being known as the last water and the last step being visitations and care of the grave (Kenney and Gilday 2000). What is important to note is that while there are many rituals and practices for death in Japan, many of them are undergoing changes. One example of a belief, and its related rituals changing, is focused on pollution caused by death. There appears to be less fear and importance placed on removing pollution from the body once a family member has died. More and more people are

skipping steps in burials related to that, especially as the funeral industry becomes more commercialised (Suzuki 2000). There are certain areas, however, especially in a more rural context, where pollution does seem to still be something of concern (Kim 2012). This difference in views helps to show that there can be differences due to change but also that changes that may occur in one context are not present in others.

Continuing on with the idea that individual's views and relationships can contribute to changes within the context of death is that there is evidence that people want funerals more tailored towards them or the deceased rather than a standard experience (Suzuki 2000). Some specific examples of this phenomenon are a rise in pre-funerals in which individuals are choosing to host a funeral while they are alive (Kawano 2004a). The individuals who choose to host a pre-funeral do it so that there is no need for a large funeral after death and so that they are able to control the ceremony more (Kawano 2004a). This is partly due to older individuals wanting to express their independence through the ceremony (Kawano 2004a). This type of ceremony or change is not universally liked, with some individuals thinking that it is an additional cost or burden. This is because some families will still conduct a large funeral despite the wishes of the elderly (Kawano 2004a). An additional example of changes in rituals and people's relationships with each other affecting these changes is that people are becoming less satisfied and less willing to participate in certain rituals or traditions. One such example is the *Koden* a practice of giving money to the family of the deceased (Tsuji 2006). More people are viewing this ritual as a waste of money and a forced commitment that causes them and their children too much hassle (Tsuji 2006). Additionally, new funerary rites and preparations are emerging due to new types of relationships that people may have, such as eternal memorials for people who have no traditional family graves to be buried in (Allsion 2017; Yasui 2003). Other

practices may become less common or desired as what they were originally purposed for becomes less common, such as death during childbirth (Allsion 2017; Yasui 2003).

All these rituals help to reflect the changing notions around funerary rites and traditions that are occurring with some people valuing different aspects more than others. They also help to reflect the importance of noticing shifting relationships that people have in their lives. Which will, in turn then affect how they view and conduct themselves around death.

Family:

Family is a topic in Japan that has been heavily researched. Aspects that have been examined range from the relationship that elderly individuals have with their families to the role of women. One aspect that again is common in many of the works that cover family is change. As Japan has an ageing population with more and more people needing care, there has been a shift in who is expected to care for them and how they are cared for (Kim et al. 2009; Long 2008; Platz 2011). The role surrounding the elderly and the role that the elderly have are both seeing change, but they are also having some aspects linger (Long 2008; Mirza 2016).

Women in Japan have also had their role drastically change with more and more choosing to work and to stay in workplaces delaying marriage (Hashimoto and Traphagan 2008; Mirza 2016; Tokuhiko 2010; White 2002). As women's roles have changed so has their desires on what they want from marriage and from life (Nakano 2011; White 2002). As a result, the age of marriage has increased, and the number of children being born has been reduced (Hashimoto and Traphagan 2008; Kumagai 2008; Ronald and Alexy 2011; White 2002).

The role of children and their relationship with their family has changed over time as well. Some of these changes include, of course, the reduced number, but also the amount of

resources placed into a child's life has been increasing (Hashimoto 2015; White 2002). Children's relationship with their parents is becoming less authoritarian and more friendly (Kumagai 2008; White 2011; Vogel and Vogel 2013). This is due to a variety of factors such as children experiencing an economic downturn and not believing in the idea that just working hard for the family and your job will lead to a successful life (Hashimoto and Traphagan 2008).

Many of these changes are also linked to changes to the family system and the reduction of the *Ie* system. The *Ie* system was a rigid family system that clearly laid out the roles and responsibilities of each family member, but that has become less and less present since the end of World War II (Hashimoto and Traphagan 2008; Ronald and Alexy 2011; White 2002).

It is important to note family and the changes occurring in families as ancestor worship and the Obon festival are linked to the family and how one learns and participates in these things is largely dependent on their family.

Space:

The final category in this literature review is space. This is because spaces can have an impact on how people act. Additionally, transportation between where a person lives and their hometown is a big aspect of the Obon festival in Japan. Cities in Japan are often shaped by their transportation systems with major hubs of activity being located near and around train stations (Chorus and Bertolini 2011). People, as well as the government, can choose to use space in certain ways to help foster certain ideas and how people live (Cheng et al. 200; Davidson 2013; Sorensen 2009; Sorensen et al. 2009). Certain locations such as cemeteries can act as locations that tie people to their community as their family is buried there, creating a sense of belonging,

though again people are finding new places or new ways of finding a sense of belonging (Allison 2017; Blackburn 2007; Kawano 2004b).

Within Japan, there is also the idea of *furusato* meaning hometown and native place though directly translating to old village (Creighton 1997; Robertson 1988). The idea of *furusato* is not just one of where you are from but has also a powerful idea behind it (Robertson 1988). The idea is partly about linking an individual's heart and mind to a location as well as creating a sense of nostalgia that makes a person desire to return home or in some cases feel at home in a new location or even feel a sense of nationalism (Creighton 1997; Greene 2016; Robertson 1988). This sense of belonging can lead people to desire to travel back to where they are from or to a place that they feel they have a connection with (Creighton 1997; Greene 2016). This location can act as a centre of relief from daily lives and a place of comfort (Greene 2016).

These works help to show the importance that travel and space can have for individuals in Japan and directly ties into the Obon festival as many individuals travel back to their hometowns for the festival.

Methodology:

I conducted my research during the months of July and August of 2019. During this time, I conducted eleven semi-structured interviews. I elected to use semi-structured interviews rather than structured or unstructured interviews. I believed that it was necessary to have certain themes to start the interviews such as the general topic of participation in the Obon festival. I also felt that it was important to be able to adapt and change certain topics or ask certain questions depending on what each of my interlocutors said which is why the semi-structured interview style was chosen (Bernard 2011).

My interlocutors were young Japanese adults living in Tokyo and Osaka. They were all in their 20s and 30s with the oldest being 38 years old and the youngest being 20 years old, though most of my interlocutors were in their 20s. These interlocutors varied in employment types and status as well as some of them being university students. They came from all around Japan with one being from Hokkaido and one being from Okinawa. The place in which most of my interlocutors (four) were actually from was Osaka though two of them were no longer living there. Through these interviews, I was able to gain an understanding of my interlocutors' perspectives on the Obon festival and what factors have impacted it.

My time in Japan was split between Tokyo and Osaka.² I first arrived in Tokyo, where I stayed until the end of July. I then relocated to Osaka for the month of August. These two locations are two of the largest cities in Japan. It is important to note the location in which I conducted my fieldwork as how the Obon festival is practiced varies from region to region, and there is also a distinction between rural and urban practices. I chose these locations as they were the two locations that would allow me the most potential access to interlocutors due to my prior connections. In order to find interlocutors to interview, I had initially planned on primarily using the snowball method (Bernard 2011). As I had existing connections in both of the cities who matched the age group of my study, I had hoped that they might be able to help me find more individuals. While through the snowball method, I was able to get one more interview outside of my pre-existing connections, most of my interviews were gathered outside of this method. The issue I had with the snowball method is that my target audience and pre-existing connections

² I went to one festival in Kyoto as recommended by one of my interlocutors.

were all relatively new workers or in their final years of university. Due to this, most of their friends were busy working or with school.

To get around this limit and find other interviews, I instead tried to go to events where I would be able to meet more Japanese people in the age group that I was interested in. To do this, I primarily started using an application called "Meet Up." "Meet Up" is an application and website that allows people to create groups and events for certain topics or themes. Most of the groups and events are open for anyone to join if you register beforehand. Due to this, I was able to find groups that were hosting events for language exchange or language exchange groups that were hosting events such as visiting parks or going out for food. Throughout my stay, I ended up going to a total of twenty different "Meet Up" events hosted by different groups. Many of the events I went to were language exchange ones due to my limited ability in Japanese. Through these events, I was able to find more people to interview, though some of them ended up falling through as well, due to factors such as the previously mentioned ones that limited the snowball method.

These events not only allowed me to find more people to interview but also allowed me to have more casual conversations with people both within the age group I was aiming to study and outside of it. These more casual conversations allowed me to find out more information that I had not considered or thought of myself originally. One such example was when I was talking to an older gentleman, and he asked me what I was doing in Japan. Once I answered, he then asked me to tell him what the Obon festival was and when it occurred. He then also mentioned that there was actually another date for Obon that not many people participate in. This occurred due to a calendar change, so there is actually a new Obon and an old Obon. One occurs in July and the other in August.

The timing of when I stayed in both cities was also dependent on my existing connections. I went to Tokyo in July and then went to Osaka in August. As mentioned, August is the month in which most places participate in the Obon festival. I chose to go to Osaka for the month when the festival was occurring because most of the individuals I initially knew in Japan were from Osaka or close by. As I was aiming to participate in the festival with some of my interlocutors, I thought my chances of being able to go with them would be higher if I went to where I knew more people. Additionally, some of my interlocutors that were living in Tokyo and were the reason I chose to go to Tokyo were originally from Osaka so they may have also ended up returning to Osaka in order to participate.

Where I conducted my interviews varied depending on where it was easiest for my interlocutors. Therefore, I held interviews at Starbucks, food courts, or other cafes throughout both cities. Despite the diversity of my interlocutors, I was able to find common themes and ideas which will be explored later in this thesis.

Aside from interviews and casual conversations, I had also planned on observing some of the Obon festivals that occur throughout Japan. Ideally, I would be able to make some of these observations into participant observation if given the opportunity (Bernard 2011). I went to seven separate festivals, three of which were done with interlocutors. Of these events, one occurred in Tokyo, five occurred in Osaka, and one occurred in Kyoto. The reason there was such a discrepancy of so many occurring in Osaka is because, as mentioned previously, while there are technically two Obons, most places only celebrate Obon in August, which is when I was in Osaka. I had also not originally known of the Obon in July. However, due to learning about the Obon in July and happening to see some advertisements while I was in Tokyo, I was able to find an Obon festival occurring in Tokyo while I was still there. The one instance of me going to

Kyoto for an Obon festival was due to a recommendation of one of my interlocutors. This festival was very different from the rest as it signaled the end of the Obon season in Kyoto and was a city-wide lighting of fire kanjis on mountains. However, it is very difficult to see all of the kanji that are lit unless you pay or gain access to taller buildings hosting viewing events. That being said, each of the festivals I went to was different from each other with the only really common occurrence being dancing, music and stalls.

Within each city, I went to different regions in order to conduct my fieldwork. For the various festivals, I went to many that were located at and around temples within the cities. Some also took place in public areas such as Namaba, a popular centre for activity in Osaka. Each of the festivals varied depending on which area of the city they were located in as each area had its own traditions and styles to conduct it in. This helps to demonstrate that even within one city, there can be a large amount of variation in how people participate in the festival. To find the festivals I was going to go to, I relied on advertisements, invitations, or recommendations by my interlocutors. For many of the events, I was able to find advertisements online, but for three of them, I relied on being told about, invited, or happening to see an advertisement while I was there. Despite having advertisements online when I told my interlocutors about them, they did not know of them.

Aside from the festivals, I also went to visit the Aoyama and Tanaka cemeteries in Tokyo in order to conduct observation at the cemeteries. However, these observations will not heavily feature in the thesis as they do not fit in the focus of the festivals as much as I would have liked initially.

For all of my interactions with my interlocutors I used verbal consent. I also sent them all a consent form prior to meeting and brought a physical copy to the interviews as well. All of my interlocutors were willing to have their interview voice recorded.

During my participant observation, I took pictures of the events that were occurring. Having these pictures allowed me to recall certain events more easily. Additionally, the pictures help to better convey what I am trying to describe because, rather than solely relying on my description of events, the reader is able also to match the descriptions with the pictures. None of the pictures in this thesis will be of my interlocutors though there will be other random people as the events I went to were filled with people, because the festivals are public events where anyone can go and participate.

Limitations in my methodology would primarily be not being able to speak Japanese. This lowers the number of people whom I could have potentially interviewed as well as forced the people whom I did interview to speak in their second language. This could potentially result in them not being able to express themselves in the manner that they wanted to. However, with this in mind, I do still think the information and the people I interviewed were able to convey their ideas and provided a wide range of information about my topic. Additionally, many of my interlocutors wanted to also practice their English, and many had already a high level of English. So ultimately, while there is room for improvement, I do not think this limitation ultimately hindered or harmed the study.

Theoretical framework:

For this thesis, I will be primarily using the framework provided by Hobsbawn (1983) in his work “The Invention of Tradition.”

The invention of tradition deals with the idea that certain traditions are not actually as old or traditional as they are made out to seem. Instead, these traditions have been developed by society more recently and tied back to the past to give them a sense of legitimacy and importance. These new traditions may have the purpose of improving or developing social cohesion, establish membership to a group, provide or legitimize institution and authority (9). These new traditions may also be a result of old traditions that have either failed or not covered enough desirable topics. They may also be attached to old traditions by taking from them in order to help create the idea that the new tradition is indeed an old aspect of society rather than a novel invention (6). These new traditions often appear during periods of social change and as mentioned help to fill gaps in which old traditions no longer fit such as when a society becomes more secular in nature (5, 11). These invented traditions are meant to be a set of practices that are most often shaped by rules that instill certain behaviours in order to provide repetition and help to create the illusion that the tradition is tied to the past.

Old traditions, as Hobsbawn (1983) describes, are not stagnant and have the ability to be changed. This adaptability is not an invention of a new tradition as the old tradition still has more historic roots (4-5). In some cases the old traditions are lost or stop being of importance as they are no longer deemed important by the society. This can in turn create instances of apparent revival or defense of what is deemed traditional and the emergence of new traditions from those that believe that traditions are being lost (7-8). Despite this what Hobsbawn describes as genuine old traditions do not need to be revived or invented (8). A difference that Hobsbawn finds between new and old traditions is that new traditions are often used alongside more vague ideas (his examples include loyalty, duty, school spirit) while old traditions are more specific in their

nature and goals (10). Another difference presented by Hobsbawn is that old traditions have a larger role and are more present in people's lives than new traditions are (11).

Hobsbawn (1983) also provides an explanation of the difference between what tradition is versus what a custom is. For Hobsbawn a custom is actions or events that occur. These can change quite rapidly and often, which in turn has an impact on traditions (2). Traditions on the other hand are what surrounds the custom (2-3). The example Hobsbawn provides is that the work judges do is a custom while their outfits such as robes and wigs are the tradition (3). These two things as Hobsbawn describes are deeply connected to each other with customs being able to change the tradition (3).

This idea of invention of traditions has also been built upon by anthropologists. One idea that is further fleshed out is the "reinvention of tradition". Oberholtzer (1995) discusses how certain old traditions can be drastically changed in order to fit new ways of thinking and fulfill new purposes while still having ties back to what makes them old. This builds upon Hobsbawn idea that old traditions that survive are adaptable. Oberholtzer looks at how dreamcatchers and the web shape of them come from old traditions but have now been changed to hold new meanings, that differ for different groups and individuals, but still tie back to some original meanings in the original old tradition.

Throughout this thesis I will not be arguing that the Obon festival is an invented tradition but rather I will demonstrate how the Obon festival is an old tradition that has been able to fulfill a needed function which in turn has helped it remain relevant and practiced within Japan despite changes to society that have occurred. Rather than being solely a festival about ancestor worship, the Obon festival has been adapted, so while still being about ancestor's worship for those that

still desire it to be, it also acts as a period of vacation and more emphasis has been placed on living family.

This thesis will demonstrate that while the Obon festival is an old tradition it has adapted alongside changes that have occurred to other factors such as family and work. Throughout the thesis I will demonstrate how the festival has gained new roles in Japan while still remaining an old tradition.

Outline of Thesis:

Including this introduction there will be three primary chapters and a conclusion. The first of the primary chapters is "What is a Japanese family? What is ancestor worship and the Obon festival?". This chapter can be broken down into two major parts. The first part contextualizes the Japanese family, providing information about its makeup and major factors that have caused it to change. The second half of the chapter contextualizes ancestor worship. It does this by providing information about important parts of ancestor worship such as who participates in it and how different people may go about it. These two sections are interconnected as ancestor worship is highly reliant on the family as will be demonstrated.

The second chapter is "The relationship between Family, The Individual and The Obon Festival". This chapter builds up from the first chapter as the Obon festival is an aspect of ancestor worship. This chapter is primarily ethnographic and explores what is the main factor that impacts how my interlocutors see and participate in the Obon festival. It examines how the family is the most important aspect in deciding what a person does during the Obon festival or what they wish to do.

The next chapter “Work, Leisure and other Obligations” is again primarily ethnographic. It looks at other factors aside from family that my interlocutors mentioned that impact how and if they participate in the Obon festival. Some of these other factors include work, vacation, space and obligation. These factors, while influential to people, do not influence their thinking around Obon as much as their family does.

These three chapters lead to the conclusion that for my interlocutors, family is the most influential aspect in their lives when it comes to the Obon festival. What my interlocutors think of the festival varies from person to person, but for each of them, their opinions and actions come primarily from how their family thinks and participates in it.

Chapter 1: What is a Japanese family? What is ancestor worship and the Obon festival?

This chapter will look at and examine changes in Japanese families and ancestor worship. Both of these aspects of Japanese society are continuously undergoing change. For this thesis, an understanding of these two aspects is important as they are both interrelated. Family determines how, who, and when people participate in ancestor worship, so changes in the family makeup and structure will create changes in ancestor worship. Additionally, as the Obon festival is directly part of ancestor's worship, changes that occur to one of these aspects will also likely change the Obon festival in some way.

The Japanese Family:

Introduction:

The Japanese family has been a heavily studied aspect of Japanese social life in many fields, including anthropology (Ronald and Alexy 2011, 3). One major period that has been studied is post World War II. This period is viewed as a period of rapid social change with aspects such as family, work, and school all undergoing change (Hashimoto and Traphagan 2008, 1). There have been changes to the population demographics, and also individuals are also thinking about families and themselves differently. One demographic change is due to the increased life expectancy and reduced number of births - there are more individuals over the age of 65 than there are individuals under the age of 14 (Hashimoto and Traphagan 2008, 1; Kanai et al. 2020, 157). Additionally, fewer Japanese are getting married, and more individuals are waiting longer to get married with the average age of marriage for women rising to 28 and the average age for men rising to almost 30 (Fukuda 2013, 107; Hashimoto and Traphagan 2008, 2;

Kumagai 2008, 31; Mirza 2016, 22; White 2002, 25). A reason for this is that individuals are preferring to maintain their individuality and avoid being married, with more and more individuals prioritising their own happiness over family (Hashimoto and Traphagan 2008, 2-3; Mirza 2016, 22). There are also similar changes occurring both for those who wish to get married and those who do not such as that both groups desire less hierarchical family relationships (Hashimoto and Traphagan 2008, 2).

The first section of the chapter is organised into five main topics. These sections are: The makeup of the Japanese family, Women's status and role in society, Changes to marriage and divorce, How children are viewed and cared for, and The relationship elderly individuals have with their Family and Society. These sections will help to provide some understanding of changes that have occurred to the Japanese family and how it exists in contemporary Japan.

The makeup of the Japanese family:

It is important to have an understanding of the family system in Japan and how it has changed. Prior to the end of World War II, the Japanese family operated on the *Ie* system. The *Ie* (which can directly translate into house or household) system is a family system that helps to denote the roles that each member of the family has. The *Ie* system or the "traditional Japanese family" is a patrilineal family system practised before World War II in Japan that prioritises succession and the higher statuses of men to women (Hashimoto and Traphagan 2008, 3-4; Inoue 2013, 123; Ronald and Alexy 2011, 3-4; White 2002, 6-8). This system was legalised by the Meiji government and made those deceased belong to the household unit, and also encouraged their worship by their descendants (Inoue 2013, 123; Kanai et al. 2020, 164).

More specifically, *Ie* can be thought of both: the individuals who make up a smaller part of a family and also the family (which includes branch families and ancestors) as a whole. It is a patrilineal system. This is because the system helps to delineate the hierarchy through age, and gender as well as highlight the difference between the main family and a branch family (Ronald and Alexy 2011, 1; White 2002, 6-7). This is done by placing more importance and power within the main household causing the branches to be subservient to it. The power and authority of the household resides in the family head (Kanai et al. 2020, 164). The primary goal or ideal of the system is, however, to keep families intact while also limiting potential conflict. This is done by clearly providing members of the household with different roles, responsibilities, and an order to follow (White 2002, 7). Women in this system work, in essence, for the prosperity and benefit of the male heads (White 2002, 68). Therefore, there is a prioritisation of males and of firstborns who will eventually become the head (Hashimoto and Traphagan 2008, 3; Ronald and Alexy 2011, 7; White 2002, 7-8). As mentioned, the *Ie* system is not only about the living members of the main family and branch families but it also extends into the past and future with everyone working towards a common goal of ensuring the families' success both in the present and in the future (Hashimoto and Traphagan 2008; Ronald and Alexy 2011). This system also encouraged and made three-generational houses common being made up by the head of the household, his parents and his children (White 2002, 9), which is due to the fact that one of the responsibilities the head has is to care for his parents. Alongside the *Ie* system, there is the *koeseki* which is a family registry. Prior to World War II due to the *Ie* system, each family only had one *koeseki* which was kept and controlled by the mainline of succession (White 2002, 68-69). The *Ie* system and the *koeseki* allowed for there to be a very clear hierarchy and structure to families all throughout Japan.

After World War II, however, the family system in Japan changed. This change in the legal family system was in response to American influence in Japan. The new government which was shaped by the Americans stopped the *Ie* system from being the legal code, and families began to reflect the nuclear family (Hashimoto and Traphagan 2008, 5). This was done by reducing the position of prominence of the emperor and expanding who could form families. The nuclear family, in turn, reduced the connectedness between large families (and ancestors) as each family ends and changes in one generation as children move out and spouses die (Inoue 2013, 127; Kanai et al. 2020, 164). One main reason for this is that the Americans thought the *Ie* system was something that harboured national and systemic loyalty to the emperor. Due to this change, there have been numerous other changes to the family structure in Japan since World War II, such as the reduction in the number of three-generation homes.

Another major shift away from the *Ie* system dominance was the change to the *koseki*, which essentially means the family registry. After World War II, instead of the *koseki* being exclusively tied to main families, each citizen had their own so new families were able to start separately from the main household (White 2002, 68-69). Despite these changes the *Ie* system is still present in some ways - it is in the background with fewer people explicitly thinking of it and organising things around it (Kanai et al. 2020, 165; White 2002, 11). This allows for people who are not the first in the line of succession to create their own families freely without being a branch to the main family. What this also helps to do is lower the prioritisation of the first son in the line of succession. There has been a rise of smaller families that focus on the nuclear family and less importance given to three-generation homes and maintaining the traditional families prosperity (Kanai et al. 2020, 157; Suzuki 1998, 179; White 2002, 11, 68-69). This is especially the case in major cities as people move.

One way in which the *Ie* system is still present is in some practices tied to ancestor worship as many of the practices are meant to be performed by the head of a family. However, family structures and views such as the nuclear family have led to the decline or change in such practices as the continuity of the family is less important to many and also more variability in individual roles is possible (Inoue 2013, 133). The reduction of the *Ie* system can also be linked to more freedom and new relationships being possible, especially for women (Kanai et al. 2020, 165).

Women's status and role in society:

Many of the changes that are occurring within Japan and more specifically within the family can be linked to changes to women's status in society. One example of this is the changing nature of women's role within a household and their ability to find jobs outside of it. The peak number of women in domestic roles after World War II was reached in 1975 and has been declining since (Hashimoto and Traphagan 2008, 8).

In continuation with the decline of women's domestic roles there have been changes in attitude and programs that have pushed women to join the labour force such as Prime Minister Abe's "Womenomics" (Coleman 2016, 6-7; Enomoto and Bublitz 2016, 72; Senda 2015, 25). However, there has also been a similar push for women to have children (Senda 2015, 47). One such example is when in the 2000s under Prime Minister Koizumi, structural reform was instituted (Hiroko 2011, 46). One key reform that was made during this time was a further emphasis for people to act as individuals in the job market (Hiroko 2011, 47). This reform, while meant for everybody, was especially targeted at women more heavily as it aimed to encourage a split breadwinner model for households (Hiroko 2011, 47) and for example encouraging women to continue working after childbirth and having more gender-equal workplaces (Senda 2015, 25;

White 2002, 33, 187). A more recent change in a similar vein done by Abe was trying to increase the capacity of daycare centres to allow more couples to both work and have children (Coleman 2016, 6-7; Enomoto and Bublitz 2016, 75). Some other reforms have been an increase in national holidays, these days aimed to encourage people to have children, care for the elderly, and fight overwork by placing importance on these and other family themes. Some such examples are Respect for the Elderly Day and Happy Monday (White 2002, 33, 187).

As mentioned there have been pushes for equality, changing gender roles, and wanting to encourage women to take roles that were originally occupied by men. However, there is also pressure and expectations that once a woman marries, she will quit her job to have children and raise them (Mirza 2016, 24) - there is still a strong tendency for men to be the sole or primary earners and women to become homemakers after marriage (Fukuda 2013, 112-113; Hashimoto and Traphagan 2008, 8-9). Women, therefore, while no longer having to try to fulfil the role the *Ie* system laid out, are still pressured to fit into more traditional roles, despite also being encouraged to work at least for a time. There is also, however, a growing number of women and men who are desiring dual-income households (Fukuda 2013, 113).

Women, therefore, are having more ability and encouragement to choose what they want to do. However, there are still many pressures that women face in terms of their role in the family. These changes to women's roles and what impact it has on the family could help to change the role they have in ancestor worship as women are able to support themselves and their family in a manner that was more originally reserved for men.

Changes to marriage and divorce:

Changes to marriage and divorce that have occurred post World War II and the shift away from the *Ie* system have allowed more choice in families and more freedom for the individual. One major impact of moving away from the *Ie* system is that it allows for more people to marry without the consent of parents (Tokuhiko 2010, 18-19). Politicians also began to stress the importance of equal and mutual respect, with spouses working together rather than placing the husband in front of the wife (Tokuhiko 2010, 18-19). These two examples of change have a very clear impact on the family as more individuals can marry and form new families and again create a new, more equal household.

As well as the fact that more people are waiting to get married there have been also other shifts in marriage. One major change to marriages is the type of marriages that are occurring. Marriage has shifted to being based on love rather than arranged marriages (Inoue-Smith. 2016, 85). By the 1970s, more people were getting married due to love rather than arranged marriage, and the number of love marriages continues to grow (Hashimoto and Traphagan 2008, 6; Tokuhiko 2010, 20). While there is an increase in the level of love marriages, people are also being selective in different ways. For example, rather than marrying someone they love, they may choose to marry someone they see as safe or desirable in another way, such as having a stable well-paying job (Inoue-Smith. 2016, 86; White 2002, 140-141). What women desire from marriage is seen to have shifted from what is called the “three highs” to instead the “three C’s” which are communicative, and cooperative with housework and childcare (Nakano 2011, 136).³ Other desires some women still have which relate to the three highs are men who have higher

³ The three highs are high salary, high social status, and being tall.

salaries and education status than themselves (Inoue-Smith. 2016, 87; Yu and Hertog 2018, 604).⁴ Other desires women have about marriage is hoping to avoid being solely responsible for caring for the home, children, and elderly (Mirza 2016, 26, 30). There is no lack of diversity in desires though, as some women, for instance, want to be able to stop working until their children are in school and then return to work (Inoue-Smith. 2016, 87). One major and general trend however is that more and more women are choosing to maintain their independence and not get married or delaying marriage as they become more educated and have more financial opportunities (Inoue-Smith. 2016, 91; Mirza 2016, 25). Regarding ancestor worship, there are still lingering aspects of the *Ie* system which can influence desires. For example, firstborn sons or only sons are considered less desirable for some women. This is because it is expected that the women will have more responsibility caring for their elderly parents as it is often the eldest son's wife who is made responsible for taking care of his parents (a tie over from the *Ie* system) (Yu and Hertog 2018, 590-591, 603-604).

Other changes marriage is undergoing (as well as the general society) include fewer people choosing to live with their parents, and less choosing to have children, with the birthrate falling to 1.29 in 2003 (Hashimoto and Traphagan 2008, 6; Ronald and Alexy 2011, 14). It has risen to 1.42 as of 2018 (World Bank 2018). It is important to note that having children is linked to being married. Births outside of marriage account for only 1-2% of births in Japan (Enomoto and Bublitz 2016, 72; Fukuda 2013, 108; Mirza 2016, 25). This small percentage is partly due to the occurrence of "shotgun marriages" which lowers the birthrate of those that are unmarried (Tokuhiro 2010, 16).⁵

⁴ The opposite is true for men's desire (Yu and Hertog 2018, 604).

⁵ Marriages that occur because of or are sped up due to the bride becoming pregnant.

Women can be seen as the main (though not only) driving force of the changes to the perception of marriages as they gained more access to education and opportunities which marriage could potentially hinder (Tokuhiko 2010, 21). Other phenomena that are occurring are with people who oppose different aspects of marriage or family in Japan. One example is the law that requires married people to have one surname. This has led to some couples getting “paper divorces” where a married couple will either not legally marry or would get divorced after marrying so both people can keep their last names (Hashimoto and Traphagan 2008, 6-7). Other such phenomenon have arisen due to the rise in divorce rates (Hashimoto and Traphagan 2008, 8). Such as a phenomenon is dubbed “Narita” in reference to the Narita airport in which couples would arrive after their honeymoon and get divorced (White 2002, 87). Despite this phenomenon, there are arguments for both quicker divorces being more common or that the longer a marriage lasts, the more likely it is that there will be a divorce (Fuess 2004, 156). There are however other studies that show that while there is a larger amount of people getting divorced later in life, there are still more divorces that occur after only a short duration (Kumagai 2008, 61). Additionally, there is an increased likelihood of divorce if the couple does not have children (Fuess 2004, 156). The divorce rate is not as high as in America but when compared to most European countries, it is at a similar level (Fuess 2004, 144; White 2002, 88). Like many western societies, it appears that one in three marriages in Japan will end in divorce (Ronald and Alexy 2011, 15).

Marriage is now seen much more as a choice rather than an obligation (Fukuda 2013, 107; White 2002, 124). Laws helped equality in Japanese marriages, making it possible for both women and men to seek a divorce after World War II (Fuess 2004, 147). In regard to children and divorce, there has been a shift from men getting custody of their sons to that of mothers

being more likely to gain custody of children regardless of the child's gender (Fuess 2004, 156-157). A common reason for divorce more presently is due to economic factors that may cause tensions within families, and this is also one reason why people hesitate to marry (Kumagai 2008, 58-59), as both parties may stress and be concerned over the ability to support children and their families (Kumagai 2008, 58-59). While there have been many changes on views regarding what a marriage should be and when to get married, most people, including women, wish to marry (Mirza 2016, 28; Tokuhiko 2010, 23). This wish or desire to marry can be for a variety of reasons such as stability, security or even just that it is seen to be normal. So rather than marriage becoming something that is forgotten or disregarded it is more that the expectations and wants from marriage have changed (Kumagai 2008, 35; Nakano 2011, 132-133; Tokuhiko 2010, 24-25, 27).

Less marriage and birthrates affect ancestor worship directly as there are more limited amounts of people to care for the ancestor. Additionally, there is a smaller chance of a family continuing in a way that can support ancestor worship as structured by the *Ie* system. Especially, as mentioned, women may choose to marry people that will not require them to take on extra responsibilities, or they themselves may be more responsible for their family's ancestors.

How children are viewed and cared for:

Within Japanese family's mothers and their children tend to have a powerful bond, especially compared to children and their fathers. Fathers additionally have also begun to lose their more authoritarian role (Coleman 2016, 9; Kumagai 2008, 18-19; Vogel and Vogel 2013, 10-11). Mothers are expected to be very present in the child's life, especially in the child's first three years of life in order to educate them as well as care for them (Coleman 2016, 8; Mirza 2016, 29). How children are raised and what role they have in the family can potentially impact

ancestor worship. This is because there may be changes in what parents think their children need to take on and ancestor worship may be either put to the side or increased depending on each family.

One concern that the government had and still has is the aforementioned reduction to the number of children people are having. Because of this, there has been a push to make families more equal (Nakano 2011, 140; Hiroko 2011, 51-53). The government has encouraged men to help out at home as well as improve the notion that anyone could be a worker and breadwinner (Enomoto and Bublitz 2016, 74; Nakano 2011, 140; Hiroko 2011, 51-53). This push hoped to encourage more people, especially women, to get married and have kids as they would not be forced to be only a home caretaker and could maintain more of their independence (Nakano 2011, 140; Hiroko 2011, 51-53).

While for some having a child is still tied to success, there are fewer chances to have one due to factors like work, and childcare problems like limited amounts of daycare (White 2002, 25; Yamamoto 2016, 178). With those couples who do choose to or can have children, there is more emphasis on having only one child. This is done in order to properly care for the child financially as well as to allow both partners to maintain their careers if they so choose (Enomoto and Bublitz 2016, 72; White 2002, 25-26). This has led to a more equal sharing of roles within the house, especially if the women chooses to continue working (White 2002, 26). There is pressure, however, from the government and others, to have more than one child (Coleman 2016, 14; White 2002, 27), so much so that there has been a development of “babinomics” (Coleman 2016, 14). A concern with having children or more than one child is, as stated before, partly the economic necessities of having a child but also because of the limited amount of availability of options for childcare with nurseries being extremely difficult to get into (White 2002, 31;

Yamamoto 2016, 178). These institutions are seen as very beneficial to the child and family (Mirza 2016, 30). There has been a shift in attitudes of babysitters or nannies being more acceptable though still not that common (Coleman 2016, 18; White 2002, 31). In a sense, the Japanese family could also be seen to have shifted around to be child centric. This refers to the fact that quite often the family's money, time and other factors are structured around the child and in hopes to help them succeed (White 2002, 100-102). This child centeredness also seems to play a role in the fewer number of children in families as families want to focus their resources (Coleman 2016, 18; White 2002, 103). These costs and worries have led Prime Minister Abe to attempt to lower the cost for parents and make child-raising cheaper (Coleman 2016, 16).

Television programs and movies examine different social phenomenon occurring in Japan. Some programs encourage certain behaviours and look at things outside of the norm such as "Poka Poka" and "Hush!" one of which follows a gay man (Dasgupta 2015, 17; White 2002, 4). The idea is that changes and shifts in the families are seen and commented upon by mainstream media with people commenting and highlighting the shifts, effects, and the ways the family is changing. An example that has been examined quite heavily that relates to the transition from a hierarchal nuclear family which is then impacted by changes in work and relationships between family members is "Tokyo Sonata" (Dasgupta 2015, 14). In this movie, the father who is a middle-management salary man loses his job and is unable to find a similar position and instead has to work as a cleaner (Dasgupta 2015, 14). Despite lying to his family about his job to try to maintain the norm, he begins to lose his authority with his sons becoming more independent. As a result, his sons and his wife must form new relationships with each other which are more reflective of their new roles rather than the hierarchal relationship they had previously (Dasgupta 2015, 16-17).

These changes to family, like the smaller family sizes and fewer children being born, can impact ancestor worship heavily. For example, if a family has only one child, and the child is a girl, following the *Ie* system, the family would have to adopt a son or have their daughter marry a second son. This is because if she marries a first son, there would be no one to carry on caring for the family's ancestors. Additionally, rather than placing so much importance on the elderly and the family head, instead the child now has a more important and valued position.

The relationship elderly individuals have with their family and society:

Changes to the role of elderly people and how they interact with their family could have implications on ancestor worship as there are fewer clear ties between generations. Additionally, as it is usually the job of the elderly to pass on the ways to conduct ancestor worship, there may be less transmission and less desire to learn.

Japan has an ageing population. With the aforementioned decline in births, Japan faces many difficulties in how to deal with the number of citizens over 60 years of age (Kumagai 2010, 582). While many of the elderly in Japan try to be self-sufficient, traditionally, the *Ie* system would have had the eldest son and his wife care for them (Long 2008, 137; Platz 2011, 254), though due to gender roles, the role of caring for the parents would fall mainly on the wife (Kumagai 2010, 604). This "traditional" way of care, however, began to be problematic as more and more people began to have extended lives. Though the elderly in Japan have had positions of honour and esteem, there has been a shift to remove them from their position of prominence and instead see them as potential burdens (Kumagai 2008, 107-108). This change in status is at least partially due to the declining birthrate and higher life expectancy creating a problem of how and who will support the elderly (Kumagai 2008, 108-110). This change in status has also led or might be partly because of a sharp decline in cohabitation with their children (Kumagai 2008,

115-116; Kumagai 2010, 604). It has also led to more elderly remaining in the workforce for longer, especially older men (Kumagai 2008, 116-118).

Old age in Japan is now seen as a social problem as there are fewer people able to care for the elderly despite their rising numbers. This lack of care is partly due to more women staying in the workforce as well as there just being fewer people able to care for their family (Long 2008, 140), though again, there is pressure for women to leave the workforce and care for the elderly (Mirza 2016, 24). This has prompted the government to create programs to help care for the elderly. Everyone over the age of forty pays into these programs even if you do not make use of all of the services provided (Long, 2008 140-142). Examples of these programs are an increase in nursing homes as well as home nurses (Long 2008, 142). Along with these new systems, there are also other members in the family who can potentially act as caregivers though the wife is still often playing a major role. It is now more and more common to see spouses, sons, or daughters act as caregivers when other options are not available (Long 2008, 143), rather than rely on the traditional *Ie* system of determining who will care for the parents as they age. Now it is more common for this to depend on proximity. This has given rise to the idea of the elderly parents "living apart together" where they live separately and independently as much as they can but get support and help from their children and networks who live close by when they need aid (Platz 2011, 267-268). Additionally, there has been a push by the government to re-establish three-generation households (Mirza 2016, 24).

There is some concern with the idea of home nurses and other changes in caregivers as in a sense, you are taking a potential caregiver of someone else to be your own's family caregiver (Long 2008, 143). There are, of course, other systems such as shared caregiving where rather than one person in the family being the primary caregiver it is more of an equally shared

responsibility (Long 2008, 149). An issue that arises from this shift and non-traditional caregiving is seen often because of other tie overs such as husbands not being able to properly care for the elderly or have the knowledge of the house to provide skilled enough care (Long 2008, 151). However, the stigma against nursing homes is shrinking, and they are becoming more popular and accepted forms of care (Kim et al. 2009, 67-68). Nursing homes appear to have had a positive effect on the elderly who live in them, allowing them to have more positive relationships (Kim et al. 2009, 67). With the emergence of the internet and other forms of quick and easy communication, it has helped to maintain elderly Japanese people's ability to communicate with their families and grandchildren especially (Kumagai 2008, 119-120).

This portion of the chapter aimed to provide some context of what is influencing the Japanese family and provide some understanding of how the Japanese family currently exists. Though, as I have hopefully demonstrated, the family is constantly changing and there is not one standard that is truly applicable to the whole country.

Ancestor worship:

In this second section, I will look more at ancestor worship and how it is changing in Japan. This is important because the Obon festival is part of ancestor worship, so general changes to customs will likely have an impact on the festival as well. This includes more material aspects as well like the days in which people practice ancestor worship such as the Obon festival. In Japan there is a belief that every person has a soul/spirit that can become detached from the body (Smith 1974, 39). Ancestor worship in Japan has been seen to exist in some form or another since as early as the seventh century CE (Smith 1974, 211). This, of course, does not mean that it has existed in the same way or has had the same meaning. It does help to demonstrate though that ancestor worship was a significant social institution in Japan. Ancestor

worship acts as a reciprocal system where both the dead and the living care for one another through one's lineage (Kanai et al. 2020, 2020). However, the importance and belief in ancestor worship has been declining since the end of World War II (Kanai 2020, 151). One can also note that currently, about 51% of Japanese believe in life after death (Mathews 2013, 39). This does not mean, however, that all 51% believe in ancestor worship. However, those who do believe in life after death did often cite Buddhist belief as a reason why they believe, so Buddhism still has an effect on how individuals' view death (Mathews 2013, 29-40). Additionally, individuals also want to treat death as an extension of life. They may treat their deceased loved ones as though they are alive remembering them in new ways and how they were when they died (Kanai et al. 2020, 166; H. Suzuki 2013b, 228; I. Suzuki 2013, 155). It is also important to note that while Buddhism is considered the religion of death in Japan, Japanese religion is very syncretic being made up of numerous religions (Roemer 2009, 300).

Who participates in ancestor worship:

Ancestor worship is tied to the household system and is meant to be propagated and continued by the household (Inoue 2013, 214; Kanai et al. 2020, 152). The head of the household is expected to maintain the grave and care for the ancestors. They do this by cleaning the grave and paying the fees to the temple (the cost of tablets and goods also are seen to reflect the respect one has for their ancestors) as well as other rituals involving the ancestors (Boret 2014, 11). Due to the *Ie* system the head of the household's eldest son is supposed to be the successor who will take over the duties of caring for the ancestors (Boret 2014, 11; Suzuki 2000, 30). Though the successor is the primary caregiver and usually the one who receives the tablets and altar, anyone can worship the ancestors (Smith 1974, 217). Similarly, if a person purchases land with graves on them, they are expected to care for the graves (Smith 1974, 44). These duties, the grave and

other aspects like the altar and offerings (often a family meal is done as an offering) are meant to help maintain household unity as well as helping to show the status and importance of the family (Boret 2014, 12; Smith 1974, 40; Suzuki 2000, 31-32).

In regard to who is participating, or leading ancestor worship and the rites related to it often it is primarily the head of the household alongside their spouse. The next generation will start to participate more heavily when they become the head of the family (Smith 1974, 116, 119). In families where there is no male heir, a male can be brought into the family through marriage or through adoption. He is then expected to care for the ancestors of his adopted family, though now the percentage of families who will not adopt for this reason has risen to 57% in 2013 from 16% in 1953 (Kanai et al. 2020, 159; Smith 1974, 165). Since the late twentieth century, fewer people are likely to participate in ancestor worship or believe in it which seems linked to the level of education, though some may continue the worship due to external pressures (Smith 1974, 116-118). This is also linked to the willingness and relationship that the deceased had with their family - people who have more attachment or a strong relationship with the living are more likely to receive worship (Suzuki 1998, 174-175, 184). Changes in belief and relationships also create new ways of remembering loved ones that may not need the typical ancestor worship methods, for example scattering of ashes (Inoue 2013, 128-130; Kanai et al. 2020, 165; Kawano 2004b, 237; Suzuki 1998, 184; H.Suzuki 2013b, 227; I.Suzuki 2013, 144).⁶ Similarly, the idea that one only truly dies when everyone who loved and cared for them dies is emerging (H.Suzuki 2013b, 229). Changes in how pictures are used demonstrate these new remembrance or worshipping practices as pictures originally occupied a temporary role at altars.

⁶ People also express being more concerned about being remembered themselves rather than believing in ancestors and being concerned their descendants will participate in ancestor worship (Mathews 2013, 41-42).

Now individuals talk to and move pictures of their loved ones throughout the house as well as including individuals or pets that may not have been included in typical ancestor worship (I.Suzuki 2013, 144-145, 149).⁷ Though ancestor worship has national days, most often, children will learn of their ancestors and the custom of ancestor worship from their grandmothers rather than from school (Traphagan 2003, 135). If she has already died or does not live with them, then there is a gap in who teaches them which is sometimes filled by a parent (often the mother) (Smith 1974, 120-121). In rural areas, it seems to be especially true that the grandmother is the primary one teaching and encouraging ancestor worship (Traphagan 2003, 135). In contrast, in cities, parents play more of a role if they themselves participate (Smith 1974, 122). Another difference is that it appears that families that are considered white collar also have a higher amount of participation and veneration for ancestors when compared to blue-collar families (Smith 1974, 122).

There have been many changes to ancestor worship, and many people have seemingly stopped participating in one way or another. The Obon festival and ancestor worship are still important in some way as seen for example because the former emperor of Japan visited his father's grave during the Obon season to tell him of his upcoming abdication (Japan Today 2019b). One can also see that changes within families change who teaches and how people learn about the festival.

The role of spirits and their interactions with people:

Spirits can be beneficial, or they can cause trouble for the living (Smith 1974, 40). Often a spirit is problematic, and steps must be taken to remove or keep the spirit separate from the

⁷ Offerings, prayers, and conversations also take place where the pictures are located. The location of pictures may also demonstrate which of the deceased the person was closer to (I. Suzuki 2013 149-151).

household. These problems can occur if the person has recently died, and the proper rituals have not been fully completed (Smith 1974, 41). As such, until the first Obon festival after the person died, their spirit may be a risk or danger for their family (Inoue 2013, 123; Smith 1974, 41). Some of these risks may be the possession of objects or animals and causing misfortune. Balance is important between the living family and the spirits of their ancestors as they both create and need the other to survive. This is because, without the ancestors, the family would not be there but without the family believing the ancestors cease to be (Suzuki 1998, 184).

After people die, it is believed that they eventually will become Buddhas. It is possible for people not to become Buddhas or be cared for as ancestors. Such is the case with children, couples who do not have children, unmarried people, as well as people who did have initial care but now their family has stopped caring for the ancestor (Boret 2014, 13; Smith 1974, 44). If a person becomes an unrelated spirit (a spirit without a connection to the living world) right after their death, there is no way for them to change and stop being an unrelated spirit. However those who became an unrelated spirit after death because their family stopped their care of ancestors can become Buddhas if their family starts to care for them again (Boret 2014, 13). Unrelated spirits can be a danger to people and society. They may even need to be pacified or exorcised on occasion. For some, the thought of becoming an unrelated spirit is the worst possible outcome for their life (Boret 2014, 14; Smith 1974, 40). If a family stops caring for their ancestors, as previously mentioned, it is possible for the spirits to wander. These spirits will look for comfort and food and may take possession of newly dead people, animal, or other objects (Smith 1974, 42). Unlike other forms of Buddhism, Japanese Buddhism requires one to die in order to become a Buddha as it is not possible to achieve that state in life (others may become gods or both Buddhas and gods after death) (Smith 1974, 50-51). One example of people who become gods

after death are soldiers who die fighting for Japan who become national gods (Smith 1974, 52). Ancestors do not need to be reborn as they have the role of being a protector of their descendants (Kanai et al. 2020, 153; Inoue 2013, 214; Smith 1974, 54).

Where ancestor and spirits who are not wandering reside is something that is unclear, as people may believe that they exist at the grave, at home or in another location such as in mountains or in rivers (Smith 1974, 63-64). It would appear however that spirits should not reside primarily in graves or houses as during the Obon festival it is believed that spirits are called back to one of these locations (Smith 1974, 63). There are also concepts of paradise and punishment that are determined by how one conducted oneself in life (Smith 1974, 63). Wherever the ancestors or spirits do reside though, it is thought that they can always be contacted through the household altar as they are the family's protector (Smith 1974, 67-68).

By the end of the Obon, the newly deceased spirit is thought to cut its ties more permanently with the world of the living (Smith 1974, 102; Suzuki 2000, 48-49). Spirits of the newly dead, as mentioned previously, are considered more dangerous than the ancestral spirits which is another reason why Obon is more focused on caring for the new spirits (Smith 1974, 103).

As one can see the care of spirits depends deeply upon the family. Due to this, depending on what one's family's beliefs are, spirits of ancestors may play a large, minor or no role at all in an individual's life. If the family does believe, however, there are considerations that the individual and their family must take into account in order to maintain the family's relationship with the spirits such as the Obon festival. Changes to beliefs will affect how the family and the individuals function. On the other hand, the family and individuals, have also to actively

maintain the status quo that has been established if they want the family and its relationship with their ancestors to remain the same.

Ancestor worship rituals and practices:

Why people choose to pray and care for ancestors is an important topic to address. Once again, much like many of the previously mentioned topics, there are numerous reasons why someone may choose to pray. Common reasons are to make sure the spirits are peaceful, not causing harm and also to ask for help and request that prosperity comes to the household (Smith 1974, 123). Other reasons may include doing it out of obligation or just out of respect.

It is also important to note that the manner of caring for the dead can vary from place to place so there is no orthodox or standard ritual or practice that everyone will do (Smith 1974, 70-71). Despite the variance of rituals that may be present, the primary goal of all of the rituals is to make sure the spirit rests peacefully and moves from just being a dead spirit to an ancestor spirit (Smith 1974, 72). One more fairly common idea is that the spirit begins its journey to become an ancestor spirit at the conclusion of the first Obon festival after the death of the individual (Smith 1974, 72).

The manner of ancestor worship and the grave system has undergone many changes recently (Boret 2014, 10). Ancestral or what is often regarded as traditional style graves and practices occur at Buddhist temples as the religion of death in Japan is Buddhism (Boret 2014, 10-11; Suzuki 2000, 172). However, many families' relationships with Buddhist priests and temples are becoming worse as people view the cost as too high and are not forming relationships with the priests (Allison 2017, 17; Suzuki 1998 182; Suzuki 2000, 170).⁸

⁸ Similarly, there is also some reduction in the communality of funerals as they have been commercialised (H. Suzuki 2013a, 110-111).

Additionally, as new family structures are formed, some are not able or allowed to get graves in Buddhist temples as it does not seem like they will be able to be maintained by a family in perpetuity (Kanai et al. 2020, 165). This is due to the fact that some of these new families lack a clear line of succession or are not large enough.

Other changes include live funerals or celebration of life events, which allow the person to control and participate in the ceremony, and then just have a small funeral once they do die (Inoue 2013, 124; Kanai et al. 2020, 160; Kawano 2004a, 156; H. Suzuki 2013a, 103,109). These events can act as somewhat replacements for ancestor worship as they can place the celebrant on a pedestal and in a sense deify them when they are alive and are able to control their approach to death (H. Suzuki 2013a, 114, 120).

Some more common practices of ancestor worship include the deceased members of the family becoming Buddhas and receiving new names (the length of the name also reflects status and reflects that change in status) (Boret 2014, 13). Prior to becoming an ancestor and a Buddha, there are a variety of steps that have to occur first. *Sōsai* (can be directly translated as funerals and ceremonial occasions) is the term that encompasses all of these rituals and steps in the process (Inoue 2013, 123). One of the steps is that the spirit of the deceased wanders their family house for 49 days before their cremated remains are placed in the ancestral family grave (Boret 2014, 12-13; Kenney and Gilday 2000, 171-173; Smith 1974, 92). During this period of waiting the living family is supposed to go to their family grave every seven days. This action is supposed to make the recently deceased individual rest in peace (Boret 2014, 12; Kenney and Gilday 2000, 171-173; Smith 1974, 92). After this, the spirit of the deceased is believed to no longer be in or visit the living world, aside from special occasions such as the Obon festival (Boret 2014, 13).

There are a series of rituals and visitations to the grave that are expected to be done after a person dies. These begin the first year of death and last until the fiftieth year, though these special visits are not expected yearly but only on certain years such as the thirty third for example (Boret 2014, 13). However, the thirty-third year is often used as the final memorial service by many families as by then it is likely someone else will have died, and rituals for the newly deceased will have to be started (Smith 1974, 96). Families also come together at certain times of the year to go to and care for the ancestors such as the aforementioned Obon festival but also other important periods such as New Years (Boret 2014, 13). Some of these aspects are changing with more importance being placed on remembering and celebrating recently deceased family members prior to the completion of their deification (I. Suzuki 2013, 155).

There are also rituals conducted for spirits by temples and religious organisations. One such example is exorcisms. Some temples also perform rituals (*segaki*) to help care for wandering spirits after Obon, but in contrast to Obon, these rituals are not as eventful and are done in darkness (Smith 1974, 42-43).⁹ This type of ritual may also occur at certain locations, such as the site of a natural disaster where people died (Smith 1974, 43). While the rituals and practices of death are tied to Buddhism which has the concept of rebirth, it appears that there is no way to get rid of the problem of wandering spirits fully and permanently but it is only possible to please them temporarily (Smith 1974, 48).

Ancestor worships has been undergoing significant changes since as early as the 1970s (not that it was stagnant prior to that) such as the aforementioned movement away from memorial tablets to having pictures of the deceased instead (Boret 2014, 14; I. Suzuki 2013,

⁹ *Segaki* meaning to give to the hungry ghost (Smith 1974, 42).

141). Other changes include that people are choosing to remember people and participate in ancestor worship, more due to the closeness of the relationship and having had a bond with the deceased, rather than due to familial responsibility (Inoue 2013, 126; Suzuki 1998, 171, 173; Boret 2014, 14-15). This is in contrast to the older idea that even people who may be considered evil were still supposed to be cared for and given a proper burial (Smith 1974, 44-45). There are certain rules and procedures by which family members receive tablets and to determine which group is meant to maintain and care for the ancestors. However, some of these rules are ignored by certain individuals. For example, when people marry into another family, they are expected to care for their new family's ancestors. However, there are often cases of people ignoring the standard expectations when they have a close relationship with an individual, or when they think they need to care for a person in death (Inoue 2013, 126; Kanai et al. 2020, 166; Smith 1974, 184-186). So instead of focusing on the new family's ancestors, they continue to care for or start caring for people outside of their new family. Some ways people do this is by making a new tablet or memorial picture for the person in question (Inoue 2013, 126; Kanai et al. 2020, 166; Smith 1974, 184-186). For some, this may cause problems as they believe that if there is more than one memorial tablet, it might lead to the spirits being confused during periods such as Obon (Smith 1974, 186).¹⁰

The location where rituals primarily take place are at cemeteries within cemeteries. The rituals occur primarily at family graves, though single person graves are becoming more common and certain phenomenon like double graves also exist (Smith 1974, 74-75; Suzuki 2000, 35).¹¹ Family graves and the worship at them is also decreasing due to the nuclear family

¹⁰ There are also ways to make a clear distinction between copies of tablets, so the spirit does not get confused (Smith 1974, 186).

¹¹ Double graves occur when a person will have one grave in a cemetery but also have a grave in another often less accessible area.

structure. This is because less importance is placed on succession and maintaining a long lineage. This, in turn, reduces the need for a family grave and the need to maintain and pay for one (Inoue 2013, 127). These changes have caused some not to expect their descendants to participate in ancestor worship and care for the dead (Kanai et al. 2020, 152). Again, though, there is variance as most people have some sort of memorial tablet or picture for the people who die in their family and also still give them posthumous names (Smith 1974, 78-79).¹² Posthumous names vary in nature, but a general rule is that the more complicated the name is, the greater the respect or importance of the person, though it also depends on how much money the family pays (Smith 1974, 84; Suzuki 2000 169-170).¹³ Often memorial tablets and pictures are kept on a domestic altar that can be found in Japanese homes. In some cases, the altars may have their rooms but more commonly they are in a cabinet that varies in size and style (Smith 1974, 88). These tablets are eventually supposed to be removed and disposed of as the person becomes an ancestor spirit, but often tablets and pictures are kept instead (Smith 1974, 97-98). This transition of becoming an ancestor spirit is often around thirty years after their death (Suzuki 2000, 36). At the altars, it is common to keep incense as well as keeping objects of importance near them like diplomas (Smith 1974, 89). At these altars, offerings may be made such as giving food and drinks as well as other things like the previously mentioned incense and flowers (Smith 1974, 90-91, 98). A trend that is occurring is a reduction in size and expenditure for altars or the lack of them altogether. This is true, especially in more urban areas due to people having less income or just not believing in religion or ancestors (Kanai et al. 2020, 164; Smith 1974, 89, 105-107). However, people who do not believe but still have disposable income may maintain and keep

¹² Priests give posthumous names.

¹³ This has led to more disillusion with the system as people see priests as taking money from them (Suzuki 2000, 170).

their altar as it is also a sign of wealth (Smith 1974, 89). There are various reasons why people may not have an altar or memorial tablets such as changing their religion, though sometimes the practice of ancestor worship survives religious change (Smith 1974, 152). Other reasons can include moving to a new house or being a branch family as well as people just not wanting to continue the practice as mentioned earlier (Smith 1974, 156-157; I. Suzuki 2013, 141, 143). Additionally, with the rise of pictures to replace tablets, it is possible to place the pictures in numerous locations and place those pictures which mean more to you in better locations around the house (I. Suzuki 2013, 143-144).

There are events throughout the year where people remember and care for their ancestors. Specifically, these large celebrations are New Years, Obon and the Vernal and Autumnal Equinoxes (Smith 1974, 98; Suzuki 2000, 48). The largest and most elaborate of these in regard to ancestor worship is the Obon festival (Smith 1974, 99). During this event, many practices occur such as cleaning the family grave, hanging lanterns, and the building of cucumber horses and eggplant bulls.¹⁴ While a nationally recognised event, not everyone gets a holiday from work, though many jobs do give time off. For those whose jobs do not give time off automatically, many do request time off work, and as a result, numerous people travel back to their hometowns or go on a vacation. Still, these all vary from place to place with every family choosing how to participate (Smith 1974, 99-101). There is evidence that much like other practices of ancestor worship, there has been a decline in how many people are going to the festival and participating in Obon (Smith 1974, 101). During Obon the primary spirit or deceased

¹⁴ The cucumber horse is supposed to aid the families' spirits in getting to the place of the celebration quicker as horses are fast. The Eggplant bull is strong and slow so it is meant to help the spirits get back to the spirit world safely but also leave slower and linger with their family for longer.

person who receives the most attention from their relatives are the newly dead as it is believed that ancestors come back to the home for the period of Obon (Smith 1974, 101-102).

There are many reasons why an individual may end up participating in aspects of ancestor worship even if they do not believe in ancestors. One such reason that may cause someone to pray and honour their ancestors is the feeling of repaying a debt or feelings of guilt or love that the person feels that they owe or did not give enough of while the deceased was alive (Smith 1974, 131-133). In a sense, though, Japanese ancestor worship is not the act of praying *for* the ancestor but of praying *to* the ancestor (Suzuki 2000, 33; I. Suzuki 2013, 154). Ancestors, however, are not usually expected to make direct changes or interventions in people's lives. Hence, when people ask or pray to them, it is usually in a more general sense (Smith 1974, 127). During certain times of the year, however, someone may ask for more specific help like before an exam or if someone has an illness (Smith 1974, 141). There are also times when people may just pray to the ancestors that they are closer to in order to update them and reassure them that they are fine, such as before a wedding, so the spirits can be happy and not worry (Smith 197, 142-143). While ancestors are thought to care and want the family to thrive they are not solely givers of blessings. They may also provide warnings or punishments if they do not believe their household is behaving itself, even with extreme cases in which they cause death (Smith 1974, 123-127). There is inequality for ancestors and spirits that reside in the *Ie* system. This inequality may not be visible to someone just looking at the altar and tablets, but certain members, often based on age or sex, may be prayed to more or held in higher regard (Smith 1974, 128-129).

Why and how an individual participates in ancestor worship often comes down to family. The changes that have occurred to the practices of ancestor worship have come often due to changes to family structure. As families and relationships within families change, there will

continue to be changes in ancestor worship. One can clearly see this on the way pictures have been used in ancestor worship. There are some areas in which practices will continue to remain similar, though in these cases it still requires the family to make an effort to keep things the same for whatever reason they have decided to do so.

I will now try to provide a brief general description of the Obon festival. More specific descriptions of the festivals I attended can be found in the annex. In general, a public Obon festival involves music and dancing. It is generally located near or at a Buddhist temple. The dancing occurs in a circle around a stage area where there are musicians and lead dancers. Around the temple or inside there are stalls where people are selling food, drinks, toys and hosting games. This event usually occurs in the evening and last a few days.

Private Obon celebrations or practices can vary widely. They can occur at home, or at family graves. They can include praying, bringing offerings such as food and drink as well as additional events such as lighting a fire to jump over or making the aforementioned cucumber horses and eggplant bulls. This type of celebrations can also be a multiday affair. They can involve people travelling back to their hometown and having a large family gathering.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this chapter has aimed to provide context on the makeup of the Japanese family and ancestor worship. More specifically, the chapter has provided information about the relationship between the family and ancestor worship showing that changes occurring to one will have an impact on the other. At the core of this chapter, it is important to see that changes to family will impact how ancestor worship exists. There will then often be changes to ancestor worship that will often reflect the family changes. This is true whether it is the larger family

structure or just individual relationships between the members of a family. As the main focus of the thesis is how individuals relate to the Obon festival, I have also provided information on how the Obon festival is situated within ancestor worship. By providing context to both of these things, the reader should be more equipped to understand their relationship as it is found in my more ethnographic research.

Chapter 2: The relationship between Family, The Individual and The

Obon Festival

Introduction:

In this chapter, I will be examining how family shapes an individual's experience of the Obon festival. The Obon festival is a yearly summer festival that is an aspect of ancestor worship. Like the rest of ancestor worship, it heavily depends on one's family as examined in the previous chapter. Therefore, in this chapter, I will discuss how family has shaped the experience of my interlocutors. I do this through the use of ethnographic data. In doing so, I will try to show how family influences the Obon festival, which can be seen through the participation, practices, and individuals themselves.

A core aspect of the Obon festival is remembering and celebrating your family's ancestors. However, while the idea of ancestors will be present to some degree, this chapter will focus on the living family of my interlocutors. The data for this section was gathered through interviews, casual conversations, as well as observations done at instances of the Obon festivals I attended. This chapter will have four main sections. The first section will explore how people learn about the Obon festival. The second will be how my interlocutors and their family participate in or do not participate in the festival and the reasons why. The third section will look at how important my interlocutors feel the festival is to them and to Japan. The final section will be about how my interlocutors view their future with the Obon festival.

How people learn about the Obon festival:

I was attending the Obon festival (Figure 1) at Joko-Ji in the town of Yao, Osaka on August 24th, 2019. While I was watching the dancing a young couple and their kid came to the large tree I was sitting on and sat down in a different part of it. They were all dressed in modern clothing opposed to the more traditional clothing (Yukata) some other people were sporting. They had been visiting the other parts of the festival as could be seen from the shaved ice ball (kakigōri) that they were sharing. They began to watch the dancing as well. However, once there was a song change, the woman got excited and went to join in on the dance. At first, she tried to get her son to come with her but he did not want to as he was preoccupied with eating the shaved ice ball. The woman went dancing and once she had done a full lap of the dance circle, her son noticed her and ran to join her. They held hands with the child mainly just walking beside her but also attempting to follow along with some of the steps. The mother still followed the dance though was more restricted physically, but she still maintained her previous enthusiasm. The child periodically ran back to the father and back to the mother. Throughout the time they were at the festival, the man took pictures of both the woman dancing alone and when the kid decided to join her in the circle.



(Figure 1: Dancing at the Joko-ji Obon festival.)

This type of scene is not rare to see. At the multiple Obon festivals which I attended, there were similar occurrences. Many parents brought their children to the festival and had them dance with them or partake in other parts of the festivals. Both parents and other attendees were encouraging everyone, including children, to learn and participate in the dancing. This encouragement and the attempt by families to get their children to be involved in the festival were similar to the stories told by many of my interlocutors. My interlocutors recalled that they did small dances with friends, at school, or just at the festival when their family took them to them. This encouragement does not stop at only dancing though, with both my key interlocutors and other people that I had the chance to talk to, mentioning different activities related to the festival that they were encouraged to do by their family when they were younger. Some examples of this include carrying a miniature version of a drum, singing karaoke, as well as going to the family grave. Through this scene and my interviews, it is clear that for many people, including foreigners, the Obon festivals are open and welcoming. This kind of encouragement serves to help introduce and teach children about key practices involved in the Obon festival. These examples also help to show the effort that some families do in order to continue and or introduce practices related to the Obon festival to their children.

These examples help to demonstrate the importance of family in the Obon festival and how family tries to encourage and include their children in the festival. Despite this encouragement by family, this does not necessarily translate in the child participating and caring about the Obon festival as they age. A variety of reasons can be the cause, such as work and school.¹⁵ Overall though, a common reason is that the family and the child may not continue to care about the festival or actively encourage participation. Instead, other aspects of life are seen

¹⁵ Some of these reasons will be explored more in the next chapter.

as more important such as just visiting family and spending time with each other at home rather than going to the festival or participating in other Obon related activities.

All of my interlocutors, whether they care about the festival or not, answered that family is where they learnt about the Obon festival. When I asked about school most said that school never covered the Obon festival. Some of my interlocutors mentioned that teachers would ask what they were planning on doing for it since they received a break from school - however this was not a common occurrence for them. These responses again help to show that family and the Obon festival are heavily linked together. Without family, a person would have very limited opportunities to learn about the festival unless they sought out the information themselves. It again shows that it is primarily up to the family as a unit to put in the effort to continue their own traditions related to the festival.

The relationship between my interlocutors, their family and the Obon festival helps to demonstrate ideas and characteristics of traditions that Hobsbawn (1983) suggests some traditions have. The relationships help to demonstrate how the traditions are learnt and conveyed. These instances of teaching both from family and others, at the public instance of the festival, demonstrate both social cohesion and socialisation as the public festival brings together families and communities. These two attributes that are highlighted by Hobsbawn when discussing traditions (9-10). The Obon festival acts as a way to both maintain relationships for those who continue to participate in it due to their families but also potentially to build new ones as others can join in and form relationships with other attendees. Additionally, rather than solely focusing on ancestor worship, the festival is important for other aspects such as the living family which helps to demonstrate how it can still be relevant and adaptable if needed. The variety of ways that my interlocutors mentioned how they learned of the festival, for example from drumming or

karaoke, also demonstrate the variety of ways people can learn and participate in the festival demonstrating that there is not a strict set of rules which people have to learn or need to be able to participate in the festival.

How the family of my interlocutors participate in the Obon festival:

Many of my interlocutors participated in the Obon festival in some way when they were a child. However, many of them have now stopped participating in the festival. They do not think about the festival very much or care about it. This section of the chapter will examine how my interlocutors have participated in the festival as well as what changes may have occurred to their participation and why.

One of my key interlocutors, Toga-san, who I both interviewed and attended a local festival with, was not originally going to go to the festival until she knew I was coming to Japan to study the festival. As a child, Toga-san did attend the festival, participating in various aspects such as dancing, as well as children versions of drum carrying. However, once Toga-san talked to me about the festival, she mentioned that she could not remember the last time that she had gone to the festival. Toga-san not participating in the festival despite participating as a child was not an act against the wishes of her family. It was not even due to another reason, such as work or school. Instead, Toga-san and most of her family had just stopped attending. Toga-san and her family were not alone in this regard as not only had many of my interlocutors stopped attending the festival but so had their parents. Midoriya-san also mentioned when I went to a festival with him that he had not gone to any type of festival, Obon or other, since he was in high school. In regard to the Obon festival, this is despite the fact that for many people it is quite easy to get time off of work during the festival period. These instances help to show the changing importance of the Obon festival that can occur as well as the effort needed to continue to participate. While

these individual occurrences do not show what is occurring to the festival as a whole they do help to show how a tradition can stop being important to certain groups of people. These instances would suggest that the tradition of Obon may be dying as many of my interlocutors are no longer attending the public portion of it and neither are their families. The festival's traditional role within ancestor worship and society is therefore no longer serving the same purpose as it once had for these groups of people.

Some of my interlocutors' views and participation of the festival is somewhat of a mixture of participating but also not participating. My interlocutor Rumi-san, for example, said that she does not believe in the festival or ancestors. Despite this, she does go to her grandmothers during the festival. She also participates in the Obon practices that her family does. She mentioned going to her family grave and bringing flowers because that is what her grandmother wants. Another interlocutor Midoriya-san mentioned that despite him and his family not believing in ancestors or being religious, he said that if his family ever tells him to do something, he will do what they are asking. These previous explanations help to demonstrate that rather than one's personal beliefs, often, the family decides on how, if at all, an individual will participate in the festival. These examples show what role and how the Obon festival as a tradition exists currently and how it is able to change. While for some they stop thinking of it entirely, for others the tradition has changed and acts in a different way while still having aspects that were present before such as the importance of family and being able to see them again.

It is also important to note that some of my other interlocutors both believe and think the festival is important. Some of these individuals participate in it with their families almost every year. This includes travelling back to their hometowns and going to visit graves. These instances help to show that the Obon festival can have influence and be important in an individual's life.

However, again the family is still present in these instances and a big reason why these individuals hold these beliefs, and this will be explored more within the chapter. Some of my other interlocutors who do want to participate in it, have cited reasons why they are unable or choose not to participate in the festival for a year. I will talk more about these reasons both in this chapter and the next.

There are many ways for a person to participate or not participate in the Obon festival. However, how a person ends up choosing to interact or not interact with the festival often comes down to what their family decides to do. What their family decides to do can often go against what the individual may personally choose to believe or fully want to do. A question I asked all of my key interlocutors was, “has how you participate in the Obon festival changed from how your parents or grandparents have participated?”. The majority of the interlocutors answered this inquiry by stating that, as far as they were concerned, how they have participated in the festival was the same way that their parents and grandparents have participated with no major changes occurring. This, of course, is not meant to make families or the festival itself sound like an authoritarian institution in which individuals have no free will or say in the matter. The families of my interlocutors do not force their children to participate in any specific way. Instead, it seems like you often just participate in the same way as the rest of your family as that is how you grew up. I asked my interlocutors if they thought that individualism or being outside what would be considered mainstream Japanese society would impact an individual’s participation in the festival. My interlocutors responded that, as long as you have or maintain your relationship with your family, you would participate or not participate depending on your family: *“So Obon is really it's deeply connected to the family so because we, we think the relationship between family is the most important, so that's why we tend to participate in Obon festival.”* This quote from my

interview with Yaoyorozu-san helps to show the interconnectedness between family and the festival. It also shows the overall importance that family can have in people's lives.

This is not to say that families cannot and do not exert pressure on certain individuals to participate. For example, if a woman marries into a family that participates, then she may have to participate. As my interlocutor, Rumi-san said, "*...but if I get married to Japanese man, and his mother or his parents told me to go there maybe I would go.*" These instances help to show the complex nature of how the family shapes the relationship someone has with the Obon festival. This is again due to the interconnectedness of the festival and the family. As family is very important, a family can essentially coerce someone into participating even when they have not previously. This would be because although they do not personally believe or think the festival is important, if the family does, they essentially have to participate as their family expects them to. Additionally, what Rumi-san said helps to show how a family may maintain their Obon practices by teaching and incorporating new family members into them.

One thing to note is that as my interlocutors were in their 20s and 30s, they may have different perspectives than older generations. As mentioned in the previous chapter, many families only teach the successor about the ancestors. Additionally, fully learning how to care for the ancestors occurs as the individual starts taking on the role of the head of the family. Other individuals and younger members may learn parts of ancestor worship but may not have to learn as much as the new head in most cases if the family is still following the *Ie* system. Two of my male interlocutors Bakugo-san and Midoriya-san are both in their 20s. Therefore, their families may have yet to teach them about their expected future roles. Todoroki-san, who is in his late 30s, is the head of his family. He wants to participate in the festival and care for his ancestors. So, he thus serves as an example of someone who has been taught and accepts his role in regard

to the festival. For my female interlocutors, as a few of them mentioned, they might learn and participate depending on whom they marry. If that individual is the successor or an only child, they will have a higher chance of needing to learn more about ancestors. They may also end up learning more if they themselves are thought to be the successor and or are the only child of their family. These factors are potential tie overs from the *Ie* system that families may still follow.

An example of how people participate or do not participate in the festival can be seen in an experience I had during one of my participant observation periods with Toga-san. A few days before we were going to go to the festival closer to where she lives, Toga-san contacted me, asking if it would be all right if her mother also came to the festival. Toga-san said that her mom wanted to come as she too had not been to the festival in many years. I met Toga-san and her mother at a train station close to where they live. We then went to where Toga-san's father had parked the car so he could drive us closer to the temple where the festival was taking place. He, however, did not stay for the festival. Both Toga-san and her mother were not originally going to go the festival and felt no obligation to do so which is also shown by Toga-san's father who was fine just dropping people off and leaving to do his own thing.

Another point to note from this festival and interlocutor in particular, is that Toga-san told me to wear a yukata to the festival as it would be a good experience and fun to do (Figure 2). However, when I asked if she would also be wearing a yukata, she gave me multiple reasons

why she was not going to do it. One was that it is too much work and that the festival is not special to them as they had gone to it so many times. This interaction shows that families, as well as children who use to participate in the festival, are no longer doing it, and it is not just one individual but large portions of the family. This instance also shows how the festival can change in meaning for a family and an individual, going from a festival they participated in, to something that is not important to them at all.



(Figure 2: Marlon in a yukata.)

Despite this, the festival was also an excellent example of how family teaches each other in real-time about the Obon festival. As I was with Toga-san and her mother on that occasion, I would ask Toga-san about certain aspects of the festival. One example of this was when I asked what was the meaning behind the different objects that were adorning the large drums



(Figure 3: Drums with different adornments on their sides)

(Figure 3) or what the songs the different towns participating in the festival were singing meant. In the instances that Toga-san did not know the answer, she would turn to her mother and ask for

clarification. Often her mother would then have the answer and explain it to us. However, on some occasions, her mother would also not be sure of the answer. One such time was when I asked why the drumming groups were going in different directions after their performance. Luckily at this point, her grandfather, who is still involved in the festival, had joined us. Since he was with us at this moment, Toga-san's mother asked him, and he provided answers to us.¹⁶

This experience helps to show that within families, there can be differences in knowledge and experience. It also helps to show that family's experiences are connected to each other. Toga-san and her family, aside from her grandfather, participated and stopped participating in the festival together. Additionally, Toga-san's knowledge is limited compared to both her mother and grandfather whom both seem to have chosen or not seen the need to fully explain or ingrain their knowledge of the festival to her. Similarly, in other works about ancestor worship, older generations have chosen not to teach or continue certain practices. This is because they wish to allow their children to focus on themselves and not to worry about ancestor worship (Kawano 2004a; Kawano 2004b). Additionally, they may also change how they are participating so it becomes more suitable for them and their family (Kawano 2004a; Kawano 2004b). Toga-san's grandfather also acts as an example of someone who had a position to control more of how the family participates in the Obon festival but for whatever reason decided that the rest of his family did not need to participate or care about the festival. This shows that it is possible for individuals to do something differently than their family. Toga-san's family shows both the continuation of how people view the festival and changes to the festival from generation to generation, which is

¹⁶ The answer was just that the drums left in the direction of where the town they were from was.

seen as the change from her grandfather to her mother and the continuation from Toga-san's parents to her.

As mentioned, my interlocutors are not forced to go along with or believe what their family decides. Family is just very influential in an individual's life when thinking about the Obon festival. Within families, the tradition of the Obon festival can change from one generation to another, depending on whether or not they decide to pass down traditions or decide to change how they participate in the festival. This can be due to a variety of reasons such as the ones mentioned by Kawano (2004a, 2004b) and my interlocutors. As demonstrated by my data, a person's family and how their family participates in the Obon festival both currently and in the past helps to indicate how my interlocutors will view and participate in it. How the family participates can act as a link to the past as the family chooses to maintain the practices. The family has also the influence though to sever this connection, which can change how people view and use the tradition.

The fact that the Obon festival is an old tradition tied to ancestor worship does not seem to be a large factor in the decision making of my interlocutors on whether they will participate in the tradition or not. Instead, they participate or do not participate based on what their families have taught them. In some cases, this is by seeing the festival as a way to see family but for others it does not really mean anything. While there are still aspects of ancestor worship such as the public festival often occurring at temples and private ancestor worships, the festival, for even those of my interlocutors who do believe in ancestors, has adapted to act as a way of escaping work and going home to see family or take time off depending on what their family has taught them. For families that do care about ancestor worship the festival still fulfills its new role as Rumi-san says:

"I really like Japanese traditional things it seem disappear these days, so I think I feel sad to that these kind of traditional things are decreasing, but as for me, Obon festival is just like praying for my ancestors, but I don't personally believe in religion or ghost, so I don't need to go there. I think the important thing is just enjoying the moment with family so for me Obon festival is just together with whole family and spend time with together."

Even in the cases in which families do hold the festival in very high regard how they celebrate it would again come down to the family. There is a wide variety in the way each family can celebrate, which can be impacted by many things like location, work, and desires of certain individuals. Ultimately though, each family will have their own slight variations to practices and will influence the members of the family to participate in these different ways.

These examples of participation also help to demonstrate the continuity that the festival has within most of the families of my interlocutors. There were two instances of change to how the family of my interlocutors participated. In these instances, it is clear that the family decided the change. Once this decision was made, it was then followed on by my interlocutors. These being the instances of Toga-san and Bakugo-san. Toga-san being the aforementioned shift in that her grandfather participates, but she does not. Bakugo-san's case will be explored more shortly.

The importance of the Obon festival to my interlocutors:

I was interviewing people in their 20s and 30s. Out of these only Todoroki-san had children of his own. Despite not being able to attend the festival himself, he mentioned that his wife was taking his two kids to the festival to participate. He wished he could go with them:

"I think it's important, but recently I don't have much time to do it. Actually, my family, my wife and son do it, but ya I think it is quite important I just didn't have enough time to care about it."

This quote helps to show that the festival can still be important to certain people even if they cannot participate in it. Bakugo-san is another one of my interlocutors who thinks the festival

and ancestors are important. Bakugo-san mentioned that he believes that ancestors are important and should be respected and remembered for what they did for the country.

“Actually I want to respect the ancestor because Japan is like loser country in the World War II, but it developed so rapidly and so strongly in that period so I, this Japan is made by from the ancestors, so I want to make the importance of the ancestors, and also I want to make importance of the traditional way, traditional festival, ya.”

Bakugo-san also mentioned that he prays to his ancestors every day due to his respect for his ancestors even after moving.

Bakugo-san: ya ya ya like that. Pray sometimes

Marlon: So, you do that?

Bakugo-san: yes, yes, yes

Marlon: and that's just in your family's house or?

Bakugo-san: yes yes

Marlon: and that hasn't changed from moving from the countryside to Tokyo?

Bakugo-san: Actually, when it comes to story it didn't change, I don't change because even in my house there is one big this equipment, I don't know how to explain.¹⁷

Marlon: ya

Bakugo-san: and I pray every single day so

Marlon: every day?

Bakugo-san: ya it's not changing ya ya

This interview segment shows that not only does Bakugo-san think that the festival and that his ancestors are important but also that the act of ancestor worship plays a significant part in his life. His respect for his ancestors is so great that he makes it a habit to take time out of every day to pay his respect.

Interestingly despite how much he cares about his ancestors and also for the Obon festival, Bakugo-san has not participated in the festival since he and his parents moved to Tokyo. He moved when he was fourteen years old, he turned twenty-three in 2019. While he expressed a desire to participate in the festival, he mentioned that his friends do not do it and his parents do

¹⁷ Equipment refers to the altar.

not participate in it now either. For him to participate in the festival, it would require his parents to decide to participate in it again, despite personally caring and wishing to do the festival. This again shows how a family can change and influence how a person can think about ancestors but also if they participate in the festival. It does also show again, however, that people can have different views than their family but still follow the practice of their family.

A way that the Obon festival can be important both to ancestor worship as a whole and to an individual can be seen in my interview with Asui-san.

"Marlon: so, do you think it's important for the ancestors as well, or the is living family the only reason?"

Asui-san: yes, also we can see the connection with our family and our old ancestors

Marlon: ok

Asui-san: because we don't have much opportunity to think like that right

Marlon: ya ya

Asui-san: during Obon, though only once a year but at least we can think about ancestors like that."

This segment of Asui-san's interview helps to show that the Obon festival can serve a practical purpose for those who do care about ancestors and family but are otherwise too busy to participate in ancestor worship throughout the year.

Other interlocutors like Yayorozu-san, Ashido-san and Hagakure-san also care heavily about the festival trying to participate every year. However, interlocutors like Toga-san they do not care about the festival itself. They do not view the festival as important at all. Instead, she thinks the festival is only important on an individual basis with Toga-san saying:

"like people who really like, enjoy, like people who join the carry the things the taiko (a large drum) I think they are very interested in the festival and they are, they have motivation to do that, but like for some people they don't care at all, so it really depends on people I think."

This quote helps to demonstrate that some individuals do not care about the festival at all and think that it is important at a very individual level changing from person to person. It also helps to demonstrate the range of people's opinions on the festival.

Alternatively, Midoriya-san, Ururaka-san and Ashido-san do think the festival is important to Japan though also not thinking the festival is important to them personally. Saying things such as

"cause you know family is really important thing, so Obon is I think Obon helps keep people keep remembering or thinking about the family and the you know thanks to the ancestors, so I think it's important."

This quote helps to show Ashido-san's view that again family is very important and so, due to that, the festival is important. Uraraka-san similarly thinks the festival is important although she does not care about it, saying:

"Uraraka-san: festival like it's not that important to me, it's a nice event that we have, but it's not like I got to go to that festival because it's Obon festival and important"

Marlon: So, I know it's... I care more about your experience but in general do you think it's important to Japan as a whole even if it is not important to you?

Uraraka-san: maybe maybe ya because you know we have a big event and many people visit the festival, and we even have dance for Obon, Odori, so it's important to the culture"

This segment and the previous quote shows that the festival does seem to have importance to Japan due to a variety of reasons. Some of these reasons are its link to family as well as being something that is important as it is a cultural staple. The variance shown by my interlocutors demonstrates that there is large room for variance among young adults when it comes to how important the Obon festival is to them.

Again, like the last section, it is important to refer to the previous chapter as the importance of the festival and ancestor worship may grow for my interlocutors. This is as mentioned due to the *Ie* system. The importance will potentially grow if they become the head of their household, and their household expects them to fulfil the obligations of care. This is because ancestor worship and therefore, the Obon festival, is tied to family. Family helps to determine how and if someone will participate and how depending on the individual's position in the family. An individual's engagement with the festival will also change based on the *Ie* system, with firstborn males potentially being made to take up the role of caring for the family's

ancestors when they reach a certain age. Females, on the other hand, will depend more on whom they marry based on the *Ie* system, though this would change from family to family. As families have changed, females may be expected to take a bigger role within their own family, or a family may just not care about the festival at all so none of the children will participate in the festival in the future.

As there have been changes to family and the *Ie* system it makes sense that there would be changes to both ancestor worship and the Obon festival. The festival has had to adapt in purpose and meaning as ancestor worship and the *Ie* system have changed to fulfill different roles in society as well as maintain its previous functions. The festival, even in cases where an individual does not participate in it themselves, still impacts them. Some examples of ways that the festival may impact an individual's life even when they do not care or participate in it include: more coworkers missing, more crowded subways and advertisements for festivals. So, while their family and them may not care about the festival, at least in the sense of remembering and honouring their ancestors, the impact that the tradition has in society is still important.

The interlocutors who do place a high amount of importance in the festival often mentioned that they were busy with something else so they could not participate in the festival despite wanting to. Some even mentioned that the interviews I did with them actually made them think about the festival. This was because they usually did not think or remember the festival with Bakugo-san saying "*I think I didn't think about Obon this much, so I'm going to look at it more to see which one is new and which one is old.*" These examples, as well as the fact that the festival, at least in regard to my interlocutors, is not a tradition that is very present in their lives, show that they are more reminded of it and find meaning in it in different ways rather than looking at it as a tradition that needs to be maintained and thought about constantly.

The importance of the festival in the sense of continuity and change again, as previously mentioned, depends on the family of my interlocutors. This section showed that while the festival can hold and continue to hold larger importance in the opinion of my interlocutors in relation to the culture, it can also be subject to change or remain the same within families. If the festival changes or continues to remain the same on a family basis depends upon the views of the family and if the family decides to put effort into changing or maintaining its current views.

How my interlocutors believe they may or may not participate in the festival in the future:

The topic of family arose again when I asked about the future and if anything would make them start or stop participating in the Obon festival. For many of my interlocutors, how they would participate in the future again depends on what their family decides to do. For example, Bakugo-san, who as mentioned prays to his ancestors every day, said that he would participate in the future if his parents decided to begin participating again *"Parents have a big influence on me. So, let's say parents say, let's do the Obon festival. I'm going to join it."*

Other interlocutors had similar sentiments, even if they were the ones who did not care about the festival very much. Such as Midoriya-san who said he would go along with what their family told him to do: *"like they don't say anything but they just like, oh look come, we're going to pray for our you know ancestors, and I'm ok ill do it that's it"*. Some of my female interlocutors, however, mentioned that how they participate in the future would depend on whom they got married to. Yaoyorozu-san values the festival quite highly. She participates in it almost every year. However, despite wanting to continue to participate in the festival mentioned that if she married someone who was from Tokyo and their family happened not to participate in the festival, then she would not continue to participate. This is despite caring about it a lot: *"...we get into the same tomb after we die, the husband's tomb, I think the wife follows her husband's*

family's customs." This quote is just demonstrating Yaoyorozu-san's opinion on how women follow the customs of her husband's family. Jiro-san, who, unlike Yayorozu-san, does not care as much about the festival also has the same view. She feels like she would follow her husband's customs, saying that if their husband's family did participate that they would participate in it in the way that the husband's family does: "*well if I got married and my husband is traditional guy maybe*".¹⁸ These women and their answers help again to show that despite a person's own personal beliefs or preferences, how they participate and interact in the festival is heavily influenced by their current and future family. Different views on the festival may cause certain women to consider certain potential marriage partners differently, depending on how much they care about the festival because once they join the new family, they may have to change how they participate in the festival.

"Yaoyorozu-san: Maybe because it's, it's so Japanese culture and oh and if the husband is the firstborn it really matters, I need to participate in their event, and I need to be the host.

Marlon: ok

Yaoyorozu-san: but if the husband is the second born or third born it doesn't matter, I don't have to do anything.

Marlon: Ok

Yaoyorozu-san: I do just have to just, participation is needed, but I don't have to be a host."

Yaoyorozu-san's explanation of how there would be a change to how she has to participate in the festival depending on which son she marries, again links back to the *Ie* system. This is because the first son is expected to take over the main role of caring for the ancestors, and it is expected that his wife will help him. It also shows considerations for the future that people may have when

¹⁸ These two women and their answers help to show an avenue for future research on the gender roles, and how the festival is gendered. However, in this thesis, I am not focusing on gender. Most of the data that I gathered in my fieldwork does not touch on gender so I do not believe I could do a thorough enough job in this work to warrant a lengthy discussion on gender and the festival.

looking to marry, as depending on if they care about the festival and how much may influence if they want to marry someone who is the firstborn son or not.

Midoriya-san also mentioned in this segment of my interview with him that he does think it is possible for people who want to start participating in the festival to do so show.

“Marlon: So, if you wanted to start doing, could you start doing it or would your parents be confused or tell you to stop or something?”

Midoriya-san: maybe I can restart it but only in my family

Marlon: ya

Midoriya-san: so, if I keep doing it, my sons or daughters will see what I'm doing, and they learn something from me. Ya so maybe it's not that difficult to restart it.

Marlon: ok

Midoriya-san: but maybe it's hard to restart it in all of Japan.”

This interview segment helps to show again the importance of family in how people participate.

It also shows that the family is a main decider to participating both now and in the future. In this segment, he also shows that a single-family participating or not in the future is easy to change, but on a larger scale, it would be harder to make people participate. This helps to demonstrate that if someone decides to put an effort into changing how they and their family participate, they could have some success. However, this is likely to also be dependent on the position that the individual has within the family.

Individuals and their families may also change in the future due to variety of circumstances. Changing ideas of family and the impacts it has can be seen in similar traditions. Allsion’s (2017) study on burial and remembrance practices is one such example. Individuals have formed new burial and remembrance groups when they lack more standard family groups. Similar types of changes could in the future affect the Obon festival as well. Families create the practices that an individual views as important in regard to the festival. So new types of families could create different practices for the Obon festival. Families, as previously mentioned, are very

important in determining how an individual may view and participate in tradition - however they are not completely deterministic. Practices can and do change as members of the family change and over time. One example previously mentioned is the example of Toga-san whose grandfather still participates in the festival despite the rest of his family not doing so. Toga-san and other interlocutors participated with their parents but now both them and their parents no longer participate in the festival.

As I have been trying to show family, while not completely deterministic, is one of, if not the main factor pushing the Obon festival and is what the festival is primarily about in contemporary Japan. Without their living family how, my interlocutors view and think about the tradition of Obon would change drastically. Instances in how family both shapes and is the driving force behind the festival can be seen with Bakugo-san, who wants to participate but does not as his family does not, or Yaoyorozu-san who does participate but said that she would stop if her future family did not participate. These examples help to demonstrate the power and central role that the family has. An individual may choose to abandon or completely change how their family participates in the Obon festival. As Midoriya-san mentioned, his family does not participate. He says this was a result of a member of his family choosing not to participate and not making their children participate either. He also believes, however, that if he wanted to, once he had kids, he would be able to start his family participating in the Obon festival again quite easily. This instance helps to show not only the influence of family but also how the family and individuals have to choose to continue or change practices. The festival exists as something that individuals and their families can use and shape creating new meanings for the tradition but also maintaining the tradition. This demonstrates the adaptability of Obon and how, despite the

seeming continued decline of ancestor worship, the tradition still remains an important cultural event.

While Hobsbawn (1983) brings up the idea of new traditions and how they can be attached to old traditions in order to give them legitimacy, this is not what is occurring with the Obon festival. While I have mentioned that the Obon festival is a festival attached to and part of ancestor worship it should not be deduced that the tradition was solely about ancestor and paying respect to them. While that was and is an important part of the tradition, the festival was also about family and family dynamics. As highlighted in the previous chapter up until recently the dynamics of family was heavily influenced by the *Ie* system. While the *Ie* system is still lingering and has impacts on ancestor worship its effect has been reduced, and this would in turn change family dynamics, ancestor worship and the Obon festival. So, while the Obon festival for many of my interlocutors has shifted away from being about ancestors, it still has importance as far as family. This importance though, is not as structured or hierarchical as before, when the *Ie* system was more present. This importance on family, though different, remains a very key aspect of the festival and goes in line with the idea that the Obon festival tradition is continuing but also adapting to fit the needs of society.

Conclusion:

Throughout this chapter, I aimed to understand family's role in determining why, how and if Obon is practised by the young adults I interviewed. Additionally, I tried to examine how the festival fits into the idea of Hobsbawn and if the festival is an old tradition that is adaptable or a new tradition that is just attaching itself to an old dead tradition. As a result, I was able to see that family in most cases is one of the most important aspects in somebody's life in relation to the festival. This importance and meaning behind how my interlocutors view the festival helps

to demonstrate the adaptability that traditions can have. As Hobsbawn mentions, old traditions that survive are those that are able to adapt and fill a new role and meaning as society changes. The Obon festival in the case of my interlocutors has shifted away from being primarily about ancestor worship and instead has focused more on living family. Due to this how my interlocutors view and participate in the festival is heavily dependent on their family and is subject to change depending on how their family chooses to participate in the festival. This variance can shift from year to year but the importance and role of family in the event seems to remain. The festival acts as a way for my interlocutors to see their family and while they may not participate in the public or more traditional private events of the festival, they still make use of the event either as the event is happening or later on.

My interviews show how a family can change and control specific aspects of ancestor worship and the individual participation. Through the experiences that my interlocutors have had and have told me about, it is clear that family has heavily impacted how they view the Obon festival as well as ancestor worship. Within my research, there are both: cases in which my interlocutors have similar and different views than their families on the festival. In most cases, my interlocutor defers to their family when deciding what to do in regard to it. In some cases, the differences in view are due to changes within practices, and in others they are due to the practices remaining the same.

The festival and what it represents for families and individuals is both changing and continuing to be the same. This varies depending on the scale in which you look as well as within certain families and instances. This duality reflects the complex and non-stagnant nature of the festival. This is because it is possible for one family to keep the same traditions and practices around the festival occurring over generations while the festival may change on a broad

scale to reflect new ideas and incorporate new practices. What the changes and the continuity have in common though, is that it is reliant on families and the individuals within those families to put in effort in either direction. However, through the experiences of my interlocutors, it is clear to see that family is the main contributing factor in their views and practices when it comes to the festival. This chapter reflects this, as well as demonstrating, much like the previous chapter, that families changing will impact ancestor worship as they are deeply tied because, through family, one learns of the Obon festival and ancestor worship as a whole.

For many of the families of my interlocutors, the festival appears to be an important time to meet living family instead of caring for ancestors. For other families who care more for their ancestors, they may still change how they participate in the festival to better suit their families needs and their ability to practice. There is no one specific reason why the families of my interlocutors have changed or kept the way they participate in the festival the same. The way my interlocutors participate still corresponds directly to what their family is doing and as mentioned, most of my interlocutors do not think there has been a change in how their family participates. The instances where there has been a change or a difference that my interlocutors mentioned, it was due to them disagreeing or disliking the change. Some individuals within a family do also appear to have more control over how the family participates, and on whether direct changes occur to the family tradition. This is seen often with the grandparents of my interlocutors - though parents as well for certain people like Bakugo-san. The grandparents help to control the proceedings more directly around ancestor worship and the Obon festival, such as making the family go to the cemetery. Within my examples, there are cases of both grandparents making the family participate and of grandparents letting the family do what they want with less of a direct influence. This can be seen to tie back to the *Ie* system where the head of the household is in

charge and is the most knowledgeable about ancestor worship. This link is because with the *Ie* system grandparents and parents hold a large amount of influence over the family. Within the *Ie* system individuals in the positions of power were able to make more decisions and hold more influence over the rest of the family. This can be argued as to why some of the grandparents of my interlocutors have more control over the festival proceedings. So, it makes sense for these older individuals to have more control over these proceeding and the younger members of the family to go along with it. This reliance on family and individuals in determining what the festival means again demonstrates Hobsbawm's idea that old traditions can be adaptable.

In conclusion, the relationship that my interlocutors have with the Obon festival is reliant on their family. Their family helps to shape their view and if they participate. Some of my interlocutors do not always view the festival the same as their family but participate in how their family tells them to despite that. For others, they echo similar views as their family.

Chapter 3: Work, Leisure, and other Obligations

Introduction:

This chapter will look at a variety of other factors that my interlocutors discussed. These factors influence their decisions of how and if they participate in the Obon festival. This chapter will examine how work (including school), vacation, and rural versus urban space influence the festival and my interlocutors. Much like family these factors help in shaping what the festival is in contemporary Japan and demonstrate the adaptability of the Obon festival as a tradition. Each factor presents a possible obstacle and reason why the festival as an old tradition needs to be adaptable and has influenced how people see and use the festival. The factors, of course, impact my interlocutors to different degrees so again how they use the festival differs. Additionally, how much influence the other factors have on the festival and individual is also impacted by how the family and individual views the festival. The coming chapter will discuss how work is the closest to matching the influence that family has on the individual and their relationship with the Obon festival.

Work in Japan:

Prior to looking at how work can impact the Obon festival, it is important to have some understanding of how work functions in Japan. Since World War II, working at a large company has been seen as something to strive for in the middle class (Cook 2016, 3). Working for a large company demonstrates success and reflects positively on both the individual and their family (Nishimura 2016, 19). Once an individual begins their job, they are expected to give their all for the company, which includes being loyal to the company in question. In return, the company is supposed to provide a stable long-term job often a lifetime employment (Nishimura 2016, 20;

Slater 2011, 112). Due to this, for some, doing what their company expects of them can be more important than current family matters (Nishimura 2016, 20). Additionally, by putting in effort into work, you will help your family thrive in the long run which helps to encourage individuals even more (Slater 2011, 106). Working for a large company not only provides an income but also provides social benefits. Men who work at big companies are seen as more desirable. In order to get married and start a family, it is expected that you have a stable job. This is because men with a stable job are thought to be able to support and care for their wife and children (Cook 2016, 87; Nishimura 2016, 25; Slater 2011, 113). Not having a full-time job is seen as a negative thing, especially for men (Cook 2016, 87; Kano 2016, 88). This can cause them to struggle to find a place in society and to start a family as they may be seen as lesser individuals and problematic.

There has been some shift in the position of companies and work in Japan, some of which explored earlier with the rise of women in the workplace. In general, there have been movements towards making work life more open to different possibilities (Mirza 2016, 22). Due to economic crises and larger amounts of layoffs and unemployment, more young adults are hesitant to give their long-term loyalty to companies (Cook 2016, 87; Mirza 2016, 22, 24; Slater 2012, 107, 114). More young adults are trying to keep their options open, and they are more willing to leave jobs for better opportunities (Cook 2016, 88; Slater 2012, 114). While views of companies are changing, the expected work rate is still very high, with workers still being expected to put in long hours (Cook 2016, 116). There has been some encouragement from the government to try to create more of a work-home life balance (Kano 2016, 98). Work is still a very prominent institution with most young adults joining the workforce as soon as they graduate university (Cook 2016, 44). Work in this context refers to paid full-time employment at a company. If one

fails to get hired in a full-time position prior to graduating, they are often forced to work part-time and viewed negatively (Cook 2016, 44). Therefore, knowing about the influence that companies have on individuals and society is important to address.

How work and school affect the Obon festival:

While at an event right around Obon season in August, I was talking with three Japanese individuals and a man from Spain. The Spanish man ended up asking if they had done anything for Obon. All three of them answered no but for different reasons. One woman said she works for an international company, so she is not given time off for it. She also said she did not mind as her family does not do anything for it. The second woman said she could have gotten time off but decided to work through the season instead. She did this so she could ask for time off at a different time when fewer people are travelling as it will be cheaper and less troublesome. The Japanese man said that he was not able to take time off because the store he works at is too busy at this time, so everyone needs to work.¹⁹

As one can see from these three individuals, there are multiple ways and reasons work can influence how one participates in the festival.

A common theme that arose in my interviews follows this exchange. The theme was being too busy with work in order to participate. Let us take as an example, my oldest interlocutor Todoroki-san, who as previously mentioned, thought that the Obon festival was very important. Todoroki-san's family would be participating without him as he has been unable to go both this year and previous years because he was busy with work. "*Well, the thing is that because most people are busy and then they're just judged by their work and their school and stuff they don't have enough time to pay respect to their ancestors.*" Todoroki-san's comments help to illustrate that even when people do want to participate in the Obon festival, they may not be able to. If they do participate, they may risk their job or their school lives if they work somewhere that is not as accepting of individuals participating. This is due to the current nature of work and schooling where individuals are often expected to give their all for the company.

¹⁹ I would later see this man again at another event where he would tell me about a festival I was going to go to, as he was from there and used to participate in the dancing.

Ashido-san also had a similar view in that she usually tries to go back to her hometown but is unable to this year because of work as seen in this segment of her interview:

"Ashido-san: So for me Obon is like to get together the whole family

Marlon: Ok so do you go back to Fukuoka?

Ashido-san: Actually yes usually but this year, unfortunately, I don't have any vacation."

These interactions help to show that the festival is in some cases not deemed important enough by companies to warrant time off. This helps to demonstrate that, as ancestor worship is less important, so is the festival and its value as a tradition is not as great as it once might have been. Despite this the festival may still be important to the individual despite their company preventing them from participating.

Other factors that can impact one's general relationship with work could be gender, age and one's position in the company. These different factors could potentially change how much they value the festival as well as how work impacts their participation in the festival. This is due to the fact that work has great importance in these individuals' lives, it is important both for them and for their family. Therefore, it can influence how they approach the Obon festival. With the idea of tradition from Hobsbwan if one were to ignore other factors, work could seemingly kill off the tradition of the Obon festival. This would be because work for many people and their families, takes up a larger part of their lives than Obon and ancestor worship, so the festival would not be able to compete with it in many cases. For example, Todoroki-san mentioned that a reason he needs to work is to provide for his family, so it is important for him to skip out on the festival in order to support his family. In relation to the Obon festival this might have a detrimental effect as work prevents him from participating even when his family does. However as will be examined later this is not the case as Obon has been able to survive and has adapted to fulfill a role in relation to work.

A contrasting notion to the idea that work prevents an individual from participating in the festival emerges in my interviews. This is the notion of using Obon season as a means to get away from work. This contrast is important to look at as it helps to demonstrate the different ways in which work can influence an individual to act in regard to the festival. Additionally, it shows how, as in the case of the family, there are numerous ways in which work can influence the individual's relationship with the festival. Both, individuals who want to participate in the festival and those who do not want to participate, use the festival period as a means to get away from work. Many companies in Japan do give time off and or allow people to take time off quite easily during this time. This allows for people to go see family or go do other types of vacations for a few days. One such example was a middle-aged man I talked to. He was planning on going on a road trip during the few days off he had for Obon so he could get out of the city. This is a similar sentiment to another person whom I talked to, Hagakure-san, who is in her twenties, and tries to go on day trips or weekend trips in order to have a break from work and Tokyo. For Obon Hagakure-san tries to go back to her hometown during the few days break she gets as both she and her family view the festival as important. Other people I interviewed shared similar sentiments of wanting to go home or go on vacation and that Obon allowed them to do it as their work allowed them to have time off easily. Uraraka-san talked of how easy it was for her and her coworkers to get time off during the season.

“Uraraka-san: Well honestly, Obon to me is just a vacation period, it's pretty much the period where I go back. I visit my grandparent. I spend the week with my whole family, cousins or grandparents, my parents, sisters, so that's pretty much it.

Marlon: Ya ok, so do you get it off work? Or do you have to take personal vacation?

Uraraka-san: Yes, sometimes, it depends on the year but uh people, I need to pay even if I want some days off, I need to take my paid leave, but a lot of other people also take days off during that time, so I don't really; usually when I get paid leave I am like sorry I need to take time off, but they are always fine with it.”

This segment from Uraraka-san's interview helps to show how she uses the festival period and how she sees other people using the festival, demonstrating that for some the festival is just for a vacation and that it is a very popular time for people to get time off work for. Midoriya-san also expressed similar sentiments about the festival and how he used the period *"For me like, I don't do any cultural things like, here in Japan, with my family. So like I just think Obon festival is kinda vacation so I can go back to my home, my house and see my families."* Again, this quote helps to show how some individuals use the Obon festival for a vacation.

One good example from my interviews in which an interlocutor both cares about the festival and ancestors but also likes to use the festival period as a way to have a break from work and go on vacation is Asui-san. She states that *"... for me Obon is just summer holiday and everyone get together and have a big meal, something like that."* She also stated, *"during Obon, though only once a year, but at least we can think about ancestors like that."* These different views and feelings help to show how work and the Obon festival interact. Work can influence people's views on the festival in a variety of ways. So even if someone does care about the ancestor part of the festival, it may still serve as a way to escape from work. Additionally, they help to show how the festival can help to shape an individual's life by acting as a way to take a vacation. As mentioned, work can act as a hindrance to some who want to participate in the festival by preventing them from having enough free time to leave the office. Alternatively, work can act as a motivator for individuals who, while maybe not wanting to participate in the festival, do want to have a break from work to see family or just have a break. Both of these are due to the nature of work in Japan and how it shapes individuals' lives. As mentioned, work and giving your all to a company is a very common idea in Japan. Individuals will do this as it is expected both by society and by their family (Slater 2011, 106).

These instances help to show that work can heavily impact an individuals' life both when it comes to Obon as well as in general. For some individuals, even when they want to participate in the festival their work is too important for them to do so. On the other hand, when the festival lacks importance on what could be said a religious or traditional sense, it can still act as an escape. The break it provides acts as a very important time of the year where people can put their work on the back burner for a few days. The function of Obon and its relationship with work is therefore very varied with each individual seeing the festival as a different thing in regard to work. Some of these functions can be an escape to see family or do other things like travel. For those that do not really care about the festival, it may not affect their work or daily life aside from coworkers leaving. For others, Obon could be something that the person wishes to do but is unable to due to the importance of work. What I would argue, however, is that in most instances, during the period of Obon, the family remains more important than work. This is because how work impacts the individual is a result of their family views on Obon and if they want to visit their family. If an individual and their family do not care about the festival, then it is possible for them not to care that they cannot leave work for it and instead get a vacation during another time of the year. For others, they may be very upset due to not getting time off. The variance in how work affects individuals is large and dependent on their views of the festival. Therefore, it is possible for work to be more influential and important in regard to the festival than family for certain individuals. Though based on the experiences of my interlocutors, in most cases I would still think that family holds more influence over an individual's actions than work as far as regarding the Obon festival. Work though does act as a good example of how multiple factors influence an individual and change how Obon as a tradition exists within Japan.

Furthermore, those that I interviewed that used Obon to get off work, often cited the reason they wanted to was so they could go home and visit their family. In one case one of my interlocutors, Asui-san, was only using it for vacation. She usually went to see family and her mother wanted her to come home for the festival. *"but my mom asks me, please come back but cannot this year."* This helps to demonstrate that the influence of different objects and desires of individuals also shift often, which can change how they interact with the festival. For some, unless there were extreme circumstances, they always want to go home for the festival. For example, Yaoyorozu-san, who was from Okinawa but living in Tokyo, says *"I think so I'm going back to Okinawa every year during this time."* Similarly, there are those that were unable to leave work for Obon but wanted to. These individuals often wanted to participate with their family or at least see them as mentioned previously. These opinions and views on the Obon festival and work would have likely come from their upbringing. So, while even though work may prevent them directly or just pressure them to miss the festival, how they feel about the festival would still tie back to how their family has taught them to think and view the festival. This would also be true for those who have no problem working through the festival. This again helps to demonstrate the influence that the family has during the Obon period. Family influences how individuals think about the festival and how they think about other factors like work. This is done by the family instilling certain ideas of the Obon festival into the individuals, which then affects how they react to different factors that affect the festival.

The instances of work being seen as more important or getting in the way of participating in the Obon festival is also present in other aspects of ancestor worship. One example is caring for the family grave and ancestors. This need to care can be seen as a hindrance and a chore for people pursuing their career (Kawano 2004b, 239). It is also important to note that in this case

not only it is a concern that the caring of the grave could hinder the sons' dreams and career but also as they are so busy, they would not have time to care for it properly (Kawano 2004b, 239). Again, these instances both show that the festival can remain an anchor and a steady thing in an individual's life or be subject to change year to year depending on other changes in their lives. Work can cause major changes in how an individual participates in the Obon festival and for some be more important than family when trying to decide how to participate in the festival. However, how an individual reacts to the influence of work on the festival comes from how they have learnt about and view the festival, which again comes from family.

How vacation and fun impact how people interact with the festival:

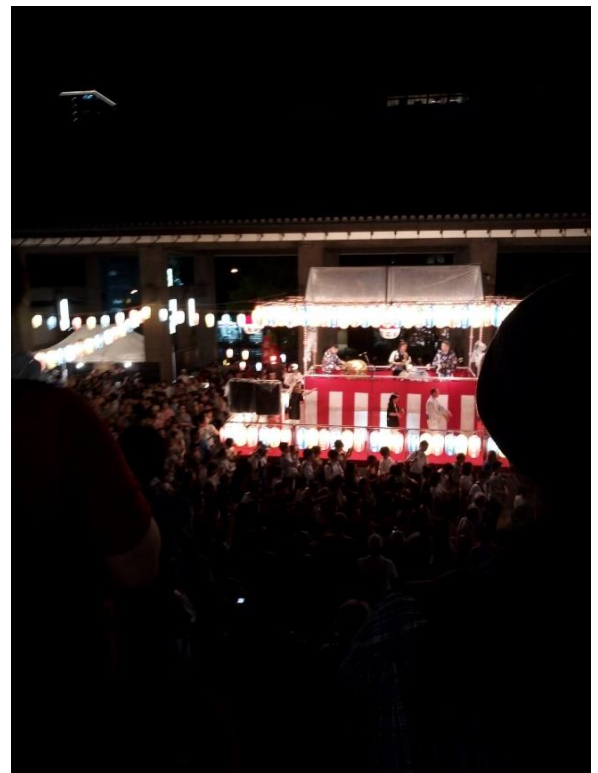
A second impacting object that was present in my research is the idea of vacation as I began to mention previously. Instead of viewing the Obon festival as a cultural or religious day, many of my interlocutors and individuals I talked to viewed it as an opportunity to have a vacation or for fun. This was because, for many of them, Obon acts as a summer vacation when it is possible to get time off of work or school as well as potentially acting as a fun event to attend. One example of an interlocutor not caring about the festival in a religious or cultural sense comes from Uraraka-san, who says "*festival like it's not that important to me. It's a nice event that we have, but it's not like I got to go to that festival because it's Obon festival and important.*" She demonstrates a lack of care towards the festival and its meaning at least in regard to how the festival is an aspect of ancestor worship. Instead, many view the festival as something that they might do if they had friends who wanted to go and hang out during it. Again with Uraraka-san saying "*maybe like that would be like, be more maybe there might be some friends who are doing it so maybe if my friends are doing it I might participate in it.*" This type

of sentiment of relying on or being willing to go to the festival with friends is echoed by other participants such as Midoriya-san saying

"ya, I think so cause now since I don't have many friends here in Tokyo, I don't have many opportunities to hear that hey ____ like there is going to be Obon festival like next month. So why don't we do some stuff for the festival..."

Toga-san also has a similar thought saying *"maybe when I was young I went to the festival with my friends who live near here, but since we grew up my friends go to Tokyo to work or go to school. So maybe that's why I stopped going."* These instances help to highlight how the festival can be used for fun as it is an opportunity to hang out with friends. It relies on others going with them and not really as an individual festival that many people go to by themselves. It is also important to note that all three of these interlocutors do not really care about the festival and their families do not participate either.

I would say I experienced at least the fun aspect of the festival. I was not working at the time, so it did not serve as a vacation for me. At the festivals I went to, both with participants, and by myself, I would say there was a fun atmosphere with most people having fun. There were various different types of stalls at the festivals selling toys, food, and gaming stalls such as fish capturing. In my experience, though, as I went both with and without other people, I would say I enjoyed the festival more with other individuals I knew. Though I cannot speak for others, this was because I was able to talk and do things with the other people more rather than



(Figure 4: Dancing at Obon festival with famous singer.)

just being more of an outside observer. When I went by myself, it was still fun and I was able to participate in the dancing and other things, but it was just nicer to share the experience with friends. While at one of the festivals with Midoriya-san, he mentioned that he had not been to any festival since he was in high school when he used to go with his friends. This gives a hint that rather than only the Obon festival it is also other festivals that are attended for fun going with friends and not really something you would do by yourself.

While less to do with friends, an elderly man I talked to mentioned two things of note related to the Obon festival being more about fun.²⁰ The first one is that he mentioned how people in Osaka do not care about the Obon festival because they care about the Awaodori more.²¹ The second one was how his wife was a big fan of a famous Obon singer who tours around singing. This singer was actually present at one of the Obon festivals that I went to. This specific festival is a very good example of an Obon festival that is very focused on making sure everyone has fun. This festival not only had the typical stalls and dancing, but it additionally had various musical guests prior to the Obon dancing, a dance showcase, and a raffle of items from various companies. Once the famous singer began to sing it was very much like a concert with lots of people dancing (Figure 4), as well as many others watching from the stairs of the temple. The singer not only sang but also introduced the drummer and guitarist he was performing with allowing them to do solos.

Another instance of fun being of key importance for the festival and the individuals attending was seen at another festival I went to. A portion of this festival included large drums being played by different groups along with a song. Here each town associated with the festival

²⁰ See introduction page 6 and chapter 1 pages 53-54 and 59-60 for information about the Obon festival again.

²¹ It is still a part of the Obon festival occurring during August. It is the largest dance festival in Japan. It occurs in the Tokushima Prefecture.

had their own contingent, and while they all played the same song to begin with, they each then performed again. During the second portion, many put on their own variation of the song or made a new song such as a song specifically about how much they loved their town. One group had an outfit change between their performances and rather than have the individual on the drum being dressed like the others they had him dressed up as the genie from Aladdin (Figure 5).

Similarly, while I was at the festival, an older gentleman involved with one of the drumming groups approached my interlocutor and me and asked if I would like to stand on top of the drum. While this was likely due to me being one of the few foreigners at this particular festival, it also



(Figure 5: Individual on drum dressed as the Genie from Aladdin.)

helps to highlight that even as a foreigner or perhaps more so because of it, people wanted others to have fun as they participated in the festival.

Along those lines, there was an Obon festival that was more concerned with getting foreigners to be involved in Obon being called "Dotonbori Bon-Odori Dance International." At this festival, there was, of course, an announcer speaking Japanese but also one speaking English and another one speaking Mandarin. This event was located in a very touristy and busy place of downtown Osaka. The announcers encouraged tourist and onlookers to participate in the dancing

and invited people to dance on the boat that they were on. While this festival had fewer stalls due to the location, they had other events such as a karaoke competition over the course of the two-day event. They were very concerned with individuals' involvement in the festival with the individuals involved in the organisation actively asking passersby and onlookers to come and dance. On the note of fun being of importance in regard to the festival, there is also, as partly seen with this festival, a growing desire to make the festival more well known. The organisers seemed to want the festival to be seen as a fun thing for not only Japanese people but also for a foreign audience. A goal of this specific festival was to encourage tourists and international individuals in Japan to participate, as seen by the name but also by the multiple languages of the announcers. In addition to this, the announcers encouraged people to take videos and pictures of the event for social media with a hashtag of the festival.

Similarly, to help show that this trend of inclusion is not solely limited to this festival, there are also individuals such as "DJ Koo" who wants to bring the Obon dancing to the world (Kyodo News, 2019). This DJ has incorporated newer songs such as songs from anime and foreign songs such as "Living on a Prayer" alongside Obon songs for the Obon festival he has hosted (Kyodo News, 2019). This is an effort both to make the event fun for everyone and to make the festival more accessible to non-Japanese audiences (Kyodo News, 2019). These instances of differences show the adaptability of the festival as well as showing the importance that individuals place on making the festival a fun time for everyone involved. The goal of wanting the festival to reach a bigger audience shows that many individuals see the festival itself as an important cultural event that they wish to grow and continue even if it is changing. Aside from these news stories and outreach programs, most of the festivals I went to also had news coverage of some sort. These instances of coverage also help to demonstrate how the festival is a

mainstay in certain individuals' lives and circles as they are expecting to get coverage and be able to see the festival through the media.

The general idea of fun remained common in most of my interviews and my attendance of festivals. While the festivals changed due to the area, the core feeling of fun remained unchanged. This idea of fun could potentially allow for the tradition of Obon to remain alive and be of use in Japan. This is due to the fact that individuals such as my interlocutors want a break from work, so the festival fills this role not only by helping them get time off work but also by providing them with something fun to participate in if they choose to.

Obligation to participate:

Other reasons why some people decide to participate in festivals aside from the previously mentioned fun and religious aspects are a sense of duty or responsibility to the community. This can be seen in the drumming display where the theme was not only about ancestors and the Obon festival but also about how much they care for and want to show that their town is the best town. This is like a sense of duty towards making the event a success. By doing so, it will not only make people enjoy the festival but also reflect positively on the town. While many of the events I went to were local, many still had the potential or expectation that both, individuals outside of the community and individuals who just could not make it that day, would see some of it. This is noticed as many of the festivals had photographers; some even had film crews for the local news. This broader appeal or need to be a success is also seen as all of the events I went to had sponsors. These sponsors varied in how much they contributed and on how present and visible they were. Some only had their advertisements on the fans that organisers were handing out, while others had banners on stages. The most visible sponsors were at the festival with the famous singer. Companies provided prizes for the raffles that everyone

who attended was entered in. This raffle was one of the larger events occurring at this festival. While these sponsors may not be as directly impactful on an individual who is not really part of the organisational aspect of the festival, it has the potential to impact the festival as a whole.

Moving back to the idea of responsibility and being part of the events, we can look at the importance of neighbourhood organisations. These organisations can pressure individuals to participate and maintain relationships with their neighbours. Festivals such as Obon though, meant to be religious, can more so be about other aspects such as social hierarchy and interconnectedness of the community (Bestor 1989, 225-226). Larger festivals such as Obon can also serve as ways to demonstrate organisational abilities and gain prestige for those sponsoring and running them (Bestor 1989, 232; Van Houwelingen 2012, 480-482, 486). With more local festivals, there is potential for tensions and individuals feeling required to aid in organisation and funding or face judgement from their community (Bestor 1989, 237). Individuals more involved in the neighbourhood association may face scrutinisation for these obligations and expectations as the roles are often rotational (Van Houwelingen 2012, 480). Most families are part of neighbourhood associations that help to organise and run festivals which can potentially create a sense that an individual has to help organise and participate in the festival (van Houwelingen 2012, 468).

Despite the potential of obligation in helping or attending the festival, none of my interlocutors talked about feeling like they had an obligation. Unless you interpret their desire to see their family or how they participate in certain aspects of the festival with their family as an obligation. Though as mentioned, some of them said that they would participate in aspects of the festival and ancestor worship if their family told them to. This section again echoes ideas from previous sections about family and how the festival has the role of helping families reunite. This

again is due to the fact that family remains more of a decider in an individual's participation. However, how an individual's relationships and obligations shift or remain the same will impact how and if they participate in the festival. This, in turn, may keep the festival the same for certain individuals but may also change it for others so it becomes completely different. While the obligation to one's community and family is an important driver in how one might participate, it may also end up causing problems with their work. If an individual's work does not allow them to leave for the Obon festival, and they do have strict obligations to attend to, they will somehow have to manage the scenario. This could potentially lead them to decide what they care about more or feel like they have to do more. This helps to demonstrate the pressure that work has on the Obon festival as a tradition and how the festival could potentially be threatened if more and more people think that what the festival offers is less valuable than work.

Effects of space on the festival:

Space is an interesting concept to look at for the festival. Many aspects of the festival are impacted by space-related factors such as actual location and how much space the festival requires. These types of factors can be impactful both on a larger scale and for individuals. On an individual level, how space impacted the most individuals that I interviewed was the need to travel back to their hometowns for the festival. This need to travel back to their hometown comes from them moving for work. It is very common for people in Japan to move to Tokyo or other big cities in order to find work. This again demonstrates how work can affect an individual's ability to participate in the Obon festival. The impact of this need to travel home for the Obon festival is seen with my interlocutors. Yayaorosi-san for one saying, *"I think so I'm going back to Okinawa every year during this time."* The only times she has not travelled back was when she was living abroad. Most of the interlocutors that I interviewed in Tokyo were not originally

from Tokyo. This requires them to travel back home if they wanted to participate or if they wanted to see their families. These are not rare cases and cause increased prices and very limited availability for transport during the Obon period as many people are trying to travel during this time. As mentioned, previously, some individuals choose to work through the Obon period because of the difficulty of travel. While I was in Japan near the end of the Obon season, there was a typhoon hitting the country. This typhoon caused many delays in travel, and many people were left stranded. This was because many people were trying to travel and there was not enough room to accommodate people whose trains got delayed or cancelled due to the typhoon (Triballeau 2019; Japan Today 2019c).

A topic that arose in my interviews is the effects that urbanisation or being in an urban setting has on the festival. A few of my interlocutors, though they have been living in Tokyo for a few years, were not aware that Tokyo had the Obon festival. They knew that their hometowns had the festival but thought that there were not any in Tokyo. There were a few interlocutors who believed that there was a difference between urban and rural in regard to the festival. They believed that in more rural areas where individuals are closer to their family and community (in a geographical sense), individuals were more likely to participate in the festival and that the festival would be more important. This also tied into that their grandparents would also be closer, which would encourage individuals to participate. A few of my interlocutors were actually originally from more rural parts of Japan. For example, Bakugo-san lives in Tokyo; he did not move solely for work and school; instead, it was his parents who moved there when he was fourteen. While Bakugo-san does participate in ancestor worship daily and had expressed a desire to participate in the festival, he does not participate. This is mainly because his parents no longer did. However, he also expressed that in Tokyo there is not enough physical space to

participate in and hold the festival *"so I make the importance of the event, but now I live in the Tokyo, and there is no space to do the Obon."* This helps to show that for some individuals, moving, separates them from certain cultural activities. As seen by Bakugo-san who despite living in Tokyo for eight years was not aware that there are festivals in Tokyo. There are also concerns with the capability of cities and urban areas to be able to host certain things. For others like Jiro-san who are aware of the festival, they may view the festivals in Tokyo as being too crowded with too many people.

"Jiro-san: that's a difficult question cause when I was a child I used to go to a local festival held in a park. It was like five minutes away from my home, so it was easy to get to, but now I'm away from my hometown, and I don't like crowded places.

Marlon: in Tokyo?

Jiro-san: ya everywhere is crowded, so the festival is in the top of it like for me Disneyland, festival is the same.

Marlon: so, you think lots of people are still doing it then?

Jiro-san: ya but I don't like it, so I don't go."

Here Jiro-san shows how space and attendance of the festival can impact if individuals are willing to go. Additionally, she helps to demonstrate how people can view the Obon festival in different ways, depending on what they are used to and where they are from.

Yayorozi-san, another of my interlocutors, is from Okinawa. She wants to participate and tries to go back to her hometown for the festival every year. One thing that she mentioned was that as Okinawa is becoming more urbanised, she thinks that the festival is changing due to the changing space.

"Yayorozi-san: I think it's changing. Ya because Okinawa is getting more urbanised now.

Marlon: ok

Yayorozi-san: so, like compared to Tokyo we have bigger grave, bigger tomb.

Marlon: un

Yayorozi-san: so, the tomb in Tokyo is not so, is not that big, but we have a big tomb because we have a party, but as the city is getting urbanised we have little space.

Marlon: ok

Yayorozi-san: less space than before."

This echoes similar sentiments from my other interlocutors. While many come from cities, they still believe that the Obon festival is more actively participated in and important to rural areas than to urban areas. A reason why is that some of my interlocutors believe that rural areas have more connections with family, especially grandparents. For example Hagakure-san, who is from a more rural farming town, says that the reason she participated and thought it was important was because she believed that she could contact her grandfather during the festival *"because I believed, I believe, I could meet my grandpa on the day."*

Many of my interlocutors also believed that these more local small festivals were also becoming less popular with fewer people attending them. The festivals were unable to draw as large crowds as they had been previously with Toga-san expressing this sentiment in a segment of her interview:

"Toga-san: I think it's because many people, like in general many young people who want to live in rural areas like Kyushu or Shikoku are, they move to Tokyo, to Osaka, to work or study and these rural areas there are less people and their traditional things will gradually disappear.

Marlon: ok

Toga-san: that's why only old people live in that area.

Marlon: so, you think rural areas do it more, but since people are moving away, less people are doing it?

Toga-san: ya"

There appears to be a difference between rural and urban celebration and participation in the Obon festival. In my experiences of attending festivals, both with and without interlocutors, the festivals seemed to be very popular. All of the festivals were in cities, though some were much smaller local ones and others were larger ones. I would say in my experience the festivals were often very crowded and difficult to move around at some points. When I went to one with some interlocutors who had not been to that specific festival in Tokyo, they also commented on

the fact that the area in which the festival was being held was packed. This crowdedness was not only in the immediate area where the dancing and stalls were but continued into the nearby convenience stores, such as “Family Mart”, where people were lined up inside trying to get drinks, food and other things. These instances do not discredit the idea that the festival may be getting less popular and having smaller attendances, but it does help to show that for whatever reason there are still numerous amounts of people who enjoy going to the festival part of Obon at the very least in cities. These differences and the importance of space again is also indicative of the impact family and work have on the festival. Work causes many individuals to move to urban centres like Tokyo while family draws them back to their hometown. There are, of course, other reasons and ways that can affect an individual's participation like a family moving to a new area altogether.

Space in regard to the Obon festival is very important due to the idea of going back to your hometown and to where your ancestors and family are located. Due to this space is an important aspect to look at in the festival though again the driving force of going back to hometowns and continuing to participate is ultimately family. While space is important, it is changeable if families move. Space, both acts as a changing factor of the festival and as a continuous one in the sense that your hometown will remain your hometown. For most individuals, it will be where you participate in the festival; however, new locations due to moving change what you have to do to participate and if you can participate at all. Space therefore has a varied amount of influence on individuals and is influenced by other factors such as work and family.

Conclusion:

Work, vacation, and space all impact how and if an individual will participate in the Obon festival. They help to shape and provide reasons for the role the tradition of Obon has in contemporary Japan. While they each impact the individual, they can also impact each other changing the ways the individual see the festival. The impact that these other factors have on the festival is also dependent on the family of the individual. While work directly and often impacts if someone can participate in the festival, it does not change in what way an individual views the festival. Instead, work may impact their ability to participate or act as an additional motivator. An individual's ability to take a break, see family, worship ancestors or a combination of those three is partly dependent on if they can get time off work. However, what they choose to do if they get time off during the festival is dependent on how their family has taught and encourages them to do. As I have seen through my research, those who do not participate in ancestor worship during the Obon period do like getting time off but are less concerned about getting time off during the exact dates of the festival. Instead, they just want time off at some point in August or some other time during the summer.

There is also the individual and how they view the festival, which may influence their desire to participate. While individuals do not necessarily need to believe in ancestor worship or agree with it, they may still feel pressure and be inclined to participate if their family is more invested in the festival. This can be seen when looking at some of my interlocutors' experiences. So, while the individual may see ancestor worship as unimportant, the influence of the family may cause them to participate. The desire to participate and the active role the individual takes in order to try to participate will thus be a mixture of how they individually feel and how important their family has taught them the festival is. Additionally, it depends on if the festival acts as a

way for the individual to see their family and that appears to be one of its major roles in current Japan. So, if they are able to see their family outside of the festival it may be less important to them.

This chapter helps to demonstrate how different factors can influence individuals and the Obon festival. Each factor can impact how and if an individual participates in the festival. They can act as a hindrance to participation, help to encourage participation or neither. One example is if someone lives in a different country, they may find it difficult to go to their hometown to participate. Due to the factors covered as well as other potential factors, one is able to see that family is not the only factor that affects an individual. However, when looking at my interlocutors, these other factors do still help to show how family is still the most important factor in how they view the festival. Due to this, the different factors do not hurt the idea that family is the driving force behind Obon as a tradition. While there may be many roles that the Obon festival fills in or helps with as it is an adaptable tradition, family is most often a very important part on deciding how people will make use of this tradition. These factors help to show the adaptable nature of the Obon festival. Any change to these factors could potentially cause changes in how an individual and their family participate in the festival. Though the family and individual may also see the change and react to it in a way that maintains the status quo on how they participate.

In conclusion, this chapter examined some other aspects aside from family that impact how and if people participate in the Obon festival. While they have varying effects and change depending on the person, in terms of my interlocutors, family was still the most influential. The role of the festival is heavily influenced by the family in particular as currently the festival role appears to be about visiting family. However, as discussed in the chapter, there are a variety of

other factors that can impact the festival. Changes to certain aspects of people's lives show how participation in the festival can change but also how certain changes do not end up affecting how their family participates in the festival. These factors impact both if the individual can participate and how they choose to participate. Some of these factors include work, vacation, and space and each provides different obstacles for participation as well as the reverse creating more reasons why someone may want to or not want to participate.

Conclusion

The Japanese family is continuously changing. As the Japanese family changes, so does ancestor worship. This is a result of family and ancestor worship being interconnected. The Obon festival is a Japanese festival that is deeply related to ancestor worship. During the festival, the spirits of a family's ancestors come back to the homes of their family for a few days. So, because the festival is so tied to and is a part of ancestor worship, it will also change when family and other ancestor worship practices change. Despite changes such as the role of women and the elderly within individual families, there may not be visible changes to ancestor worship and the Obon festival. Or at the very least not visible or apparent to the members of the families as the family has decided to maintain certain practices consistently. The alternative is also potentially true with families deciding to change how they participate or reacting to changes.

How an individual celebrates their ancestors varies greatly. It can include cucumber horses, having a town festival with drumming and dancing, both or neither. However, how they do end up celebrating or not celebrating in the Obon festival is greatly influenced by how and what their family has taught them about ancestors and the Obon festival. Family can teach an individual that ancestors are very important and need to be worshipped daily. On the other hand, family may not teach the individual anything about ancestor worship. Family, in essence, determines the role of the festival and if the individual will want to or will participate. This is because, as explored earlier, there is an interconnectedness between family and the ancestor worship. An individual may not care about ancestor worship or the Obon festival. However, if they maintain a relationship with their family, they will likely participate in the manner that their family decides.

For many of my interlocutors, their lack of care for the festival and ancestor worship also comes from their family. This is because their family, in general, does not participate in ancestor worship practices or have changed them for a different reason. In the context of the study, many of my interlocutor's families use the festival mainly just to see each other. The festival is both undergoing changing and not changing depending on how individual families are choosing to practice it. Families have decided that the festival holds a certain meaning or importance to them and have passed this view down to their children. These views can range widely with some seeing the festival as a chance to remember ancestors and others seeing it as a vacation period. Within many of my interlocutor's families, the way that they and their family use the festival for, is just a potential vacation from work. Often the festival is used as a time to travel to see their families without also going to practice ancestor worship. While the festival occurs on specific days every year, some of my interlocutors just view it as a summer vacation period so they may not travel at the exact time of the festival.

The influence of family can also be seen in instances where my interlocutor may have a different view than their family. In the cases in which my interlocutors did not believe in the same things as their family, they still usually end up participating in practices that their family wanted them to. More commonly for my interlocutors, that means that they do not personally care about the festival, but since their family does, they participate when asked to, though the reverse can also be true.

The Obon festival is one of the major festivals in Japan, similar to New Years. Most places in Japan celebrate Obon in August though there is some variation. There have been some studies on the Obon festival such as “The View of Spirits as Seen in the Bon Observances of the Shima Region” published in 1988, which looks at rural participation in the festival. However, as

mentioned English studies on the festival are very limited, especially once you try to focus on young adults residing in cities. Therefore, this study using ethnographic material gathered in Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto helps to provide new knowledge and understanding of how Japanese people in their 20s and 30s see the festival. This research examines individuals' participation in the festival. It explores what has shaped or impacted their participation in the festival. This research helps provide a more in depth understanding of the relationship between family and ancestor worship. Additionally, it examines the role this prominent festival has in Japanese society for the individual. Through this, one can look at the festival and potentially start to get an understanding of the current relationship between family and ancestor worship in Japan and how these aspects may be changing.

The original research question for this project was, "*How do Japanese individuals in their 20s and 30s interact with and view the Obon festival?*" There are many ways this research question can be answered and explored. One early focus area which was going to be examined was what impact individualism had on the festival. However, from the data I gathered and my analysis, I conclude that family is the main factor that decides if and how an individual participates in the Obon festival. When I did ask about individualism, all of my interlocutors did not think it would impact the festival at all. Instead, they mainly talked about the ways family has shaped their understanding of the festival. This is due to the fact that an individual's family teaches them about the Obon festival. The family also organises how and if people are participating in the festival. However, specific individuals within the family can express more control over the family's proceedings around the festival. Like other parts of ancestor worship, this also comes from pre-existing notions of family in Japan though it may not be as present in other aspects of Japanese family life. So, for families that put a great deal of importance on the

festival, the festival will be a more important tradition for them in its more original form. For example, Midoriya-san tries to visit his family, but they only pray and actively participate in ancestor worship if his grandma makes them. This example shows both the presence of family around the Obon period as well as how both family and an individual can cause other individuals to participate in certain ways. As a result, changes in how an individual participates in the festival are dependent on their family. This example also helps to show the adaptability and different roles that tradition can have both on a larger and smaller scale.

Though the family is the most important factor that is currently influencing the Obon festival for the individual and the traditions surrounding it, other factors impact how and if the individual can participate if they want to. Some of these other factors include work, school, obligation, and space. Each one of these factors impacts how and if a person participates. Their influences vary and though some can be very influential in most cases, they are still secondary to the family. While the primary role that the tradition of Obon has is that of a festival that allows people to see their family, that is not its only role or a role that it is stuck with. In the current times as ancestor worship has declined and factors such as work have become more important, Obon acts as a tradition that allows people to see their family when they likely would not have been able to otherwise. This has allowed Obon, an old tradition, to adapt and remain an important tradition in Japan.

How the family decides to participate in the festival, however, may change over time. This may be due to who is part of the family or may stay the same for the same reasons. These types of changes can appear both on a small scale within families or on larger festival-related aspects. A family may choose to stop participating or change what they do when participating. A festival, on the other hand, may change to incorporate new dances or music depending on who is

part of the organisation, and they also have a certain status quo in which the changes occur. In my research, I did find that while certain aspects of the festival are changing, other aspects are remaining the same depending on the family. Such an example was Toga-san who continues to visit her grandparents but no longer goes to the festival in most cases.

To answer my research question, I have organised this thesis in a way to help build an understanding of some of the factors that have an impact on an individual and the Obon festival. These factors include family, work, school, space and obligation. In the first chapter, I provided contextualising information about the Japanese family and ancestor worship as well as examined their relationship with each other. I did this as these two aspects are connected to each other, and some understanding of them is required to understand the Obon festival because the Obon festival is an aspect of ancestor worship as a whole. This examination helps to demonstrate that practices of ancestor worship are changed and are conducted by families. So over time, as families change, the practices will also change. The next chapter builds up from this context. It is, however, heavily ethnographic, as I examine how family has influenced my interlocutors' relationship with the Obon festival. This was a result of all of my interlocutors talking about how they learnt about and how they planned on participating in the festival. These decisions and answers all came directly from what their family decided to do. As mentioned though, there was a variety to what each individual was going to do or wanted to do during the festival. This helps to demonstrate the variation on how people think about and participate in the festival. For some of my interlocutors what they personally thought about the festival may not be in line directly with what their family practices. Despite this they still decided, for the most part, to do what their family wanted. In the final chapter, I focused on ethnographic material. In this chapter, I examined how other factors, such as work and space, impact the individual and the Obon

festival. Additionally, I examined how these other factors interact with family, for example how moving is a reason why some families stop participating and how for others being away from their family causes them to want to participate more. Work may prevent some individuals from participating while the rest of their family participate. Vacation is another example, where for some of my interlocutors' families the Obon period is used as an opportunity just to have a vacation from work. This chapter again helped to demonstrate the importance of family as it shapes people's actions despite other influences being present. The chapter also helped to flesh out the context of the Obon festival as people are not solely dealing with family, the festival and ancestor worship but are also influenced by other factors.

Through these chapters, I demonstrate that the Japanese family, ancestor worship and the Obon festival are continuously changing. Many of the changes to ancestor worship and Obon are related to the changes to family. However, as stated previously, in many cases there are parts that remain the same. The majority of my interlocutors did believe that how they participate and view the Obon festival is the same as how their parents and grandparents do. Due to the information provided by my interlocutors, I am able to show that for people in their 20s and 30s how they view and interact with the Obon festival is primarily dependent on how their family see the festival, with some caring more deeply about the festival, others just seeing it as a vacation and others something in between. If one then considers Hobsbawn's (1983) invention of tradition where he discusses how some old traditions are able to adapt and find new roles in society while still maintaining aspects of their old roles, the Obon festival fits into his description of an old tradition. While the ancestor worship aspect of the old Obon tradition has been reduced, the family portion has been increased and also Obon has been gaining seemingly new roles as a period of fun, escape and vacation. This is similar to the idea raised by Creighton (1997) with the

idea that people want to escape cities and go back to a simpler time due to a sense of nostalgia (243). However, though there are parallels and the idea of trying to escape from cities and work fits within what my interlocutors have mentioned perhaps due to their age the idea of nostalgia is not as applicable to them.

My interlocutor's age, their opinions and views may change, and as they start their own families, they will, in turn, influence how their children view the festival. Though I have focused more heavily on the family and its influence on the festival, there are many other avenues of research that could be taken regarding the festival. For example, some factors that I was not able to examine as closely as I would have liked due to the limits of my research are women's role in the Obon festival, rural views on the Obon festival, and also regional variations of the festival as even within one city there is a large amount of variation. Each of these different factors would provide different understanding and insight into both the festival, ancestor worship and family. Additionally, a focus on Obon could potentially be brought to other previously done research like Allison's work on new remembrance groups and see how these groups deal with the festival.

The goal of this thesis is to attempt to understand how the Obon festival exists and what it means to people in their 20s and 30s. It aims to see what factors affect and change how a person thinks and acts towards the festival. What this goal has ended up accomplishing, as mentioned numerous times previously, is demonstrating that there is a direct tie between family and the Obon festival for people in their 20s and 30s. Due to this, the study of ancestor worship, the Obon festival and or family will reveal aspects of each other.

Annex

The first of the festivals I attended took place in Tokyo. It took place right outside one of the many stations in Tokyo. Unlike other festivals this festival did not take place in or near a Buddhist temple. What it did have in common with many other festivals was the stage area in the center that had two levels - one for musicians at the top and then a lower level for the lead dancers. The area around the stage was roped off and had guards to ensure that people who wanted to participate in the dancing around the stage did not have drinks or food with them. Outside of this roped area there were many stands selling different types of food such as *karage* (fried chicken) and *kakigōri* (flavoured shaved ice). There were also convenience stores close by with large lines where people were purchasing other items such as alcohol. Around the festival there were lights hung up and advertisements displayed. The music at this festival was likely the most varied out of all the festivals I attended with more modern songs being played such as the one that was focused on Olympic sports with a new dance to match.

The next festival I attended was in Osaka and took place within a large Buddhist temple. Leading up to the temple there were hanging lamps along the roads. Once you passed the initial entrance of the temple there were stands set up selling food, drinks and other items such as masks. Additionally, there were a few stands that were also game stands where participants could play games to try to win prizes. As this was a larger temple, there was one open air building you could enter that was filled with lamps, as along with the Obon festival there was the *Mantou Kuyō* occurring at the same time. Past that building and the pagoda in the temple there was a large area located in front of the (prayer building) of the temple. This area had a sizable pond which was being used as the area that the dancers were dancing around. The stage and musicians

were off to the side instead of in the center. Around the dancers there were many on lookers with some individuals bringing chairs to sit on while watching the dancing.

Another festival that I attend also took place completely within a temple's grounds. However, this temple was much smaller as far as the area it covered. To enter this temple, you first walked up some stairs. Once inside the temple there was another large set of stairs leading up to a temple for prayer. To either side of the stairs there was a small area with standing tables set up and some stands selling food and drinks. In front of the large staircase there was a stage area. When you first arrived, there was a lineup of people. This line up was to receive a program and a number which would be used later for raffles. As more people came there was a guitar player and a singer playing music. Eventually MCs came to the stage and started the official proceedings of the night. Most people at this point were sitting on the stairs. As the events continued, they had music and raffles. When people were about to start dancing however it began to rain. Due to this everyone was led inside to an area with a stage. Here the musicians began to sing, and people started dancing. Between dances they would talk to the singers and also there would be other events such as a dancing exhibition. Eventually it stopped raining, so everyone went back outside. The timing worked quite well as this was right before the main singer of the night began his portion of the event. After we went outside, they did the last bit of the raffles and then introduced the main singer. Once he started lots of people danced around the stage. This continued for an hour or two until the festival finished and people left.

One festival I attended took place in downtown Osaka where there are many tourists and shoppers. It more specifically took place to the left of the main bridge of the area by the river. The main stage area for the announcers, musicians and lead dancers was on a boat in the river. This festival was the smallest in terms of area covered as well as people actively participating at

the same time. While there were lots of people around the area due to the location, not everyone there was participating in the dancing. There were a few stands on the walkway above where the dancing was occurring but not many. At this festival there were people associated with the festival more actively encouraging passerby and onlookers to participate and try dancing. Additionally, they allowed people to dance on the boat if they wanted to. Unlike any of the other festivals this one had announcers that spoke English as well as Mandarin. After some time had passed and when the festival was approaching its end, they opened up the other side of the river to allow for more people to participate in the dancing. This festival, like many of the others, was a multiday affair and according to the schedule on another day it also had a karaoke competition.

A festival that I was invited to begin with a drumming display performed by various groups associated with different parts of the town the temple was located in. Initially they all did the same song and had a similar performance but after that, each of them took individual turns performing more unique songs and performances. Each group consisted of a larger drum carried by many men, with one standing on top leading the others through the chants and they were followed by a group of women with fans who were also chanting. Each group was wearing different colours. After each of the second performances the drums went into the temple and were followed by onlookers who associated themselves with that group. Once inside the drumming group would carry the drum to a specific location that was allocated for each town. They would do a final small performance and then hang the drum up. These were all around the entrance area of the temple when you first entered (see figure 2). In the center of the temple there was a stage area. Once the drumming had stopped, music and dancing began around the stage area. The lead dancers rotated and were also associated with the different towns. At the back of the entrance area there was the prayer building. To the side of the entrance area there were

numerous festival stands set up within the temple grounds selling food, drinks and having games. Due to how crowded the area of the temple was, many people, once they wanted a break from dancing and they had gotten food, went and sat outside of the temple by the side of the road.

Another festival that I went to was located both inside and outside of the temple. Outside of the temple on a shopping street there were many vendors selling food, toys, drinks, and hosting games. Within the temple itself there was a stage where there were musicians and dancers and around it people were dancing. Behind the stage from the entrance there was the prayer area of the temple and off to the side, in the corner, there were two more game stands. This festival had the most visible variation between popularity of the songs to dance to with many people rushing to join for a particular type of dance which was faster pace. Unlike the other festivals, this festival had a portion of women musicians as well as male musicians, though the male musicians still had much more playing time.

The event I went to in Kyoto was not so much an Obon festival but rather marked the end of Obon for the city. For this event multiple Kanji had been written on various mountains with fire. While there are roof top events where you can see all of the kanji, where I was located you could make out three of them if you walked around. The area I went to was by a river that had a view to one of the mountains and there were many people both sitting by the river and eating or just walking by. As the kanji were lit lots of people began to stop by a bridge nearby, that was partly sectioned off and controlled by police, in order to see other kanji. This event was very informal in the sense that where I was located you would be able to see the kanji and, in a sense, participate in the event, even if you had not planned to do so. There was no organization for this location aside from making sure the bridge was still functional and safe.

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