Japanese Urban Tree Burials:

Diversity and Individualization

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Abstract

Parallel with demographic concerns and an individualization process alternative burial practices in Japan have developed. One of them is tree burials that eliminates obligations for descendants to tend the grave, takes up relatively little space in a graveyard and enables memorialization while also providing an opportunity for the dead to remove one's self from household constraints. The thesis investigates urban tree burials in Tokyo and discusses how the burial practice reflects the individualization process in Japan using the framework of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002). This thesis relies primarily on observational data, informal interviews conducted during fieldwork in Tokyo in 2020 and commercial brochures. The gathered material was analysed thematically, focusing on behaviours, objects, and location of burials in the cemeteries. The findings of the thesis noted the diversity among urban tree burial cemetery operators, reflecting consumer demand as well as hinting that tree burials are in an experimental phase in Japan. Furthermore, urban tree burials show different characteristics to both the tree burials researched by Boret (2014) and natural burials. Lastly, urban tree burials seem to be part of the individualization process of Japanese society by demanding choices to be made by its consumers and bereaved.

Key words: *Jumokusō*, Tree burial, Japanese burial, Urban burials, Individualization, Natural burial, Memorialization

Acknowledgements

Table of Content

1. Introduction

Every culture has distinct ways of handling death. Researching how deceased members of society are handled have the potential to yield insight into that society's social cohesion (Collier, 2003:728). Or as Suzuki (2000:18) states: "Death rituals are the crystallization of cultural values and symbolism." Death rituals, or burial practices, are an example of memorialization of individuals which "reflects society's attempts to deal with death" (Collier, 2003:728). Memorialization can be shown in material culture like headstones for the grave, which highlight the absence of a deceased person for the bereaved (Hockey et al, 2012:116-117). Nature focused burials makes use of "nature" to memorialize individuals by utilizing trees as grave markers. Recognized in the US and UK, 'natural burial' is focused on nature and environmental concerns. In Japan a similar phenomenon emerged since the late 1990s, tree burials (*jumokusō¹*)*,* and gains in popularity with the notions of "returning to nature" (Boret, 2013; Inoue, 2013; appendix, group 2, figure 4) and "dying one's own way" (Kawano, 2010; appendix Group 4, figure 3). However, tree burials are interpreted differently, and many variants exist which can generate confusion (Sekiguchi, 2015).

Changes in burial practices are paralleled with changes in society over time. Japan is a country with changing demographic which makes the surety of descendants, who according to cultural logic are responsible for taking care of graves, less certain. Hence, people who consider their mortality are looking into options diverting away from the conventional system of a family grave taken care of by the eldest son and his wife (Sugimoto, 2014; Boret, 2014; Kawano, 2005). Japanese tree burials provide a solution to the issue and were investigated by Boret (2014). The burial practice provides an individual grave with capacity for memorialization while responsibility for the care of the grave lies with the cemetery operator. Additionally, tree burials take up comparatively less space and are cheaper, characteristics that are of great interest in an urban area and within a society in which a funeral is expensive (Suzuki, 2000). Several cemeteries offer tree burials as an option within the Tokyo region. However, they show notable differences from the research by Boret (2014), and these distinctions have not been closely investigated before within an English language academic context.

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¹ The Hepburn style of Romanising Japanese will be used when it is relevant. Common words in English like Tokyo will be excepted.

1.1 Research aim and questions of the thesis

Overall, there is a lack of literature and research focusing on Japanese tree burials conducted in an urban context and by analysing their part in the individualization process, further insight into how Japanese society is affected by demographical changes can be understood. While Boret (2014:99) proposes that the individualization process is not enough to understand tree burials in Japan, this thesis analyses whether that is similar concerning tree burials conducted in urban areas. Within the framework of considering graves to "provide a key to understanding the Japanese perception of the afterlife, and also of their perception of the ideal social ordering of communities" (Suzuki, 2000:35), this thesis investigates tree burials in the cemeteries that say that they offer tree burial, *jumokusō* (樹木葬), in the Tokyo region and contrasts the findings to natural burial and previous research on tree burials in Japan. Accordingly, this thesis aims to highlight urban tree burials and further develop understanding of alternative burial practices in Japan and thus expand knowledge about changes in Japanese society and their implications within the framework of the process of individualization. Consequently, it is a hypothesis of this thesis that the individualization process should be visible in burial practices.

In order to grasp the meaning of tree burials in contemporary Japanese society, the thesis approaches this form of burial practice with two interrelated questions: first a question regarding the phenomenon that explains the burial practice based on findings from fieldwork and compares it to previous research of tree burials and natural burial. By comparing a Japanese nature focused burial practice with a nature focused burial practice most well-known in the UK and US, the Japanese specifics of tree burial will be emphasized. Secondly, an exploratory question regarding the relationship between tree burials conducted in urban areas and individualization in Japanese society.

1. What does Japanese urban tree burials entail, especially in contrast to previously researched nature-focused burial practices?

2. Do urban tree burials as a burial practice reflect the trend towards individualization of deceased in contemporary Japanese society?

1.2 Structure of thesis

After this introduction I will discuss the theory that frames this research, individualization. The literature review in Chapter 3 begins with reviewing the changes of burial practices ongoing in Japan and their relation to individualization and continues with background information concerning conventional burial practices in Japan. A section concerning previous research on nature focused burials, both in Japan and outside the country, follows and accentuate the differences between nature focused burial sites. Lastly, background information concerning cemeteries as a space and memorialization is provided in order to lie the ground for a broader understanding of cemeteries in Japan. Doing research on the topic of death and burials not only demands careful ethical considerations but was also formative in conducting and limiting my research including its questions. This will be discussed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 is dedicated to discussing the method in detail. What urban tree burials consist of is presented in Chapter 6, while Chapter 7 analyses how urban tree burials and the individualization process are interlinked. The thesis finishes with the conclusion in Chapter 8, and finally references and the appendix are placed last in this thesis.

2. Theoretical framework: Individualization

Individualization can be a difficult theory to clarify as the concept is used in various ways. Howard (2008) points out the "currently intense debate and disagreement about the nature of individualization" and states that this debate is not only academic in nature, but also political since individualization is utilized "in the name of particular political ends" (p. 2). In this thesis, individualization is overviewed as described by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002).

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) explain individualization as on one hand a "disintegration of previously existing social forms", and on the other that "in modern societies new demands, controls and constraints are being imposed on individuals." Hence, individualization is not "mere 'subjectivity'" (p.2). Changes in social forms are, for example, transformation of gender roles and family structures. In that case, new demands would be that individuals would have to make a conscious decision regarding their own gender identity and chose how to express it. These decisions would, before the individualization process, be made by the surrounding society and not be a choice. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) write that "one of the decisive features of individualization processes, then, is that they not only permit but they also demand an active contribution by individuals" (p. 4). In other words, it is not only that

individualization enables people to make choices, but that individualization forces people to make choices. Individualization is "a concept which describes a structural, sociological transformation of social institutions and the relationship of the individual to society." (p.202). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002:5) link individualization to urbanization. Urbanization involves individuals removing themselves from the community, and hence their expected community disintegrates, and the individual forms new social bonds at their new location.

With individualization also comes the concept of 'a life of one's own'. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002:152) explains the concept to be dependent on institutions that "presuppose and release individual actors". They add that despite what it might sound like, 'a life of one's own' does not mean individualism or egoism. Neither does it mean that the individual determines themselves. 'A life of one's own' also entails "a detraditionalized life", Beck and Beck-Gernsheim writes that traditions remain important but they "must be chosen and often invented, and they have force only through the decisions and experience of individuals." (p. 26-27). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) continues to write that the concept of a 'life of one's own' is fully explained only by considering the "existential significance of death". They write that the individualization process of peoples' lives entail that their lives cannot be replaced, and hence ends with oneself. "The more personal and unique life is, the more it is irreplaceable" (p.152).

Within a European context, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim claims that "in religious cultures death was like a change of costume or a change of stage.", in other words death was not the end of your existence, just a new form. Secularized societies such as communist ones, instead portray that lives continue on in the betterment of the world. They therefore claim that "Death as the end — not a passage but an absolute and irrevocable end — first emerged with the form of existence we have called 'a life of one's own'." Consequently, "Death becomes unfathomable. Dying becomes the ubiquitous threat to one's own life." (p.152). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) thus propose that modern societies "bury death", that they "forget and suppress" (p. 154).

With comments that 'a life of one's own' is "a life of thorough *conformity* that is binding on more and more groups within the context of labour markets buffered by the welfare state" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:152), they convey a feeling of political views in their theory of individualization, and further makes the theory not universal since not all societies have a welfare state. Confirming the diverse interpretations of individualization within academia (Howard, 2008 and Genov, 2018), Boret (2014:117) points out that "Rowe

problematically assumes that the celebration of an individual's life equates to individualization." Critiquing the theory, Atkinson (2007: 356) points out that its features are ambivalent and contradictory in instances. For instance, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002:203) claim that individualization "exist more in people's consciousness, and on paper, than in behaviour and social conditions", this contradicts the earlier claim that individualization is not "mere subjectivity" (2002:2), argues Atkinson. Another critique of the theory is that it attempts to "universalize the very particular experiences of the affluent middle classes" by ignoring the unequal distribution of access to resources (Atkinson, 2007:350).

In summary, the individualization process does not only describe a society were individuals are conceptualized as individuals, but a society that 'condemns' individuals to choices. Individualization as in 'a life of one's own' enhances the finite of death and will be considered in this thesis regarding the personal memorialization of an individual. Individualization understood as the societal change into providing or demanding choices from individuals will be used as an analytical concept in the thesis.

3. Literature review

The literature review has its focus on literature concerning the individualization process in Japanese society and introduces alternative burial practices focused on nature. Additionally, established Japanese burial customs and beliefs are reviewed. Relevant literature that defines characteristics of a cemetery as space, as well as memorialization as a concept is introduced to provide background for studies in burial practices. The literature review is set up followingly: The first section (3.1) continues from the theoretical framework in the previous chapter and reviews literature about the change within Japanese burial practices that reflects the societal changes of individualization. The second section (3.2) discusses literature about the conventional Japanese grave and the underpinning spirituality concerning ancestor-hood and pitiful spirits. Section (3.3) reviews natural burial and the previous research concerning tree burials in Japan, which embeds the thesis in contemporary burial practices research and puts Japanese urban tree burials in a global perspective. Lastly, section (3.4) concerns cemeteries as a space and their relation to memorialization.

3.1 Changing Japanese burial customs: Individualization

As the Japanese society is changing, so does its mortuary landscape. According to Sugimoto (2014), the Japanese society is transforming as its demographic composition is undergoing change. This 'demographic crisis' leads to a reformation of structures like the welfare system and the labour market (p.85-90). Subsequently, demographic change also impacts family structures and kinship relations. Sugimoto writes that "Japan's family and kinship groups have dwindled and even disintegrated" (p.25) which impacts the social constraints the family and community have enacted. "The disintegration of the family and kinship systems, plus the gradual dissolution of the local community, tends to liberate individuals from intense social constraints imposed by these traditional structures." (Sugimoto, 2014:26). These changes provide an opening for changes in burial practices.

Sugimoto (2014) is far from the only one stating the change in Japanese society and its reasons. Boret (2014:62) declares that the "declining birth-rate and the decrease in marriages are the most significant changes within Japanese families" and that this "have rendered the prospect of establishing and maintaining a generational grave simply impossible for a growing number of Japanese people." Shimane (2018) describes changes in social structure as a consequence to the "unprecedented ageing of Japanese society and the country's declining birth rate" (p.3) while Inoue (2013:127) points out the dissolving of nuclear families. These changes in society and the family structure hence correlate to "the emergence of equally diversified forms of disposal of human remains" (Boret, 2014:62). Suzuki (2013:12) agrees that "changes brought about by social and cultural shifts prompted a larger variation in funerals". Suggesting the individualization process, Suzuki (2013) claims that "the variations are caused by the lack of constraints and controls, while on the other hand, they arise from the respect to the deceased's choices and the deceased's unique relationships to the bereaved and their friends." (p.13).

Suzuki (2000) investigated the funeral industry and explores the transformation of community-based funerals to commercial funerals. Community-based funerals are a "cooperation by community members" in order to "protect the living against the danger of a spirit and the impurity of a corpse" (p.40). Hence, funerals functioned to enhance the relationships of solidarity and cultural values within the community. In contrast, commercial

funerals are conducted by professionals and have been through a process of standardization of prices and services (p.58).

One of the main differences from previous death rituals of community-based funerals are that commercial funeral rituals emphasize memories of the deceased, not their contribution to the household. The funerals functions as "an evaluation of the deceased's life and personality" (Suzuki, 2010:38). Similarly, Inoue (2013:125) also writes that the individual is now in focus during mortuary rituals, in contrast to previous funeral rites. She writes that "the focus of the funeral shifted from the household to the deceased as an individual" which in other words, means "the individualisation of the ritual unit". She further writes that this transformation to the individual as a unit is based on privatisation and individualization.

Suzuki (2000) as well, finds that the commercialization of the funeral in Japan was paralleled with modernization and individualization. She states that "[t]he transition from death rituals to funerals is tied closely to the process of modernization, urbanization, and commercialization in Japanese society" (p. 49). Likewise, Shimane (2018:6) writes that the community-based funeral was a feature of "pre-modern societies" while modernized funerals are noted by the professionalization of services and tasks. Thus, Shimane state that "around the end of the twentieth century, the modernization of the funeral in the urban areas of Japan was almost complete" (p.4). Notably, this completion of the modernization of funerals are occurring at the same as the emergence of alternative burial practices, namely the 1990s (Inoue, 2013:129).

Kawano (2010:145) also state that "alternative burial systems" increased from the 1990s in Japan. Key features of these alternative burial systems were that there were no requirement of a successor and that "individuals rather than families are the basic units of participation." (p.145). Inoue (2013:123) even more strongly claims that "the basis of Japanese society shifted from collective consciousness to individual consciousness" and as such, Inoue writes that the Japanese society has "moved its fundamental unit to the individual". Boret (2014) as well, writes that "conventional cemetery managers and grave-users have developed strategies that respond to changes within family structures" (p. 62).

Suzuki (2013:4) finds that "[t]he sharing of social and cosmic space and values between the bereaved and their community was fundamental for individuals to comprehend who they are,

where they belong, what is their life purpose, and what is the meaning of death." Suzuki continues to write that when removed from the community and the community funeral "and its shared moral framework", individuals must seek their "own identity, belongingness, and purpose of life within complex layers of continuously shifting social relationships." Boret (2014) also points out the shifting relationships as one of the "most distinctive changes in contemporary Japanese mortuary practices". Another distinct change is choosing the burial methods and funeral, "the act of choosing one's death" (p.88). In other words, "contemporary Japanese had to find multiple ways to deal with death" (Suzuki, 2013:4) instead of relying on previous established institutions. Correspondingly, Inoue (2013:126) puts it simply that "with the decline in respect of household and ancestors, Japanese are coming to see themselves as individuals and now value those relationships they nurtured. In an individualised society, family members or others can't replace the death of each individual from a network because specific individuals cultivated those ties." Rowe (2000) as well detects the "individualization of the deceased" to be visible in the shift to mortuary rites that are "urban individual family events" instead of community-based, as well as the "increasing choices and commercialization of the funeral process" and the presence of the deceased as an individual and consumer "with choices and wants" (p. 371).

In summary, the Japanese mortuary landscape has undergone significant changes. It went from a community-based, pre-modern funeral to an individualized and professionalized, modern funeral reflecting changes of Japanese society, namely demographic changes of low birth-rates, altered family structures and an aging population. Suzuki summarily states that the "physical nature of death never changes but the experience of death has changed from a collectively shared event to an individual and professionally processed affair." (Suzuki, 2013:4) In other words, previously funerals and burial practices were centred around the household, now in contemporary society this is dissolving, and focus is instead the individual; hence personality becomes an aspect in the mortuary landscape. Moreover, individualization consequently means that dependency bonds to Buddhist temples decrease, and Inoue points out that this change is occurring mainly in urban areas (2013:126). With new, alternative burial systems created, that are catered to individuals rather than family units, burial practices in Japan are in a transitional state, since family graves still substitute a substantial part of the mortuary landscape in Japan. The next section will provide background information on established cultural norms concerning death in Japan.

3.2 The conventional Japanese family grave and Buddhist mortuary rituals

In order to understand the mortuary landscape of Japan the concepts of the household system and its connection to ancestral worship needs to be kept in mind. Additionally, the spiritual concept of *muenbotoke* (無縁仏) is fundamental for understanding the Japanese sense of apprehension for a lack of descendants and the structures influencing the choice of grave.

Each country has some form of registration, in Japan this registration is structured into households (*ie,* 家) with a household head. Each household have traditionally a family grave where the ancestors of that household are memorialized. The duty of taking care of the family grave lies with the household head, which patriarchally is usually the male/husband in the family, with the eldest son as heir. As such, the family grave and the household system are linked. Boret (2014:98) states clearly: "The ancestral grave system is based on the established conventions of the household system."

Apart from keeping the grave physically clean and orderly, the responsibility of the family grave includes taking care of the dead spiritually. Boret (2014:176) writes that "the deceased who do not receive ritual care by their family are socially and morally stigmatized as undignified individuals and, possibly though not always, feared by the living." Hence, there is the "cultural logic that the successor should ensure the well-being of ancestors." (Kawano 2005:35). This is accomplished by offerings such as incense and specific ceremonies at fixed points. "Japanese people perform elaborate ancestral rites to gradually transform the dangerous newly dead into benevolent ancestors during a ritual cycle of thirty-three or fifty years." (Kawano, 2005:82). This is supported by Suzuki (2000:35), who states that the Japanese have the belief that death has a process. The final station for a deceased's spirit is as an 'ancestor'. After conditions of ritual care are met, the deceased reach ancestor-hood as they lose their individuality. Kawano (2005:29) writes that "by the end of the typical ritual circle, the dead have left the memories of the living, as their contemporaries, one by one, have died out."

Ensuring that any deceased in the household is transformed into an ancestor is a social duty that if not fulfilled, leads to stigmatizing. Kawano (2005:34) continues to state that "tending

the family dead properly is a moral act that embodies a person's commitment to the stem family." However, descendants are not the only ones taking care of the spirits of the deceased and their last resting place. Buddhist priest traditionally gives the deceased a posthumous name during the funeral, which will ensure the deceased is purified and becomes a Buddhist disciple in their afterlife. Moreover, the posthumous name provides information of the deceased, for example age and gender (Suzuki, 2000:168-169). Buddhist temples depend on parishioners for their livelihood, and new parishioners are recruited during funerals and the placement of deceased's ashes onto the temple burial grounds (ibid,168-176). Historically, by law, it has been obligatory for each household to be registered with a temple. In contemporary Japan however, this relationship between household and Buddhist temple have changed in its nature. Due to migration, households break ties with temples and bereaved "now have the power to choose their temples and priests rather than depending on them" (ibid, 171-172).

But what happens in cases where the spirit is not taken care of? The concept of *muenbotoke* answers that inquiry and is fundamental for understanding of how death is understood within Japanese society. A *muenbotoke* is a spirit of a deceased that for some reason did "not follow or live out the normal course of life". For example children, divorced daughters, persons with no offspring and unmarried persons. In addition, persons who died while traveling will also become *muenbotoke* (Suzuki, 2000:32) Boret (2014:92) explains *muenbotoke* as "unattached and uncared for spirits". Kawano (2005:34) as well, writes that "without descendants to care for them, the dead in untended graves are destined to become pitiable, homeless souls *(muenbotoke)*" Understandably, a lack of descendants to care for your grave and spirit after your passing is a pressing concern. "Japanese people have a fear of being ritually neglected and forgotten after death, which is regarded as a truly miserable condition" (ibid, 29).

Culturally, the deceased thus does not 'rest in peace' and the "the family grave is treated as a house for ancestors in the outside world" (Kawano, 2005:33). Boret (2014:125) makes the addition that the family grave "represents the status of the household or deceased". Lastly, it is important to keep in mind that ancestors are typically greeted "by clasping of one's hands and given incense" (Kawano, 2005:24). Consequently, lightning incense and clasping one's hands is expected behaviours at a gravesite. In this thesis I have used the word "pray" to refer to the clasping of one's hands, but as Kawano points out, it can also be a greeting. Below are two pictures that show examples of how conventional cemeteries and graves in Japan are constructed.
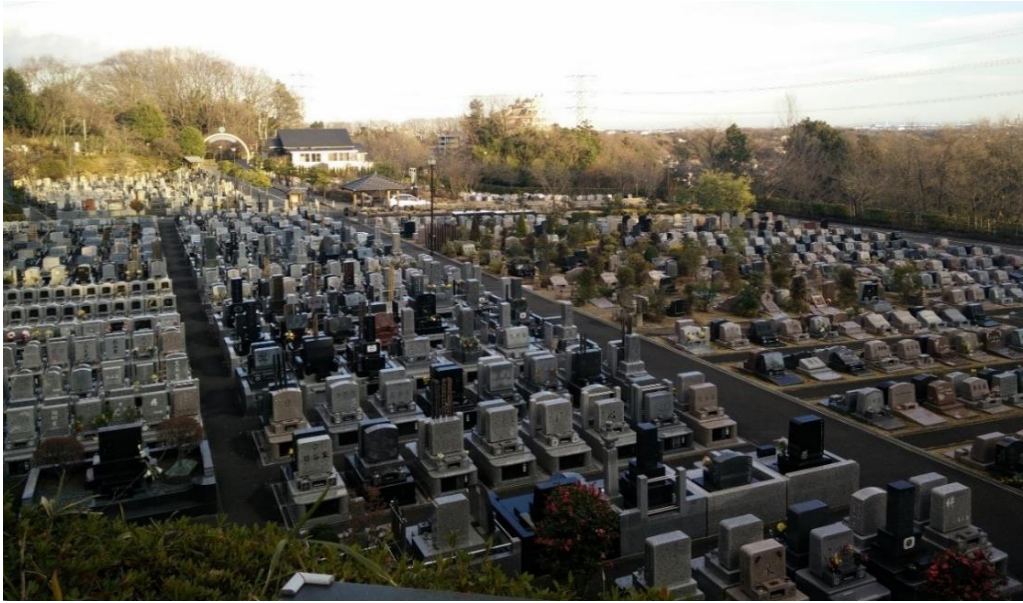
Picture 1[2]. Overview of a part of Machida Izumi Cemetery, 2020.
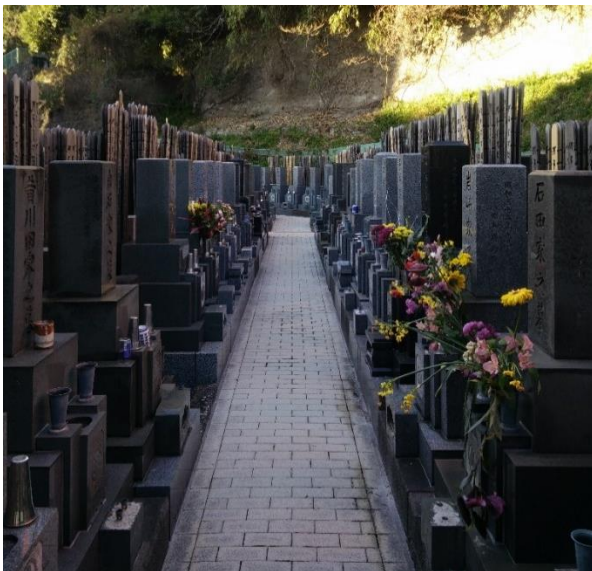
Picture 2. A path between rows of conventional family graves, Rurikō-ji, 2020

In summary, the conventional Japanese mortuary landscape is heavily influenced by the household structure of *ie*, which dedicates a corresponding burial system where individuals are buried in a family grave. The spirituality of mortuary ritual in turn is heavily influenced by the idea of the spirit transforming, by the action of descendants, into proper, non-dangerous, ancestors. Should this fail, the spirit may be a danger to the living on one end of the spectrum, and on the other be in a pitiful situation. Finally, mortuary rituals are associated with

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[2] All pictures used in this thesis is photographed by me.

Buddhism. The next section will concern nature-focused burials and the previous research on Japanese tree burials.

3.3 The environmental conscious burials: 'Tree-Burial' and 'natural burial'

Boret (2014) notes several key differences between tree burials conducted in Japan and the kind he investigated, hence the term 'Tree-Burial' which indicates this distinction. 'Tree-Burial' consists of ashes directly put into a hole in the ground with a tree planted above or nearby. In addition to the tree marking the grave, wooden tablets inscribed with the deceased's name are used as well (Boret, 2014:8, 31). The main difference between Japanese tree burials and the Japanese 'Tree-Burial' is the 'forest cemetery', which is a large woodland area where within 'Tree-Burial' is conducted. Furthermore, the practice is environmentally conscious and have activities in conservation and restoration of forests (ibid, 7-10). Another distinctive feature of 'Tree-Burial' is that the graves are not constrained by the household system and thus enables Japanese to negotiate social bonds and chose with whom they will be buried (ibid, 100). 'Tree-Burial' also have a community formed around the practice and protection of Japanese nature. Workshops, hikes, and various other activities are open for members to attend and enables them to form social bonds with each other (ibid, 131-134).

Boret (2014:7) states that the counterpart to 'Tree-Burial' is the 'natural cemeteries'. Therefore, literature reviewing natural burial will be discussed. Markedly, Boret (2014:32) distinguishes between Japanese tree burial and natural burial since the body in Japan is cremated, while other 'environmentally friendly' burial practices prefer a full body burial as a basis of the practice. Hockey et al. (2012), Coutts et al. (2018), Stewart (2018) and Clayden et al. (2018) write concerning natural burial with a primary focus on the UK and the US. Coutts et al. (2018:130-131) importantly points out that while natural burial is "approached as a new phenomenon in Western Europe and the US, in fact represents standard practice in many places"

Clayden et al. (2018:99) describe the vision of natural burial to be a cemetery space where headstones are replaced with trees, and as such, "nature would be the focus of this new cemetery landscape rather than the preservation of individual graves and identities of the deceased." Moreover, they add that natural burial has "environmental and ecological objectives." (Clayden et al, 2018:100). Additionally, Hockey et al. (2012:121) write that characteristic of natural burial is that "its mortuary purpose may not differentiate it from its

surroundings" even if the burial ground is set aside for mortuary purposes. Underlying meaning is also that natural burial grounds are "sites designed to bear limited evidence of human intervention". In similar vein, Coutts et al. (2018:131) describe natural burial as "burial of an unembalmed body in a biodegradable casket or shroud with no vault" and claim that natural burial is "the most conscientious alternative on the spectrum of ecological sensitivity". Finally, Stewart (2018:295) describes natural burial as having three main defining components: "foregoing chemical embalming, using a biodegradable burial vessel, and returning the remains to the elements without a burial vault."

Interestingly, Clayden et al. (2018:101) observes that natural burials have a pragmatic aspect for cemetery operators. A different form of grave could enable cemetery operators to utilize cemetery grounds otherwise not considered usable for conventional graves; Clayden et al. uses steep topography as an example. As such, natural burial can be "marginal spaces" within the cemeteries. In their fieldwork, the found that natural burial was utilized to create spaces of shelter, enclosure, and privacy in the urban cemeteries (p.104).

Natural burial is an ecological sensitive burial practice that tries to limit the visible remains of human activity when disposing human remains. However, natural burial has been contested in this ideal, as memorialization of deceased is a human action that is strongly integrated in the societies these researchers have investigated. Writing about stress and pressure from surrounding society, mainly relatives, Stewart (2018) fins that "[t]hose who seek out and choose natural burial at times experience considerable stress as they worry about family members, friends, and community members who may perceive natural burial to be a violation of community norms" (p.299).

One common community norm concerning graves is memorialization of individuals. Hockey et al. (2012:121) have focused on how the burial space of natural burial relate with the material culture regularly visible in conventional cemeteries (for example gravestones), hence has they have utilized the concept of "absence" and asks the question of "How do these absences become present in sites designed to bear limited evidence of human intervention?" In their fieldwork they have found that tensions arise between an "undisturbed natural landscape" and memorialization. Some bereaved people wished to mark the grave through various means, while others were annoyed by the disturbance in the landscape. For example, by not disturbing the plantation, some thought the burial grounds were being neglected; instead of the cemetery operators having "an active management regime of non-intervention"

(ibid, 125) Hockey et al. also points out that by marking the grave, bereaved people are "making their absent friend or relative present" (ibid, 124).

These tensions allow for the development of various forms of the burial practice. Clayden et al. write that natural burial went through an experimental phase where various diverse forms of the burial practice were created, but all unified in the concept of replacing the headstone with plantation. For example, natural burial in the form of wildflower meadows or orchards. Furthermore, they note a difference between natural burial within the public sector and the private sector of independent cemetery operations, with the latter generally being more "innovative in its interpretation" of natural burial (Clayden et al, 2018:100).

In summary, natural burial is a practice that notably have tension regarding memorialization by the bereaved and what "natural" entails. Moreover, natural burial is utilized by cemetery operators to both create diverse spaces within the cemetery as well as to utilize the landscape to the utmost. 'Tree-Burial' is a Japanese tree burial practice that shares similarities with natural burial. Namely, that both are environmentally conscious, place ashes/human remains directly into the soil and that both mark the grave with a tree. The next section reviews further into the concept of memorialization and cemeteries as a space of mortuary ritual.

3.4 Cemeteries as a space of memorialization

Significance and meaning of cemeteries have been previously debated and is a research area in its own. Rugg (2000) points out several key features of a cemetery. She claims that an established perimeter, as well as the location is the primary characteristic of cemeteries. Cemeteries are an enclosed space, "generally located close but not necessarily within settlements" (p. 261). Rugg writes that the perimeter, most often a secure boundary, have both the purpose of keeping the dead from being disturbed, but also to keep the dead "sequestering" from the living. The perimeter, with the addition of a marked entrance, thus establishes the cemetery as separated place with a specific purpose. This enclosed, separated space is also defined by how it is utilized. Cemeteries are a space for disposal of primarily human remains as well as memorialization of deceased individuals. Cemeteries "offer the possibility of, and a context for, memorializing a particular individual" through the construction of ways of locating a specific individual, for example pathways and grave

markers. It is "implicit" in the construction of cemeteries to allow "the ability of users to locate a specific grave" (Rugg, 2000:262).

Lastly, cemeteries can also be a space for recreation and to "enjoy the landscape". Rugg writes that "indeed, over time, cemeteries may acquire the characteristics of local parks." (ibid, 272). Rugg concludes that each generation "defines its key reasons for seeking to dispose of the dead in a particular type of cemetery landscape. The site may become increasingly sacred or less so," (ibid, 272). As such, cemeteries as a space are constructed within the society, and how they are constructed are flexible with the changing times and different cultural influences. In other words, cemeteries reflect the culture and society in which they are created, and therefore they are of interest to research as a window into society.

Since memorialization is a vital part of human interaction with burial it is necessary that the concept is overviewed. Collier (2003:728) writes that memorialization "reflects society's attempts to deal with death". Furthermore, memorialization of the deceased is linked to material culture. Material culture involve for example, mementos of a person who lived and the marking of the grave. Hallam and Hockey (2001:5) questions the view that the dead are sequestered away from the living and claim that fear of death is deeply interwoven with fear of social death, to be forgotten. "Indeed, in contemporary context, the threat of death is very much bound up with the possibility of *social* erasure and the annihilation of identities that they have lived out." (ibid, 4). Therefore, memorialization of the dead is conducted. Similar to Rugg (2000:262), Hallam and Hockey write that cemeteries "serve as sites of memory making" and that "the cultural meanings ascribed to spaces of the dead and dying are evoked through social practices and it is this nexus of social space and practice that reproduces potent death-related memories." (Hallam and Hockey, 2001:5).

Hallam and Hockey (2001) describe diverse ways of memorialization of death. Western conceptions of memory consider objects as holders of memories, and therefore some objects are chosen as mementos of death because of their perceived endurance to time, such as stone. (ibid, 49). On the other hand, some objects are chosen because their perceived weakness to the passing of time, such as flowers. Flowers symbolizes the fragility of life as they, cut off from their roots, wither away quickly (ibid, 5). Hence, Hallam and Hockey (2001) write that flowers and trees are utilized to visualize the "iconography that registers the flow of time in a material environment" (ibid, 51). Hallam and Hockey also point out that mundane objects can

be associated with keeping memories based on their connection to the deceased (ibid, 49-50). Thus, objects of memorialization are not uniform. Lastly, Hallam and Hockey claim that the spatial location are also part of the memorialization ritual as they write, "within public space, the meaning and cultural values assigned to objects are informed by their spatial location" (Hallam and Hockey, 2001:77).

In summary, memorialization is linked to spatial location. Cemeteries enable visitors to locate individual burial locations and provides a context for memorialization. Cemeteries are a space for disposal of remains, located some distance away from the living, marked by a boundary and are sometimes used as parks by the living.

4. Ethical considerations and challenges

Since my thesis topic concerns burials and death, ethical considerations in this research are of great importance. Most of all, the topic demands great respect to other people's feelings who might be grieving a beloved one. Ethical considerations therefore guided my choice of methods and also limited my research possibilities. Accordingly, research and method strove to be as unobtrusive as possible, and I have chosen written material and observation as my main sources of data. Additionally, informal conversations to office personnel in varying length, from 15 minutes to almost an hour, constituted part of my fieldwork and was used as one of the main sources of data. I did not ask for names and consequently the informants are all anonymous. I introduced myself as a student doing fieldwork and writing about tree burials in Japan as a thesis through Waseda University. The informants were both men and women, and of various positions. One seemed to be a gardener, two seemed to have a higher position as noted by other informants' behaviour towards them. Interestingly, the three positions mentioned was all male, while the rest of the informants that seemed to be office personnel were all female. This observation corresponds to findings of gender stratification within the funeral industry made by Suzuki (2000:133-147).

Permission was asked for photographs of graves and granted by the office personnel of the cemeteries, on the premise that no names were visible enough to be read and were taken with discretion. When conducting observations, I was careful of my actions and dress, in order to remain as respectful and unnoticed as possible in the situation. Despite my cautions I was noticed, and my presence might have had an obstructive effect which in turn might have

disrupted the observation. For the written material collected I did not need to pay attention to ethical considerations as the material was commercial and informative, meant to be shared. At the cemetery offices, personnel provided me with further material upon request.

4.1 Validity, reflexivity, and reliability

The aim for unobtrusiveness influenced my choice of methods and the methods chosen of informal interviews, written material gathering, and observation were used to gain data concerning a burial practice. Understandably, the methods chosen influenced the type of data able to be collected. To ensure validity, the questions asked during the informal interviews were as often as possible open-ended, the material gathered were commercial brochures, adapt for investigating how cemetery operators explained the burial practice through how they marketed themselves as well as information concerning prices. Observation is appropriate for collecting data about behaviours.

As a researcher, I have the responsibility of being reflective and questioning of my own experience. I am a young Swedish woman that visited cemeteries in Japan, and while 'death tourism' is a phenomenon, I can safely assume I was noticed and stood out. As such, the recognized issue of people changing their behaviour when observed (Bryman, 2016:276) could potentially have influenced the data. Although, assumedly a majority of the visitors to the cemetery had a purpose there, and hence came to do their business and would do it whether a stranger sat by on a bench enjoying the sunlight. But for some of the visitors my presence might have influenced their behaviour.

My outside perspective as a non-native might have provided insight that someone brought up in the culture would have missed or assumed to be universal, but the chance for the opposite is likely as well. A native person would probably have had access to more information concerning burial culture within Japan, while I had to start from what little I knew from my previous stay in Japan and visits to tourist spots. Moreover, fluency in Japanese would have eased the conversations and made interviews easier to conduct. I tried to avoid bias in my own interpretation of the data by going through my fieldnotes several times from different perspectives. Potentially, the passing of my grandfather and the choice of spreading his ashes in a memorial site some months prior to the fieldwork could have influenced my views on funerals and choices concerning burials. Not in the least, it probably influenced my impression of urban tree burial sites as reminiscent of Swedish memorial sites.

Several sites had common elements but considering the diversity within the sites a broader search area for urban tree burial sites would be beneficial for the thesis' reliability. From the informal interviews of those informants that could provide the information, I got to know that the sites only had had *jumokusō* as an option for less than a decade. As such, if there would be a study in the future concerning the same topic, I have full faith there will be more foundation for data available. However, considering how the urban tree burials accustomed to customer demand and showed variety it would be difficult to say that *jumokusō* in Japan would remain similar to what it is now. Therefore, the findings of this thesis are uncertain in terms of replicability, as so much of the findings depended on what sites were visited. The uncertainty could have been lessened by expanding the number of sites visited, or the addition of homepages or other second-hand material. Additionally, my language level in Japanese could impact the reliability of the informal interviews as they were conducted in Japanese and I experienced some communication issues.

4.2 Limitations and demarcations

The sites in this thesis are but a small number of all the *jumokusō* sites in Japan, nonetheless it provides examples of what urban tree burials entails. The area of interest was demarcated to sites located reasonably near Tokyo and were chosen based on proximity and available information online. Moreover, this thesis has relied on literature written in English only. One insufficiency of the thesis is that I fail to compare urban tree burials with other alternative burial practices in Japan, for example, ash scattering as investigated by Kawano (2004 and 2010).

Moreover, I also do not explicitly compare tree burial with conventional burials. This choice was made since a comparison to natural burial seemed more appropriate and likely to yield interesting results as they share the utilization of trees in the burial. Additionally, considering my immediate association between the tree burial sites and Swedish memorial sites, a comparison between these two would have been interesting to further pursue.

Another limitation is that individualization as described by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) is focused in a European context, which have inherently issues when applied to non-European contexts (see Wesley-Smith and Goss, 2010: Mielke and Hornidge, 2017). The Eurocentric issue is also noted by both Porcu, (2018) and Rowe (2003), and the thesis also relies on

findings by Suzuki (2000 and 2013), Inoue (2013), Kawano (2010) and Sugimoto (2014) that individualization process is ongoing in Japan.

4.3 Research focus and choice of methods

Since tree burials are a relatively new phenomena with a lack of available English-language research in the context of urban cemeteries in Japan, I wanted to have an explorative mindset before conducting fieldwork, with the possibility to adapt my research topic to what needed to be understood within the topic of tree burial in Japan. Hence, I had research questions before going to Japanese cemeteries that provided *jumokusō* as an option and my research questions were adapted after fieldwork.

Originally my main concern was to understand the concept of tree burials, which remains part of my aim. However, my initial plan was to research how tree burial looked like in Japan in connection with how the cemetery operators marketed the service, by collecting commercial brochures. During fieldwork I realized that what I thought I would research looked different from what I expected, and I did not understand the basics of the practice yet. Boret (2014) emphasized the community formed around tree burials, which differed from my findings of urban tree burials. Memorialization and the individualization process seemed to play a prominent role and therefore, after fieldwork my interest in individualization and memorialization were expanded. Additionally, my interest in the design and construction of urban tree burials increased as I was struck by their similarity to Swedish memorial sites. Certainly, this type of exploratory research has its great disadvantages, and it would have been good if I could do research again on this topic in order to investigate deeper.

Several methods were considered to understand the phenomena of tree burial. Interviews would provide in-depth information and as such deeper understanding of the thought processes behind the burial practice. Participatory observation or ethnography would probably yield high-quality data consisting of both deeper conversations beyond small talk as well as observation of behaviours at the sites. Participatory observation and ethnography are methods that when done properly is a long-term commitment. The time restraint of four weeks thus made them difficult options. However, timing also proved to be to my disadvantage. The staff at the site of the Ending center at Izumi Machida Cemetery, asked when I would leave Japan and were disappointed to hear that it would be at the end of February and not the end of March, since their yearly ceremony underneath the cherry tree blossoms were to be held in later March, and I was asked if I could stay to attend the ceremony. During my fieldwork I

was unable to attend any of the ceremonies that several sites had a set amount of times a year, where a Buddhist priest would offer incense and prayers for the deceased.

Since I did not know how willing personnel at the sites were to answer questions, or how intimidating I would be as a white foreigner or even how sensitive the questions I had was, I choose to keep the interviews informal in nature to lessen the formality of the situation and ultimately to lessen the pressure on my informants. Me taking notes when they were speaking and reading questions from a paper in a certain order would potentially turn the situation into a burden for my informants. In the cultural context of Japan, them telling me to leave or openly refusing me would be quite rude in their role as personnel and the face outward for the cemetery operator. Aware of this ethical issue, I decided to try to gather information as informal as possible. The difference in status between replying to a curious inquiry by an exchange student doing a thesis and being interviewed is great in Japan and require different levels of commitment and responsibility of the informants. The caution proved to be the right one after my first informal interview where the staff said that the cheif knew more English when we faced communication issues, and when I asked when the chief would be at the site and potentially available (hoping for an interview with prepared written down questions), the informant avoided providing me with information. As Suzuki (2000:139), who similarly have researched the sensitive topic of death in Japan, states that "by avoiding direct answer, they were saying no." I took it to heart and left shortly after and did not return for a further interview.

5. Methodology: Data collection and method of fieldwork

To answer the research questions this thesis relies primarily on first-hand data collected during four weeks in January and February 2020 in the Tokyo region, with a majority of them located in the east parts of Tokyo due to ease of travel. The data was collected through multi-sited fieldwork that included both observation and informal interviews in Japanese with the personnel available, most often office staff. Furthermore, I collected written material, such as advertisement, commercial brochures, and information pamphlets, primarily from the cemetery offices at the sites during my fieldwork. Japan have a surprisingly substantial amount of cemetery operators offering tree burials but due to ease of travel and information available on the internet, only 7 locations were visited. Of these locations, two are temples, one is a public cemetery, and the 4 others are cemeteries run by companies. The sites and their

addresses were found through the internet, with a simple search of "Tokyo jumokusou" and "樹木葬" leading to sites compiling tree burial grounds in Japan and providing information like addresses. Namely these sites were utilized: mazdoya.co.jp, iseya.co.jp and en-park.net.

5.1 Observation of cemetery space

Observation is useful when forming hypothesis or researching an area of new interest. Hence, this method was chosen as most probable to provide the initial understanding of how tree burials function. Furthermore, observation of the sites provided me with an understanding how tree burial sites looked like, and observation of people visiting the site gave me information on how tree burials were treated within Japanese society. Observation of tree burial cemeteries was conducted as non-participatory and nonobstructive as possible. Notes were taken immediately on the site and expanded on upon in the evening the same day. The notes include "location, who is involved, what prompted the exchange or whatever, date and time of the day and so on" (Bryman, 2016:440) As well as my own reflections and initial theories. My procedure at the sites were to first take a slow walk around and locate the *jumokusō* burial ground, categorize its design and compare it to previous experiences, then find a place to blend into the background as much as possible and start the observation. During observation I would track visitors' movements and take notes on behaviours and any thoughts that came to mind. Lack of visitors after a certain amount of time or other interferences would conclude the observation and I would move to gather material and conducting the informal interviews.

5.2 Informal interviews of office personnel

After concluding the observation, I headed for the office building or took contact with personal available at the site that I encountered. I opened the interaction with asking for material, such as brochures, on *jumokusō* and introducing myself as a student of Waseda University, writing an essay on tree burials in Japan. The response was positive at all sites, and I was able to ask questions. I focused the questions on things that I could not gain from observations: how the burial was conducted, if the ashes were in direct contact with the soil, if the burial was popular, how long the cemetery operator had offered tree burial, if the consumers were religious, how come the site was designed as it was, if there was any significance to the species of trees/vegetation, if there was a price difference between tree

burial and conventional burial and what reasons there were for tree burial. The questions were frequently adapted to each site and how the conversation flowed with the informant. In cases where language barrier was apparent, Google Translate and Jisho (online dictionary) was used to ease the conversations. At some sites, the staff proved to sustain longer conversations than others. Some informal conversations were in part small talk or exchange of funeral culture. For example, I discussed Swedish gravestones, my grandfather's funeral, and religious sentiments. Such cross-cultural comparison is to be expected as small talk and frequently my experience and reason for being in Japan, and how long I had been in the country and how long I have studies Japanese was a substantial part of the conversations. After asking my questions I thanked them for their time and help before taking my leave. Immediately after I would find a place to sit and write down fieldnotes of the conversation.

5.3 Analysis of fieldnotes

When conducting the fieldwork and writing up the notes, key elements struck me, and these key elements made up my initial analysis and theorizing. After returning to Sweden the fieldnotes were printed out for overview and easier coding by hand. The material was read and coded into themes that appeared in the material, and repeatedly compared and re-read to ensure "a close connection between data and conceptualization" (Bryman, 2016:573). Themes that emerged was "flower, incense, pray" together as one theme and as separate, "discussion/talk", "no flowers", "no incense", "no pray", "respect", "margin", "pray at grave spot/individual", "grass", "contemplation", "pictures", "food", "container", "generation difference", "threw away trash", "clap", "company cares" and "difficult to find". In later stages the themes were re-coded into "memorialization", "behaviours", "location" and "attributes".

In addition, the fieldnotes were marked with colours, red indicated actions of visiting the grave while green indicated actions not focusing on visiting a grave, such as jogging and taking pictures. This was done for easier overview of the different actions taking place at the sites. Pictures taken were also utilised in the thematic analysis and was considered part of the fieldnotes (Bryman, 2016:550), but the pictures were not printed out as this was deemed unnecessary and costly.

6. Findings during fieldwork: Urban tree burial

This section provides the main findings of the fieldwork and describes what urban *jumokusō* involves. The urban tree burial sites visited was:

- Tokyo Metropolitan Kodaira Reien, Kodaira, Tokyo
- Kodaira Fureai Park, Kodaira, Tokyo
- Hanakoganei Fureai Park, Kodaira, Tokyo
- Kodaira Hōen Garden, Kodaira, Tokyo
- Ending Center at Machida Izumi Cemetery, Machida, Tokyo
- Rurikō-ji, Minato, Tokyo
- Shōman-ji, Minato, Tokyo

Sadly, at two of the sites I did not manage to find the location of *jumokusō*, which indicates how the tree burial sites are marginal in contrast to other forms of burial at the cemetery operators. The two sites were Kodaira Hōen Garden, where I met an elderly lady and discussed conventional ancestral family graves with her for a bit more than an hour. She provided me with much information about her own view of conventional burial practices which helped me grasp the meaning of conventional burial customs. The second cemetery was Rurikō-ji where I located a pillar covered in plants and seemingly used as a memorial but were unsure if that what was the site meant with *jumokusō* due to lack of signs. At Shōman-ji the *jumokusō* was not marked with signs and I confirmed my assumption with personnel at the site. Similarly, personnel confirmed at Ending Center the sites of tree burial. The remaining sites all had signs that clearly stated *jumokusō,* with Tokyo Metropolitan Kodaira Reien having the site separated from the rest of the cemetery with a boundary. In summary, out of the 7 sites 5 areas of tree burial was located with certainty.

6.1 Construction of urban tree burial

Tree burial can be conducted differently, and different cemetery operators provide different services. One type is with a tree replacing the headstone of an individual grave as described by Boret (2014). Other types exist where several individuals are buried in the same vault/crypt underneath a single tree or surrounded by trees, and also types where several individuals are buried in separated spots underneath a shared 'symbolic' tree (with the roots not necessarily reaching all the graves). During my fieldwork I encountered the two latter types. In contrast to

the first type of one tree per grave, both of the latter types enable space saving with fewer trees than buried individuals, which is likely why these types were common in urban areas.

The site of Tokyo Metropolitan Kodaira Reien provided both individual spots underneath shared trees on one mound, and the type with shared vaults underneath shared trees on the mound located beside the first one, which they called *jurinkata* (樹林型). Ashes could be buried both in sachets and containers with a price difference (see appendix, group 1, figure 4). Furthermore, the *jumokusō* was separated from the rest of the cemetery by a fence with signs encouraging tranquillity and prohibiting smoking, jogging, eating food, biking, walking dogs and stepping on the grass (see appendix, group 1, figure 7). Tokyo Metropolitan Kodaira Reien reminded me more of a memorial than the other sites. Below is a picture showing both mounds, each with its own altar.

Picture 3. Tokyo Metropolitan Kodaira Reien, 14 January 2020

The site of Ending Center focused their tree burial on the cherry blossom trees, called '*sakura*'. Hence, they called their *jumokusō* for *sakurasō* (桜葬). In contrast to the other sites, Ending Center had both a separated area only for tree burials, and tree burials interspersed within the cemetery of Machida Izumi Jōen (see appendix, group 2, figure 1). In other words, Ending Center was the only site where the tree burial was not placed in marginal spaces and/or at the edge of the cemetery.

Several different types of tree burial and locations within the cemetery were available through the organization. Ending Center started as an organization to "support the changes in graves from 'kin' to 'connection'" (Inoue, 2013:131) and hence one of its aims is to serve as a

replacement of the family and provide a community. The community function is showed in their magazine where several activities can be joined, for example cooking together and a support group (see appendix, Group 2, figure 2 and 3). Inoue (2013) calls the 'cherry burial' a "branched out tree-burial" and writes that if a grave can be compared to a house for ancestors then 'cherry burial' compares to a condominium (p.131). Ending Center thus provides graves where individuals with no kinship relation can be buried based on other bonds. For example, graves with only females and graves with only males buried referred to as a "sharehouse" (see appendix, Group 2, figure 5). The following picture show the name plates, places for flowers and incense and the grass covered graves.

Picture 4. Ending Center, 29 January 2020

Some burials within the Machida Izumi cemetery constituted of larger sections of grass with fewer trees. Some burials were surrounded by plants and bushes but keeping the area directly above the burials covered only by grass. The picture below illustrates graves covered by grass only, with the symbolic tree separated from the section by a pathway.

Picture 5. 'Cherry burial' at Machida Izumi cemetery, 29 January 2020

Both Tokyo Metropolitan Kodaira Reien and Ending Center had trees as their focus. In contrast, the sites of Kodaira Fureai Park, Hanakoganei Fureai Park and Shōman-ji reminded me more of flowerbeds than the word "tree burial" would be assumed to indicate. Both Kodaira Fureai Park and Hanakoganei Fureai Park showed great variety within the cemeteries concerning headstone design and had graves focused on roses. Both sites offered tree burials that were marketed as 'Rose tree funeral "Diana"' (バラの樹木葬「ダイアナ」) in a cemetery promoting as a garden with features like water fountains. From office staff at Hanakoganei Fureai Park I was informed that all grave spots were sold out and that it was a very popular burial.

Picture 6. Kodaira Fureai Park, 26 January 2020, the road outside the cemetery visible through the fence. The flowers in metal vases are flowers left by visitors, the tree burial vegetation is the planted plants.

Picture 7 and 8. Hanakoganei Fureai Park, 26 January 2020. The picture to the left show tree burials alongside a pathway and the picture on the right show tree burials at the edge of the cemetery. Name plates are placed on the stone separating the burial ground from the pathways.

With the smaller size of the grave (see appendix, group 2, figure 7 and figure 8), tree burial enables cemetery operators to utilize space that otherwise would be difficult to sell as spots for family graves. Space that otherwise would be used for making the cemetery look more aesthetically pleasing can with *jumokusō* also be utilised as burial grounds and thus earn the operator more income. Thus, *jumokusō* in urban cemeteries are useful for cemetery operators and provides cheaper graves with no descendant necessary for customers. Furthermore, the newness of the burial might also impact its location within the cemeteries. As it is newer, and hence an addition to the cemetery, it is natural that its location would more often be at the edge since remodelling the cemetery would entail relocating already placed graves. Additionally, this location in the cemeteries could have implications for memorialization as "the meaning and cultural values assigned to objects are informed by their spatial location" (Hallam and Hockey, 2001:77). Urban tree burial's marginal location could accordingly implicitly mean that the memorialization of urban tree burial deceased is considered less important in contrast to established conventional graves.

The containers for the ashes that I were able to receive information about had all similar design, except the cherry blossom tree burial at Ending Center which did not have a bottom part; according to office personnel at the site since the customers asked for this kind of design. Below are pictures of containers for ashes.

27

Picture 9, 10, 11 and 12 in order from left to right. The two pictures to the left are from Ending Center, 29 January 2020, container without a bottom for ashes for burial and a book for size reference. The two pictures to the right are from Shōman-ji, 2 February 2020, container for ashes with the *jumokusō* in the background and nameplates visible at the edge of the burial area.

Several informants at different sites showed how deep down the container was buried, about 30-50 centimeters down. This information was also provided in the brochyres (see appendix, Group 1, figure 5 and Group 2, figure 6). When visiting the Machida Izumi Cemetery I had the opportunity to see a spot in a stage of preparation for burial (see below picture).

Picture 13. Ending Center, before burial of ashes, showing the "top" of the container. The picture also shows two rows of tree burial, namely the ground raised by a stone wall that is covered by grass.

6.2 Marking the grave: Memorialization

In contrast to the other sites, Tokyo Metropolitan Kodaira Reien did not mark the grave with name plates, instead they had plates with letters placed on the edge of the mounds marking where the lines of the grid in place goes. Exact location of a certain individual was information that you had to ask the office for but provided in that case, as two visitors who started a conversation with me did. As such, even if the graves were not marked by name plates, individuals could still be located and hence memorialized. Ending Center, Kodaira Fureai Park, Hanakoganei Fureai Park and Shōman-ji all had name plates with names engraved at the edges of the burial. There was a difference in closeness between the name plate and the location of the grave between the sites (see for example picture 4 and picture 6). By marking the grave with a name plate, the burial enables individual memorialization for the bereaved. In other words, the deceased remains "present" (Hockey et al, 2012:124).

All sites enabled individual memorialization by making the individual's name and burial location known. However, some sites did not have space for leaving flowers individually, or equipment for lightning incense close by an individual grave. This implies the importance of names over offerings to the deceased in how individuals are memorialized. Tokyo Metropolitan Kodaira Reien did not have space allotted for individual flowers or for individual incense, Kodaira Fureai Park and Hanakoganei Fureai Park had the opportunity to leave flowers for an individual grave (on top of the grave), but less visitors had lit incense in comparison with Tokyo Metropolitan Kodaira Reien. Ending Center had spaces allocated for flowers and incense, but not over the individual grave. The Shōman-ji had space neither for incense or flowers and was in all a very small site. The allocated space for flowers and incense if there was, were located at the edge of the burial grounds, so it was not necessary to walk over a grave to place flowers. At some of the sites visitors had left offerings in the form of a drink, which is a common thing to leave at graves, but offerings of food or drink were scarce.

The reason for lightning incense at graves was according to one informant to be that incense was like *gohan* (rice or meal) for the spirits of the deceased. Leaving flowers at graves are common not only in Japan and can be since flowers symbolize the fragility of life and the passing of time (Hallam and Hockey, 2001:5, 51).

6.3 Observations of behaviours

Most of the visitors to Tokyo Metropolitan Kodaira Reien lit incense, brought with them flowers and clasped their hands in front of them in prayer. There was variation in the amount of bowing. While some bowed twice before praying, others only bent their neck and back slightly. Some visitors did not bring flowers, but lit incense and the opposite were done by others. Some visitors did not bring flowers with them, and some visitors did not light up incense, but only prayed. Actions of prayer were not only done at the allocated space for flowers and incense but also conducted by some bereaved in front of the grave of the individual they presumably knew. One visitor at Ending Center was observed to calculate the exact spot of the grave from the grid-system given by the name plates. Actions like these demonstrate the importance of exact knowledge of the burial spot for memorialization to be conducted by visitors.

There was a notable difference both in amount of time spent at the site as well as who visited between a Sunday observation and a Tuesday observation from around lunch to the afternoon. The Tuesday visits were in general shorter in nature, exemplified by a man biking inside the area, praying, and then biking right out afterwards, the whole visit taking less than two minutes. In contrast, the Sunday general visitor constituted of a family with a man, woman, and children. The children were observed to be allowed to run around, laugh, and play during the visit. Furthermore, middle-aged to elderly couples constituted a substantial part of the visitors. Some visitors stayed for a longer time, more than half an hour, in contemplation. A majority was around 5-15 minutes long. Visitors also walked to a specific grave location, or as close as they could, and prayed or contemplated at that location instead of at a common altar, which highlights the importance of individual memorialization.

Many were observed to talk with each other during the visit, except when praying. One family made sure the family was lined up together on a line in front of the altar and bowed and prayed together. In contrast, some parents let their children play while the parents prayed for a moment. There was also a diverse amount of respect for the burial site observed. A few treated it like the grounds of a shrine and bowed before exiting the site and clapped before praying. In contrast, another visitor to the same site lit up a cigarette even when a non-smoking sign was up and visible.

As Rugg (2000:272) notes, cemeteries can be used as parks and this was affirmed in the observations. Some visitors simply walked by on their way to another place or jogged

through. A few visitors took pictures of the flowers or possibly insects, and one mother videotaped her children playing with the water from the water faucet. Some visitors took the time to eat food they brought along themselves at the benches available. Interesting, some of these activities were discouraged by a sign prohibiting them but done anyway, indicating the low level of sacredness by some visitors despite it being a burial ground.

6.4 Reasons for the choice

In all informal interviews, the reason for choosing *jumokusō* was explained to be demographic reasons. By conducting yearly ceremonies for the spirits of the deceased and tending to the grave, cemetery operators ensured customers that even with a lack of descendants, smaller families and less marriages, the grave would be taken care of. Price difference was also brought up as one of the main reasons for people choosing *jumokusō*. Notably, in contrast to previous literature about tree burials (see Boret, 2014 and Inoue, 2013) notions of returning to nature was not stressed as the reason for customers to chose tree burial. Even so, it remained in the marketing as seen in the brochures collected (see appendix, Group 2, figure 4 and Group 5, figure 3).

From the informal interviews, it became clear that cemetery operators did not have *jumokusō* as an option for longer than a decade. Most sites only had it less than a decade. This is further supported by the death years engraved into the name plate at the site of Hanakoganei Fureai Park; while there were a few from earlier than 2000s, a vast majority was from after 2010s.

Informants also confirmed that urban tree burials were not connected to any specific religion and open for people of various religious thought. Even so, the yearly ceremonies were commonly Buddhist in nature, and some of the sites were at Buddhist temples (Kodaira Hōen Garden, Rurikō-ji and Shōman-ji). That *jumokusō* served purposes to make the cemetery look more aestically pleasing was supported when several informants confirmed that the plants utilized beyond the trees were to make the burial look nice year around. As such, there was no particular significance of the different plants used. Exception would be Ending Center, the informants explained that cherry blossoms are greatly liked by Japanese people, and hence the focus on cherry trees. Cherry blossoms have multiple meanings in Japan, it has for example been used as a symbol for "the Japanese soul" and during the wars of the 20th century the falling cherry blossoms were used as a metaphor for the deaths of Japanese soldiers (Ohnuki-Tierney, 2002:103-121).

6.5 Comparison to other nature-focused burials

In order to make the characteristics of urban tree burial clearer, the findings from fieldwork are contrasted to previous research on another nature associated burial practice, 'natural burial' and then contrasted with the previous research on Japanese tree burials, 'Tree-Burial'. Comparing urban *jumokusō* to natural burial as described by Clayden et al. (2018), Hockey et al. (2012), Coutts et al. (2018) and Stewart (2018) several key differences are evident. While both burial practices put focus on nature, in contrast to natural burial's intention as described by Clayden et al. (2018:99), urban tree burial in Japan did not simply replace headstones with trees as grave markers but rather looked like flowerbeds in a garden. Moreover, urban tree burials did not try to blend into the landscape or look "natural". Hockey et al. (2012:121) writes that the lack of human intervention is a characteristic of natural burial, and I claim that *jumokusō* certainly bears marks of 'human intervention' and makes it no secret that it is a human burial place (for example see picture 14).

The difference between urban *jumokusō* and natural burial becomes even further visible when considering Coutts et al. (2018:131) description as well as Stewart (2018:295). They both write that natural burial requires that the remains be not embalmed chemically (or at all), and that the remains are placed in a biodegradable casket or burial vessel, as well as not buried in a vault. Sites of *jumokusō* conducted all three of these points on various levels. Non-biodegradable burial vessels were certainly used, vaults were sometimes utilized, and the remains were in all cases cremated. Hence, the image of a burial with the corpse simply put into the ground or in a decomposing casket in a 'natural' landscape with little or no marks of human influence does not correspond to the fieldwork findings. Supporting evidence suggest that urban *jumokusō* in Japan frequently utilizes metal, plastic, or ceramic containers. While remains are buried in the earth in some cases, more common is to use containers buried next to other containers, or in a vault underneath vegetation. Vegetation can simply be grass with a symbolic tree some space away, but also be without a distinct tree. The picture below displays all these points. The graves are close to each other, enclosed by a rose decorated backdrop. The flowers visible is flowers left by visitors at individual burial spots, except the plants in the middle of the middle section in a bronze rectangular pot. Additionally, a small box for incense as well as offerings of drinks is visible to the left.

Picture 14. Hanakoganei Fureai Park, 21 January 2020

Picture 15. Hanakoganei Fureai Park, 21 January 2020. In the picture the stark contrast to family graves are highlighted. To the left lower corner, three family graves and the backside of one more is visible. In the *jumokusō* boundary at the edge of the cemetery there is a total of 36 individual graves.

Natural burial communities had experiences of pressure concerning memorialization of graves by personal markers or leaving the burial grounds undisturbed (Hockey et al. 2012:121-125). This tension between nonconventional burial practices and conventional ones is also noted by Stewart (2018:299). While the data of this thesis does not include in depth interviews, the data

collected suggests there was little tension between memorialization and 'natural' landscape preservation. The urban tree burial graves were clearly marked and made seemingly no claims to constitute "no human intervention". On the other hand, personal memorialization in the form of lighting incense, leaving flowers and name plates were readily conducted.

Urban tree burial and natural burial have distinct differences but similarities between the burial practices do exist. First, both make use of marginal spaces within the cemeteries, and thus serves purposes for the cemetery operators. Clayden et al. (2018:101) writes that otherwise unusable land like steep topography is utilized, and during my fieldwork such areas were found. Personnel at the site informed me that these sections already had trees when they were converted into burial grounds, and that they were a later addition to the cemetery. However, in contrast to natural burial grounds, *jumokusō* was not readily used for enclosure or privacy, both since their placement at the edges of cemeteries and since the plants utilized was not of the kinds that would provide shelter.

Picture 16 and 17. Machida Izumi Cemetery 29 January 2020. Pictures show steep topography unsuitable for family graves with trees from before it was converted into burial grounds.

Second, Clayden et al. (2018:100) note a difference between private and public cemetery operators concerning natural burial. Namely that private cemetery operators are more "innovative" in their "interpretation" of the burial practice. This difference between private and public cemetery operators can also be noted in urban tree burials. While the sample is too small to make strongly supported claims, it is worth noting that the public Tokyo Metropolitan Kodaira Reien offers a tree burial reminiscent of a memorial with two options:

burial in individual spot or in a vault with others, both with a symbolic tree some space away. In contrast, private actors like Ending Center and Hanakoganei Fureai Park specialized in their respective ways (cherry trees and rose bushes) but also offered several different burial spaces within their specializations. Ending Center provided the options of burial in a vault with others, burial above or underneath containers of other individuals of their own choosing, burial with only individuals of the same gender, burial with a pet and individually burial. Several different locations within the cemetery, with various attributes, could be chosen if there was a spot free, as informed by personnel at the site. Hanakoganei Fureai Park similarly could offer different locations within the cemetery, with different attributes, but offered only individual burial. Shōman-ji and Kodaira Fureai Park were smaller cemeteries and thus could be assumed to lack the space to offer several different *jumokusō*. Even so, neither of them had a tree burial with any trees.

Although natural burial is a phenomenon occurring outside of Japan, within Japan other forms of tree burials are occurring. Boret (2014) describes what he refers to as "Tree-Burial" as a burial practice where a hole is dug in the ground, ashes are directly inserted, and a tree is planted above or nearby to mark the grave. In addition, the grave is marked with a wooden plate with the secular name written and is circular and around a metre in radius (Boret, 2014:31). Likewise, urban tree burials utilized secular names on the name plates. In contrast to 'Tree-Burial', urban tree burials favour putting the ashes into a container, that in turn is buried in soil, with each grave being less than 50 cm on each side. Several sites had spots as small as 20 cm on each side. Additionally, in contrast to 'Tree-Burial', two of the urban tree burial sites followed a grid system to indicate the exact burial location of an individual while keeping the name plate from being directly placed at each the grave. The other three sites also had the name plates gathered at the edge of the burial area, but they were so small that a grid system was unnecessary.

In urban tree burials the grave was not necessarily marked by a tree, while trees were exclusively used in 'Tree-Burial'. One more distinction between Tree-Burial and urban tree burials is that urban tree burials had graves that would be kept for "eternity" as one of my informants informed me when I asked how long the graves at the site were kept. In contrast, Boret (2014:100) writes that the dead at Tree-Burial "eventually lose their individual identities". Finally, Boret (2014) argue that "the economical soundness of Japanese tree burial is not sufficient to justify, let alone understand, the subscribers' choice and their growing popularity." (Boret, 2014:91). However, price and price difference was pointed out

repeatedly by the informants which might on one hand be since they are staff at a cemetery operator whose main goal is to sell a product, and on the other it suggest that price difference is more important factor in urban areas.

Another similarity between the tree burials in Japan is that some markers of the individual is not expressed. The tree burial cemetery operator Boret investigated supplied a list of available trees to choose from, any tree outside of that list was not accepted, and only offered one option concerning the placement of ashes. Moreover, an individual's wealth or social status cannot be expressed as the burial practice Boret researched was standardized to that extent (Boret, 2014:125). Similar standardization is visible in the fieldwork data of urban tree burials. The plots of land were of equal size within each cemetery operator and the plant or tree covering the grave was not decided by the consumer of the grave, according to one informant and nowhere on the brochures indicated the possibility of choosing. This choice is apparently made when the choice of cemetery operator is made. Although, the diversity between urban tree burial cemetery operators ensured that customers could choose which type of plant and burial type suited them. Since the family grave symbolizes the household's status, with bigger and grander meaning richer and higher status as one informant states and Kawano (2005:33) confirms, tree burials make a distinct turn against this by being small, of equal size, and focusing on the individual by only providing the name of the deceased and their years of life. In contrast, family graves usually only have the household name visible on the front, with ancestor's names engraved on the sides or on the back of the stone monument (Boret, 2014:10-11). As such, urban tree burials highlight the equality between individuals in contrast to family graves.

In summary, urban tree burial is distinct from natural burial in several ways with some similarities. Differences include that the human remains do not necessarily need to be in contact with the soil and that the tree does not necessary cover the grave, or even be a tree at all. Similarity includes that the burial practices serves a purpose for the cemetery operators and that private actors are more diverse in their interpretation of the burial practices. Between urban tree burials and 'Tree-Burial' as described by Boret (2014) there are several distinctions as well. The main differences are that ashes are handled differently, the kind of plants used is different and finally that urban tree burials conduct burials where several individuals are buried underneath or connected with one tree, while 'Tree-Burial' opts for one tree for each individual. Now when it is clear what urban tree burials consist of, we will move onwards to the analysis of their relation to the process of individualization.

7. Analysis: Urban tree burials and the individualization process

Previously in this thesis the characteristics of urban *jumokusō* has been accounted for (Chapter 6). In section 3.1 several authors conclude that Japanese society is undergoing demographical changes which dissolves social systems of household and community, leading to diversifying burial practices (Boret, 2014; Sugimoto, 2014; Shimane, 2018: Kawano, 2004, 2005 and 2010). Some authors take it further than that and state that burial practices in Japan are in the process of individualization (Rowe, 2000: Inoue, 2013: Suzuki, 2000: Porcu, 2018).

This chapter discusses how urban tree burials reflect the trend of individualization based on my fieldwork and notes how the distinctions between different variants of Japanese tree burials impact how the individualization process is viewed. As section 3.2 describes, burial practices in Japan are closely linked to the household system of *ie* and conventional family graves are a system where several individuals belonging to the same household are buried together. The system of household-linked family graves constricts who should be buried where. With other alternatives these expected burials are negotiated, even if the result is the burial in a conventional grave, the state that alternatives exist inherently means there is a choice. Urban tree burial is one alternative where individuals can be buried independently from the household structure, and consequently urban tree burials come with a lot of choices. Hence, the diversity of urban tree burials' existence can be argued to be an example of how individualization is visible in contemporary Japanese society. Rowe (2000) considers the focus on the individual deceased as a consumer and the increasing choices within the funeral process as indicators of individualization.

Individualization have been noted for its challenge to use as an analytical tool, due to the "large variety of manifestations and features of individualization" (Genov, 2018:47-48) and in order to demarcate the analysis, I focus on how individualization entails a "disintegration of previously existing social forms" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:2) and the following 'choices' aspect of individualization, that individuals due to individualization are authors of their own lives and strives to live 'a life of their own' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:152). Correspondingly, 'a life of their own' also means 'a death of their own', or perhaps less dreadful; 'a burial of their own'.

Urban tree burials are not only a potential relocation from the household to independence, but also an opportunity to establish connections to other individuals that they have no kinship

relationship to. Boret (2014) maintains that *jumokusō* is "an opportunity to negotiate and create new bonds which are not recognized by conventional family grave practices and the household system." (p.105). Not only is tree burial "an opportunity" it is demanded that social bonds such as the household ties are negotiated as tree burials entails someone choosing not to be buried in a family grave or create a new one. This characteristic of tree burial indicates the level of individualization in Japanese burial practices.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) write that it is not only that individualization enables people to make choices, but that individualization forces people to make choices. Concerning burial practices, individualization should thus entail that people must make choices concerning their and their beloved's burials, whether that is to be buried the conventional way or in an alternative way. Furthermore, it means that even if you make the choice yourself to be buried in a certain way, individuals in your vicinity can make other choices, for example to have a tree burial and thus distance themselves from the household. In other words, choices made by other people also influence an individual's relation to the other people in question. These social bonds come to light in burial practices since the choice of burial indicates relationships to other individuals. Collier (2003) asserts that cemeteries, as a space of burial, are "replicas of the living community". Cemeteries "allow for the dead to remain identified as members of families, social institutions, and the present citizenry through the sacred consecration of ground within the community for their remains." (p. 728). Correspondingly, individualization of society is paralleled in individualization concerning mortuary rituals, and negotiation of social bonds and relationships as is evident in alternative burial practices like tree burial, suggests that individualization of burial practices thus entails a negotiation of social bonds or relationships.

Several findings from the fieldwork support the evidence of choice inherent in urban tree burials. First, tree burials offer a choice concerning location. If the household already has a family grave, its location is already decided. By choosing a tree burial, consumers also choose where to lie to rest as they create their own place of burial instead of following the predetermined burial place of the household's family grave. With urbanization comes the dislocation of lived lives from community ties and urban tree burials provides an alternative burial potentially close by, or at least, a cemetery with easy access due to location.

Second, the diversity in the configurations of urban tree burials indicate the influence of consumer demand in its characteristics. Based on the sites visited during fieldwork, urban tree burials took the form of for example, burial next to rose bushes, underneath a cherry tree, in a flowerbed and in a mound covered by grass and some trees of varying types. The reasons for the diversity of *jumokusō*, one staff member of a cemetery claimed, is that the design decision of the container for the ashes to be made without a bottom was made according to customers' wishes. In this way, the ashes would eventually become one with the soil. Other containers for the ashes from other cemetery operators had bottoms, and thus kept the ashes separated from the soil. This data indicates strong wishes of the cemetery operators to provide services that fulfil the diverse needs of customers. In other words, urban tree burials are diverse since there are diverse needs and wishes from customers.

Third, data from fieldwork supports that urban tree burials provoke the "disintegration of previously existing social forms" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:2) by the diversity of ways of burial. During my fieldwork I encountered cemetery operators offering burials with other individuals, being in the same burial vault/crypt or being buried on top of each other in the same plot of land. Potentially, tree burials can thus keep one household buried together similarly to a family grave. Nevertheless, even if the possibility to keep the household together in burial exists, there is still a choice to be made to do so. In contrast to "previously existing social forms" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:2) it is not obvious that several individuals would be buried together, it is a choice. Most cemetery operators encountered during fieldwork offered tree burials as individual graves.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) write that "one of the decisive features of individualization processes, then, is that they not only permit but they also demand an active contribution by individuals" (p. 4) Moreover, by choosing cemetery operator and burial spot, consumers also chose which form the tree burial will take. For example, underneath a cherry tree with other individuals or close by a rose bush in a separated container of ashes.

'A life of one's own' that Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002:152) propose is notable in urban tree burials by the marketing of an individualized burial, visible in the collected brochures' notions of "living one's way and dying one's way" (see appendix, Group 4, figure 3). Furthermore, 'a life of one's own is notable by the utilization of name plates, which enables visitors to memorialize a certain individual. In other words, nurture their relation to the deceased. In this way the deceased is treated as "irreplaceable" through individualization.

Inoue (2013) notes that increasingly Japanese people are considering themselves as individuals and that their individual relationships cannot be replaced upon death since "specific individuals cultivated those ties." (p.126). Correspondingly, name plates signifying specific individuals were noted during fieldwork. However, the name plates were not individually placed at the grave, but kept to the edge of the burial area, which potentially could have symbolic meaning, but could just as well be a practical solution. Furthermore, at one site the names were not visible for visitors at all, but available at the cemetery office. This site might be an exception, but further research is necessary in order to conclude this.

Another aspect of 'a life of one's own' and modern societies is that death is changed to something to suppress, to "bury" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:154). Arguably, urban tree burials do "hide away" death by masking the grave with grass, flowers, and trees. However, how much values of 'returning to nature' and aesthetics interlink with 'suppression of death' concerning urban tree burials is an area for further research and beyond the scope of this thesis. Suzuki (2000) does however write that death is no longer viewed as "impure" in the scope it was previously and that funeral companies "not only suppress the concept of impurity but also distance themselves from the very idea" (p.92). Agreeing with Suzuki, Rowe (2000:371) writes that "[c]oncomitant with this focusing on the individual is a lessening of concern with death impurity and an increasing variety of responses to death" and connect the change to modern views of death.

Above I have argued that urban tree burials indicate individualization of burial practices since *jumokusō* involves choices on several levels. However, Boret (2014), having done ethnographic research of a tree burial site outside a highly urbanized area, asserts that since "the process of memorialization remains a collective process" alternative burial practices like tree burial, despite having the individual's identity as focus, does not imply individualization of the deceased in Japan (p.99). Boret thus approaches individualization from the perspective of the importance of the centrality of individuals in mortuary rituals, and since his findings indicate the creation of new social bonds and a community around tree burials he maintains that "instead of the individualization of the deceased, Tree-Burial and possibly other non-ancestral graves are characterized by a personalization of the grave, as differentiated from an individualization *per se*." (p.99). Or in other words, instead of individualization, tree burials indicate "a (re)appropriation of memorialization of practices" (Boret, 2014:126). Moreover, Boret (2014) says that 'Tree-Burial' is "not about the representation of the lives of single

individuals. Instead, the making of a grave is often explicitly or implicitly a collective reflection about what life and death means for the deceased." (p.209). Important to keep in mind is that Boret (2014) writes concerning a burial practice with several distinctions to urban tree burials.

Since the burials of the one cemetery operator he studied included planting a tree and enabling the deceased's ashes to directly come into contact with the ground, therefore creating a circle of life, it makes sense that 'Tree-Burial' is a "reflection about what life and death means for the deceased" (Boret, 2014:209). Urban tree burials consist of neither of these aspects. Ashes are in most cases kept securely away from direct contact with the soil, and seldomly are new a tree planted when a burial occurs. As such, urban tree burials are not signified by their "collective reflection about what life and death means" even if collective memorialization possibly occurs in the yearly ceremonies provided by the cemetery operators. Since I was unable to attend one during fieldwork, the findings of this thesis lack sufficient data to draw conclusions concerning collective processes in urban tree burial practices. Nonetheless, during observations acts of individual memorialization were noted repeatedly. As such, Boret's claim that tree burials show an shift towards individual memorialization (2014:126) is supported in the fieldwork findings of urban tree burials. Even so, as the fieldwork findings of this thesis indicate, urban tree burials contain more choices to be made by the consumers of the graves than 'Tree-Burial' and therefore show that urban burials are further along the individualization process. Worth noting however, is that Inoue (2013:132) maintains that "cherry burial" is a "collective gravesite" as there are no "outer frame" between the graves even though name plates are used for each individual.

Boret's second argument against *jumokusō* being a sign of individualization is that the household bonds were replaced by bonds created with the tree burial community. In the case of urban tree burials, little indicated a community on the scale Boret describes, the only exception being Ending Center which, is an organization with the outspoken aim of creating new bonds outside the household system. The other sites, as far as I can conclude based on the data gathered, did not have a lively community. More research is needed to conclude if new social bonds, or any, are created and nurtured in connection with urban tree burials beyond the Ending Center. Additionally, Boret claims that "it has become evident that the family morals of ancestor worship have been replaced by ecological ethics." (Boret, 2014:210). However, the yearly ceremonies that cemetery operators conducted in order to spiritually care for the

41

deceased in urban tree burials implies a continuous belief in ancestor-hood and the necessity of spiritual care. Furthermore, none of the urban tree burial sites made claims of caring expressively about nature or having ecological concerns as their main purpose.

In summary, with the difference between urban tree burials and Tree-Burial also comes a difference in indicators of individualization. The individualization process "presuppose and release individual actors" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:152) and consequently, the individual is forced to make choices concerning their own lives and is held responsible for their own lives and these choices for death. In other words, the decision of how to dispose of human remains after death becomes the choice of the individual rather than the choice of institutions, customs, or society. For any choice to be made, there needs to be options. Thus, urban tree burial is intrinsically part of the individualization process in the sense of it being an alternative burial practice available for individuals to choose and in its diversity.

8. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to shed light on urban tree burials in Japan, contrast them to other nature focused burial practices and discuss their relation to the individualization process ongoing in Japanese society. It was a hypothesis of this thesis that individualization process of Japanese society would be visible in the burial practices as cemeteries reflect the community that have created them (Collier, 2003:728) and are formed after the wishes of each generation (Rugg, 2000:272). As such, investigating burial practices can "yield great insight into the community and the society in which they occur" (Collier: 2003:728) which is why this thesis have focused on the alternative burial practice of *jumokusō* and by contrasting it to natural burial showed the specifics of tree burial to Japanese society norms.

The findings reveal that urban tree burials are notably diverse and interpreted differently by each cemetery operator, which reflects the influence of consumer demand. Furthermore, the diversity of *jumokusō* indicate that they are in an experimental phase. Private operators showed greater variety, exemplified by cherry tree and rose burials, which corresponds with observations that private actors interpret more innovatively made by Clayden et al. (2018:100). Both between cemetery operators and within the same cemetery several options were usually available depending on the size of the cemetery.

The findings also expose that trees do not seem to be a necessary element of urban tree burials. A majority of the sites used flowers, bushes, and grass more than they used trees despite calling it tree burial. In other words, it was not necessary that Japanese urban tree burials had the aesthetic of "untouched" nature. The number of graves exceeded the number of trees, sometimes with a vast difference. As noted by Boret (2014:10), reasons for this disparity between trees and graves are likely practical reasons of land prices and urban areas lacking space. Additionally, urban tree burials were used by cemetery operators in marginal spaces. The graves were often located at the edges or in marginal spaces in the cemeteries that are difficult spaces to use for family graves or the *jumokusō* were placed next to cemeteries in their own boundaries as an addition to the cemetery. Urban tree burials are an alternative burial practice that have adapted to demographic changes in Japanese society and this thesis so far has showed features of urban tree burials that can serve as an inspiration for solutions of disposal of human remains in other urban areas across the world. Urban tree burials indicate the individualization process and the memorialization of individuals in several ways.

By providing name plates and the location of the grave, urban tree burials enable consumers to be individuals to be memorialized in death. Urban tree burials are both highly individual graves and offer the option of several individuals being buried together. Therefore, urban tree burials enable individuals to remove themselves from the societal constraints of households and in death nurture bonds to others outside of kinship relations. Moreover, urban tree burials enable individuals to disintegrate from the unit of the household while at the same time not necessarily mean a disintegration of cultural and spiritual values of ancestor-hood and the afterlife, since the cemetery operator will ensure the deceased is spiritually taken care of through yearly ceremonies and tending to the grave.

Individualization is recognized in this thesis as the dissolving of previous societal constraints, and consequently choices are asked from individuals by modern society (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:2). Hence, urban tree burials reflect the individualization process in Japanese society as they, in their diversity, provide a wide range of choices and demands choices to be made. Furthermore, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) concept of 'a life of one's own' is visible in urban tree burials, as specific individuals can be and are memorialized, as was observed during fieldwork in the form of offerings, flowers, and incense, as well as observations of visitors and their behaviour at the sites.

Several distinctions between urban tree burials, non-urban 'Tree-Burial' and natural burial were revealed. Most notably, although all three burials practices focus on nature, human remains were treated differently. Natural burial emphasised an "untouched" nature as the setting of the burial and hence tensions between how much memorialization would be acceptable was noted (Hockey et al. 2012:121-125: Stewart, 2018:299). Both natural burial and urban tree burials were used by cemetery operators for various purposes (Clayden et al., 2018:101, 104). Non-urban tree burials were investigated by Boret (2014) and several distinctions are evident between urban and non-urban Japanese tree burials. First and foremost, non-urban 'Tree-Burials' consists of a tree for every grave and ashes directly in contact with the soil. In contrast, urban tree burials prefer to keep the ashes in a container and fewer trees, or not use any trees at all. Second, 'Tree-Burials' consisted of new bonds being formed, upheld within the community created around the burial. In contrast, only one site of urban tree burials promoted group activities to form new bonds. These distinctions between them also influence how the individualization process of burial practices are viewed.

The individualization process in Japanese society have previously been stated (Rowe, 2000: Inoue, 2013: Suzuki, 2000: Porcu, 2018) and this thesis provide evidence from the fieldwork of urban tree burials, in contrast to previous research, that further supports that individualization is ongoing in contemporary Japanese society. In a time with demographic shift toward an increasingly elderly population globally, burial practices that utilizes space will likely be increasingly important. Additionally, our times are also noted by the environmental concerns and thus burial practices that focuses on nature is of interest. As Rugg (2000: 272) observes, cemeteries are used for leisure and as parks for their greenery. Hence, cemeteries are an opportunity to make urban areas "green", and tree burials in urban areas are one burial alternative that will likely become even more popular in the future as they take up relatively small space, serve purposes for cemetery operators and enables memorialization of individuals.

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Appendix

Group 1: Tokyo Metropolitan Kodaira Reien, information brochure printed in 2019.
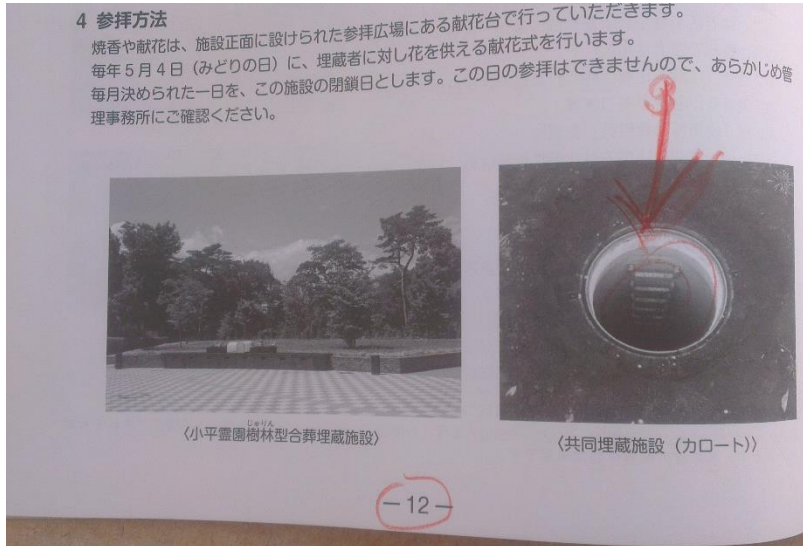
Figure 1. Entrance to vault. Red markings made by office personnel informant at the site

Figure 2. Hole for ashes

Figure 3. Price difference between couple burials and single burials

Figure 4. Price differences between different fineness of powdered ashes and their containers
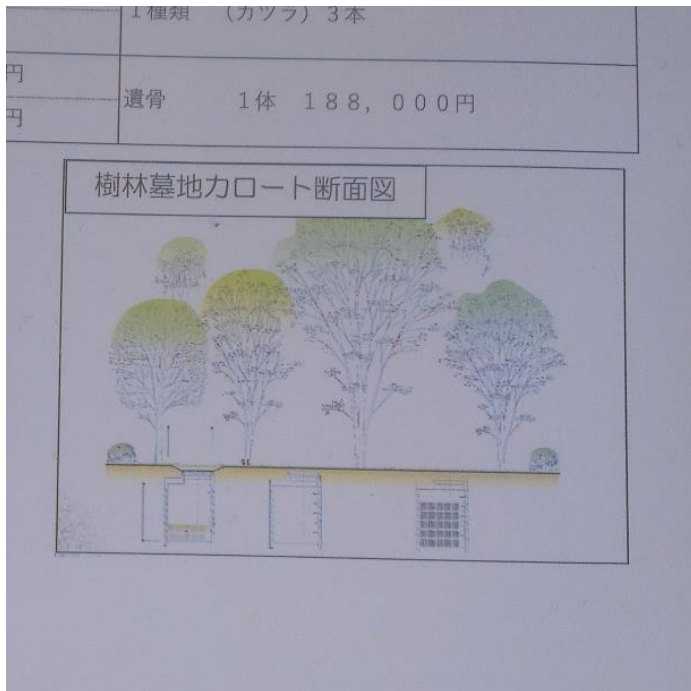
Figure 5. Different ways of storing the ashes in the vaults
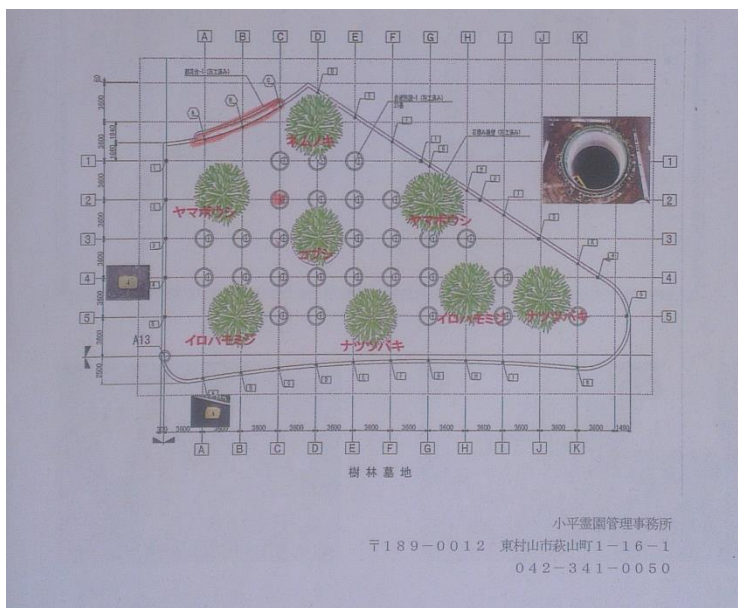
Figure 6. Formation of the burial mound, where the vaults and trees are placed and the grid in place

Figure 7. Sign placed at the entrance

Figure 8. Map over the cemetery, tree burials are at the bottom at the edge, coloured in two shades of green

Group 2 Ending Center, various information pamphlets and brochures, printed in various years (2015, 2018, 2019) and some pamphlets are without years. Community magazine is vol. 123, 2019.

Figure 1. Location of cherry tree burials in Machida Izumi Cemetery (pink markings)

Figure 2. Information regarding activities for members

Figure 3. Pamphlet for the support group "Ending Support"

Figure 4. Tree burials and "return to nature"

Figure 5. Gendered burials called "Sharehouse"

Figure 6. Image of how ashes are placed in the soil

Figure 7. Image showing the number of graves and their sizes (20 x 20), as well as prices at the bottom
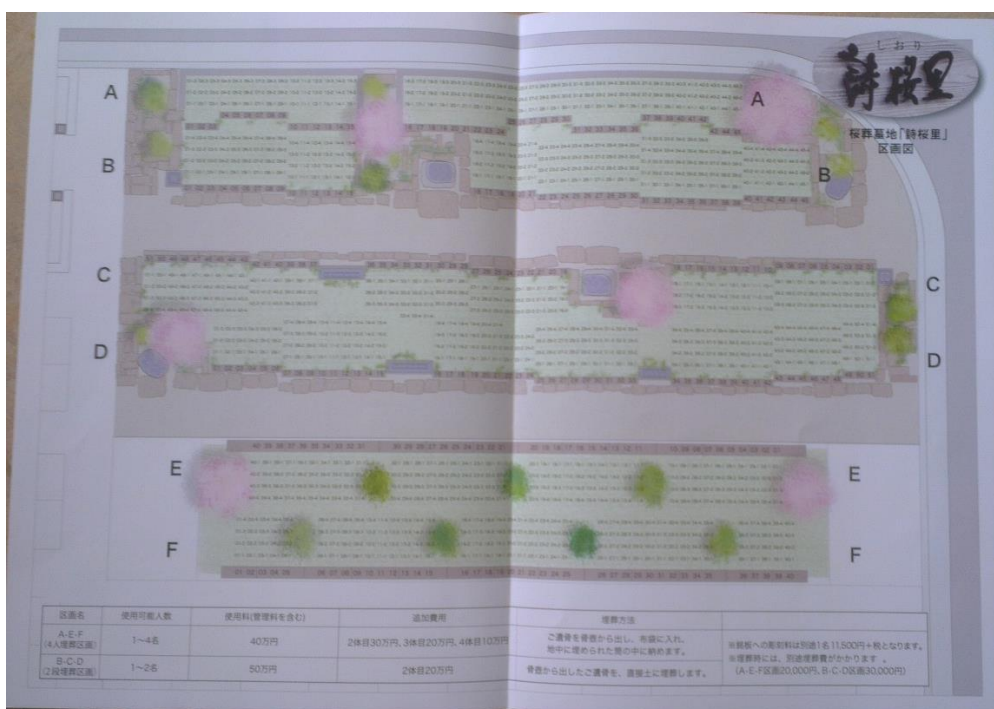
Figure 8. Layout plan showing the number of cherry trees and the number of graves

Group 3. Kodaira Fureai Park. Pamphlet has no print year

Figure 1. Information pamphlet "Tree burial Diana", the price difference in relation to the amount of years (13 or 33) are at the bottom

Group 4. Hanakoganei Fureai Park, brochure printed in 2019

Figure 1. Image showing how marginally placed the rose burial is (alongside a pathway at the edge of the cemetery)

Figure 2. Sold out rose burial and a map showing the cemetery's location along the train track

Figure 3. The text conveys the notion "I want to live my own way, and be buried my own way"

Group 5. Shōman-ji, neither pamphlet nor brochure had any print year written

Figure 1. Price differences between different burials (tree burials are the middle one)

Figure 2. Image shows different types of tree burial by the same temple (the first two)

Figure 3. The text starts with "I want to be buried in nature" and is the last type from Figure 2 above.