

JIZO-BON IN KYOTO TODAY: A CELEBRATION OF CHILDREN AND COMMUNITY

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Toward the end of summer, when children's summer vacation is coming to an end, Jizo-bon takes place in the neighborhoods of Kyoto. On street corners or in back alleys, in front of the small shrines in which a Jizo statue is placed, both children and adults gather; the streets are enlivened by children's laughter. Red and white lanterns tell where a Jizo-bon, one of the most popular festivals among children in Kyoto, is taking place in a neighborhood.

Jizo-bon is a festival performed for the Jizo deity¹ a Buddhist bodhisattva. A bodhisattva is a compassionate figure who, while exploring the path toward the highest form of existence, remains in this world to help those who are suffering. In Japan, Buddhism is often associated with funerals and memorials for the dead and less related to children or childhood. But Jizo is an exception: he is considered the guardian deity of children. He is often found in the form of a stone statue with a gem in the left hand and a stick in the right. This symbolizes his mission to walk throughout the world and save anyone in need. Jizo's *ennichi* (festive day) falls on the 24th day of every month, and on August 24 a special celebration, Jizo-bon, takes place for Jizo. Although Jizo-bon is a festival to celebrate a Buddhist deity, it has become a customary folk tradition in neighborhoods in Kyoto, regardless of the origin. It is one of the most important neighborhood events in Kyoto.

The purpose of this article is twofold: to describe Jizo-bon, a child-centered festival, in the context of urban life in Kyoto, and to interpret its meaning and function for the community and for children. This essay consists of four parts. The first part demonstrates the images and folk beliefs regarding Jizo reflected in a folktale and in legends in order to provide the background on Jizo. The second part explains the city and its neighborhoods where I conducted my fieldwork on Jizo-bon. I focus mainly on daily life of the residents and culture surrounding Jizo. The third part describes Jizo-bon as I participated in the celebrations. I lived in a neighborhood in Yoshida, Kyoto, and participated in Jizo-bon each year from 2003 to 2005 as a resident and as a participant observer. In the summer of 2006, I visited Jizo-bon in different neighborhoods in the area, observed the process, and interviewed the residents including both adults and children. The final part discusses the function and meaning of Jizo-bon.

Jizo-bon is a complex social phenomenon; it has many functions and various meanings. In interpreting its meaning and function, two perspectives are adopted. One is the perspective from a neighborhood community. For leaders of a neighborhood association, the goals are to bring people together, to provide an opportunity for communication among members of the association, and to promote community solidarity among the residents. Jizo-bon provides the opportunity to accomplish these goals as it involves both a symbolic folk object of the community (Jizo) and communal recreational activities.

There are various symbols involved in Jizo-bon. The most important symbol is Jizo himself, because this is a celebration on his festive day. In Kyoto City, it is believed that a Jizo statue in a neighborhood protects the children and the neighborhood community. As Victor Turner suggests, it is crucial to examine symbols in process (1982, 20), so my examination includes how the group acts on Jizo, and how people behave toward him. Further, I argue that the space in front of Jizo, created and shared by neighbors, has a symbolic meaning in the context of contemporary social life in urban area. How is the special space created in a neighborhood during Jizo-bon? How are the festive activities organized and why? How are social interactions among neighbors during the festival

different from those in daily life? What kind of roles do children play in Jizo-bon? By answering these questions, I will explore the symbolic meaning created by performing Jizo-bon. Simon Bronner suggests that we should be conscious of the ways children's folklore is exhibited in various media (2002-2003, 101). In my analysis of Jizo-bon, I will pay attention to how playing children are "displayed" in the festival structure.

Next, the meanings of Jizo-bon are explored from the perspective of children. Jizo-bon provides children with both social and cultural experiences and, in particular, with arenas for learning social relations that children do not often have in their daily lives. The festival also offers children opportunities not only to learn about the cultural heritage of a neighborhood but also to express themselves in games and in play with neighborhood peers.

Jizo in Folk Narratives

Jizo is one of the most popular Buddhist deities in Japan. Some Japanese call him Jizo-sama indicating their respect, while others call him Jizo-san indicating a sense of familiarity or closeness. One of the fundamental characteristics of Jizo is his generosity; he rewards people for goodwill. This feature of Jizo is reflected in the following folktale, "Kasa-Jizo", which is well known among children as well as adults, and is the most often recited narrative of Jizo in Japan:

Once upon a time, there was an elderly couple who made a living by making straw hats. They were too poor to buy food for the New Year. On New Years Eve, the old man went to town to sell the hats, but no one bought them. On the way back home, he saw six stone Jizo statues along the road. Jizo looked freezing cold in the snow, so the old man felt sorry for them. He put the hats on the statues' heads, but he realized that since he only had five hats, he needed one more. So he took off his own hat from his head, and put it on the Jizo's head. When the old man returned home, he told his wife about the incident. His wife was happy to hear what he had done. Early on the morning of New Year's Day, the elderly couple heard a noise—it was the Jizo statues in the straw hats bringing rice cakes and fish for the New Year as well as vegetables and sake.

This story exists with many variations in the details. The number of Jizo statues ranges from one to twelve; the work of the elderly man differs. Yet the basic structure of the narrative is the same: the old man sacrifices himself in order to help Jizo, and in return the Jizo images bring plenty of food on the New Year's Day.

Another important characteristic of Jizo is his close relationship with children. In the *Konjaku monogatari*, compiled in the eleventh or twelfth century, there are many tales in which Jizo takes the form of a child and helps people (Komine 1994, 4-59). In *Jizobosatsu reigenki*, which was also compiled around this time, this close relationship between Jizo and children is also observed. Considering the fact that other Buddhist deities do not take a form of a child, we may say it is a characteristic unique to Jizo. In the following legend, Jizo takes the form of a child-monk:

Once, there was a poor but pious peasant who prayed to Jizo daily. One summer he became involved in a fight over water for irrigating his rice paddy. He was badly injured so he had to stay home and recover. A child-monk stood in his rice paddy and poured the water into it. When

the peasant's enemy saw the child-monk, he shot him with an arrow.
 When the arrow struck the child-monk in the chest, he disappeared.
 When the peasant recovered, he found his rice field filled with water.
 He felt grateful and went to the front of the Jizo image to pray. When
 he looked at the statue, he was surprised to see dirt on the statue's feet,
 and an arrow stuck in his chest....(Komatsu 1992, 70-74)

As can be seen, the ending of the tale implies that it was Jizo who took the shape of a child-monk and sacrificed himself to help the pious peasant.² Taro Wakamori argues that the belief in Jizo as a guardian deity of children originated in the notion of Jizo appearing as a child (1983, 56, 67).

Another legend, *Sai-no-kawara*, illustrates more directly the relationship between Jizo and children; it shows the folk belief in Jizo as a protective deity of children. This legend also demonstrates that Jizo not only protects living children but also saves the souls of young children who have died. *Sai-no-kawara* is a riverbank, a marginal place between the worlds of the living and the dead. It is believed that all children who die under ten years of age gather at the banks of the Sai River where they pile up stones for their living parents, reciting prayers for them. The legend of the humming of the *Sai-no-Kawara* gives us an idea of the close relationship between Jizo and children. The summary of the legend as follows:

There is a very sad story. At the riverbank, which lies between the world of living and the world of the dead, little children were piling stones to make towers, saying, "The first stone is for the happiness of my father, the second stone is for the happiness of my mother, and third stone is for the happiness of my brothers and sisters." But as the sun went down, a demon appeared and destroyed the stone towers with an iron stick and ordered the children to pile them up again. At that very moment Jizo appeared with the night breeze. Telling the children that he would protect them like a father and mother in the other world, he compassionately held them within his robe, letting them sleep in peace....³

As this legend illustrates, Jizo's main characteristic is that of a merciful protector of children.⁴

Daily Life in Yoshida, Kyoto

Kyoto City, where I conducted my field research, is located almost in the center of Japan's main island, Honshu. It is the capital of Kyoto prefecture with a population of approximately 1,475,000.⁵ Kyoto City is divided into 11 wards, which are further divided into *cho* (neighborhoods). Kyoto has a long cultural and historical tradition, having been the capital of Japan from the end of the eighth century to the latter half of the nineteenth century. It lies in a basin surrounded by hills, so it is hot and humid in summer and cold in winter. The Kamo River, which provides the urban residents with a green space, flows north-south through the city. Kyoto is also known for the imperial palace, and many Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples including a number of world cultural heritage sites. To the west of the Kamo River is the old part of Kyoto, which is laid out along a grid, with the axes running north/south and east/west.

Kyoto is also noted for having a number of Jizo statues. They are not only found in Buddhist temples, but have also been enshrined in the streets or at crossroads. In Kyoto City,

it is said that there are approximately 8,000 to 10,000 small stone Jizo images but the exact number is unknown (Takemura 1994, 6). Most of the stone statues in the streets or at crossroads are Jizo, but we cannot assume that all of the stone images in neighborhoods in Kyoto are Jizo. Besides the Jizo images, there are also *Dainichi-nyorai* (Vairocana Buddha) stone images in the neighborhoods.

Most of the neighborhoods in Kyoto have a stone statue, either Jizo or Vairocana Buddha, to care for, but there are some neighborhoods which do not have one. This is especially true in newly developed residential areas or condominiums. When a neighborhood does not have a Jizo, often the neighborhood association still organizes a summer festival without Jizo at the time of Jizo-bon; or they may rent a Jizo from Mibu Temple, famous for its many Jizo statues.

I mainly conducted my fieldwork in some neighborhoods in Yoshida and its adjunct areas, which lie in the northeast part of Kyoto City, east of the Kamo River. In present-day Yoshida, Kyoto University occupies a large space along with Yoshida Shrine and its precincts. Except for these public spaces, the neighborhoods in these areas are urbanized cityscapes; they are densely populated and little private space remains unused; there are neither rice fields nor vegetable fields.

Yoshida and its surrounding areas were mainly agricultural hamlets until the turn of the twentieth century. When Kyoto University was founded at the end of the nineteenth century, there was an increase in rooming houses, apartments, and privately owned restaurants; the hamlets growing rice and vegetables began to change (Suzuka 2000, 25). The neighborhoods in this area now include small shops and businesses operated as household enterprises, and apartments for the university students. Quite a few of the residents are landlords of the rooming houses and apartments for university students.

Yoshida is further divided into neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are administrative units, and are also self-governing organizations that work for the improvement of their living environments. Households are members of the neighborhood associations, not individuals, and membership is voluntary. In this area, the number of households ranges from as few as thirty to as many as 130. Each neighborhood association is a social unit which is a bounded entity with an executive committee consisting of a president, a vice-president, and a treasurer. Although there are many university students living in this area, neighborhood associations do not include university students, probably because they live in a community only temporally.

In the northeast part of Ushinomiya-cho, a neighborhood of Yoshida, about half of the households moved into the neighborhoods after the World War II. About half of the households are long-standing residents, some of whom have known each other from their elementary school days. While there are households in which three generations live together, there are quite a few households in which an elderly couple or an elderly man or woman lives alone as the children have grown up and moved out. There are a few young couples with one or two children. Therefore, there are not many children, and there are many more elderly people in the neighborhood. One of the longstanding residents in his late sixties commented that when he was an elementary school student, there were a lot of children in the neighborhood because each household had four or five children.

In the past, community members took some responsibility for child rearing. Shizuko Koyama, in a historical study of the Edo period from the 17th to the 19th century, has illustrated how child rearing was a function shared by the local community (2002). Moreover, Konosuke Fujimoto points out that after the World War II, especially after the rapid economic growth in the 1960s, the circumstances dealing with children have changed. He adds that among the three areas of socialization of children—the home, the neighborhood,

and the school—school education has become most important and influential in recent years, while community involvement has become less important (Fujimoto 1996, 187).

Presently, there are only three children from the northeast section of Ushinomiya-cho who go to the elementary school. Several other children join them from the northwest section of Ushinomiya-cho at a certain point, and they walk to school together. This is a group prearranged by the elementary school for the safety of the children, reflecting the increase in crimes committed against small children. Around eight in the morning, children's lively voices and laughter breathe life into the streets of the neighborhoods. After children leave for school, the neighborhood remains quiet until midafternoon when the students come home with their friends. After school, children whose parents both work go to a daycare center located the opposite the elementary school. Others return home and then meet with their friends or go to various lessons, such as swimming, English, piano, and *juku* (special examination preparation schools). While I was living in the neighborhood, I rarely saw children playing in the streets of the neighborhood. Elementary school children tend to visit friends of the same age at their houses, play video games at a friend's house, or play in a park. If students want to play at school, they are allowed to stay in the playground until 4:30. Playing after school is an unsupervised activity. There is a big junglegym with slides and some iron bars for gymnastics. Children play on these or play with balls. They often play tag or hide and seek in the open fields. Children also play in the garden, looking for insects or other creatures.

Various folk religious traditions are ingrained in the daily life in Yoshida. People visit Yoshida Jinja (a Shinto shrine) to pray for a happy New Year on New Year's Day. They also visit the shrine for the *setsubun-sai* (a festival at the end of winter) in February, the spring festival in May, and the fall festivals in October. In August, the residents participate in Jizo-bon. Japanese people often pray to the gods at a Shinto shrine and to the Buddhas at a Buddhist temple for protection and for good luck.

Jizo images are placed along roadsides or at junctures where two or three roads meet. In Yoshida and surrounding areas, quite a few Jizo statues can be observed. A neighborhood takes care of at least one Jizo, and sometimes two or three Jizo statues. There are some *Dainichi-nyorai* (Vairocana Buddha) standing in a little wooden shrine as well. The festive day of Vairocana Buddha is the 28th day of the month. But in recent years, about half of neighborhoods hold a ritual and celebration together with Jizo-bon around the 24th of August. If a stone statue is Jizo, in most cases, they are *Enmei* ("life-prolonging") Jizo, which are believed to protect children and the neighborhood.

The appearances of Jizo statues differ from each other. Jizo in neighborhoods do not necessarily hold a gem in the left hand and a stick in the right. Further, it is often difficult to recognize exact features of the face and body. One of the informants explained that the reason for putting make-up on Jizo is to make a clearer representation of Jizo. One Jizo statue, located at a juncture in a neighborhood, is seated on a green lotus, and has a radiating halo of bright yellow in the back. In another neighborhood, I observed a couple of Jizo figures standing together in a tiny wooden shrine. Some of them are plain, and others wear white make-up on their faces. In Kyoto it is popular to put white paint on the face of Jizo, with black eyes, hair, and eyebrows, a red mouth, and a red round dot in the center of his forehead.

The origin of some of the Jizo statues is unknown, but many of them were found in the last one hundred years. The residents of the area told me stories about how the Jizo were found. There are three main ways that Jizo were found and placed in the neighborhoods. The first is that it was found when a house was rebuilt. The second is that it was found in the river, and third is that it was found in the fields.⁶ In each case, people explained to me that it is important not to move Jizo from the place where it was found. They said that Jizo statues

were there for various reasons (implying that there was some power beyond human at work) and people should not move them for their convenience. There is also a case in which a Jizo statue was made for a memorial (Figure 1). An elderly woman told me:

There used to be a mansion here. When a child in that rich family died, the child's parents made a Jizo and placed it in a *kimon* (unlucky direction). Don't you think the Jizo in the center is beautiful? That is the one. The other two were formerly in different shrines in the neighborhood, but the three are now all together in this shrine.⁷

In daily life, Jizo statues are often taken care of by elderly women who live near Jizo. They first clean the shrine, offer flowers, and burn incense. In recent years, however, in some neighborhoods, each household takes turns taking care of Jizo. In one neighborhood, for instance, I was told that they began to take care of the image on a rotating basis after an elderly woman, who had taken care of Jizo for more than thirty years, had died.

It was rare that I saw children stop in front of Jizo and pray while I was in the community, yet I did witness such an incident twice. One time a girl in the fifth grade stopped and put her hands together and prayed to Jizo; I did not ask her what her wish was. Another time I saw a boy in the third grade praying. He was praying for rain because he had a swimming class, which he hated, at school that day. He needed Jizo's power to cancel the class. I also heard that a mother of seven-year-old boy was invited to her son's class and talked about her experience with Jizo. She said in the class that her son dropped his favorite game machine in a ditch and could not reach it. After he asked Jizo for help, he was able to get it back safely.

Jizo-bon

Jizo-bon festivals share a basic structure in the preparations for the event and in what the event consists of. First, the committee in charge of Jizo-bon is formed and its members plan various activities. Second, on the day of the festival, the daily space of the neighborhood is transformed into special festive space. Third, the committee members, with the cooperation of the neighbors, arrange fun events for both children and adults.

The executive committee, in the case of northeast section of Ushinomiya-cho, is in charge of planning Jizo-bon in the community.⁸ It consists of the longstanding residents who have known each other since childhood. About three weeks before Jizo-bon, the committee holds a meeting to plan the upcoming festival. I participated in the meeting in 2005 when the committee members invited some female members to think over the events of the Jizo-bon to make it more attractive and to draw more people around the Jizo statue. In the discussion of how they could attract more people around the Jizo, one of the leaders suggested that they should offer lunch on Sunday, which they did not do in the previous years. The female members suggested that they should include more activities for children such as painting on big lanterns and *wanage* (a Japanese game similar to quoits or horseshoes). They also discussed how to encourage junior high school students to participate in Jizo-bon and help, because they usually do not take part in Jizo-bon. By the end of the discussion, they had decided on a date to go shopping to buy prizes for the raffle, snacks for children, and other necessary materials for the games.

About a week before the festival, the executive committee sent an invitation letter to all the households in the neighborhood. The letter included a seasonal greeting for the end of summer and the schedule for the Jizo-bon. The feast day of Jizo-bon fell on August 24, so neighborhoods in Kyoto traditionally held the feasts on August 23-24. In recent years,

however, most neighborhoods hold the feasts on the weekend closest to August 24, since the number of salaried men and women has risen. Not only have the feast days been moved to the weekend but also, in many neighborhoods, the feast days are only celebrated for one day instead of two.

In the northeast part of Ushinomiya-cho, Jizo-bon is celebrated for two days; the making of a ritual space is scheduled for nine in the morning on the first day every year. In 2005, when I participated in the event, even before nine, the neighbors had gathered in front of Jizo and began to work voluntarily. The first thing they did was to set up a white tent with the name of the neighborhood on it in front of the Jizo shrine. The purpose of white tent is twofold: to prevent people from getting wet in case of a sudden rain, and to demarcate the communal space during the festival. Another important item for preparation is arranging straw-mats. Spreading the straw-mats indicates that the space is like a home; not only does everyone take off their shoes to enter the space, but also they feel at home.

After the tent was set up and the straw mats arranged, red lanterns and white lanterns with a simple design were hung around the tent. On these paper lanterns, the name of the Jizo, Enmei Jizo, and the name of a child were written with a calligraphy brush. These were dedicated to the Jizo by a household in the community when a baby was born to the family. At night, lights were lit which provided a shimmering illumination.

In front of Jizo, offerings were placed on an altar made from a small table belonging to one of the neighborhood residents. While the men were putting up the tent, the women arranged the offerings to the Jizo. One elderly woman put flowers on the altar along with vegetables and fruits such as apples and a watermelon; another woman prepared food and drinks for the people at the gathering.

Another way of making a festival space is to move the Jizo image(s) to a larger space and make a temporary altar for the statue(s). The larger space can be a shed, storehouse, or garage of a member of the neighborhood association, or an apartment playground. If there is a large space in the neighborhood, a community may choose to use the space for their gathering every year. Or, the communal space for the Jizo-bon may change each year, if the household in charge of hosting the Jizo-bon rotates.

In 2006 in the Shogoin Kawara-cho neighborhood, for instance, at ten in the morning, two men began moving four Jizo statues from two small wooden shrines in different parts of the neighborhood to the temporary ritual space. The residents in charge had already gathered there, and had spread the straw-mats when the two men arrived there with the Jizo statues. The place was also draped with festive red-and-white bunting around the walls. Red and white lanterns with the name Enmei Jizo and the names of the children were hung at the entrance to the temporary ritual space. As soon as the two men brought in the Jizo statues, an elderly woman began to wash them. A middle-aged man explained to me that if make-up on the Jizo had faded away, they would redo it at the time of Jizo-bon. An elderly woman took the lead in arranging the altar because she was knowledgeable about how it was done. She asked the other residents if any babies had been born in their neighborhood in the previous year. In years when no babies have been born, the bibs would be washed instead of putting new ones on the statues. When a baby is born in the neighborhood in the previous year, it is customary for the family to donate a bib to the Jizo. On the top level of the tiered shelves, the washed Jizo statues were placed; on the lower levels, flowers, candles, red and white pieces of rice cake, fruits and vegetables, rice, and boxes of drinks were beautifully arranged and offered to the Jizos (Figure 2).

The ritual exchange of gifts, an important part of this celebration, highlights the concerns for reciprocity. During the preparation, neighbors dropped by to offer donations placed in red and white ceremonial envelopes which are customarily used for presenting money on festive occasions. The money that the neighbors contribute constitutes the primary

financial resource in organizing the Jizo-bon: buying gifts for the raffle, items for children's play activities, food and drinks for the participants, and lunch and dinner. The neighborhood association treasurer receives them, and after he takes the money out and puts it in a safe place, the envelopes are placed on the altar near the Jizo. The contribution of money is done on a voluntary basis, but all the households which participated in Jizo-bon made a donation. The amount of donation depended on various factors such as the number of children in the household, the household's position in the neighborhood association, and the financial situation of the household.⁹ Moreover, donations are not always in cash. Sake, beer, and other beverages are also donated to Jizo.

As the two examples have demonstrated, in the center of the shared public space stand a purified and decorated statue or statues of Jizo. It is in this space where various activities take place for one or two days. The schedule of events and activities are posted near the Jizo, and these planned activities attract many children and adults, but even between activities, children came out from their houses to play in the space, and the adults enjoy chatting, and drinking beer, tea or coffee (Figure 3).

The children who participated in the Jizo-bon of the northeast part of Ushinomiya-cho in 2005 included not only the children who live in the neighborhood, but also those who were visiting Jizo-bon because their grandparents lived in this neighborhood. About twenty children, whose ages ranged from two to twelve years old, participated in the festivity. Popular activities included making origami (folding paper), blowing bubbles, and playing catch with a soft ball (Figure 4). Moreover, objects such as ice, which was used to keep the drinks cold, and the water used for other games became their favorite toys. Being outside with other children in the festive space often led to spontaneous play among the children. For example, one girl began to play with some ice, and others joined in as they also found it fun to play with. One boy was enjoying playing with the water, and others also began to play. Two boys brought Nintendo games to the space in front of Jizo to play with other children. I also noticed that one child who was too shy to go outside and play with the children in his neighborhood felt comfortable to play under the tent. He was excited about the newly created space. I saw him playing with boys and girls that he rarely played with in everyday life.

The free play is "interrupted" by various activities which take place according to the schedule, which includes both aspects of ritual and entertainment. Although the ritual aspect relates to Buddhism, most residents do not see the festival as a religious event. However, performing a Buddhist ritual in front of the Jizo statue certainly reminds participants of the origins of the Jizo belief.

At one o'clock on the afternoon of August 20, 2005 in Ushinomiya-cho, a Buddhist priest in a purple robe arrived to perform a prayer ritual for the Jizo, to pray for the happiness of the children and prosperity for the neighborhood. This occasion attracted many neighborhoods. After reciting some prayers, the priest introduced the posthumous Buddhist name of a woman who had recently died in the neighborhood; he also explained that she had donated the new tent to the Jizo and the neighborhood association. The priest then shifted the topic to the Jizo statue: he explained where it originated and why it does not have a lower half of the body. One of the leaders of the community, a man in his late sixties, stated that the Jizo was discovered when his parents rebuilt their house about eighty years ago. He added that he did not know why, but the two other Jizo images found with it had the lower half of their bodies. He continued that three Jizo statues were too many for a small shrine, so he had asked Mibu Temple to keep the other two. The talk by the priest and the conversation after the ritual offered the opportunity to let people know about a death in the community, and to share the history of the Jizo in the community. In half an hour, the prayers to Jizo and talk by the priest had ended, and the priest left by motorbike. The residents who gathered for the ritual stayed and commemorated the woman who had died in the previous year.

In Ushinomiya-cho many neighbors gathered when the ritual for the Jizo was held by the priest. However, the children were not very excited about the ritual. One nine-year-old boy said he loved everything except the ritual. It was the only occasion in which the adults subtly imposed control over the children. The children probably felt that they were expected to sit quietly as they listened to the prayers that they did not understand.

In Shogoin Kawara-cho, when I participated in the ritual in 2006, a Buddhist priest arrived at ten in the morning, and before the ritual she distributed to the participants a sheet of paper on which a Buddhist prayer was written. During the ritual, everyone including the children had a chance to recite it aloud with the priest. Afterwards, the priest talked to the neighbors about the expression of the Jizo statues in the neighborhood: she pointed out that the Jizo is smiling and looks very gentle and kind.

In many neighborhoods in Yoshida a prayer bead ritual was performed. In front of Jizo, the neighbors sat in a circle and passed around a long string of prayer beads one hundred times as the person in the center recited prayers and hit a gong one hundred times. It is a rule that when the prayer beads are passed around, if a large bead comes to you, you lift it up to your forehead. When everyone finished passing around the prayer beads one hundred times, they pressed the beads to each other's bodies, believing that the beads would keep them healthy and happy. This ritual can be fun experience for children, since it involves more action and participation. It is closer to "play" than just sitting and listening to the priest's prayers.

It is common in every neighborhood for each child to receive a package of snacks from the member of neighborhood association at three in the afternoon. In the case of the northeast Ushinomiya-cho in 2005, it was also the time for the popular children's game of catching goldfish. Many goldfish, both red and black, were put into large plastic cases filled with water. The children used a catcher made of paper to try to catch the fish before the catcher was soaked with water and fell apart (Figure 5). It is a popular game in Japan, especially during festivals, but Jizo-bon is the only time when children can play for free and as many time as they like. All of the families in the neighborhood that had small children gathered near the Jizo.

Some activities are also held in the evening. At 6 o'clock, the neighborhood association of northeast Ushinomiya-cho held a dinner party in a fancy restaurant near the neighborhood. This party attracted many more residents than the activities in front of the Jizo. The party began with an address by the president of the neighborhood association. He asked every resident to cooperate in making their community a safe and wonderful place to live. There were also junior and senior high school students in attendance who had not participated in other Jizo-bon activities. During the party, fun activities such as bingo took place. While I was living in that neighborhood, there was a dinner party at the restaurant every year. But during my interviews, one informant told me that this was a recent event, and that previously they had had the dinner party in front of Jizo. At night, children were allowed to play with fireworks in front of the Jizo. This is one of the children's favorite summer activities. The fireworks can include sparklers, rockets, and fountains, but in the limited space in front of the Jizo, the children played mostly with sparklers. They were all excited and shared the fireworks.

Many children I interviewed said that their favorite event was the *fukubiki* (a raffle). *Fukubiki* is a compound word that means to draw (pull out) happiness, and it is one of the most popular activities in Jizo-bon. In Ushinomiya-cho, the *fukubiki* was held on August 21, 2005. The prizes for the raffle were prepared in advance by the members of the executive committee for both the children and the adults. The number of residents who joined the gathering in front of Jizo was at its largest when the raffle took place. The prizes for the

adults were practical items or daily necessities such as fans, frying pans, soap, and plastic wrap, whereas for the children there were toys and book coupons.

Fukubiki raffles function in various ways. From the perspective of the neighborhood leaders, they are a technique to attract more residents to the gathering. From the perspective of the participants, including both the adults and children, winning prizes and the element of chance are fun. Taking the whole festival into consideration, there is certainly a function of reciprocity. The residents receive a certain amount of value in return for their offerings to Jizo.

The descriptions of various recreational activities at Jizo-bon thus far have mainly been based on those of the northeast section of Ushinomiya-cho. There are many neighborhoods in the area that share the basic structure of the festival, but which have different activities. When I visited different neighborhoods in Yoshida and surrounding areas, I noticed that the committee members attempted to create various opportunities for children, which were different from one another in the particulars, but had common characteristics.

One of the most important characteristics is that of maintaining cultural elements from the past. For instance, in some communities the children enjoyed drawing or painting on the lanterns. They were encouraged to draw whatever they liked, so their pictures included popular TV characters and characters from games (Figure 6). It was special experience for children to paint on the lanterns, an activity which signifies continuity from the Edo period. Another example is traditional theater. In one neighborhood, a puppet play, which we seldom have the opportunity to watch, was performed for the children. In another neighborhood, one of the traditions is to show movies with a projector on a large screen. Although at present day every family has a DVD and video player, it is fun for children to watch movies on a big screen with other children in the neighborhood. Furthermore, the movie themselves tend to be traditional stories, such as folktales.

In terms of social relationships, in all activities, the adult members of neighborhood associations helped the children who needed it. Especially in activities such as catching gold fish or fireworks, the children need adult help so that they can enjoy themselves. These activities provide an important stimulus for the development of close ties among adults and children.

Finally, adults' recollections of their experiences of Jizo-bon in their childhood provide insights in interpretation of Jizo-bon in contemporary Kyoto. One middle-aged man explained excitedly that he got to stay up late, maybe until midnight. He went with a group of children of various ages to the ward building, which was very old and scary at the time, for *kimodameshi* (a courage-testing game). A similar story was told by a mother of two small children. She told me that one of her most memorable experiences was that the leaders of a children's group took the smaller children to a gravesite or to a scary spot at the university; in those days it was very dark so walking to those places was a scary and fun experience for the children. I was also told that during Jizo-bon, the neighbors were always in the space in front of Jizo, talking, eating and drinking and the children were also out playing all day on both of the festival days.

Function and Meaning

The previous section has described Jizo-bon in Kyoto. In this section, I would like to interpret the function and meaning of the Jizo-bon as it is enacted in Kyoto's urban neighborhoods. Two different perspectives may be useful in understanding Jizo-bon. One is the examination of function from the perspective of community, community leaders to be more specific, and the other is to examine it from the perspective of children.

The leaders of the neighborhood made much of the occasion of Jizo-bon to increase group solidarity and to create a sense of social identity. Fun activities were organized for both children and adults to encourage participation and communication among the neighbors. Further, eating and drinking together increased the sense of closeness among neighbors. In some relatively large neighborhoods, the neighbors cooked and offered homemade dishes that were well liked by children. Moreover, in quite a few neighborhoods, dinner was shared, either in front of Jizo or at another place. Almost all of the activities took place in the symbolic space which was created and shared by the neighbors. In the center of symbolic space stands the statue of Jizo, who is a protective deity of children and of the community. As Bronner (1986, 207) states, objects help communicate beliefs and also affirm them. By gathering near the Jizo, and with everyone making offerings to Jizo, the neighbors reaffirmed the belief that their community and children are protected by the Jizo.

Not only is Jizo a symbol, but also the space in front of Jizo where people gather comes to have a symbolic meaning: that of an "ideal" community. The image of an ideal community includes a space open to every member of the community; both young and old share the same space, playing, talking and smiling, and helping one another. In daily life the social relations of a neighborhood are different from the ones during Jizo-bon: neighbors do not share time and space very often, and in addition, the children do not play in the streets of the neighborhood. Thus, the space and time shared in front of Jizo represents symbolically the image and value of "community." By performing Jizo-bon, the image and essence of "community" are enacted and communicated among the neighbors, and contribute to a sense of communal solidarity as well. The representation of the children playing in a neighborhood is indispensable for the creation of an "ideal" community, because having children in a community indicates good prospects for the future of the community. Moreover, children's playing in a neighborhood carries feelings of a warm atmosphere, neighborliness, friendliness, and the solidarity of the community. In this sense, we can say that children fulfill their role in Jizo-bon by "displaying" their play in a communal space.

Second, the perspective of the children who participate in Jizo-bon is essential in understanding the meanings of Jizo-bon. Although neighbors do not gather around Jizo all the time during the Jizo-bon as they did in the past, Jizo-bon still provides children with arenas not only for creating new social relations and learning traditions, but also for expressing themselves in a shared space in a neighborhood. Throughout Jizo-bon, in the special communal space in front of Jizo, children play with the other neighborhood children and interact with the adults of the neighborhood. As illustrated in the second part, these children have few social relations with neighborhood community in their daily lives. Usually children are busy with after school classes, or even if they do not have structured activities, elementary school children tend to play with friends from school in their homes or on playgrounds. They do not play with the neighbor children in the streets, so the neighbors do not interact with the children in daily life. In short, the role of neighborhood in children's socialization has decreased. During the Jizo-bon, however, children have a chance to learn about relationships with adults in the neighborhood. Unlike school, Jizo-bon is not compulsory: children can choose what activity they want to participate in, and when they want to be in the shared space. The adults in the neighborhood do not set out to teach the children; instead they try to make the children happy; and they help any child who needs help. These factors make the relationships different from the ones children experience with their teachers at school. Further, children's relationships among themselves are different. Because of the space, they can stay as long as they want for the two days; children of different ages in a community become closer to one another; and children play with neighbor children instead of classmates.

Moreover, Jizo-bon functions to offer cultural experiences for children as well as a chance for them to express themselves in games and at play. They have an opportunity to become familiar with Jizo folk culture. They have probably heard the folktale "Kasa-Jizo" recited at home or nursery school. Everyone probably knows the story, yet beyond the story, they do not know much about Jizo. By participating in Jizo-bon, they become familiar with the culture related to Jizo. In addition, because a Buddhist priest is invited and recites Buddhist prayers, children are exposed to Buddhist ritual; many of the children may not have had this experience if they have not attended a funeral. Children have the chance not only to learn traditions related to folk religion, but they are also exposed to the culture inherited from the past such as puppet plays and drawing on lanterns. Finally and most importantly, Jizo-bon provides a space and opportunity in which children can express themselves in play and in games, and new types of play are created when they interact with other children from the neighborhood.

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END NOTES

¹ The meaning of Jizo has changed over time. Jizo originated in India and originally he was an earth god. However, the belief in Jizo was not widespread in India. In the fifth century, the belief in Jizo spread to China. It became popular as the concept of hell and heaven grew since it was believed that Jizo could save one from the tortures of hell. The exact time that Jizo belief was introduced to Japan is unknown but the first reliable source dates back to the mid-eighth century.

² Wakamori argues that in Japan's Middle Ages Buddhist priests used this type of legend, that is, stories about Jizo taking the form of a child, in order to increase the numbers of Jizo believers (1983, 57).

³ For detailed texts in English, see Hadland (1992, 107-8), and LaFleur (1992, 63-64).

⁴ For other legends of Jizo, see Dorson (1962, 37, 41-44).

⁵ Further statistical information of Kyoto City, see Kokusei chosa (2006).

⁶ According to research on Jizo in the southern part of Kyoto City, people often said that they also found Jizo statues either in fields or in the rivers. Because the Meiji government introduced the policy of separating Buddhism and Shinto, people in Kyoto buried the statues of Jizo in the fields or threw them into the river to hide them (Fushimino machizukurio kangaeru kenkyukai 1987, 146).

⁷ Interview conducted on October 4, 2006.

⁸ In Kyoto, the adults plan and organize the Jizo-bon. In contrast, there are other parts of Japan where the children's organizations plan and organize it (Ito 1992, 271).

⁹ In some neighborhoods, the donation amount from each household is decided by the neighborhood association and is an obligation.

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Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 2



Figure 4

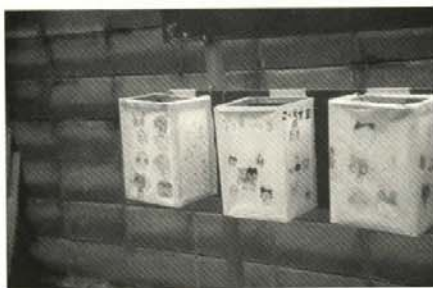


Figure 5



Figure 6