Wrapped gifts

Ritual prestations and social obligations in contemporary Japan

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I declare that the work in this thesis and the composition are my own original work and has not been presented to any other institution, nor has a degree been conferred by this or any other University on it. I thereby sign to certify,

Modern Japan is widely regarded as a society saturated with customs, values, and social relationships that organically link present generations of Japanese to past generations. Especially since 1945 and the eclipse of the ideology of the emperor-centered family-state, Japanese have come to know themselves, and to be known by others, through their cultural traditions. Group harmony, aversion to litigation, the martial arts, industrial paternalism: these and other "traditional" values and practices are assumed both to predate Japan's modernization and to have contributed to its unparalleled success. It was not that long ago, in fact, that Japan specialists ascribed Japan's successful modernization to the utility of its premodern values and institutions, on the assumption "traditions" were direct cultural legacies. (…) Examined historically, familiar emblems of Japanese culture, including treasured icons, turn out to be modern. Much of Japanese tradition is a modern invention

Stephen Vlastos (Mirror of Modernity: Invented traditions of Modern Japan 1998).

PREFACE

1. The Thesis

This thesis is based on eighteen months of fieldwork carried out in the town of Kamikatsu, a rural community in the prefecture of Tokushima, on the south-east periphery of Shikoku Island. It aims to advance social anthropological theories of gift exchange, as well as produce an ethnographic study of ritual prestations and the negotiation of social obligations among the villagers of the town. More precisely, it takes up the analysis of wrapping in anthropology that is so often overlooked in the analysis of gift exchange, and reconsiders it in the light of the ethnographic material from Kamikatsu.

My initial interest for the research came from a problem found in the literature of Japan. The Japanese Society was described as having a traditional exchange system. Unlike European gift exchange, for example, Japanese gift exchange was highly ritualised; there was a strong sense of obligation to return gifts; its wrapping was concerned with pollution and politeness (Befu 1969, Hendry 1986 and 1993). Simultaneously, Japanese society had acquired capitalist gift exchange practices such as Valentine's Day gifts, and invested them with new attributes and meanings (Hendry 1999). The paradox was that although the features of obligation and wrapping had been transformed with the emergence of a strong capitalist economy, they were used to give capitalist gift exchange a traditional outlook. I decided to investigate the contention that Japanese exchange was a hybrid between a traditional gift economy and capitalist gift exchange. In order to do so, I considered two distinctive elements of Japanese gift exchange: social obligation, known as *giri,* and ritual wrapping. I hoped that by looking at the relation between social obligations and wrapping I could make a contribution to

the anthropological debates surrounding the nature of gift exchange in capitalist societies. Thus, my analysis of gifts centres around the way social obligations known as *giri* are constructed through gift exchange. It considers the importance of wrapping and unwrapping gifts and strives to understand the nature of the changes in the perception of both.

I thought the villagers of Kamikatsu could illuminate some of the aspects I had in mind. However, as I became involved in the life of the town I was bewildered by the different approaches to gift exchange I found. The obligatory character of mid-summer and New Year gifts, which I had planned to look at, was played down. Instead, gifts of thanks, compensation, and from the heart (*orei*, *service, and kimochi*) were more relevant. *Okaeshi*, a traditional funeral return gift, was being censured by local administrations as superfluous and excessive. Villagers were very concerned with the developmental programme they called 'making the town'. Giving and receiving prestations were at the centre of this process. Somehow it was imperative that people should accept gifts, and with them the obligations and communal responsibility to help 'make the town'. As I perceived, wrapping gifts was a means of convincing people to accept the obligations acquired with the gifts and commodities. I was also intrigued by the idea that on some occasions the villagers did not wrap the gifts themselves. Most villagers left wrapping to shops and wrapping specialists. By contrast, villagers spent much time and effort on wrapping the buildings and places where exchange was about to take place. I gradually realised that the villagers' understanding of exchange was not a homogeneous one.

After several months of fieldwork, I was still not clear how to make sense of the differences in practices of gift exchange and uses of wrapping. I started questioning my method of research. My initial approach had been to participate in and observe as much as I could of gift giving occasions, focussing on the

presentation of the gifts. It became obvious that this strategy was a good starting point but it was not enough. Thus, I began to watch the whole process of gift exchange and to listen to what people talked about and did in relation to the production of gifts. I began to gain some insight into Japanese life, including the villagers' approach to their uses of wrapping, to auspicious prestations, and to obligations.

Back at Queen's I tried to gain an understanding of the material by placing it within the theories of exchange and wrapping. The basis of my argument is the awareness that analysing gift giving requires analysing the construction of wrapping, but that wrapping is based on a particular view of commodity giving and communality. Since I left the field, I have continued to be in touch with the people in Kamikatsu through letters and telephone calls. In the process of writing in 1999, I was told how famous Kamikatsu had become as a rural dream after I had left the town, verifying some of my observations during fieldwork. I have integrated these data with what I collected during fieldwork. The results of my research will eventually be made available to Kamikatsu municipal offices and to others through publication

2. Fieldwork

My field research was conducted from July 1995 to January 1997. While preparing for fieldwork, I was encouraged by a friend to visit the Tokushima prefecture at the periphery of the great industrial expansion of the Inland Sea (Osaka to Kagawa). According to my informant, it was a 'rural' place where I could pursue most of my interest in gifts and wrapping. My plan was to travel around the prefecture for few weeks and find a village of less than 4,000 inhabitants in which to carry out fieldwork. The search for a location proved

difficult. In the first two weeks I was turned down by all the towns and villages in the prefecture I visited. I only arrived in Kamikatsu by letting other people 'wrap' me into their groups and associations. The Tokushima International Association wrote me letters of introduction and directed me towards the southern areas of the prefecture where Kamikatsu lies.

Figure A. Map of Southern Japan. Tokushima Prefecture in blue with Tokushima capital and Kamikatsu town.

Figure B. Kamikatsu's physical size and location in (white) in Tokushima Prefecture (blue) at 48 Km from Tokushima Capital.

On my first visit to Kamikatsu, I met Hiraoka San at the *yakuba* or town's office. He read my letters and kindly drove me to Fukuhara village to the *onsen* (hot-spring resort) where he introduced me to Mr. Abe, also from the town's office. After offering me tea and biscuits they discussed who could offer me a homestay (a short residence in a home). I was treated to a meal, offered a bath, and given some *omiyage* (souvenirs). In the meantime Mr. Abe mediated my requests with Mr. Mima, the head of the *onsen.* I left the town with a month's homestay at Mr. Mima's annexed house, after which I had no guarantee of remaining in town.

On the last day of my homestay with Mima's family I met Diana, an artist from New Zealand married to a Japanese man, who introduced me to their acquaintances, the Watanabe family in Yokomine district. The Watanabe family took me in with ease. They had lived in Nepal for several years, and their experience enabled them to understand the nature and needs of my research. As we talked in the porch of their house, we discovered that Gufodh, my host, and Professor Hiroshi, who had offered me the research affiliation, had both lived in the same house in Nepal in the same year, knew of each other but had never met. The coincidence amazed us. It was hard to believe that of all places and of all the people I could have met in Japan, I met them. *En*, as they call the chances of destiny, marked our relation. I moved into their house few days later. Our arrangement was informal; they offered me a room free of charge in their annexed house, on top of the room where Gufodh San made his pottery. They only charged me for board, which was minimal. I shared their vegetarian diet and organic homegrown products. Their initial three month period become a full year, in gentle transition from stranger to resident in their home. I mostly helped in domestic arrangements. I taught Spanish to Junco, their 10-year-old daughter, as she was home taught. I spent many hours in their kitchen learning about recycling, gardening, and organic agriculture. Their life-style put them in a

marginal position in the town, which I shared to some extent during my time with them.

The research process was less eclectic after I settled in Yokomine. I spent my first two months visiting the five villages that compose the town in order to understand the internal composition of the villages. I realised that the villagers no longer organised their daily activities solely around their districts or villages except for festivals in the autumn. Nearly everybody depended to some extent on the town's municipal administrative *service*s. It was the town that was of paramount importance in centralising and organising everyday life for the villages. I decided that it was essential to understand the town and the internal division of villages simultaneously rather than as units apart, or as units within. I concentrated on getting maps and tracing out the distinct areas, keeping the unity of the town as a general administrative framework (see Figure D).

The bulk of my research on gift and wrapping took place at the town's more than 54 festivals. They are the largest occasions for public wrapping and gift exchange. Additionally, I participated in private gift giving through my main informants. I carried out most of my research in Kamikatsu except for short visits to the neighbouring towns of Sanaguchi and Katsuura, their libraries, the prefecture library of *Bunkanomori* and the capital Tokushima. On two occasions, I made short visits to the University of Tokyo to consult its libraries. The study of gift giving put me at the centre of what Harrison has described as 'an intense familiarity with a wide cross-community of people' (Harrison 1993: 6). The system of gift-exchange practised in Kamikatsu and other parts of the region made me the recipient of multitude donations, from the gift of two cars, to clothes, a video camera, stationery, money and food. I kept a formal record of all prestations that I received and I witnessed. I photographed all of them and their wrappings. I videotaped with permission over 160 hours of ceremonial activities,

Figure C. Map of Kamikatsu and its five villages. Location of main sites of fieldwork: Shrines, temples, administrative buildings, informants, close informants, and my neighbourhood.

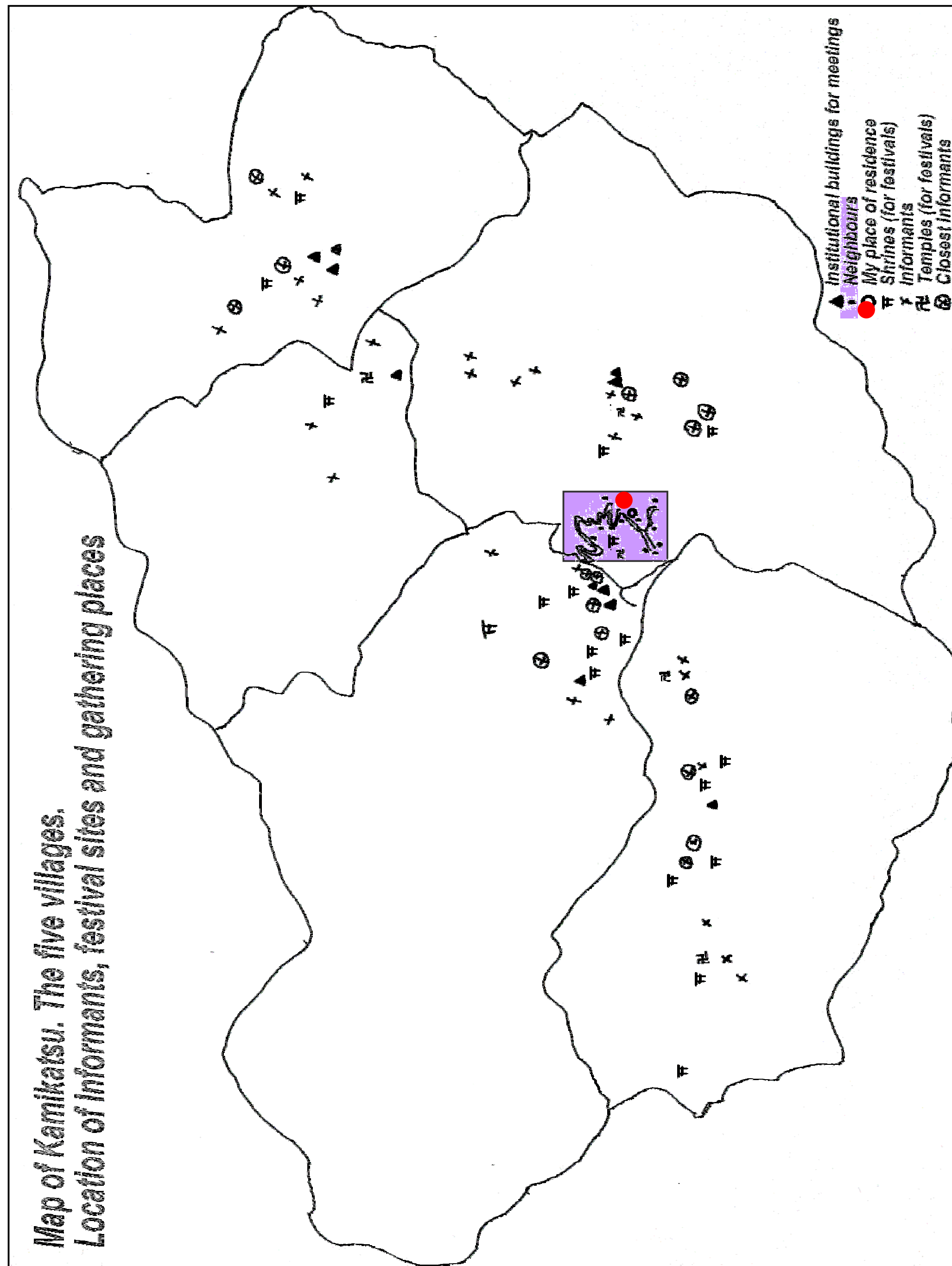


Figure D. Actual Map of Kamikatsu. It is a 3A page, doubled in two A4 parts

meetings, festivals, and the gift exchange in these contexts. As to my relationship with the villagers of the five villages, I tried to balance my participation in each of them. Most of the quantitative data that appear in these pages refer to samples taken from each district and village. The group of people that I came to know best were a number of fifteen houses dispersed over the five villages, of different economic and social status and neighbours (see Figure C). I had informants both in the central areas of the local administration and at the periphery, although I came to be mostly associated with those at the 'margin' (not geographical, but social) of the town. Geographically I was placed in a very advantageous position. I lived at a close distance to one of the main crossroads in the town (see figure D). Each family in their knowledge of gifts and their positions of centrality and periphery plays a prominent role in the thesis.

2.a Methodological constraints

As many anthropologists have argued, there is no neutral or objective collection of data:

> data are the product of limited and marginal interactions (…) these data are bound to reflect the uncertainties and ambiguities of the limits of perception and communication through which they were initially generated (Ellen 1983: 214).

Strathern (1987) has also argued that fieldwork methods interfere with the research and with the comprehension of the social life experience. The presence of the anthropologist always highlights the unequal relationship between researcher and informant (Strathern 1987: 19). In this respect, my research disrupted life in the village in the sense that it was difficult to find a role that would smooth over my incorporation into the life of the town. At the beginning I was often assumed to be one of the many English teachers that travel twice a week to the local school to teach conversational English. Gradually people

learned that I was 'living in the town', and for some I was 'living with the Watanabe'. Most people were not sure how to define my status and how to treat me. As Hendry (1993b) has noted, the raising of Japan's economic power has turned up-side-down the colonialist power differential between the anthropologist and the local people. Status is an important issue when doing research in Japan. It is one way of classifying not only people's identity but 'proper place' (cf. Hendry 1987). Anthropologists working in Japan are no longer ascribed a 'superior' status by virtue of their origins. However, for most Japanese people, English-speaking people have a preferential status. They are regarded as speaking a privileged language. Not being from an English speaking country meant that my status was rather ambiguous, this being a factor in the non-equality of our relationship. I shared with English speakers the fact we were all regarded as having little knowledge of indirect communication. The effects of unequal relations were not lineal. They fluctuated depending on the context. I never felt that the longer I stayed in the town my status either improved or diminished. Status and unequal relations were always contextually tied to the occasions on which I was coming into a house (village, district, festival, ceremonial) or leaving these spheres. Being a woman in Japanese society meant that my age was the most important factor in determining my status. I was twenty-seven and single during research. On the whole, although disagreements over my presence and worries about me were not manifested verbally, people's concern created an empathic relationship that was the beginning of deeper relations during the year. My strategy was to try to negotiate a temporary 'social space' and become a 'marginal native' (cf. Keynes in Jackson 1992). However, my association with people who were regarded as 'marginal' made the boundaries of my 'social space' more clear-cut than perhaps other kinds of approaches to fieldwork in Japan. I tried to negotiate, not the exploitation of the topics of '*gaijin*-Japanese, you-us', but the dimensions of my own personal affiliations and the process of

letting others ‘wrap’ me into their lives. This process of wrapping was not without problems. Each time I was ‘wrapped’ into a group I found my relations with other groups disturbed people’s sense of place and politeness. Fieldwork meant on most occasions that I was forced to leave some groups in order to visit others, to go from one village to another, and to have no particular alliances with a particular group. I did not consider that my presence in Kamikatsu was entirely successful in relation to how well I engaged with people, because I let others wrap me into their lives without accepting the constraints of such inclusion. If something came out of the process of wrapping and immersion, it was that to become part of a group, which was always marked by gifts, also meant to share social obligations to the group, some of which I fulfilled and others which I could not.

As I reflect here, I used the traditional methods of fieldwork: intensive participant observation (see Okeley 1987: 71 and Clifford and Marcus 1986). I have to say though, that ‘intensive participant observation’ is here a loan term that describes an experience full of contradictions, marginality and estrangement from what I assumed ‘participation’ to be before fieldwork. My methods encountered the fact that methods must deal not with ideal societies and identities, remoteness, or exclusive ways of living (Sperber 1982: 4 and Strathern 1987: 31). Indeed, fieldwork as a method was always constrained by the multiplicity of changes and divergence of identities in the society where I lived. Many of my initial assumptions about fieldwork, gifts, and wrapping were challenged and changed in order to include a more encompassing reality.

My methods were affected by my ‘positioning’, or what is referred to as the reflexive character of research. I tried to acknowledge the subjective positioning of myself during research. I tried to balance the concern with reflexivity with the knowledge that there are ideas for shaping social reality (Gellner 1992: 66) and

that there are intellectual fashions and rhetorics that affect social discourse beyond their immediate recognition, reflexivity being one of them (Strathern 1993: 18-20).

I was overwhelmed by the things I received and the kindness of some people. I learned with time what it meant to 'reciprocate' and what it meant to have 'debts', but at the beginning these questions provided me with so many thinking tools that nothing made sense. The following chapters are intended to explain how things about gifts started to make sense. They aim to provide both the quantification and qualification for reflexive engagement during fieldwork, the process of using wrapping as a metaphor for involvement in daily life in Kamikatsu, and the processes of exchange that took place.

3. Outline of the Thesis

The thesis examines several aspects of the relations between obligations and wrapping, concentrating mainly on the cases of wrapping that affect the objects of gift exchange. In Chapter One, I look at the preoccupation with gift exchange in Japan and some of the representations of Japanese society. I follow this with a description of the characteristics of gift exchange in Japan. I define, briefly, the main aspects of wrapping, and offer a detailed consideration of the ethnographic and theoretical perspectives that contextualise this thesis. Chapter Two presents a theoretical discussion of the main theories about gift exchange in the literature, and offers a critique of the argument that gift exchange in Japan is a hybrid between a capitalist and a traditional gift economy. In Chapter Three I introduce the villagers' perceptions about gifts and their main classification of gifts and wrapping. I look at the processes of production, exchange, and consumption in order to illustrate how the complexity of rank in Japan cannot be reduced to

vertical hierarchy. In Chapter Four I explore villagers' ideas about auspiciousness and inauspiciousness associated with gift giving, showing how these ideas are the pivotal reference point for the construction of wrapping. The overall aim of the chapter is to show how auspiciousness and inauspiciousness are different from concerns with purity and pollution. I consider how wrapping complements ritual actions of giving and receiving gifts. Chapter Five looks at the ritual structure of wrapping and unwrapping at the rituals of giving gifts to deities at festivals. I show how gifts are appropriated in the festival process and how wrapping mystifies the creation of inequality between givers and recipients. In Chapter Six I deal with the rest of the ritual context where gift giving takes place, among kin during New Year and mid-summer, at funerals and on St. Valentine's Day. I consider that there are multiple conceptions of obligation, rather than obligation being a single notion. Lastly, in Chapter Seven I discuss the villagers' practices of gift giving as related to the process of 'making the town'. I suggest that a distinction has to be made between the numerous layers of wrapping, and the use of wrapping itself. The giving of commodities and the commoditization of wrapping presupposes a reflection on the impact that economic prosperity has had on for Japanese social organisation. I point to the giving of commodities as a central point of the contention about why wrapping is important to the identity of contemporary Japanese.

Chapter 1

Gift giving and wrapping gifts in contemporary Japan

Introduction

This thesis examines the areas of Japanese organisation that relate to the transfer of gifts. My material represents a contribution not only to the anthropological theories of gift exchange, but to the ethnographic understanding of wrapping. It also addresses a series of issues raised by literature on Japan. In particular I propose to consider the paradox that has dominated interpretations of Japan in the last two decades: the role of traditional values, such as hierarchy and obligation, in modernising Japan. My starting point is a kind of non-wrapped attitude, where I present the data and identify the layers of the complexity of this case as it moves on and wraps us. My aim is to provide a critical representation of a Japanese group in which the aspects of tradition, hierarchy, obligation, enter in consideration but are not the starting point of the analysis.

1. Contemporary Japan

> The record of the past exists to be exploited, rephrased, abridged, or ignored. What is not in the record can be invented. Examples of all of these processes abound in the modern world. The Japanese, I think, are not particularly unusual in the way they manipulate the record of their past, but it will be my contention that they are unusually adept at it. I also believe that a flexible approach to history may well prove to be a great advantage to any society faced with the necessity of making very rapid institutional transformations. As a Japanese proverb has it, the winds may fell the massive oak, but bamboo, bent even to the ground, will spring upright after the passage of the storm (Smith 1983: 9).

Contemporary Japan is often depicted as swinging between crises and success, change and tradition (Benedict 1946, Reischauer 1977, Smith 1983, and Hunter

1989). Japan's contemporary history emerges against the background of the defeat in the Second World War, leading to a fast industrial process. After the end of the war, Japan became immersed in an intense programme of national recovery. The entire society was challenged to adopt a new, foreign constitution, several protectionist strategies, land and administrative reforms. Many changes took place, from the nuclearisation of the extended family and women's access to the vote, to the development of trade unions, to the increase of the birth rate. (Takaishi 1967, Ishino 1967, Dore 1967-1978, Reischauer 1977, Smith 1978). Towards the early 1960s, Japan had achieved great urban development, with a large emigration from rural to industrial areas, educational, scientific and economic success. As Norbek describes it:

> it was a land of contrast. It was a secular nation devoted to the pursuit of happiness, land of shopkeepers, tiny industrial enterprises, of poverty and suffering, crammed houses, arranged marriage and of the most serious dedication to work, duty and obligation, and hierarchy (Norbeck 1965: 1-3).

From the 1970s to the mid-1980s the many sacrifices of earlier periods gave way to an economically prosperous society. Along with an exponential economic increase, Japanese society experienced a substantial internationalisation; expansion of national tourism and travelling; democratisation; the levels of literacy growing to nearly 100%; larger participation of women in politics and the workforce. Some Japanese saw this as a period of self-criticism and pride (Hendry 1987: 18). These were also times of paradoxes. Japan had achieved a great social and economic transformation; it had the outlook of a capitalist industrial society while maintaining complex ritual practices and beliefs (Nakane 1973, Christopher 1984, Dore 1978). Gift giving became exemplary of the kind of tension that existed between change and tradition (Dore 1967, Morsbach 1977, Smith 1983).

In the early 1990s, Japan had become more heterogeneous in composition, with a large level of Asian and South American immigration, younger women marrying later and becoming economically self-sufficient, and a lower birth rate. There was also the emergence of right-wing ideologies, and claims of the 'uniqueness' of Japanese culture (see Kosaku 1992). A strong concern for internationalisation and minority rights also surfaced in the mass media. The paradigms of homogeneity, tradition and modernity began to be questioned. As Chapman put it,

> [Japan was] fundamentally remolded and what Japan is today is largely the result of what flowed from that exciting and remarkably creative period [post war]. This would seem an obvious conclusion except for the fact that so many observers - Japanese and foreigners, scholars and ordinary people- enjoy depicting today's Japan as an extension of her most distant past…I have always suspected that some conspiracy exists to interpret almost anything that happens as having been foreshadowed by traditions and habits that existed before the militarist took power in the 1930s and led Japan into war (Chapman 1991: ix).

The level of economic comfort was heavily criticised by some. Oe (1994) argued that contemporary Japan was no longer defined by tradition but by a strong and fashionable consumerism. He argued that the discourses of tradition hide a loss of cultural identity and a lack of political direction. From 1995 to 1999 the economic mirage known as the 'bubble' heightened the perception of crisis anticipated by Oe. Many life-employment contracts were cancelled, the national agricultural co-operative and national banks went into bankruptcy, corruption spread, unemployment of men in their mid-thirties grew, several natural disasters and outbreaks of terrorism fragmented the illusions of wellbeing. Today, for many Japanese, contemporary times are a period of fast, largely unimaginable transformations, increase of wealth and domestic comfort. For a few people, these are also times of increasing uncertainty and a too compelling consumerism.

Gifts have been at the centre of this process in a paradigmatic way. From the late 1980s to 1996, the expenditure on gift giving was the third largest domestic

expenditure in an average home (Asahi Shinbun 1996). More recently, and with the economic crisis, certain gifts and wrapping have been gradually deemed redundant, thus affecting the traditional perception of gifts and the obligation to return them (see Chapters Six and Seven). In short, the roots of the complex relation between change and tradition that gifts exemplify are to be found in the process of national and economic unification that Japan has undergone since the early 1960s - processes that have also led to the current diversification of Japanese beliefs and practices.

The recent history of industrial Japan has had a profound effect on the always-provisional models of anthropologists. As Smith noted, had Japan not gained the technological pre-eminence it has, there would be little point in the world wide preoccupation with understanding the Japanese, their values and traditions, including gift exchange (Smith 1983: 6, Nakane 1973). For anthropologists, who consider each society worth studying on its own merits, the paradigm of the Japanese success constitutes a methodological problem. The large demand for works trying to understand the 'Japanese miracle' has created many ethnocentric interpretations, easy-to-use manuals about the key steps to living in Japan, and the gifts to take to smooth business relations. This has forced anthropologists to produce textbooks and newer interpretations at each turn of events. From the late 1950s to the mid 1990s, anthropologists have been engaged in producing interpretations of Japanese society that would explain social change as well as eradicate the sense of inscrutability and ethnocentrism of other interpretations (Befu 1967, Benedict 1977, Nakane 1973, Christopher 1984, Smith 1983, Hendry 1989). From a historical point of view, anthropologists argue that when we look at Japan we look at it as a product of its recent history. Hunter (1989), Nakane (1970) and Smith (1983) argue that in order to understand contemporary Japan it is necessary to understand the construction of a culture based on the conflict between the simultaneous existence of 'indigenous' and 'western' modes of

though and behaviour (Hunter 1983: 6). From a structuralist perspective, anthropologists argue that the Japanese are not intrinsically 'unique' in their values and problems. Their indigenous categories of inside/outside, public façade/private opinions are found in other societies. Rather, it is the structural combination of such categories, the values of reciprocity, hierarchy, co-operation, belonging to 'inside groups', that shape social organisation in particular ways (Hendry 1987). De Vos (1967), Allen (1994), Harden (1994), Berry (1994) and Franks (1992), from different disciplinary perspectives, have argued that it is necessary to cast a doubt on the taken for granted assumptions about the 'Japanese miracle', and the many theories about homogeneity and social harmony. They examine the existence, in Japanese history, of conflict of values, upheaval, marginalisation and dissent. Within these critical approaches have emerged several works on gender and how to reconsider the notions of group and individual in Japan (Kondo 1990) and Gordon (1985) among others (see Vlastos 1998), have proposed to look at Japanese traditions as modern inventions but from a critical standpoint. Instead of assuming that tradition is an artifice, these authors look at the invention of tradition in Japan in a progressive continuum, examining how 'tradition' contributed to the formation of national identity 'through the ideological function of collapsing time and reifying space' (see also Ohnuki-Tierney 1990). The body of invented traditions that characterise contemporary Japan are not:

> failure in the pre-war period to establish intellectual and cultural autonomy from the state, but creative responses by ordinary people who resisted the norms and values that conservative elites and the state sought to impose (Svastos 1998: 11-16).

My work follows the ideas that it is necessary to cast a doubt on the images of homogeneity, uniqueness and tradition. My own work reflects Svastos' idea of invented traditions as 'creative responses by ordinary people', because resistance

to norms and values of conservative elites was a very important concern of the people I lived with.

2. Japanese gift exchange

The Japanese are typically portrayed as deeply engaged with gifts. The extent of ritualised gift exchange in Japan is often commented on as one of the most important social aspects of Japan (Benedict 1977, Lebra 1976, Morsbach 1977, Befu 1969). Befu illustrates this idea when he says:

> The prevalence of gift giving in Japan is well known. Even the casual visitor sojourning in Japan for a few weeks will find himself presented with a gift from his Japanese friends or business associates. The full-page ads of midyear-gift (*chugen*) sales by major department stores, the rows of gift shops in any resort town, the displays of wrapped presents in stores at railroad stations, these are among the innumerable indication of the extent to which the Japanese are involved in gift exchange. (Befu 1974: 208).
>
> Indeed, Japanese give, receive, and return gifts with the obliging compulsion with which Marcel Mauss (1954) made primitive gift exchange immortal. Gift-giving in Japan is an elaborate institution (…) its complexity of the rules, its intricacy of the ritual, the numerousness of the occasions for giving, and the magnitude of financial expenditure on gifts (Befu 1967: 2).

As Befu exemplifies, rules of giving in Japan are often described as intricate pieces of knowledge. However, the complexity of gift exchange does not lie so much in the rules and classifications, as in the way this knowledge is used for the advantage of individuals and groups. Below, I describe the types and classifications of gifts, but their meaning must be understood in their use, and in the relations between those whose gift exchanges are portrayed in the following chapters.

2.a Types and classification of gifts

The occasions for ritual gift giving are specific and well defined. The words for gift *okurimono* (a present) and *okaeshi* (retribution) are somehow interchangeable. *Okurimono* means things bought. *Okaeshi,* meaning return or retribution, encompasses the meaning of obligation to acknowledge either a previous gift or previous help. However, most Japanese use both terms as the English word for gift. The term ‘prestation’ is perhaps more appropriate for defining these gifts, because it encompasses the meaning of a little token, the obligation to make a gift and to return it. Foodstuffs, *sake* and money are preferred gifts.

All phases of childhood, growth, and adulthood are punctuated by the exchange of wrapped gifts. An individual is made the recipient of gifts from an early age, starting with the infant being taken to the local Shinto Shrine or *miyamairi*, and being given her first toys. A prestation called *hitiya* must be given on the seventh night after a child’s birth. Gifts of money are offered to the deity when a child is three, five and seven years old, traditionally considered the critical years of a child’s growth. Local administrations offer gifts of towels, books, and certificates to commemorate coming of age, old age and achievements of long marriages. Prestations are also offered to deceased ancestors at mid-summer or at the anniversaries of the deaths of individuals or collectivities (i.e. war memorials[1]).

The celebration of life events also includes the celebration of educational and work achievement. Preparing for an exam is an occasion for giving money and wooden tablets to deities; passing an exam and moving from one grade to the next also requires a series of gifts, diplomas and medals. These occasions are called *gokaku-iwai, shushoku-iwai* (celebration of success in examination and in being employed). *Mimai* or gifts of sympathy are offered on occasions of distress and misfortune such as fire, earthquake and robbery. Gifts called *koden* are offered at funerals and returned with *kaeshi,* or simply ‘return gifts’. Gifts for

weddings or *kekkon iwai* also have a *kaeshi*. The offering of prestations encompasses more than the life cycle. Opening a new store, taking a trip, returning from a trip, receiving visitors, visiting friends also prompt gift-giving. Gifts of departure and arrival (*osembetsu* to *omiyage*) are the most important among people who work together. Office life is full of daily giving and receiving of cakes, drinks and tea that people bring back from a trip as souvenirs. In Kamikatsu, the construction of a new house or any new building is one of the most celebrated occasions in the neighbourhood. Hundreds of rice cakes are distributed by means of being thrown from rooftops to the neighbours on the street (*tatemae* to *mochinage*). *Mikannage* (throwing mandarins) is widely practised in the Katsuura area, also famous for the production of this fruit. The surplus of mandarins, along with sweets and crisps for children, are thrown from an elevated stand to celebrate *mikan matsuri*, orange festival (23rd November). Hendry has also reported another case of *mikannage* in *Toya*ma (Hendry 1999: 123). Both cases are based on the principle of ensuring auspiciousness (see Chapter Four) after harvest (in Katsuura) and for the New Year (in Toyama, (ibid.)). *Mikan* mandarins are offered as prestation to the deities at New Year, too.

The annual cycle is divided into two major gift-giving seasons, in mid-summer and New Year. The midsummer gift is called *chugen*, and the end of year gift is called *seibo*. Twice a year, coinciding with the giving of work bonuses, most families flood shopping malls and liquor stores. Shopping centres burst with people ordering and sending gifts. In 1996, the market share of *chugen* gifts was estimated at around Y 1.1 trillion (£ 57,000 billion), and that of *seibo* gifts to be around Y 1.4 trillion (£ 73,000 billion) (Canadian/Japanese Bureau 1999[2]). According to Sawa Bank, 88.3% of people sent gifts at *chugen*, giving an average of 4.2 gifts per person; 93.3% sent at New Year, giving up to 5 people, usually kin and superiors at work. These gifts cost Y 3,000[3] each (£ 15), with an average of Y 4,600 (£ 24) per family (Ueda 1996[4]). Gift exchange in these two seasons is

also punctuated by the sending of greeting and thank you cards to kin and business associates, with some households sending up to 300 of them. There is also a large expenditure on gifts in *bonenkai* (end of year parties at work), sometimes included in the figures for *seibo*. These are complemented with the many all-year-round commercial seasons such as Mothers' Day, and Christmas. Valentine's Day is the commercially and socially most successful of the new gift giving seasons. The 1996 sales of chocolate gifts went up to 23.2 million tons of chocolate or about Y 49.6 billion (£ 25,000 million) worth of *giri*-choco (1996 Asahi Shinbun[5]) which women gave to their male acquaintances and bosses (Chapter Seven).

2.b The value of a gift and repayability

The economic value of gifts is one of the meanings that concerns most Japanese, because for them the economic value of a gift reflects the status of giver and recipient. Usually givers do not want to 'surprise' the recipient by giving unexpected things or things that would be hard to return. Things that have no immediate utility or cannot be consumed are not good as gifts. A gift has to have a value upon which the recipient can measure a return. Despite the fact that gifts are always given with the words, 'this is a humble thing', the value of the gift is not usually 'humble'.

Gifts are expensive. There are two reasons why gifts are expensive. First, the giver has to manifest the intention that he or she is generous; that she or he wants to take care of the welfare of the recipient's family by giving gifts to them. Second, in giving a gift, the giver must show that he or she is able to calculate what the recipient will return. Givers tend to calculate what the recipient might return as a return gift (usually a 10% of the original gift), so they add 'a bit more'

to ‘compensate’. Givers buy a more expensive thing that they would have done so their gift covers what the recipient might return. Givers opt for two strategies. One strategy is to give a quite expensive gift, wrapped in expensive wrapping papers, giving more than the 10% that it is expected in return. Another strategy, the most common, is to give a wrapped gift along with several smaller (unwrapped) prestations (i.e. fruits). The first strategy is very common in funeral and wedding gifts. At these occasions (specially funerals) the gift given (Y 10,000 - £ 53) will turn to be a gift a final gift of (Y 15,000 - £ 79) because the giver wants to cover the return gift (Y 5,000 - £27) that will take place.

The problem with gifts and repayability is exemplified above. There is always a hypertrophy of the value of the gift. Y 15,000 is more than 10% of the original gift. The hypertrophy of return values happens because most givers feel it would be mean if they only gave 10% (Y 11,000) in anticipation of the return. Most Japanese say that gifts must ‘help’ (see Chapter Three). A gift is only helpful if it gives much more than what is expected in return. A gift must always compensate the gift expenses that the recipient will incur in having to return her or his gift. The hypertrophy also happens because pair numbers are considered inauspicious and givers round numbers up, for example, from 12 to 15. (Chapter Four and Six).

In conclusion, to give is not only to anticipate a return but to compensate the recipient in advance for her or his return. A given gift is a gift that contains part of the future return gift. It compensates the recipient’s gift expenses in advance. When accepting ‘humble’ gifts, people accept the implicit responsibility to return the gift, which the prestation might carry along. Although this could appear similar to what Mauss (1924) described as the ‘spirit’ of the gift (see Chapter Two), which enforces the obligation to return a gift, we must be cautious. These ‘parts’ and ‘compensation’ are always spoken in terms of the market value of the

gift, and the economic percentage that one adds or expects. The language of gifts is a language of social expectations of return. For most Japanese, however, it is foremost a language of economic transformations of the market value of commodities. I examine this theme in Chapter Two.

For most Japanese, gifts must be either good or useful (Chapter Three). Thus, money and commodities for domestic consumption are preferred. These notions are culturally constructed ones. The quality of a gift is measured against the usefulness, goodness, and value of the commodity given as a gift. Expensive brands of coffee or oil, for example, are given to recipients one wants to show appreciation to, usually recipients that have a 'higher' economic or social status than the giver. This makes gift giving a complicated business, where givers and recipients must be aware of the market value of things as much as the social status of others.

The expenditure on gifts varies for each household. According to the 1986 Sawa Bank research, there was an average of 15.9 gifts of money a year (Y 128,462)[6] (£ 676) and twice as much of other commodities (Ueda 1996[7]). How much must be given to whom is a preoccupation that many informants thought embarrassing but unavoidable. Ideally, the value of a return should be equal to the value of the gift received. In practice, the value of a return is measured at 10-15% higher than the value of the original gift. It is assumed that the giver will give more as status increases. Since status is not given but achieved, givers and recipients compete in giving to indicate status and prestige. In short, returning escalates as people fight to perform and demonstrate status to others.

In cases where a gift is repaid with a counter-gift, the repayment can be either immediate or symmetric (see also Lebra 1976: 99). Immediate repayment takes place mostly at weddings and funerals, with gifts and a feast. As Lebra noted, if the feasting and the counter-gift are not enough to balance the original gift, the

host delivers an *orei* (appreciation) gift. However, as Lebra rightly argued, 'keeping reciprocal book in perfect balance means cancellation of social ties', thus exact repayability is not a desired quality of exchange (Lebra 1976: 100). In fact, cases of matched repayment were rare, and *orei* tended to increase the differential in the repayability, increasing the sense of debt and gratitude.

The problem of calculability, and the growing concern with redundancy, are the two factors that impinge on symmetric repayment of gifts. Although symmetric repayment has been present in Japan for the last forty decades, the idea that people should reciprocate on similar occasions with similar gifts is gaining ground. The increase of counter-giving in contemporary Japan appears to be related to the increase of individual men's and women's (as opposed to household's) acquisitive power, which is also reflected in the adoption of new gift giving seasons (such as Christmas, Valentine's Day, White Day).

2.c Redundancy

I will argue throughout this work that the ethnographic data show that gift giving in Japan is marked by a high redundancy of prestations. Gifts are redundant in the sense of being both superfluous and excessive. It has been amply commented that many wrapped gifts are given to recipients who give them away before they are unwrapped (Hendry 1987, Lebra 1976, Befu 1976). The reason why most informants give away prestations received is that they are not needed. Gifts do not always bring immediate benefit to the recipient. In order to avoid wasting them, gifts are shared with those around at work or home, compelling others to consume them. Indeed, the abundance of 'gifts' in Japan has the effect of fostering relations of consumption among givers and recipients. Since early in the analysis of gift exchange, the abundance of giving has been interpreted as a sign

of cultural 'distinctiveness', as an expression of the importance of feudal moral values of 'thanking' and the obligation to return (Befu 1976, Morsbach 1977). However, I will argue that the kind of exchange shown here, where redundancy is predominant, is not peculiar to Japan, nor is it owed to traditional values. As Cheal argues, such redundancy takes place:

> as a result of a pragmatic tendency to make many ritual offerings where one might have sufficed for the purposes of interaction courtesy. One way of demonstrating the subjective importance of a significant other is to give that persona a large quantity of things. This involves giving multiple gifts on a number of occasions (Cheal 1987a, 1988: 14).

I will argue that what defines gift exchange in Japan is that gifts have an effect of fostering relations not only of consumption among givers and recipients, but specifically of redundancy. We know from Mauss (1923) and Malinowski (1922) that relations of consumption define the limits of sociability among groups of people. However, I will maintain throughout this work that Japanese gift exchange cannot be said to reflect a traditional gift economy. It is the character of redundancy, of gifts being economically superfluous and useless, that is important in defining the limits of sociability among givers and recipients of gifts in Japan.

3. Presents and presentations: wrapping

The most important feature of gift exchange in Japan is related to the presentation of gifts. There is a general agreement that the importance of a gift is not the object itself but the manner in which it is given (Ogasawara 1999[8]). Presentation is of great concern to both givers and recipients, and most of the rules about gift giving are rules of how to convey adequately the message of each occasion and for each recipient. Styles of presentation can range from ritualised behaviour and

speech to forms of wrapping. The presentation of the self, ways of dressing, bowing, wrapping papers and wrapping clothes applied to the self (see picture 2) are crucial in conveying the right message. In the presentation of gifts at cycle-events, great care is put into preparing the house of the recipient. The upper part of the house and entrance door are wrapped in cloths with the household name or crest. These forms of presenting the house and self vary depending on the occasion and the existing relations and rank of givers and recipients (Hendry 1987).

Hendry has described presents and presentations as synonymous ideas. She puts forward a model of presentation of gifts, and explains how politeness is crucial in the action of expressing relations of 'care' between givers and recipients of gifts. According to Hendry, wrapping is the main form of showing how one 'cares' for others. She argues that wrapping adds value to the gift. The benefit is interpreted in terms of 'care' and 'politeness' towards the recipient (Hendry 1993: 64).

Wrapping for gifts can be very simple, with a piece of plaited string tying a bundle of towels from a shop. Even simpler, the towel can be just folded over. Wrapping can be minimalist, such as a layer of white paper covering a cake, or a piece of paper folded in a knot to ask the deities for help. It is also functional, such as multi-purpose white bags. Wrapping is also multiple and layered, concealing the gift from view, enhancing the gift with aesthetic combinations of colour and paper. The layering can be increased with indigo dyed *furoshiki* (wrapping cloth), for carrying the gift around. Wrapping can be cheap *noshigami* printed on a sheet of paper, half-concealing and half-revealing the object. It can be very expensive, like a set of ribbons, *mizuhiki* folded over numerous times, making a golden turtle as a bridewealth for a wedding. The pictures in this chapter illustrate the many varieties of wrapping.

3.a The concept of wrapping: origata and tsutsumi

There are many techniques and schools for wrapping, but basically *Origata*[9], or the art of gift-wrapping, is the action of folding paper without cutting it. The complexity of the rules of wrapping and the techniques of origata, though important, are not the subject of this thesis. I mainly focus on the social and ritual uses of wrapping rather than the techniques of folding. Japanese people elaborate on the fact that gifts must not be unwrapped in front of the donor of the gift. Wrapping, however, is not a synonym for sealing, concealing a gift, or creating surprise. Japanese ritual wrapping tends both to exhibit the contents of the gift, and to add a touch of 'gentle concealment' (Ekiguchi 1985: 6).

Many authors have noted that the concept of wrapping (*tsutsumi*) is not limited to the notion of packaging. Ekiguchi (1985) has argued that *tsutusmi* encompasses the ideas of wrapping the space, the self and the supernatural (1985: 6) These authors seem to agree that the most fundamental aspect of wrapping in Japan is that it defines the happiness or sadness of the occasions. Auspicious or inauspicious colours are used to design the paper and wrapping cloths for gifts and people. Ekiguchi conveys the importance of wrapping papers and symbolic colours and their relation to auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, in his statement that:

> wrapping in (white washi or Japanese paper) is analogous to a kind of pledge that the contents were protected from all impurities. The fact that washi, once creased, will hold the crease forever has also come to symbolise this seal against impurities (…) white paper is used because white is the colour of gods, and therefore, is free of all contamination (1994: 6). Red indicates human life and vitality (Ekiguchi 1994: 6), and according to most informants it is an indication of health and fortune.

Barthes argues that Japanese wrapping postpones the discovery of the object, which to him is insignificant. Wrapping is a luxury of signs. The object of the gift is the wrapping and not what is contained within it (Barthes 1970: 66). Hendry

also argues that Japanese wrap not only objects but language (in politeness), the body (in clothing and tattooing), space (in layering rooms) and human relations (inclusiveness in groups) (Hendry 1993: 14, 1997: 627). The point these authors seem to make is that Japanese wrapping 'nicely breaks down the material/non-material divide we are prone to make' (Hendry 1993: 172).

3.b Ritual wrapping

Since early in Japanese history folded papers have been strongly associated with Shinto rituals and the imperial courts. One of the earliest detailed accounts of wrapping is found in the Heian period (see Murasaki 1996: 42-65). Wu (1997) argues that in The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon, dated about 1000 A.D, references are made to the twisting and knotting of letters: 'this does appear to be a somewhat formalised type of folding which may be a distant cousin of *Noshi'* (Wu 1997: 8[10]). Historians argue that the following Minamoto period gave birth to the essential elements of ritual wrapping or *Noshi*, which are still used today (Kodansha 1993).

The *Noshi* is a narrow strip of dried sea abalone, wrapped up in red and white papers, folded in the shape illustrated here in figure 1 and later printed on wrapping paper. *Noshi* is the decorative part of *noshigami* (paper with *noshi*) that is applied to most gifts and commodities. A piece of *mizuhiki*, is used to tie the paper and *noshi* together, and the gift and *noshigami* together. *Mizuhiki*,[11] created in early Edo period (1603-1867), consists of red and white cords, sometimes gold and silver, in eight different combinations of colours (Hendry 1993b, Ekiguchi 1985). They are made of rice paper, folded over many times and dried to create strong pieces for ribbon making to express the sender's appreciation to the receiver. Ribbons are constructed as symbolising the unity between the giver and

recipient. Weddings and funerals, for instance, have special knots that cannot be untied because the event is expected to happen only once in life, nor should the bride or the deceased return to their families after they depart to their new lives (Ogasawara 1999[12]). Ohnuki-Tierney (1993) outlines that the act of knotting (musubi) a string was a ritual act to encapsulate a soul on a knot, but also has other meanings like production and reproduction of the polity and nature (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993: 49). The gift of abalone, called *Noshi*, with *mizuhiki* moved from being a gift to become the symbol of a gift. According to Hendry,

> abalone or shellfish indicates to the recipient that the donor of the gift is free from pollution associated with death, (…) and it has recently simply become a customary symbol of a gift (Hendry 1987).

Nowadays, white and red layers form the basis of all ritual wrapping in Japan, and auspiciously wrapped abalone (*Noshi*) is attached or printed into ritual wrapping papers in indication of the character of auspiciousness of the gift. *Noshi* (or any combination of folded materials in red and white) can be applied to people to symbolise auspiciousness in them (see Fig. 2). Black and white form the basic layers for inauspicious occasions with Buddhist symbols and there is a total absence of *Noshi*. During fieldwork, the most common way of wrapping gifts was with pre-printed *noshigami* papers.

Fig 1. Noshi
Fig 2. Noshi with mizuhiki ribbons in girl's hair.

3.c Pragmatic and symbolic wrapping

The wrapping for objects to be given as gifts is usually commercial wrapping with pre-printed *noshigami* (figure 1) with a single layer of wrapping that does not conceal the gift. More ritualised occasions such as weddings have more layers of wrapping paper, and wrapping cloths. Gifts from friends, visiting, have personalised wrapping that imitates or enhances the quality of the gifts. A box of chestnut rice cakes, for example, is wrapped in chestnut leaves, and cords that imitate wine patterns. Most *service* and casual offerings from shops are wrapped in plastic boxes, rewrapped several times in paper and placed in plastic bags. On most occasions, the decision to wrap a gift is not taken by the giver but by the shop, who considers it a complimentary *service* (see Chapter Three). Despite the importance of wrapping, occasional donations of small prestations are handled without wrapping; *mochi* (rice cakes) are thrown to their recipients with no layering of wrapping papers. Occasionally, some givers place the *mochi* in plastic bags (Chapter Three).

Wrapping cloths are as important aspects of gift wrapping as papers. The main wrapping cloth is *furoshiki* (bath cloth), also created in the Edo period. *Furoshiki* is a large square piece of cloth, for spreading out or wrapping one's purchase or anything of any size: books, bottles, or cakes. Hendry argues that it was orignally used to wrap and carry one's clothes at communal baths (Hendry 1987). Other pieces of cloth for wrapping are Shrine and household cloths with crests, towels, *hachimaki* and *tenugui* (headbands),*kimono*, *tapi* jackets, and white gloves and white socks. Lee (1984) argues that the *furoshiki* define the attitude to wrapping in Japan. It shows the 'eastern preference for flexibility' (in Hendry 1986: 218). However, wrapping cloths of the *furoshiki* kind are also found in western societies. In Catalonia, for example, a cotton cloth, of similar size to *furoshiki*, called *farcell*, is still used for the weekly shopping and for carrying all sorts of

things and gifts.[13] The use of these items of wrapping in Japan and other industrialised societies has gradually changed, with a growing intensification of wrapping materials such as plastic bags and commercial wrapping (Hendry 1995: 23), although *furoshiki* was much used in Kamikatsu and Tokushima.

As Hendry argues, wrapping accomplishes both pragmatic and symbolic uses. It represents one of the principles of 'pragmatic meaning' about the self and human relations (Hendry 1997, Bachnick1986, Oka 1975). Folding paper, ropes, cloth and clothes are perceived as things most people should know and be good at, being a source of pragmatic knowledge rather than an intellectual construct.

> During a festival, Tomizaki, one of my hosts said to me: 'You want to learn about wrapping, don' t you. I will teach you'. He took a *furoshiki* cloth he had used to bring his food. With the *furoshiki* in hand he took a bottle and wrapped it. 'You can also wrap two bottles together, anything of any shape' - and he proceeded to wrap each object on the table. 'This is how we do it'. When I tried it, he guided my hands. He was amused and disappointed when I could not reproduce the same process on my own. I could understand the process of wrapping but the knowledge of wrapping was not in my hands. However, for him and most people around the process was obvious, wrapping was an embodied process. It was learned at school from an early age, and in many actions of folding food, books and gifts.

Learning about wrapping meant learning the actions of folding, and the process of creating shape, the final aesthetic look of the bundle. Wrapping can be seen as the expression of emotions, intertwined with ideas that see wrapping as a ritual prestation itself. Wrapped papers and strings of folded papers are often offered as prestations for deities and for auspicious and inauspicious occasions (such as weddings and funerals). The symbolism of wrapping as a process of enclosing, concealing, blurring and protecting is enacted upon pragmatic principles. Wrapping encompasses considerations of both pragmatic meaning or 'praxis', and symbolic exchange among people and deities.

3.d Auspicious, inauspicious and white wrapping

Wrapping is usually used in the context of auspicious or inauspicious occasions, what the Japanese refer to as times of fortune and misfortune (e.g. weddings and funerals). Periods of fortune and misfortune are associated with colours. Red is for vitality and life, black for death, and white for liminal stages (see Turner 1974 on liminality also Chapter Four). These colours are applied to the wrapping papers. White papers for wrapping are folded in conjunction with papers of other colours. Paper is folded in shapes of animals or ribbons that according to belief have auspicious or inauspicious qualities. Colours are usually associated to wrapping, but colours in their own have also auspicious and inauspicious meaning. On occasions where inauspiciousness is to be warded off, for instance at weddings, festivals, people and gifts are wrapped or covered in special white papers, and white cloths: socks, gloves, masks, or powdered in white. When delivering political speeches, the mayor of the town, like any politician, wears white gloves in order to avoid direct contact of his bare hands with the paper where the speech is written, thus signifying both the ‘sacredness’ or importance of the words, and his role as a ritual specialist in providing ‘clean’ speeches. At festivals white gloves and masks are consistently used by *kannushi*, (ritual specialists) to ward off inauspiciousness and pollution from deities and gifts. White is also applied to the body of brides, who wear a layer of white before other layers of *kimono* are added (Edwards 1989). White cloths are also applied to the upper abdomen of pregnant women, the statues of *Jizo* (below), children in their first visit to Shrines, carriers of *mikoshi* (portable Shrines), people on pilgrimage, and corpses. All these occasions have in common actors that are in a ‘liminal stage’. They are in transition from one stage to another: from daughter to bride, from bride to mother, from baby to child, from young to adult, from adult to old (in pilgrimages), and from deceased to ancestor.

3.e Layering of wrapping

Hendry has argued that layering of wrapping has important social meaning. According to her, wrapping reflects the locus of power relations. The more the 'wrapping', the more it reflects politeness and social distance. Conversely, less wrapping corresponds to less politeness. In her model, wrapping equates with politeness, hierarchy, and social forms. The lack of wrapping equates with social nudity and closeness (Hendry 1993: 172). Hendry's model tends also to treat layering and wrapping as synonymous, creating a metonimic relation that gives rise to the metaphor of wrapping as something that encompasses all that is layered, and has value added to it.

Hendry's model is important for this work for two reasons. First because it shows that we should not take wrapping for granted. Wrapping in Japan has profound social meanings. Wrapping is not just a material that can be 'discarded'. Unlike western societies where wrapping is just an accessory that conceals the object that one is looking for -the gift-, wrapping in Japan is as important as the gift. Second, because it defines the basic ideas upon which gift exchange is premised in Japan. Gift exchange is about wrapping an object rather than unwrapping it. My analysis of wrapping, however, differs slightly from Hendry's, in that I apply wrapping to the relation between gifts and commodities. In a sense my work is restricted to a very small aspect of wrapping, leaving other areas partially or completely uncovered. The reason for this is that early on in my work I sensed that the descriptions of gift exchange upon which Hendry and others based their model needed an ethnographic revision, especially with reference to commodities and gift economy in industrialised societies. I will argue throughout the thesis that wrapping has a crucial role in the definition of gift and commodity economies. I diverge from Hendry in one understanding about wrapping. From my experience in Kamikatsu, I cannot agree that wrapping successfully reflects the locus of

power relations. Quite the contrary, I see wrapping as having lost some of the power it had in group formation. Hendry argues that wrapping reflects how groups are formed, and it reflects the locus of power within those groups. My problem with this approach is a problem not about gifts but about commodities and the meaning of economic and social activities like wrapping. I see that there is a large redundancy in gift giving. This redundancy that characterises the Japanese gift economy also characterises wrapping. Wrapping is added in great quantities to gifts. Multiple layers of wrapping papers embellish commodities and gifts. Japanese and observers alike complain on 'meaningless' wrapping, layers upon layers of objects that will be discarded and thrown away. Hendry argues that multiple wrapping is not nonsensical. The multiple layering has social meaning, it reflects status and power. I agree that wrapping is a meaningful activity. However, the multiple layering is, to my view, about reflecting power but about mystifying relations of power between givers and recipients of gifts.

As Hendry argues, wrapping adds value to a gift (Hendry 1997: ibid). The preference shown by villagers of Kamikatsu is that the value of a gift is increased not only by means of wrapping but by adding 'small' gifts to complement the original gift. Furthermore, the layering of wrapping, in adding value, distracts us from the redundancy of the commodity as it is presented as a valuable 'gift'. In contextualising wrapping in the making of an industrial gift economy, the commoditization of wrapping, and redundancy of layering are not always about 'added meaning' to a gift, but 'adding' meaning to a 'commodity'. I perceive 'adding' as 'mystifying' the value of the commodity, and the commoditization of exchange. In other words it is my contention that wrapping mystifies commodities, and that this mystification is crucial for the gift economy of the society. By looking at these aspects of wrapping I do not pretend to reduce wrapping to a mere 'economic activity'. On the contrary, I hope to show that

mystifying the value of commodities reflects important social principles of the Japanese society.

4. The fieldwork location: Kamikatsu and rural gifts

Kamikatsu is a rural town with 893 houses and 2,455 inhabitants (January 1997) in a vast area of 109.68 square kilometres. Kamikatsu is located in Katsuura region, in the southern part of the eastern region of the Tokushima prefecture, about forty kilometres from the capital Tokushima. Kamikatsu is a geographically marginal area, cut off from the delta-shaped coast of Tokushima by a large obtrusive mountain terrain. The town is very similar to many upland rural areas of the Tokushima and Kochi prefectures. The town is composed of households (*ie*) associated by their common neighbourhood to a Shrine or temple (*buraku*). These neighbourhoods, nowadays called districts (*ko*), can range from three to twelve households, sometimes more. A collection of one to three neighbourhoods makes a village where all neighbourhoods share ascription to the Shrine and temple. The totality of villages and districts compose the town. There are five villages in total: Ikumi, Sezu, Fukuhara, Masaki, and Asahi.

The human habitations appear scattered here and there, with few patches of green paddy fields, gardens, and the occasional drink vending machine. It is possible to distinguish two types of village distribution. The mountain type is made of districts clustered around Shrine mountains, and scattered households along mountain slopes. The river type is made of districts clustered along the river margins of the Katsuura river, spreading towards the slopes of mountains.

Life quality is high, with low mortality, marriage, and birth rates. The largest group of population of the town is comprised of adults between 52 and 98 years

old, with less than 200 children (see Figure G). It is upon this age group that gift exchange in this work is mostly based, although this would hide the important part that younger families and children had in the gathering of the material. The language spoken among the villagers of Kamikatsu is standard Kanto Japanese with a strong use of the prefecture' s dialect (Awa Ben). Its local evolution, *Kamikatcho ben*, can be heard in every day conversation.[14]

4.a Kamikatsu as a mountain furusato (home village)

Mountains define the identity of the town. Twenty kilometres after leaving the capital, the mountain ranges rise sharply from one hundred to nearly one thousand meters, causing the flat land of Katsuura to disappear, engulfed by the range. The observer moves from a spacious wide and flat sight to a dense dark green forest that extends, compact and symmetrical, over 95% of the mountain terrain. The ubiquitous sequoia, *sugi* (Japanese cedar) and *kinoki* (Japanese cypress) dominate the view. The winding route into the mountains further accentuates the air of inaccessibility of the town, with three tunnels riddling the intrusive geography along the Katsuuragawa River. The main territorial landmarks are Shinto Shrines and Buddhist temples. They are usually hidden from untrained foreign eyes, and getting access to them is a process of a long and arduous ascent into the forest. Village life happens at the periphery of these sacred buildings, or else in administrative resorts. This means that when villagers have to meet to decide things in common, they must leave their villages and meet at new communal halls (or Shrines). Communal gift exchange takes place in these areas. The other types of gift exchange take place at schools, administrative buildings and between households. Like most other Japanese, the inhabitants of

Kamikatsu spend many hours in tedious organisational meetings, where prestations of food and drink are offered as 'thanks' for participation.

The romantic construction of remoteness that I reflect here, often criticised in anthropological literature as a rhetorical device for creating a sense of exoticism in ethnographic description (see Ardener 1987, Sperber 1982:4), is nevertheless a constant feature of villagers' and tourists descriptions of the identity of the place. Kamikatsu is, for most, the ideal 'furusato', the lost rural countryside - the hometown once so many people emigrated from. This romantic construction is applied to products and gifts produced within Kamikatsu and sold in the prefecture and the rest of Japan. These products recreate in their wrapping what Knight (1996: 5-10) has called 'the face of the town' (*machi no kao*). Gifts (of *sudachi* drinks, pottery, fish, *shitake* mushroom, kiwi fruit) and wrapping materials (*irodori* maple leafs, for food 'presentation' in restaurants) have been recently created to define the identity of the place, its face, for tourists and regional investors. This phenomenon, which Knight (1995) associates with contemporary tourism, has its roots in late Meiji. Moraes in 1916 describes '*yaki-mochi'* (hot rice cake) as Tokushima's *meibutsu*, a predecessor of *omiyage* (souvenir) and *isson ippin* (one village one product) (Moraes 1979: 53). Nowadays, it is this relation with the outside (machi no *soto*, outside the town), through the production of foods, drinks and gifts, that has made the town one of the most successful *muraokoshi* (rural revivals) in the region and beyond. Discourses of romanticism (distance, uniqueness of products, traditional past) and globalisation and internalisation (foreign teachers, opening to tourism, increasing democratisation) coexist in the way villagers talk and present their town to visitors and outsiders.

The spatial dispersion of the town is an uncommon feature of fieldwork in a rural locality. Ruralities are usually defined as small and manageable. Kamikatsu

was not. However, Strathern (1992) points out is that small scale does not reduce complexity. The layers of complexity are not only a matter of manageable social scales, but they lie in the meaning of social interaction, and the interpretations we give to it. Indeed, spatial dispersion was not just something that affected the research, my capacity to participate and gather information. It was a concomitant aspect of social life, and affected me as much as it affected each villager of the town. Thus, what is reflected in this work is a shared experience of space, mobility and exchange over distance, estrangement from others and efforts to make 'communality' with some and with all.

4.b The ideal communist regime

Behind the apparent distance and idealism, Kamikatsu is a modern town, where most of its villagers are constantly adapting to the demands of consumerism and state economic programs. Remoteness ceases as soon one starts living in the town. Kamikatsu is well connected to Tokushima City and Katsuura town through its main road, which is in constant repair. Most households have at least one modern car and the popular Nissan van. The road is busy with them. There is also a punctual bus *service*. Houses burst with electric appliances, television sets, videos soon obsolete and replaced by others. The villagers do not live isolated from each other, either. Televisions, private faxes, and telephones are abundant. Thus, the town is not a self-contained unit, any more than villages or households are. However, the major factor in uniting villagers over distance is the development programmes and festivals organised by the local administration.

The local administration or *yakuba* is a crucial political element of rural Japan. The town office, as it is called, manages the town by giving help in agricultural matters, providing banking *service*s, assisting in ceremonies, in national and

school events, and providing health information. The town office also publishes a monthly magazine with information on events such as deaths, marriages, births, gifts to the community, festivals, town activities and social gatherings. The office also controls the loudspeaker system that reaches and unifies the whole town. The loudspeaker tells the time, disseminates information on school and elder's activities, administrative meetings and festivals. As a local friend put it with a degree of sarcasm, 'With the loudspeaker the town looks like the ideal of a communist regime'. Certainly to my experience we all woke up at the sound of the loudspeaker radio program to early morning gymnastics, and the Watanabe family and myself heard daily weather forecasts while having breakfast. Lunch breaks were punctuated by time signals and information on changes to the bus timetable. I knew which of my neighbours received an urgent call to leave work and report to the town office for some business. My participation in the life of the town in my first year relied heavily on the communal *service*s of the magazine and loudspeakers. Nevertheless, since it occupies the air, the presence of the municipal office seems to be everywhere at all times leaving little privacy.

4.c Some information on the history and population of Kamikatsu

The earliest records of settlements in the region date to the foundation of the Kakurinji temple by Emperor Kammu in 789 A.D. Kakurinji become an important site of religious training during the Heian period (749-1191), benefiting from the patronage of lords associated with the imperial court in Nara and Kyoto. We know from the town's record books that there were earlier settlements back in the 5th century, based on daikon, barley, wheat and soybeans (products original to Tokushima). However, the first records of the area that is now Kamikatsu are related to the use of mountains for rice agriculture, and the presence of the 88th

pilgrimage route in the Kamakura period. The Jiganji temple, however, is still the main landmark of Kamikatsu, at the actual ground of what is now Masaki village. From actual informant's records on funerary inscriptions (registry of deaths in the household altars) in Fukuhara and Masaki, I was shown how several of the families in the area had settled there at the turn of the 14th Century. According to informants, this period saw the consolidation of the mountain households, and the creation of most of the actual villages. According to these informants, the characteristics of the social organisation of the villagers did not vary much over the centuries.[15]

The literature on Japan concludes that the household was of paramount importance during the constitution of Japan as a modern nation. The households became a symbol of the continuity of living people with their ancestors, even back to mythological times (Nakane 1967, Smith 1967). Before and during the Meiji period, the importance of the household shifted to the larger community of households or *mura* (village). For most villagers, the household remained the symbolic reference point for the villagers' expression of their identity. The household, as I will examine in Chapters Four and Five, is at the centre of gift exchange. Until the Meiji restoration (1968) village life revolved around Shrine harvest festivals and Buddhist festivals, those households associated with Shrines having most political power, and the power to intervene in gift exchange at festivals. The relation between households and Shrines has continued to this day, and is still constructed through the giving of ritual prestations during festivals. During Meiji, villages organised themselves through council meetings, with heads of prominent and dominant households as council members, something some informants complained bitterly about. To some villagers, village life became an arena for fierce competition for status and rank among households, especially at festival times. Smith has amply commented on this subject for rural villages (Smith 1978: 115). Relations among households become 'democratised'

after the dissolution of the Meiji period. The process of democratisation consolidated in late 1950s, when the village as an institution ceded importance to the town as an administrative centre.

4.d Depopulation problems and the birth of the town

Kamikatsu's history has to be understood in relation to the background of its creation. The history of the town, like that of many Japanese rural towns, is a recent one. In 1954, the region of upper Katsuura contained a population of over 10,000 people. There was an average of seventy neighbourhoods, with more than one hundred households each. Villages were large in numbers, but much less self-contained than in the previous Meiji era, with strong links to the region and the country. The Meiji industrial revolution and World War II brought about a dramatic population decrease. By 1954 the area had lost half of its population and it became, according to villagers, too difficult to keep up with agricultural demands. In 1956 five remaining villages and districts were unified into the town of Kamikatsu. The constitution of the town had the effect of centralising efforts to maintain the villages, but the technological revolution of the 1960s and 1970s again affected the area dramatically in terms of depopulation. In Showa 2 (1991) the population of Kamikatsu had decreased from 6,356 to 3,906, nearly half of the population at of the time of its unification, and it was left with 837 houses. In 1997 the total population was 2,455 with 893 houses. The increase of houses speaks for the increase of administrative, touristic and industry buildings. The figures below reflect these changes.

The depopulation process has forced the 'opening' of Kamikatsu to new young couples from urban areas in the region. Depopulation has also had an interesting effect on some of the political practices of the town, as younger generations and

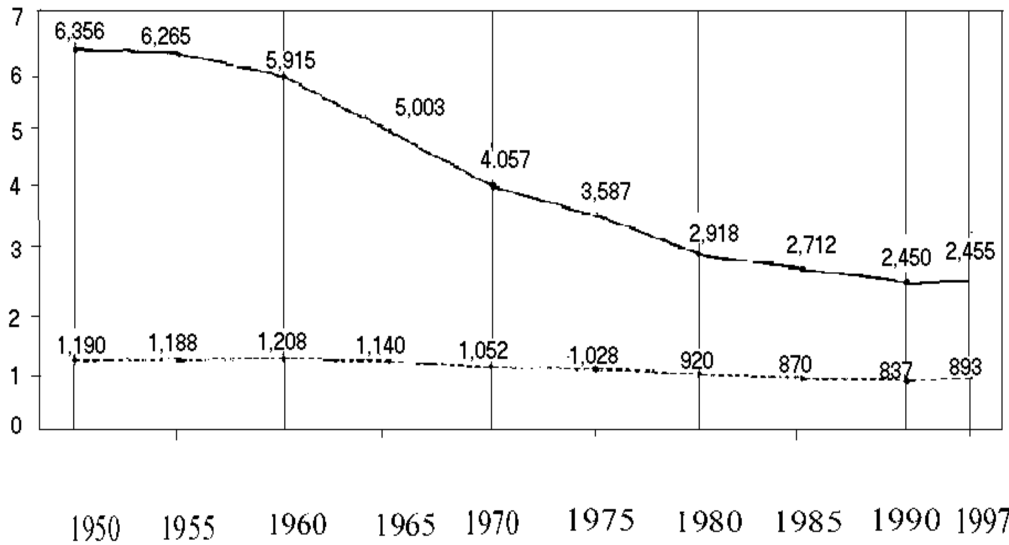


Figure E. Depopulation trends from 1950 to 1997.[16] *Top*: population. *Bottom*: houses

Figure G. Age groups in Kamikatsu

Years of age	Men	Women
100歳以上	0	0
95~99	0	3
90~94	8	17
85~89	18	33
80~84	37	86
75~79	63	92
70~74	98	122
65~69	128	130
60~64	122	129
55~59	105	110
50~54	63	96
45~49	84	63
40~44	55	53
35~39	40	50
30~34	36	30
25~29	32	41
20~24	37	24
15~19	32	34
10~14	46	52
5~9	35	50
0~4	40	24
Total	1,079	1,239

Figure F. Depopulation trends by gender

Year	Houses	Men	Women	Total
1950	1,190	3,228	3,128	6,356
1955	1,188	3,170	3,095	6,265
1960	1,208	2,997	2,918	5,915
1965	1,140	2,464	2,539	5,003
1970	1,052	1,932	2,125	4,057
1975	1,028	1,775	1,812	3,587
1980	920	1,403	1,515	2,918
1985	870	1,284	1,428	2,712
1990	837	1,146	1,304	2,450
1997	833	1,080	1,238	2,318
2000	883	1,135	1,260	2,395

women accede to positions of power sooner than their parents' generation did. This has ushered in one of the major social and political changes, which questions seniority as the source of authority in political decision making.

In fact, political conflict between younger and 'senior' members of the town, to decide on how to integrate the different members into the different political roles, is at the core of some of the gift giving practices. Tension behind newcomers and local residents is another recurrent subject of 'wrapped' tension, not usually exposed and usually diffused by means of gift giving. Newcomers do not always share views on tradition, modernity, and life-styles, this being the main reason for gossip and social avoidance. A general intensification of gift giving between new and old residents is also remarkable, and perhaps indicative of some of these aspects.

As outlined above, the town was created in 1956 with the amalgamation of local government units from the five different villages in the area of Katsuura into a single denomination or town. Knight has described a similar case in another mountain village in Hongu. He puts forward a model of delocalisation (relocalisation) of people and political resources, and explains how the amalgamation process relied on a period of outmigratory depopulation, affecting remote upland areas, and a second period of administrative rationalisation of rural localities (Knight 1996: 5). In the 1970s Kamikatsu underwent a similar process as other areas in the launching of a series of community-building strategies known as *machizukuru* ('making the town'). Gifts were crucial in this process of town making. There is nothing more constant and persistent than the flow of prestations that take place in village revival, from the town office to the villagers. These prestations are perceived by most villagers as 'facilitating' or making more 'pleasant' the task of pulling together as a town the production of a distinctive image and goods to the outside region. Prestations are necessary pieces in the

negotiation of both political power and communal identity, mainly because prestations occur to construct a recognisable piece of dialogue among villagers. Kamikatsu is famous nation-wide for becoming the most successful *muraokoshi* or rural revival in 1996. In the 40 years since the constitution of the town, Kamikatsu has moved from being a marginal area in an economically marginal prefecture threatened by constant depopulation, to an economically successful and thriving town. Most of what will be said in this dissertation about gifts and wrapping is contextualised within this process of making the town, or '*machiotsukuru*', that I examine in Chapter Seven.

4.e Ecology, agriculture and tourism

Nowadays, the population supports itself mainly by agriculture and the exploitation of forestry, with rice and fishing having a second place in the economy. The climate and rainfall conditions[17] favour an intense production of vegetables and citrus fruit: spinach, Japanese radish or *kabu*, carrots, lettuce, tomatoes, lotus root known as *daikon*, sweet potato or *satsumaimo*, bamboo shoot, cucumber, eggplant, turnip, Chinese cabbage or *hakusai* (*Brassica pekinensis*), and Welsh onions called *negi* (*allium fistolosum*). *Mikan* mandarins and *Sudachi* limes are the main fruit of the area, together with persimmons. The production of fruits, vegetables and rice accounts for more than 85% of the local income. Rice, fruits and vegetables are also very important ritual prestige foods. People market fruits, drinks, mushrooms and flowers, while most individuals earn wages in the administrative offices, agricultural co-operatives, construction or schools, or emigrate to the capital and industrial cites. The production and sales of fruits are targeted to direct consumption and the industry of gift giving (New-

Year and mid-summer gift giving seasons) within the prefecture and nation. The surplus is sold commercially.

Agricultural practices have also undergone many transformations. Before 1970, paddy terraces dominated the upper parts of the mountains. The changes in rice import, in diet and in mechanisation, forced a large reconversion of paddy-field terraces into new crops, and today terrace land use is down to 3% of the total. The landscape once made of terrace fields and maple and other caducifolea trees was turned into large tracts of fast growing American sequoia. *Irodori* leafs, greatly diminished since reforestation, are paradoxically the main export of the town. These leaves are used for 'wrapping' and 'decorating' food in restaurants, as well as for card and gift making. The natural environment (and its seasons) are essential for gift making. Seasons mark the main Japanese ritual contexts of festivals and ceremonies. However, the exchange of gifts would not take place, and would not be able to incorporate the aesthetic and symbolic time markers, without wrapping. Thus, if gift giving largely defines the seasons, wrapping defines gifts as parts of larger processes of display and consumption. In other words, gifts are fundamentally ritualised, as well as being appropriate for consumption. I will examine in Chapter Five how this consumption is not only consumption of gifts and their aesthetic conditions, but also defines political organisation.

5. Understanding contemporary Japan: Anthropological representations and the problem of gift exchange

The material that I have presented such as the historical context of the creation of patterns in gift exchange, makes it clear that Japanese society can not be studied

in opposition to the wider industrial context where it is located, but only as part of it. Although anthropologists and historians writing on Japan tend to acknowledge the need to take into account the importance of gift exchange (including wrapping), the extent to which they question the premises underlying gift exchange is limited. Exchange is usually understood as retaining pre-industrial aspects that 'survive' from the past, and which are responsible for the degree of homogeneity and peace:

> Japanese society is a remarkably smooth running one (as witnessed by a low, and diminishing crime rate) which has developed along different lines than those of all other highly industrialised nations. Far from disappearing, 'archaic' forms of ritualised gift giving are alive and well in Japan. True enough, they have undergone some changes. But they still remain a fundamental factor, helping to keep Japanese society together so well, and are of far greater importance in this respect than gift exchange in the industrialised West (Morsbach 1977: 112)

These statements are based on the image that Japan has remained traditional because it is possible to observe a high degree of ritualisation, large expenditure, and notions such as *giri* (obligation). Moreover, key temporal continuities such as obligation (*on*) are identified as the binding mechanisms that hold society in harmony and identify the source of cultural identity over time (Lebra 1976). The idea that obligation, reciprocity and loyalty are found in a pool of feudal values is the claim to the uniqueness of Japanese culture. Indeed, the records of the Edo period refer to the concepts of repayment of debt at mid-summer and new year, and the strong character of filial piety as well as the compelling stratification of the society. According to Morsbach (1977), Lebra (1976), and Befu (1967, 1969), there is no question concerning the traditonality of gift exchange in the present day. These authors consider that the changes in the perceptions of gift giving, especially obligation, are an obvious consequence of an evolutionary process in Japan:

> There are two possible positions one might take. On the one hand, one may argue that in spite of an astounding performance in the economic sphere, Japan lags behind in this

> social and cultural modernisation, since it retains many traditional elements. On the other hand, one may argue that Japan's spectacular economic achievement has been accomplished by exploiting its traditional social and cultural patterns. The former position is based on the assumption that modernisation as an end-state ultimately implies a uniform cultural manifestation, disregarding the heterogeneity cultures may display in the process . The second argues for a parallel development, namely that there are different avenues by which to arrive at modernity, (…) and that a nation can retain its traditional patterns (Befu 1976: 219).

The parallel theory (see also Smith 1983) becomes constitutive of the modern paradigm. This paradigm disregards the fact that modernisation implied certain uniformity, experienced by all industrialised societies, and that disregard of heterogeneity has been a dominant feature of contemporary Japan (see De Vos 1967). Moreover, the traditional past has been exploited to suit the demands of the reconstruction of a national tradition (see Chapman 1991, Vlastos 1998). In portraying the history and present situation of exchange as a 'result' of a series of attitudes and structural features ingrained in the modern culture, these authors conflate cultural continuity and homogeneity in the same way as the theories they criticise.

Since the elements of gift exchange, such as wrapping, are founded on the basic constraints of tradition, hierarchy and dyadic relations are overwhelmingly generated as key pieces in the definition of exchange. The possibility of other models is not taken into consideration; the process involved in the production of gifts for exchange, for instance, rather than the moment of the exchange, is usually absent from most accounts (Ashkenazi 1993, Befu 1974, Hendry 1998). Marshall has provided a model of gift exchange in which rank emerges 'through recognition of differential contributions to the success of the productive exchange' (Marshall 1994: 168). Most gift exchange in Japan is not about the expectations of reciprocity between two parties, but about the wish of the donor to provide for the good of the group (ibid.). As Marshall argues, most gift exchange in Japan takes the form of collective gift giving, where competition

among members of a group must be concealed. The consequence of this practice, as he notes, is the progressive hypertrophy of gift values, and the loss of knowledge of the post-war origins of gift giving customs (ibid.: 169).

Variations in attitudes to obligation and reciprocity, both through time and synchronically, are thus seen to be a result of the transformation of the society. On the other hand, the all-encompassing sense of politeness and hierarchy seems to keep the concept of obligation alive. My own experience in Kamikatsu suggests that gift exchange is not about the paradox of 'keeping-tradition-while changing'. Instead, gift exchange (including wrapping) reflects most of the conflicts of gift economies in industrialised societies, regardless of how they have managed to reach their industrial goals. I do not conceptualise gift economy in Japan as having the features of a pre-industrial society, thus making it difficult to sustain the parallel development theory. By trying to look at exchange from the margins of the paradigm I thus force a new interpretation upon the elements of exchange such as obligation and wrapping. My experiences of gift exchange in Kamikatsu suggest that Japanese ideas and values are neither uniform nor unique. The fact that such ideas represent a constant elaboration of 'tradition' does not preclude that present day gifts change as a reaction to the transformation of the 'traditional values' of the society. What I propose is that gift exchange becomes another way of interpreting and thinking about actual reality and difference, in the way, for instance, that history or religious conversion presuppose other ways of conceptualising reality and social relations. Gift exchange is one of the ways to think about the world, and as such, in industrialised societies, it is also an end in itself. Once exchange is understood as a single processual production, which is not solely a medium of social processes, it is possible to understand the actual heterogeneity of Japanese society, and to enhance the models at our disposal.

6. Conclusions

Japanese society has moved from a devastated society to an economically successful one, surprising observers and Japanese alike. Success has made the Japanese proud of their customs and practices, as a form of national and cultural identification, although no cultural identity is as clear-cut and homogeneous as most representations of the Japanese seem to suggest. Gift exchange is important in the understanding of contemporary Japan as it summarises the complexity and paradoxes of this process. Japanese think of gifts as fundamental pieces of their relations with the social and supernatural, the past and present. However, the patterns that gift exchange creates among Japanese illustrate that their types of exchange are like those of most gift exchange systems in capitalist societies. Wrapping impinges on the construction of certain kinds of social relationships, such as ritual and obligatory, although the classification of reciprocal exchanges also suggests that individuals relate in a voluntary way to others, sharing and giving generously. It is important to stress that gift exchange is constructed as something entirely different from commercial market exchange. The difference between gift giving and commercial exchange is reflected in the way wrapping expresses information about the donor, and the reasons for making the gift. I develop these themes in Chapter Seven. Gift exchange is presented as a ‘traditional economy’. Therefore changes in the perception of obligation and reciprocity, which I present here and examine in Chapter Two, are presented as lineal changes in a folk model. However, the actual practices suggest that multiple arrangements overlap in time within the capitalist gift economy of the society. This chapter has been largely concerned with introducing the many characteristics of gift exchange, the types of wrapping and giving and their historical context, which the reader will need to keep in mind when reading the following chapters. In the next chapter I develop the theoretical and ethnographic perspectives that ground this work, focussing on the different debates and ideas

that sustain most perceptions about gift exchange, which are then balanced with the detailed ethnographic cases in the next five chapters.

Figures. Top left 3: Wrapped papers tied in a knot on a tree. Top right 4: Wrapped bottle of sake with green furoshiki with bamboo motifs. Middle left 5: wrapped toy for gift's day in red bag, non-wrapped white dolls. Bottom left 6: Two pink and white wrapped towels with pink paper, re-wrapped with a box with noshigami papers. Noshigami papers have mizuhiki ribbons and noshi pre-printed. Bottom right 7: Wrapped gifts (envelopes) for wedding with elaborate mizuhiki ribbons. Notice the character of auspiciousness of most prestations despite their different origins.

Plate 1. Detail of river neighbourhood

Chapter 2

Problems and perspectives in the analysis of gift exchange and gift-wrapping

In this chapter, I consider the analytic validity of the 'gift economy' and 'commodity' economy debates. I then contextualise the case of gift exchange within the debates of the gift economy. My intention is to advance answers to the debate on the nature of gift and commodity exchange by looking at the definition of wrapping. More generally, the chapter outlines the themes that run throughout the thesis and clarifies my understanding of its key concepts.

1. Gifts and commodities

Since Mauss (1923), anthropologists have had a clear-cut tool at their disposal in the concept of 'gifts', one that stressed that although gifts appear voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous, they are obligatory and interested (Mauss 1967: 7, 1979). By contrast, Mauss's distinction between 'societies of the gift' (clan-based societies) and 'capitalist societies' (class-based societies) has posed many problems. Although the studies of transactions in 'societies of the gift' have illuminated many aspects of the symbolic and political importance of gifts, it has also become evident that it is not clear how to apply these findings to the understanding of contemporary industrial societies (Strathern 1982, Gregory 1982 Thomas 1992, Cheal 1988: 4).

The roots of what has come to be called the 'gift and commodities' debate are to be found in Mauss's idea that gifts identify two types of social relations: commodity relations and gift relations. Commodity relations, as found in capitalist-state societies, describe the alienation and autonomy of individuals in their market transactions, and the 'strict distinction' between 'things and persons' during exchange (Mauss 1925: 46, 47). Gift relations, in pre-capitalist societies, describe the boundedness of people with others and things, created by the transfer of a possession.

> Now, in all these numerous societies, on many different levels of civilisation, in the Maori legal system in particular, these exchanges and gifts of objects that link the people involved, function on the basis of a common fund of ideas: the object received as a gift, the received object in general, engages, links magically, religiously, morally, juridically, the giver and the receiver. Coming from one person, made or appropriated by him, being from him, it gives him power over the other who accepts it. (Mauss 1925: 8)

For Mauss, clan-based and class-based societies were different because the morality of generosity had been partially lost in class or capitalist societies in their evolutionary process (Mauss 1925: 63-67). If he could show that 'gift economies' were not a 'natural economy' or a utilitarian one as the neo-classical theories of his time argued, he would prove that western societies could transcend their utilitarian economy to achieve a moral solidarity (ibid.: 80).

In Mauss's view, the problem with gifts and commodity economies was a problem about objects, the production and exchange of such objects, and the nature of contractual relations that subjects define through objects and exchange. In another words, it was a problem of the different relationships between people engaged in transactions. In societies of the gift, these relationships take the form of what Mauss called 'total prestation' or 'total contract' (Mauss 1925: 188): every exchange embodies some coefficient of sociability, and it is a means to create peace and bonds of trust (cf. Harrison 1993: 6, Sahlins 1972: 183). In

commodity economies every exchange is fragmented at each instance of the exchange of objects, and things are alienable (ibid.: 31). The problem of the alienability of gifts in capitalist societies which Mauss had inherited from earlier works on Marx (1868) led Mauss to investigate how it was that in a gift economy gifts were inalienable. With the work of Malinowski (1923) Mauss found that the concept of Maori Hau, the spirit of the donor in the gift, was the source of reciprocity in exchange. Things were personified by the hau, enforcing a return of some kind. As Josephides (1985) put it:

> For Mauss the obligation to return gifts arose out of the powerful relation between gift and donor, such that the recipient could not enjoy the fruit of the gift without making a return to the donor (Josephides 1985: 107).

Reciprocity, though, created inequality (see Josephides 1985: 109-113). Mauss concentrated on the fact that this inequality was of a different order than the relations of alienation, dominance, and control in capitalist societies. The crux of Mauss's contrast between societies lay in the idea that class societies have forgotten the theme of the ambiguity of the gift (Mauss 1925: 66). The theme of the gift is Mauss's most famous argument: the gift is a form of self-deception. In gift societies domination is mostly 'disguised' (see Bourdieu 1997: 217, and Josephides 1985 on the mystification of inequalities). Gifts, in the sense of presents, are a source both of pleasure and of 'poison' (Mauss 1924: 28-31). As Mauss argued, the root of the problem with gifts is that 'society always pays itself in the counterfeit coin of its dream' (ibid.: 231 in Bordieu 1997).

In the 1950s and 1960s Anthropologists had come to see the gift-commodity dichotomy as a useful analytical tool. With Polanyi (1957) and Sahlins (1972), a theory of modes of exchange developed into what is known as the 'substantivist' theory of economics.[18] Sahlins argued that reciprocity is a 'continuum'. It ranges from 'pure gifts' where social proximity is intense, to negative reciprocity between actors that are not close to each other (Sahlins 1972). It was thus that the

idea of reciprocity as 'economically rational' was introduced, to account for the ideas and practices in 'primitive' societies. Designed to explain the different principles operating in production and distribution, it was opposed to neo-classical concepts of the utility of exchange. However, by the late 1970s the debate between the substantivist and the opposite formalist, or neo-classic, approach had reached an impasse. The gap or similarity between gift economy and commodity economy remained unclear.

In early 1980s the debate between gift and commodity economy re-emerged with new intensity. Parry (1986) strongly argued against the importance of the ideology of reciprocity emphasised by Sahlins and his predecessor Lévi-Strauss (1949), insisting on the deficiency of Mauss's ideas of alienation between things and persons.[19] By contrast, Gregory (1982), from a perspective of political economy, took the Maussian model to its limits, stressing that the gift is antagonistic to the commodity. Gregory argues that 'what distinguishes commodity from gift exchange is the conceptualisation of kinship as a method of consumption (ibid.: 212). Gift exchange creates relations between subjects exchanging aspects of themselves, while commodity only creates relationships between the objects exchanged. Strathern (1972), following Gregory, developed the theoretical distinction that Melanesian transactions pertain to a gift economy that cannot be accounted for in the West (1992: 5).[20] In a commodity economy persons and things are reified (Jolly 1991: 45). In a gift economy, persons and things are 'personified':[21] a process that makes people's relations visible (Strathern 1992: 189). Harrison (1990), from another angle, considers that what it is exemplary of gift economies is that they force us to look at a different conception of the gift: 'certain categories of ideas are treated as economic goods, not only standing in meaningful and logical relations but in relations of value' (Harrison 1990: 189). For these authors gift exchange in capitalist societies can not account for these meaningful holistic experiences. Weiner (1992) sees the

crux of the difference in the paradox of 'keeping-while-giving' in a social universe where some valuables are inalienable.[22] Keane argues against these views because in any form of exchange 'people hold conflicting interpretations as to what kind of transactions they are actually engaged in' (Keane 1995: 607). Looking at the transactions does not suffice for our understanding of exchange.

At the heart of these meanings is the quasi-indissoluble relation between gifts and the incapacity of the recipient to alienate the object from the giver. However, the extent to which a gift can be alienated from men is not determined. Josephides argues that the category of 'gifts to man' in Gregory 'have to be alienated from women where domestic production is their source'. Furthermore, the position of women is more central in the production of objects that circulate as wealth items than Strathern or Gregory acknowledge in their works (Josephides 1985: 206-209). Jolly also seems to argue that the radical contrast between the two types of economies is an imagined chasm, and that these realms are 'discursive rather than the geography of the real world' (Jolly 1991: 46)

The extent to which the findings of Melanesian gift exchange theory can illuminate gift giving within capitalist societies was the object of much debate in Carrier (1992) and Cheal (1988). The position taken by these authors is that the perspective of political economy taken by Gregory and Strathern 'trivialise' gift behaviour (Cheal 1988: 6). Their main contention is that western societies have a large economic expenditure on gifts, which should not be considered a 'minor appendage to life in capitalist societies' (see also Bailey 1971 and Miller 1995). Moreover, Cheal claims, gifts are alienable, and capitalist market transactions have not replaced gifts. At the core of capitalist societies, gift exchange 'has legal characteristics which distinguish it from other forms of non-commodity transactions' (Cheal 1988: 11). The explanation of the importance of gifts in the west is that gift exchange, by which he means redundant (unnecessary) gifts, has

increased in importance as family life has been broken up. They are symbolic media ‘for managing the emotional aspects of relationships’ (ibid.: 16). Granted that gifts are important for managing emotional aspects, we also have to be aware of what Thomas (1998) criticises: that anthropology has a theoretical bias for ‘social relationships’ to the detriment of ‘the nature of things’ (see also Appadurai 1986: 19). This is certainly a problem in the study of Japanese exchange, where the relational aspect of exchange predominates over ‘the nature of things’. My emphasis on the wrapping of commodities attempts to focus on how things are transformed, and the nature of such objects (gifts) is mystified.

Strathern has pointed out that ‘the gift is more under attack than the commodity’ (1993: 6). In western societies, the commodity certainly appears to have more power of representation on its own. This is in relation to what Carrier calls ‘possessions’. Carrier proposes an analytical distinction between possession and commodity. He shows how certain goods are personalised and manipulated in catalogue advertising to become a possession (1990: 693). In contrast with the commodity, which can be alienated, the possession, which identifies the attachment of persons to things, is inalienable. Carrier (1990, 1992) suggests that market processes, by means of cultural constructions such as catalogues, allow potential consumers to believe they are switching from commodity exchange to a gift economy. One of the characteristics of commodities is that they may be invested with the attributes of gifts. Creighton (1994) proposes a similar idea in Japan for how children are ‘wrapped’ as consumers of market catalogues.

Carrier’s major criticism against the theories of the gift economy, is that, following Cheal and Said, there is an ‘orientalist’ tendency in anthropological description to ‘characterise entire societies in terms of distinctive forms of circulation: societies of the gift and societies of the commodity’ (1997: viii). He argues that the West is confronted with aspects of capitalist societies that can

not be reduced to capitalism; namely, sentimentality towards objects. The west, both authors propose, is not only the land of economic rationality. Carrier tries to arrive at a polite compromise about how to theorise gift exchange: 'society contains a capitalist-sphere, a sphere of Maussian commodity exchange, existing together with a non-capitalist sphere, a sphere of Maussian gift exchange' (Carrier 1997: ix). However, as he mentions, these dichotomies are simplification of 'a muddier reality' because gift giving can not be reduced to the impact of capitalism (ibid.).[23] In a section of the book rightly entitled 'oppositions in context', Carrier establishes the crux of the problem of gifts. In Mauss's work, there is a tendency to reduce the complexity of alien societies to a mirror image of the West, and to reduce the complexity of Western societies to a mirror image of alien societies (ibid.: 201). The result is that the West and the alien societies are lost in a game of reflections, a 'wonderland' of anthropological models. This wonderland is perhaps the reason why Carrier sees that it is 'too easy to become beguiled by differences, it is hard to see similarities among different types of societies, and hard to see differences within a single type' (ibid.: 205).

The theories proposed by Carrier have a strong appeal but also contain several flaws. They lack contextualization within power and inequality relations between producers and transactors of gifts. He leaves it for the reader to answer these questions (ibid.: x). The major problem with Carrier's theories is that they cannot easily be applied to the Japanese case. He seems to argue that they do not apply because Japanese capitalism is different from Western capitalism. I will argue in section three that the Japanese case has much to contribute to Carrier's theories of gifts and commodities, not because of differences but because of similarities.

The issues of the relation between gifts and capitalism, and of the usefulness of such concepts, are at the basis of my analysis. This is a consequence of the location of Japanese gift exchange at the intersection of the concern with

'traditional gifts' (Lebra 1967) and 'change and modernity' (Smith 1979, Reischauer 1979, among others). This intersection leaves little room for easy compromises. The 1960s-1970s models on Japanese exchange must be revised in accordance with new critical work in the field of economic anthropology, and economic anthropology should incorporate the case of Japanese gift exchange into their pool of studies. Japanese society is clearly an industrialised and capitalist society. Unlike Creighton 1991 and Carrier 1995, I do not perceive Japanese exchange as containing relations that 'resemble' those of the gift economy overlapping with those that 'resemble' the commodity economy. The economy of the society is clearly a commodity economy, one that transforms commodities into gifts in order to reproduce what Cheal calls 'small intimate worlds'. Japanese society sustains powerful representations about itself and a large confluence of 'reflections' and positioning in relations to 'others'. Any attempt to compare the similarities and differences with other industrialised societies will to some extent involve representational problems and reductions. However, Japanese society in 1995-97 is not at the intersection between 'traditional gifts' and 'capitalism'. From the beginning of fieldwork, the villagers of Kamikatsu made many references to gifts, commodities and possessions in contexts other than this classic perspective of 'tradition and change'. It became clear that their actual perspectives and practices would be one of the central concerns of my thesis.

2. *Giri* and the problems of obligation in Japan

Japanese exchange is now and then invoked in what Carrier calls 'periodic rediscoveries' of the fact that gifts are not spontaneous expressions of sentiments, but socially regulated (Carrier 1990: 19). As Carrier also acknowledges it is not a

coincidence that there is such a 'lapse of memory'. In his argument that people forget that gifts are 'recurrent, predictable and socially regulated' (see also Caplow 1984 and Cobbi 1998), he points to Mauss's 'counterfeit' idea: people are uneasy about gifts and the messages exchanged with gifts, to the extent that they prefer to believe that gifts are 'free', 'nice' and 'unproblematic' (Douglas 1990). The case of Japanese gifts has come to our attention because gifts appear 'regulated', making of Japanese exchange 'a model' of traditional gifts. The desire not to look at gifts as unproblematic is not absent in Japan by any means. Gifts might have rules and obligations; they create many problems, but as I discuss in Chapter Three, Japanese people also deceive themselves about gifts. Gifts, and specially 'wrapped gifts' are presented as 'pure', 'unproblematic', 'good', and 'free', and the rules and problems are usually perceived as positive. Wrapping, I will argue, transforms most obligations, rules and problems in gift giving into a message of 'harmony', 'tradition', and 'politeness', which deny conflict and obligations in gift exchange.

2.a Obligation: giri and on

Ruth Benedict was one of the first anthropologists who invoked Mauss's idea that gifts are regulated and constrained. Everyday decisions are, in theory, based on the sense of indebtedness called *on*. To translate *on* is difficult, because the English word 'obligation' does not contain all the meanings of *on*. *On* means not only obligation but debt, loyalty, kindness and love, and debt in Japan 'has to be carried the best an individual can' (Benedict 1977: 203). The famous schedule analysed by Benedict is the following:

I. ***On***. "Obligations" contracted passively. One receives 'them' without being an active actor in the decision.

- ko on The On received from the Emperor.
- oya on " " " " " " " parents.
- nushi on " " " " " " " landlord, boss.
- shi no on " " " " " " " ones's teacher.

II. To reciprocate and repay On.

A- ***Gimu***. The return is partial and time limitless (1- to the world, feudal, lord, kinsmen, to non kin people in account of gifts, money, favours, help in communal work, and to distant kinfolk because of sharing common ancestors).

B- ***Giri***. The debt has to be paid with mathematical equivalence and in a limited time (1- to the world, the feudal lord, relatives, to non-kin people in account of gifts, money, favours, help in communal work, and to distant kinfolk because of sharing common ancestors). (Benedict 1977: 210)

Each of these *on-giri*, *gimu* categories represents a circle where the individual locates behaviour within a hierarchical framework. The ethnographic examples of Benedict point out that the return of a favour, a gift or even an auspicious word, has to be done with the same demand we claim for the payment of mortgages or loans. To measure acts, words, the type of gift and its value, it is crucial to measure *on-giri* repayment: to facilitate fluid interpersonal relations and avoid ostracism or a symbolic 'bankruptcy'. *Giri* increases in delay as bank interest does. The complimentary exchanges of gifts are written down to facilitate the further devolution of gifts and *on-giri* feelings.[24]

The circles of obligation have been criticised by many as reductionist, a mechanical device to interpret social life, although most agree that Benedict was faithful to the native idioms her informants used.[25] The rigidity of this hierarchical *on-giri* model may have been substantially altered through the process of modernisation (Doi quoted in Dore 1967: 344). However, the idea of circles of obligation is currently used by many authors. Rosenberger (1994) argues that the *giri-on* circles allow the identification of changes in social ethics,

and, therefore, the relation of the self and the group in Japanese society (Rosenberg 1994: 23).

Benedict's work has had a profound impact on later authors working on gift giving. Befu (1968: 449) and Lebra (1976: 91-96) considered *on,* or debt, to be the most important motivating force behind gift-giving (Befu 1974: 213). According to Lebra, reciprocity is characterised by the concept of *on:*

> on is a relational concept combining a benefit or benevolence given with a debt or obligation thus incurred. From the donor's point of view, on refers to a social credit, while from the receiver's point of view, it means social debt (Lebra 1976: 91).

For Lebra, *on* is crucial in understanding reciprocity and the cancellation of debt and obligation (*giri*). Lebra argued that *on* is a moral quality that creates debt and enforces the repayment of such debt. *On* can create a strong sense of obligation (*giri*) that individuals repay by making obligatory return gifts (*okaeshi).* However, making unsolicited prestations is considered an imposition of *on*, leading to hostility and guilt in the recipient of gifts and debtors (Lebra 1976: 93). *Giri*, as described by Benedict, refers to a concept of obligation which exists among individuals in hierarchical as well as egalitarian relations. It is a normative force upon which individuals measure interaction (Benedict 1946, Befu 1968: 167-169). Proper behaviour, observing gift-giving etiquette, is regarded as observing one's obligation, or *giri*, though nowadays the word *orei* is used instead. The character of obligation defines most of the return gifts (*okaeshi)*. A farmer in his mid-seventies, argued that the gifts given to return obligation were indeed an old-fashioned practice; however people of his generation did it because:

> 'One of the aspects of Japanese politeness is duty and custom, but these gifts are given to show people's vanity (*mie*) and their position *(jibun no tachiba*) to other people'. 'They should stop them, specially when people are already troubled by misfortune (usually funerals)'.

This informant's answer relates *giri* to the idea of return gifts made at funerals. He points at the idea made in 1951 by Kawashima (in Lebra 1976: 93) in which *giri* (obligation) was defined as *okaeshi* (return). It must be noted, however, that most informants made a distinction between gifts that had to be returned, and gifts that did not require a return (*omiyage*). Yoko, a woman in her mid-forties, argued vehemently that *omiyage* (a souvenir from a trip), which I considered a return gift, was not. I argued with her that people themselves said they gave *omiyage* to those to whom they felt indebted, bosses, kin, and friends, as a gesture of 'thanks'. People go on a trip and bring a cake or sweets from the place they visited. They give the cake or sweets to either those who gave a previous *omiyage* to them or those who had been kind to the donor. Yoko, however, did not perceive *omiyage* as containing *giri*. These gifts were made out of the desire to thank others, but unlike funeral or other *giri* gifts, *omiyage* was full of *kimochi* (feelings) for the recipient. However, other informants acknowledged that *kimochi* gifts such *omiyage* were not always just '*kimochi'*, and people had reasons for making them 'to keep good relations'. The motivating force behind giving was not always *giri*, *kimochi* or other classifications of dyadic reciprocity (I examine these in Chapter Three). These notions are ways of classifying relations but not a motivating force. The force(s) that motivate gifts are contextually defined in each case of giving. I examine in the following chapters how actors use the notions of reciprocity as 'creative responses' to different situations and relationships rather than as given values. Lebra argued that 'Japanese are obligation-centred, bound by obligations and duties, rather than motivated by rights and choice' (Lebra 1976: 196). However, I will show how *giri* is used to define not just 'debt and gratitude' but to negotiate the capacity of each actor to influence others in different contexts other than duty and vertical relations.

Sugiyama (1992) argues that the hierarchical model upon which most of the interpretation of Japanese society is based is flawed. Analysis tends to look only at: 'elite male groups' mode of verticality that has ideologically served both Americans and Japanese in rationalising Japanese economic superiority' (in Rosenberg 1992: 9). The impression of obligation as being crucial arises from individuals' relative positions of power, rather than being an all encompassing practice. Furthermore, informants' insistence that their gifts are not 'traditional *giri*' any more is not a denial of the obligation implicit in giving. What informants seem to point out is that *giri* and *on* are not 'forces behind' reciprocity and asymmetry. The obligation manifested by *on* should not be confused with what Mauss described as the obligation to return a gift. Japanese society is not the 'embedded' type of society that Mauss described for traditional gift economies (section 2 below). As Cheal argues for capitalist gift giving, the main characteristic of gift exchange in capitalist societies is that prestige, emotions, display and duty are used in the ritual construction of close-knit, intimate and particularistic social worlds (1992). The obligation expressed when giving is created mainly to reproduce 'small intimate social worlds' in large industrialised societies.

My argument denies Lebra's idea that the Japanese are '*obligation-centred'* because of their immemorial traditions.[26] Obligation, like redundancy, is inherent in most capitalist types of gift exchange, being historically and socially contextualised. Informants insist that the fact their gifts are not 'traditional *giri*' does not mean there is no obligation implicit in giving. They are aware of the obligatory character of most exchange. Most villagers claim that obligation to give is a nuisance and should be discontinued. It puzzled me that so many people said they preferred not to be obliged to return gifts, yet could not escape the obligation. What was important in the concept of obligation that they had to keep despite their dislike of it? From my observations, the obligation to return a gift is

necessary for the reconstruction of small, meaningful social worlds in a large, fast-moving society. I will argue that what most informants are doing when they claim that *giri* in gift exchange is dying out (or diminishing) is attempting to deconstruct the 'smallness' and boundedness of their world. They are embracing the aspirations of internationalisation and globalisation, so much in vogue in their lives through the media and local administrations. In denying obligation, they deconstruct the ritual construction of small social worlds, searching for a wider modern, international and larger society, in an attempt to exploit the best of the 'two' worlds. Their problems with obligation are a constant paradox. On the one hand, they must account for *giri* in order to construct small worlds. On the other hand, they must dispense with it in order to achieve a sense of the opposite. Thus to most observers this phenomenon makes the notion of obligation appear to oscillate. Now it (*giri*) disappears, now it re-appears. However, as I will show, there is no single notion of obligation, either as an oscillation or as a survival of the past, periodically rediscovered. Different notions of obligation co-exist side by side, and they are invoked when people reinforce or invent the notion that they are a community (see Chapter Seven), and these notions are denied when they threaten other social goals which require that the community be included in larger national and international processes.

2.a Gift exchange in Capitalist societies

Carrier has argued that in western capitalist societies, people see the family as the place of gift relations (Carrier 1995: 173). People in the West see work as an impersonal world, to which they oppose the family or a personalised context. While commodities have abstract social meanings, but no personality, gifts have personality. Carrier argues that this is not the case in Japan. According to him, Japanese think that work ought not to be alienating, and thus unlike westerners,

Japanese do not see the economic world as one of impersonal relations and things (ibid.). Americans distinguish home and work, thus gift and commodity, but the Japanese he argues, do not. Japanese gifts do not identify sentimental gift giving:

> Personal sentiments - affection, intimacy, friendship - have no place in choosing gifts or who is to receive them. There are no mutual exchanges; gifts flow one-way from inferiors to superiors (Creighton 1991: 679-80).

As I will argue, this is hardly the case. The problem with Creighton's approach is that it is based on 'company gifts', mostly among male and elite corporations. There are many instances of people exchanging gifts where gifts do not flow from inferior to superior. Gifts also flow in the opposite direction. As I contend in Chapter Three, the perception that gifts flow 'up or down' stems from the fact that gift exchange is only analysed at the moment of giving.

The reason why Japanese do not see the economic world as one of impersonal relations is because they distinguish different 'cores' within the economic world and within home. In other words, the important opposition for Japanese is not 'home' and 'work' (which they are able to distinguish), but between 'core' and 'periphery'. In Carrier's arguments, Westerners give meaning to commodities by removing them out of the market into the home through shopping (Carrier 1995: 173-179). I argue that Japanese move commodities from core to outside core (also through shopping) and later from work to home. Carrier argues that commodities are alienable, but possessions, like gifts are not (Carrier 1995: 27). He fails to explain how possessions are made inalienable in Japan and thus the relation between home and work is, in his model, hard to distinguish. I agree that Westerners distinguish home and work, gifts and commodities, because of the logic of shopping and 'possessions'. The problem is not about home and work, but about 'naked' and 'wrapped' commodities and gifts. Japanese do not oppose family and work because they wrap gifts *and* commodities.

Carrier also argues that because Japanese lack a distinction between 'home' and 'work', types of gifts such as Christmas giving are less prevalent. This is not true. Carrier's descriptions of Christmas shopping are applicable to end-of-year Japanese gifts (see Chapter Six for several examples of the kind of home/work dichotomies in end-of-year gift exchange). Japanese shopping is as good an example as American Christmas gifts of the contradictions and problems with commodity giving. I examine the case of Valentine gifts as an even more apt case to illustrate these ideas (Chapter Six). Carrier's partial misinterpretation of Japanese gifts is due to Creighton's approach on which he bases his ideas. Creighton believes that the Japanese 'domesticate things foreign'. With the case of Valentine's Day I argue that such cases are not mere 'domestication' and they are not so different from practices in other western countries. Moreover, these new gifts also express types of mutuality at work as well as asymmetry at home.

As seen here, one of the flaws of the analysis of gift giving in Japan is that gifts are analysed from the standpoint of kinds of relations expressed in the 'core' ties of large corporations. However, this is only one of the many contexts where gifts are exchanged. The reason why most observers focus on these gifts is because they are a good example of formulaic standardisation. This observation tends to eclipse the fact that gift giving in western capitalist societies is also formulaic and standardised. For example, cards are a standardised birthday gift among workmates and friends in Ireland and Britain. To give a card as a birthday present in Catalonia would be quite inappropriate. The fact that gifts are formulaic can be seen in the profusion of greeting cards, which all have a pre-printed formula to suit the expression of the donors' 'feelings'. In Japan, like in most western countries, gifts are culturally constructed and follow many formulas and commercial conventions, and the idea, 'it is the thought that counts' or '*kimochi*' (feelings in the action of giving), reflects this fact. Gifts and presentations follow formulas because the value of gifts, the redundancy, and utility, are the main issue

when giving. Gift-wrapping is used to reproduce both the 'personal touch' and to mystify such 'standardisation'.

Another division that is hard to sustain is the key distinction that the 'Japanese think that work ought to be unalienated'.[27] Carrier bases this idea on the paradigm that the corporation in Japan is a form of 'family' for the employee (Dore 1994). As the economic crisis has proved (Gill 1999), the 'family' is only for a few, those close to the core of the corporation. In fact, the rhetoric of the corporation as a family is a way of legitimating the exploitation of Japanese workers. Many new residents in Kamikatsu, for example, had left corporation work precisely because of the demands imposed on them, including the obligation to make gifts to superiors. It is true that there is extensive obligatory giving among employees and bosses. But this giving is by no means naïve. Most observers fail to say that with the obligation to give and recreate a sense of non-alienation at work, superiors appropriate part of the work and salary of employees by enforcing a gift of gratitude to them. The claim that Japanese do not see a difference between family and workplaces seems to be a large misrepresentation. Traditional family and work are places where the individual has part of his or her work extracted through the obligation to give. I will argue that this alleged lack of differentiation is not an actual fact but a product of the ideology of the 'family business' that the Meiji and post-war period was at pains to consolidate. My experience during fieldwork was that both family and work (and the ubiquitous 'family business') are in constant reformation and crisis. It seems to me a paradox in Carrier's argument that the Japanese desire that work ought to be non-alienating should be expressed through impersonal gifts, especially to seniors. One would expect these gifts to be personalised in order to make work not a non-alienating condition. I would say that work in any capitalist society could be made non-alienating by means of gifts. This, however, is a rhetoric of capitalist exploitation, as well as a wish to transcend such alienation. I suspect that in any capitalist society we are

likely to encounter the kinds of gifts that legitimate capitalist exploitation and the wish to transcend alienation and make working relations less aggressive. Looking at Europe for instance, I could count many gifts given at work, both in Spain, Ireland and Britain, to 'seniors' at their farewell parties, and by bosses to employees at Christmas.

The ethnographic data support the evidence that gifts (commodities) are personalised with wrapping. I will argue that wrapping recreates relationships and obligations in gift transactions. Wrapping is also responsible for mystifying these relationships and obligations in commodity relations. In Japan the opposition between gift and commodity (home and work) is blurred but not for the reasons proposed by Carrier. The lack of concern that Japanese manifest for such oppositions is a result of their ways of thinking about gifts and wrapping. Japanese do not oppose gift and commodity because they are wrapped. Wrapping mystifies such distinction. Shopping items, for instance, the key element of Carrier's distinction between home and work, are profusely wrapped in Japan to a greater extent than in Western societies. Japanese make oppositions between the degrees of wrapping. Certain gifts and certain commodities are more profusely wrapped than others. Certain relations at work are more profusely wrapped (and alienating) than others. Certain relations at home have more layers of wrapping (and more alienation) than others.

Another problem with the theories of gift-giving in capitalist societies, concerns the personality of the gift. Gifts are always susceptible to having 'wrong social meaning' (see Davis 1992 and Caplow 1984: 1314) and much effort has been made in capitalist societies to cope with the suitability and redundancy of gifts. According to Carrier, gifts must express relations rather than be utilitarian. However, the case of Japanese gifts proves the contrary: gifts must be utilitarian

if they are to express relations. However then, utility must be disguised,[28] hence the use of wrapping.

Much of the problem with analysing Japanese gifts as 'distinct' from those in other capitalist societies can be traced to ideas proposed by MacFarlane (1987) and followed implicitly by Carrier. McFarlane argued that the merging of the nuclear family and romantic love, as expressed at Christmas, came with the spread of industrial and commercial capitalism. MacFarlane has been criticised for associating the expression of romantic love only with certain economic classes, ignoring how the spread of industrial capitalism took many forms and how the expression of romantic love came not only as a result of it (Vaca and Trias 1993). Carrier, among others, seems to argue that the nuclear family and romantic love and thus free, personal gifts, coincided in Europe with the expansion of industrial and commercial capitalism, while in Japan, Creighton and others seem to argue that corporate companies and gifts to superiors - thus obligatory, impersonal gifts coincide with the expansion of industrial and commercial capitalism. As I argued in Chapter One, this is the view taken by those authors who argue that Japan developed a parallel form of capitalism, thus any discrepancies about gifts are analysed as different forms of development. I will suggest that Japanese exchange allows us to cast a doubt on the idea that gift giving in western societies is not impersonal and formulaic. Free gifts and the personalised gift, as well as redundant but obligatory gifts, are developments of industrialised societies the world over, revolving around the appropriation of commodities.

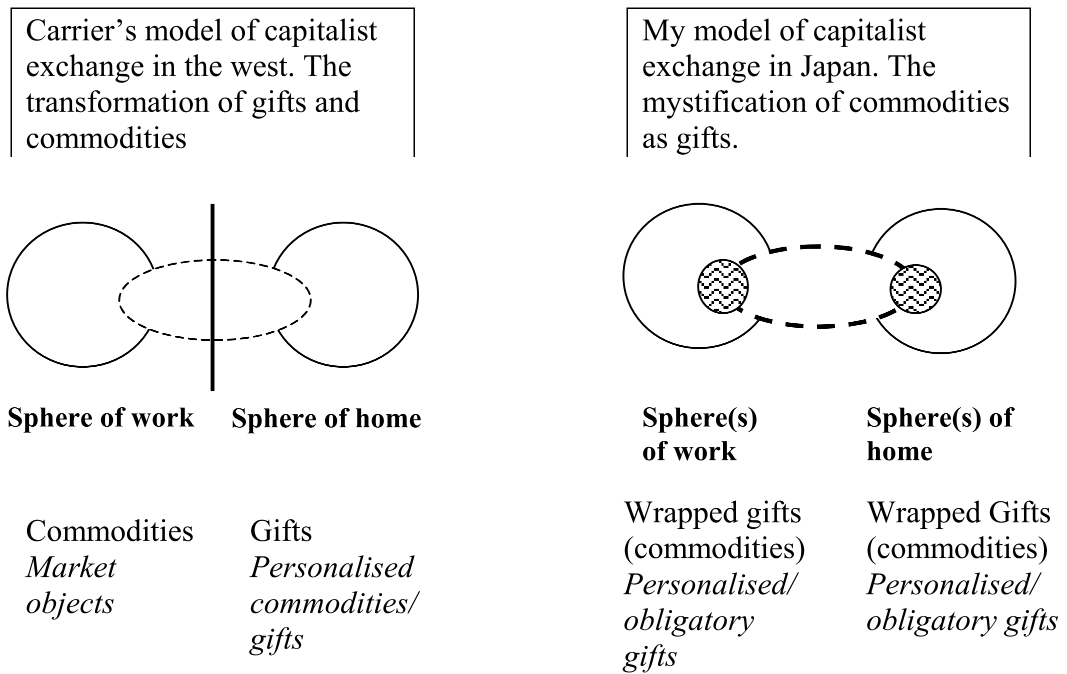
Though the theories proposed by Carrier and Cheal about gift exchange in capitalist societies are adequate for understanding Japanese gift exchange, the Japanese case can only make a substantial contribution if we resist the temptation to exoticise the character of obligation and rank, and highlight instead the

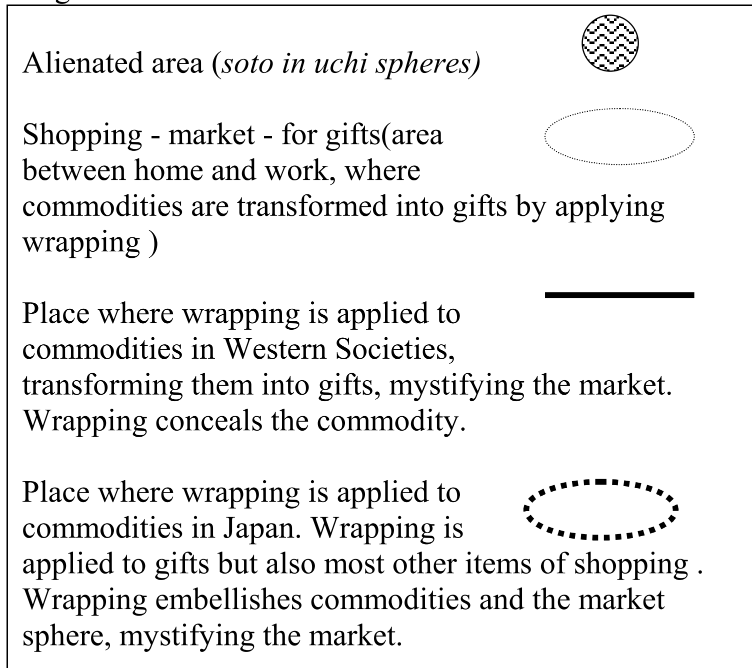
importance of the appropriation of work through gift giving in capitalist relations. Japanese gift giving is not an exception or a hybrid but is a very good example of capitalist gift exchange, one that can make visible what is present but hidden in western societies. My work does not look at gifts in corporations, but illuminates other areas of gift exchange, thus bringing out the complexity of gift giving in capitalist societies. However, it should be clear that we will gain a better understanding of Japanese gift exchange if we try to challenge both ethnocentric and Japanese perceptions that Japanese exchange is somehow a 'special' case.

In the model I propose for Japanese gifts and commodities I distinguish, as Carrier does for Western exchange, a sphere of work and a sphere of home (see Figure H). However, I see that in Japan, within each sphere there is an internal one in which relations are imagined as alienated (*uchi-soto)*. Impersonal, obligatory gifts, are made personal by the use of wrapping, which mystifies the existence of alienating work relations. The same applies for the sphere of home. The only shortcoming in Carrier's model of capitalist gifts for Japan is that, as he admits, he oversimplifies 'the process of selecting and giving presents' (Carrier 1995: 180). It is precisely in this process that wrapping is crucial. It gives us the key to understanding the relationship between gifts and commodities in Japan.

Figure H illustrates the transformation of gifts and commodities between the spheres of home and work. The alienation of the market in Carrier's model is removed when gifts are unwrapped. In Japan, the impersonality of the gift is not removed by adding wrapping and later discarding it as in the western model. The impersonality of the gift is irrelevant to the recipient because wrapping has already personalised or rather 'mystified' the market to appear non-alienating. The commodity is wrapped before shopping takes place and then re-wrapped as a gift. I illustrate the transformation of gifts and commodities between the sphere of home and work, and the basic difference from the model proposed by Carrier. As

Figure H. Model of gift and commodities in Capitalist societies.





with all abstract models of representation this table does not escape, by any means, the problems of reducing the richness of social events to a flat dichotomy. I only use it to illustrate the structural logic between two models.

My aim here is to explain these models. In Figure H, I maintain the division between work and home for the Japanese case. The difference between the two lies in the alienated sphere within work and home, what the literature call *uchi to soto*. Inside home as well as work certain areas are constructed as *uchi* (home) while others are thought to be *soto* (outside). Individuals who are placed into these *soto* areas are separated from those in the *uchi.* This has lead anthropologists like Carrier to argue that Japanese do not distinguish home and work. However, this is not true. Certain individuals can be alienated at work and at home (or village) in the *uchi* areas of these spheres. See, for example, the case of women's production of *mochi* where women's production is alienated within home by other members of the house in Chapter Three). This is also part of the experience of many individuals in Western societies. Domestic housework carried out by most housewives in Western societies, for example, is not always acknowledged as 'work'. Women's complains on the lack of remuneration for household work and the lack of prestige of this work points at a clear type of alienated sphere within 'home'. In fact, I would rather propose that the model of capitalist exchange in Japan is applicable for any capitalist society, Western or Japanese alike. Carrier's model, although useful to understand the relation between home and work, ignores the existence of spheres of alienation within work and home. I would argue that gifts are wrapped (both in Japanese society and Western societies) when moving within the sphere of home, work, and from within work and home to the spheres of alienation found in work and home. Wrapping helps to mystify the alienation and to present certain spheres as if they were 'free' or 'uncontaminated' by alienation.

Earlier in this chapter I argued that in Western capitalist societies, shopping for gifts allow people to transcend the impersonality of work and market. When shopping for gifts people move commodities out of the market into the home. The way to introduce commodities into the home, while removing their association with the market, is to conceal the commodity. When the commodity is concealed, what it is left is a wrapped gift. The immediate effect of this concealment can be seen in the attitude recipients have towards the wrapping papers when giving gifts. In Western capitalists societies, recipients of gifts emphasise the unwrapping as the most important action. When unwrapping the recipient 'discovers' the gift. The commodity is again visible. Recipients make comments like 'you should have not…, it is the thought that counts' to play down the commodity and to emphasise feelings and emotions that have lead the giver to give such object (See also Carrier 1995).

Carrier argues that givers and recipients use wrapping and words to solve the problem of giving commodities as gifts (Carrier 1995). However, I argue that wrapping does not solve the problem. Wrapping mystifies the commodity and the market. When the wrapping is removed from the gift, the commoditization -the relation that an object has with the market-, is removed as well. The wrapping is usually thrown away. I argue that the wrapping represents the market. It is not a metaphor for the market, but a reification, the objective presence of the market. As wrapping represents the objective presence of the market and the commodity, wrapping is usually discarded as a 'decoration', 'superfluous', and it is thrown away. Sometimes the recipient might keep the wrapping papers, while saying that they are 'beautiful', or for ecological reasons (to recycle them). In fact, recipients show that wrapping has a more profound meaning. They often say that it is 'a pity' to throw the paper. When recipients say that it 'is a pity' that expensive, beautiful and re-cyclable papers have to be thrown they make a fundamental statement. They acknowledge a 'contradiction'. They acknowledge that paper has

a fundamental quality, aesthetic, personal value and price (in this they do the same as Japanese people). They also point at the implicit reasons or contradiction that forces us to remove the paper. I argue that this 'implicit reason' is the market and the necessity to mystify the alienation that the market cause.

The logic that these western recipients use is the same logic that makes most western recipients object to commercial wrapping and choose personalised, hand-made wrapping when giving a gift. A gift should contain the least reference possible to the market and commoditization. The commodity and market must be mystified by applying wrapping, then removing it, or adding a wrapping that is 'personal'.

For the Japanese case, the opposite applies. A gift should contain references to the market, the more the layers, the better. Similarly, the wrapping layers are very important, sometimes more important than the gift (the commodity) itself. The process of mystification of the commodity has been inverted. This inversion is responsible for the belief that 'Japanese wrapped gifts' are 'unique' in their ideology. However, this is not true. They are not 'unique'. They follow the same logic I presented for the western case. In Japan, the commodities and the market are mystified through a process of embellishing the market, embellishing the commodity and embellishing the wrapping papers. In Japan wrapping papers never conceal the commodity. They enhance it with all sorts of colours and aesthetic motives which focus our attention on the beauty of the wrapping. This strategy keeps our eyes away from the 'commodity', or the inauspiciousness (dirt) of the market.

In the Western cases people wrap gifts when arriving at home thus, making clear the opposition between work/market and home, between the commodity and the wrapped gift, between shopping and personal emotions of giving a gift. Most Japanese gifts are wrapped by the shops, and personal wrapping is unusual. In

the Japanese case, wrapping is applied to all shopping activities - affecting the entire shopping sphere. For example, when buying a cake for oneself, the shop might wrap the cake in several layers of papers, with 'service' or customer attention and politeness 'wrapping' the action of selling the cake (See Chapter Three). The problematic nature of customer/patron relation is mystified by adding politeness, service and wrapping. Many of my informants complained of gifts and wrapping being to 'wrapped'. A gift (or shopping item) given with a lot of layers of wrapping cause Japanese to say 'you should have not…, you are a very thoughtful person', a very similar reaction to what Westerners say when 'discovering' the gift. The process of 'discovery', or rather the process of aesthetic reification of the gift, is inverted.

To conclude, in both cases Western and Japanese, wrapping (for gifts) is primarily concerned with the opposition between gifts and commodities and the problematic nature of the market. The opposition between home and work is not so important as Carrier seems to argue: what givers and recipients of gifts are mostly concerned is with the creation of spheres that are thought not to be affected or alienated by the market and its influence. In the Western case, home is constructed as the sphere least affected by market, but many gifts also take place at work, among workmates (as it happens in Japan) to remove the character of alienation existing in working relations. [29]

Wrapping mystifies the commodity in Western societies by concealing the object. The market is mystified (removed from sight) by throwing away the wrapping papers. More layers of paper increase the 'expectations' that the gift is 'a good one' (if it fails to be 'good', emotions are played up, lessening importance to the object). In Japan wrapping mystifies the commodity by embellishing both the object and the wrapping materials. The market is mystified by embellishing the wrapping materials or by saying that the wrapping is as

important than (or more important than) the object itself. The more layers of wrapping, the more 'expectations' that the gift is 'a good one', and the less important the object. In both cases, however, the object can be a very expensive gift, but it might 'fail' because the giver has failed to take in consideration either personal taste, rank (or class), the kind of occasion, the meaning of the relation between giver and recipient. In making a 'wrong' gift, the relation between giving and the commoditization of relations becomes also more obvious.

The problem between gifts and commodities both in Japan and Western societies is solved by 'discovering' the 'gift' or 'embellishing' the 'commodity', by either throwing wrapping or making wrapping more valuable than the object itself. In both cases a contradiction emerges as a result of these solutions. Wrapping becomes a problem (we might feel it should not be thrown - in Western societies- or we might feel it should not be so elaborated - in Japan -). If the gift is 'wrong' or 'unwanted' westerners place (the commodity) away in a store room to along with many other commodities or they give it to charity shops, so we do not feel 'bad' about rejecting the donor's attempt to construct a gift-personal relation with us. Japanese give the unwrapped commodity away to someone else or it goes to a store room, so they feel 'good' about making a useless gift, useful to someone else, and thus, avoiding to deconstruct the gift-personal relation with the donor. The difference between Japanese gifts and Western gifts is not a matter of cultural uniqueness but how the object (the commodity) and the gift are aesthetically reified. Both cases share the logic of having to solve the problem of the market origin of the commodities we give as gifts. Both cases also share the preoccupation with doing something to market relations (and commodities) when these endanger social and human ties among donor (s) and recipient (s). The 'solution' of transforming and mystifying the commodity with wrapping is however, not without contradictions as it depends on what it is thought to be economically and socially 'rational'[30].

3. Wrapping and concealment

In Benedict's work the obligation to return a gift appeared alongside a series of 'etiquette' problems, such as that recipients could not open a gift in the presence of the donor. Benedict's use of language blinded both her and some of the authors that followed her. In her language, gifts were opened and the thing was found. The issue of opening and the obligation left unresolved a more critical issue: wrapping. What was the relation between giving and wrapping/unwrapping gifts? Morsbach (1970) mentions the differences in wrapping in Japan, Lebra (1969), and Befu (1969) comment on the intricacies of wrapping. However, wrapping as an issue did not become a key aspect until Hendry's work. In Wrapping Culture, Hendry (1993) attempted to use the case of Japanese gift wrapping to explain the importance of wrapping as a 'cultural template' or as a metaphor for aspects of social life larger than the wrapping of objects. Hendry (1995, 1997), and Raheja (1995) for the Indian case, concentrate on the linguistic uses of wrapping.[31] According to these authors wrapping makes manifest relationships of power, and expresses different solutions to individuals' needs for expressing their position in relation to others.

These two authors have demonstrated comprehensively the power of wrapping as a metaphor for explaining modes of linguistic and semiotic performance. However, the use of wrapping for gifts has posed many questions, some of which have been left unresolved. Hendry aptly illustrates this with her 'riddle' of money, which is wrapped in white layers of paper before being wrapped in envelopes[32] (Hendry 1999). What is the importance of wrapping objects? Why do people wrap gifts in the ways they do?

Carrier, following Caplow (1984: 1311) and Levi-Strauss (1969a: 56), argues that commodities do not have personality, and it is only through wrapping that

they acquire one. Commodities become gifts because they are personalised with the aid of wrapping, which is what carries or expresses relationships. Hendry also seems to make this point, as in her study wrapping is what 'adds' meaning to a gift. The wrapping is the voice of the gift. A gift without a wrapping is naked (Hendry 1993). As I perceive it, without wrapping what we see is a naked commodity. However, as will become clearer in this thesis, wrapping is not merely a way of personalising a gift. In my view, wrapping mystifies the commodity and it coerces the recipient to take the gift (as well as coercing the giver to give it), not only by virtue of being 'personal' and adding 'feelings'. We assume that because in industrial societies commodities are impersonal, gifts by contrast are personal (Carrier 1991). When confronted with the kind of gifts found in Japan, where wrapping is ritualised, bought in specialised shops and according to auspicious elements, most authors are puzzled. Wrapping can also be ritualised and obligatory. However, gifts in capitalist societies do not have personality per se either. A gift is created in complex processes of extraction of certain qualities of the thing: its relation to the market.

Strathern argues that 'the magic of the gift lies in successful persuasion' and that a gift is not merely what is seen at the moment of exchange (Strathern 1992). What we see that moment is a not a gift but a wrapped gift. Wrapping adds value and ritual meaning to a gift. It makes the gift visible at the moment of giving. This sounds paradoxical, given the tendency to imagine that the gift is found once the papers are unwrapped. As Hendry argues, unwrapping is not always a process of 'discovery' of a gift (1995). A gift is visible with the wrapping because its *commodity aspect* has been disguised. The wrapping focuses our attention on the thing given as a gift. When we unwrap a gift the magic of the wrapping, the magic of the coercion that wrapping creates, is gone. A commodity is alienated from the market, and the rights over a gift are alienated from the giver, at the moment of wrapping.[33] In a crucial way, obligation is acquired not so much

through the gifts, but through the wrapping added to a gift. What it must return, is another wrapped gift. The wrapping symbolises to some extent the process of the alienability of the object, and the personality of the donor. As such, what Mauss called the 'poison' in gift economies is perhaps best deposited in the wrapping rather than in the gift. In capitalist societies it would be right to rephrase the idea that the 'poison' is in the wrapping. The relation wrapping has with the obligation to return and make gifts is contained in the idea that the perils and poisons that define gift exchange are veiled or mystified with the wrapping. The dangers of accepting a commodity, its market value and the impersonality and constraints of such a context are not so obvious with the wrapping. A wrapped gift, although unsuitable, redundant or inadequate, is harder to refuse than a naked commodity. One can hardly say no to a wrapped gift. Wrapping postpones the moment of the consumption of a commodity until the recipient has accepted the gift and the giver has ceded it. Wrapping mediates between the consumption of commodities and the exercise of power in making others accept these commodities. In exceptional cases, the recipient is even forced not to unwrap these gifts. As Hendry has illustrated for the case of bridewealth, a gift acquires personality because it can not be unwrapped (and thus the marriage can not be dissolved). Wrapping an object has many complex meanings to do with how people perceive the body and objects and gifts, but also with how they perceive the process of alienation of the rights over gifts.

Carrier has argued that certain gifts, what he calls 'possessions', do not need wrapping because the objects already have the personal identity that commodities do not, as for instance a jar of home-made jam (1992: 174). However, as he notes these are not just 'naked' prestations but 'relatively unwrapped', contradicting his own argument that possessions unlike commodities have a personality (ibid.). Hendry (1995) and Creighton (1992) have shown how possessions in Japan need wrapping independently from the fact that objects already have personal identity.

In capitalist societies, this personal identity is linked to their origin in the market. It is this 'link' that wrapping tries to some extent to remove. The wrapping, from minimal and symbolic to highly profuse, re-defines the identity of the commodity. While Carrier sees wrapping as 'a way people cope with the contradiction between gifts and commodities' (Carrier 1992: 174). I see wrapping as a way in which people mystify such a contradiction. Wrapping in Japan does not just 'hide' the commodity (in fact most of the time the commodity is visible), nor its market value (its price is written on the back of envelopes); it is also beautifying, enticing, aesthetically inviting. It embellishes both the commodity and the market, and it gives a 'positive' outlook to the market origin of the thing. This is not a process of mystification by 'concealment', but mystification by profuse symbolic embellishment.

4. Conclusion

The problem with Japanese gift exchange can be contextualised in Carrier's and Jolly's argument to the effect that it is very difficult to sustain the dichotomy between traditional and capitalist exchange. As many authors have noted, Japanese gift giving proves that gift exchange is very important for the management of social relations, both in work and market contexts as well as at the level of household and kin relations. There are two problem with Carrier's argument, however. First, as Cheal argues, gift giving in capitalist societies is used to reproduce intimate worlds, reflecting the degree of boundedness of the society. That is, gifts show that the degree of boundedness in industrialised societies is not very compelling, and individuals are largely autonomous. Givers and receivers of gifts in capitalist societies reproduce such boundedness in order to give meaning to their relations, but also to mystify many aspects of their relations. Second, Japanese exchange is at first sight very distinct from western

types of gift exchange. This difference has been used to explain the difference between capitalist economies, leading Carrier and Creighton to argue that Japanese gift exchange is different because 'Japanese capitalism does not rest on autonomous individuals which characterise western exchange' (Carrier 1995: 204). The problem with this approach is that the complexity of Japanese society is reduced to a minimalist exacerbated Japanism or inverted orientalism. Instead of creating a dichotomy between gift and commodity, it creates a dichotomy between individualism as opposed to relations where persons are embedded in larger relations than those of the market. Such a conclusion blurs the purpose of anthropological analysis. In making this distinction we might understand the differences between traditional and industrial societies but we are far from understanding what constitutes gift exchange. Furthermore, as Kondo (1994) has argued, Japanese society can not be depicted by the absence or presence of individualism or groupism. Japanese individuals are not more 'group-orientated' than other societies. The individual is understood through an elaborate crafting of the self onto social processes. In this thesis I will present many instances in which the self is predicated by gifts that rest less on autonomy and groupism than on how identities (individuals and groups) are constructed as having different positions in relation to particular centres of power (the town, the Shrine, the household) through gift exchange.

My position in this debate is that Japanese exchange is an appropriate case study for understanding gift exchange in capitalist societies. Following Cheal, I believe that Japanese gift exchange can tell us much about how people organise their intimate worlds in the midst of change and social heterogeneity. However, the pages that follow should also illustrate how these intimate worlds are forms of inventing tradition, and of defining an identity that is fragile and changing. The abundance of gift exchange in Japan is not an index of the existence or importance of gift exchanges as much as the very intrusive and powerful

influence of capitalist relations. The obligation to give to seniors in a company at mid-summer is not so much an index of the 'wrappedness' of bosses and employees, but of the appropriation by bosses of part of the labour and gifts of employees. Gift exchange should also consider more than the cases of large corporations. My argument follows that of Cheal up to certain point only. I see that gift exchange in Japan does reproduce intimate worlds because there are very few other ways to tackle the complexity of social relations in a vast industrial society. This is done through the elaboration of notions of obligation, kindness, auspiciousness, politeness, and wrapping. These notions do not imply that Japanese exchange is more obligatory than that in western societies, or that western societies are less naïve about the obligation of gifts. The work of Hendry in Japan has contributed to highlight the decisive importance of wrapping. I see the wrapping of objects as clearly part and parcel of the problems of giving commodities. Wrapping, however, can also be used as a metaphor (as I use it in Chapter Six) for the understanding of other principles that operate when giving gifts.

In the following chapter I look at the villagers' understandings of gifts and the main classifications of reciprocity. They provide the basis for many of the prestations and ideas in the remaining chapters. The theoretical discussion in this chapter is brought to life in the ethnography that follows.

Chapter 3

Gift exchange as the source of rural distinctiveness

In this chapter, I look at villagers' perceptions of gifts and their definitions of reciprocity. I consider aspects of the villagers' daily and seasonal exchange, what they give, when they return, to whom and why, in terms of the shifting relations among households rather than as mere representation of an internally 'harmonious' group and 'homogeneous' practices within Japanese society. The material presented makes clear that gift exchange and the use of wrapping cannot be studied outside of the context of the production and distribution of gifts and commodities. Further, relations of power among givers and recipients must be contextualised in the larger process of producing, wrapping and consuming gifts, rather than become reduced to the moment of giving gifts.

1. Gifts of thanks, gifts of help, gifts of participation, small humble gifts

The villagers of Kamikatsu think of gifts as a good thing: they are good to help others (*kimochi*, *service*), they are good to thank for other's help (*giri*, *orei*), good to express participation (*onkan*), and they are small and humble. Villagers lack the concept of a gift that has pollution or inauspiciousness in it, thus differing from other groups who believe that dirt, pollution and sin are embodied or deposited in gifts. They do not differ from other groups in having a concept of both pollution and inauspiciousness *related* to gift giving, but from the moment they are perceived as gifts rather than commodities or objects, gifts are devoid of any association with pollution or inauspiciousness. Several authors have argued

that Japanese people use the concept of 'clean' and 'pure' gifts, because they use wrapping to 'cleanse' gifts. In fact, they seem to argue that although there is a lack of definition of inauspiciousness, people have a definition of wrapping as something that symbolises the purity of gifts.[34] From this perspective, Araki sees wrapping as what cleans the donor's sins and bad feelings - pollution and dirt - from being transferred to the recipient (Araki 1978: 19 in Hendry 1995: 23). According to this view, the recipient of gifts in Japan receives a gift with no pollution inside, it's a pure gift, as pollution has been left 'outside' the gift and household.

Villagers do not argue about gifts in terms of pollution or purity. They make references to the degree to which a gift is useful, whether it can be used to thank, if it is a return gift, and what kind of return it requires. In Kamikatsu, the classifications of gifts for help, thanks, participation and auspiciousness are fixed but not clear-cut, and provide individuals with a set of tentative practices throughout their negotiation with others. Such an amount of ambiguity allows a certain degree of misinterpretation and doubt that can work both ways, creating trust or mistrust depending on how individual intentions are assessed. Since individual intentions in Japan are difficult to assess because of the constraints of *honne/tatemae*, the public façade and standard body of opinions everybody complies with, gifts of thanks become standard practice to acknowledge 'good intentions'. Although assessing others' intentions is tiresome and time-consuming, most people do spend much time trying to assess them. This indicates villagers understandings that gifts are a form of power, of exercising control over others and their actions. From an analytical perspective, the notions of gifts for help, thanks, auspiciousness and participation are multiple categories of return gifts; as return gifts they encompass understandings about gratitude and obligation, but consist of more than these terms. The distinction the villagers make about them is not a systematic classification of gifts. The classifications

overlap with considerable ambiguity. Gifts of money are always open to suspicions of being 'bribes' (Dore 1987, Baan Vaal in Sherry 1983: 158). However, as an informant in his mid-forties, who was also a businessperson, argued: 'there are ways of knowing if a gift is a gift or a bribe. A bribe is given under the table, the giver does not show the money or try to convince you to take it, he pushes it at you'. In this respect the classification of gifts, though ambiguous, is based on how gifts are made 'visible' and how the recipient is coerced to accept the gift or not.

2. Households, village Shrine and town buildings: the main arenas for gift exchange

Life in the villages revolves around a careful and measured distance between households. Households avoid interfering in each other's affairs, but they are also dependent on their capacity to construct a sense of communal belonging. Villages are organised through a head village, and sometimes through several members of a *sodai* group (Shrine members). Within a group of households belonging to the same Shrine the largest form of gift giving takes place at Shinto harvest festivals in autumn (see Chapter Five). Besides this communal gift giving to the deity at festivals, villagers exchange gifts, usually *sake* and towels, on an individual basis among themselves at *chugen* and *seibo*.

Gift giving within the neighbourhood, as opposed to gifts in the Shrine and to the town, is one of the few occasions in which villagers approach the 'inside' of the household of their neighbours, without nevertheless going in. On most occasions, social interaction, including gift giving, takes place at the boundaries

of the household, close to the main entrance (genkan), but neighbours do not cross the boundary of the entrance. As Nakui San, a friend, put it to me:

> 'I have lived nine years in Kamikatsu and still have not once stepped into my neighbour's house (…) It is very different from Brazil (where Nakui San grew up), where everybody enters and leaves their neighbours' houses easily. Here you do everything at the genkan, you have your tea, you chat, and you leave your gifts there, too, but you do not get in easily. It is different here in Japan, you see…you also have to take your shoes off to enter a house, in this way houses are kept clean'.

Villagers often say that they do not wish to enter their neighbour's house, because the 'house is not ready for visitors', by which they mean that houses are usually too busy and not always tidy. The second practice Nakui refers to in passing, inferring a fundamental connection between the two, is the practice of taking one's shoes off before entering the 'inside' of the house, in order to avoid bringing dirt. This clear separation of spheres between the 'inside' (*uchi*) and the 'outside' (*soto*) has been much commented upon in Japanese society (Bachnick and Quinn 1999), although it is common to most societies. The ambiguous boundary that the genkan (the entrance) represents is crucial for the exchange of gifts. Gifts are left and exhibited at the genkan, defining the degree of interference and participation in others' houses. The outside, the boundary between one house and the other, is opposed to the genkan. Gifts are wrapped for their journey from the house of the donor to the house of the recipient. This 'space' in between houses encloses a symbolic sphere for 'dirt'. Villagers always comment on how they wrap because of 'dirt', although dirt is not only a physical substance but a condition that affect gifts when moving 'outside' or between houses. In the same way, the genkan incorporates the symbolic sphere where gifts and givers stop, avoiding to bring 'dirt' inside. Nakui makes a fundamental connection between 'dirt' outside and 'disorder' inside the house as a dialogic process that individuals must be able to recognise. The individual is put in a position where she or he has to recognise to what extent they should enter or

refuse to enter before forcing the host to invite them in. The picture offered by Nakui is contrasted starkly with the attitude of most people of refusing to enter another's house, as they will make 'disorder' visible – and force the housewife to go out of her way to tidy up. By the direct avoidance of entering, neighbours turn a blind eye to the formalities of presentation, allowing a certain amount of disorder and privacy inside the house. Presentation then, is formalised at the entrance. The sanction against inviting the other in can be analysed accordingly as a direct avoidance to let others bring 'dirt' inside, but the emphasis is not only on dirt but also on the capacity for gifts and givers to reveal disorder within the household. I insist on the fact that it is at this fragile boundary of the genkan that gifts are offered and returned, and that it is the gift, rather than the giver, which 'enters' the house, personalising the thing under exchange.

2.a Gifts and some statistics on the annual household gift economy

The villagers of Kamikatsu follow the main features of the general description of gift exchange that I discussed in Chapter One. They can be characterised as having a system of gift giving marked both by symmetric and asymmetric reciprocity, and abundant flow of prestations and concern for the obligation to return. The differences among households are many, and they hide a great heterogeneity in practice: from villagers who hardly ever exchanged gifts, to those who did it at the obligatory seasons. Another observable feature of exchange was the importance of non-prescribed giving and receiving, made 'casually' during the year. Altruistic donations to the elders' home were common, and they were made public in the monthly magazine, next to data on births and deaths. Befu argued that altruist gift giving was 'insignificant':[35] 'the weak development of altruism also points to the strength of such traditional values as

giri' (Befu 1969: 455). In Kamikatsu altruistic donations figure predominantly in every month's magazine, with the names of donors, place of origin and type of prestation. Prestations did not vary much: *sake*, tea, *mikan* mandarins, vegetables, apples, canned juice, milk, bananas and *service*s such as cutting the grass for the elders' home. Donors were individual houses, groups (children school, factories) from the town, although families of elders from Tokushima or Katsuura were also registered as donors.

The average 'incoming and outgoing' gifts in any given household varied seasonally depending on the composition of each household, their relations with neighbours and their participation in the town's affairs. Figure (I) shows that households in Kamikatsu had a minimum average of 263 incoming prestations during a period of 15 months, with non-traditional households (those that do not follow conventional practices of giving and receiving gifts at New Year and Mid-summer) having a minimum of 153 prestations. Studies of gift exchange tend to focus on ritualised gift giving, but most of the gifts in Figure (I) are not ritual in character. In Figure (I) I detail, not only those traditional prestations at New Year, mid-summer and funerals, but also daily prestations. For example, it is common to receive small prestations of sweets, stationery, tissue paper, and drinks on occasions such as attending a health program, taking a local bus, paying a car insurance or filling up the tank. These last are easy to take for granted and Japanese fail to note them in the books where they account for gifts received. The giving of small prestations of this kind is widespread.

Keeping in mind that the population of Kamikatsu would characterise themselves as 'rural' and 'traditional' if asked, the information in the table is revealing. This figure illustrates what Riches (1981: 216) and Cheal (1988, 1987: 13) claim to be a feature of capitalist gift economies where 'the recipient could have provided by themselves, if they had really wanted to'(…) being 'likely to be widespread'. Indeed, the recipients of these prestations would have had no trouble in acquiring

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Details of gift giving in 5
Non-traditional households with children
From 153 to 230 gifts (none monetarian
k.=kin, w.=work, sh.=shop, s.=school,
n.=neighbours b.=bank t.=town a.=a. acq=acquaintances

Average cost from 150,000 to 225,000 a year

Details of gift giving in 5
traditional households with children
From 260 to 460 (six to ten monetarian)

Average cost 234.000 to 640.000

Average type (origin or donor)	**Average type**
9 box of fruits and vegetables (from *f.*, *k.*, *w.*)	17 box of fruits and vegetables (from *k.w.*)
3 bottles of soya (from *k.*)	3 bottles of soya (from *k.* and *w.*)
6 towels (from *sh.*, *n.*	18 towels (from *sh.*, *n.*)
13 tissue paper and handkerchief (*sh.* and *t.*)	35 tissue paper and handkerchief (*sh.* an*t.*)
4 pencils (from *sh.*, *t.* and advertising agencies)	13 pencils (*sh.*, *b.*s, *s.*s)
9 stationery (from *b.*s and *sh.*)	12 stationery (from *b.*s, *sh.* acq)
1 plate (from *b.*)	3 plates and decorations (from *b.*s)
6 boxes of seaweed (from *k.*)	5 boxes of seaweed (from *k.* and *w.*)
9 packets of tea (from *f.* and *k.*)	9 packets of tea (*f.*, *k.* and *w.*)
4 bottles of alcoholic drinks (whisky, sake, shoyu, others)	15 bottles of alcoholic drinks
22 cakes (from *n.*, *w.*, *s.*, *f.*, *k.*)	28 cakes (from *n.*, *w.*, *s.*, *k.*, *f.*)
5 books (*s.*s and *f.*)	3 books (*s.*s and *f.*)
1 amulet	9 amulets (festivals, *k.*, and temple)
8 boxes of colours (*s.*, acq)	12 boxes of colours (*s.* acq)
- bi-monthly giving of pictures (from extramural activities)	- monthly or more often giving of pictures
16 boxes/bars chocolate (from *s.* and *w.*)	19 boxes/bars chocolate (*s.* and *w.*)
3 bags of rice (from *n.*)	
- weekly food (bread, sweet rice)	5 bags of coal and wood (from *n.*)
8 toys (from *k.* and *f.*)	15 toys (*k.* and *f.*, *n.*)
3 sets of envelopes (from *w.* and funeral gifts)	5 sets of envelopes (from *w.*f.)
2 calculators (from funeral gifts)	9 kitchen appliances (from acq, *w.*)
1 apron (thanks gift from *k.* or *w.*)	3 aprons (*k.*, *w.*, and *sh.*)
12 bags of crisps (*k.*, from *t.* office and acq)	29 bags of crisps (acq, *t.* office, *k.*)
1 toothbrush or other toiletries (*sh.*)	9 toiletries (*sh.*, *w.*, acq)
3 boxes of beer (colleagues and *k.*)	8 boxes of beer (*n.*, *w.* and *k.*)
1 salt and sugar (*k.*)	3 boxes of coffee and tea sets (a. and *k.*)
2 boxes of meat products (a. *k.*)	
2 boxes of sugar wrapped sticks for tea (a.)	
2 boxes of melons (*w.*, acq)	
1 nuts (acq)	
6 tofu (*k.*)	2 tofu (*k.*)
11 Kg omochi (from *t.* events, festivals and *k.*)	3 Kg omochi (*t.* events, festivals)
2 umeboshi pickles(from *k.* and close *f.*)	6 umeboshi pickles(*k.*, *w.*, and *f.*)
3 boxes of mushroom (from *n.*, *w.*)	12 boxes of mushroom (*k.*, *n.*, *w.*)
1 set of mushroom building block (*s.*)	
6 boxes/pieces fish (*k.*)	24 boxes/pieces fish (*w.*, *k.*)
5 sets of coffee (bags) (*k.*, acq)	12 sets of coffee (*w.*, *k.*)
1 gloves and 6 pieces of clothing for children (*k.*)	3 pieces of furniture (*k.*)
3 boxes dried fish	3 pieces of bedclothing (*k.*, *t.*)
2 boxes of pulses (*k.*, acq)	6 boxes dried fish
1 set of colour fish for children	
3 flowers (*s.*, *f.*)	4 boxes of other fish
1 set of chopstics (*s.*)	20 can juice 1 set of trays (*s.*)
3 trays of left-over food from parties	6 accounts of money (*k.*, *w.*,
an average of Y.250,000 although it could be larger if funerals, weddings or other costly occasions)	
6 flowers (*s.*, *f.*, teachers)	
3 boxes of can juice and 25 canjus (*w.*, *k.*).	
3 dolls from a trip (friend)	
6 envelopes with money (*w.*, acq, *k.*)	
4 tickets for the onzen (*w.*)	
2 small bells (festival)	
1 set of trays (*s.*)	
1 set of chopstics (*s.*)	

these items for their own consumption in the market or from their gardens. Most exchange is predicated upon the twin idea of 'pragmatism', and 'taking care' of the recipients' domestic economy by 'saving' them from buying things they would need for their normal household consumption. Precisely because of the focus of the villagers as a rural entity within an urban society, the sociological approach underlines homogeneous traits and 'traditional' patterns at the expense of a large flexibility in the conception of gift exchange, dismissing most of this exchange. My fieldwork experience, by contrast, suggests that there is a great deal of very significant uses of gifts in which the giver and recipient reconstruct exchange as a form of intimate, close, familiar worlds (David 1986: 19), worlds that the rural relocation broke up and simultaneously imposed. However, the patterns of 'smallness' that the exchange brings about do not reconstruct the kind of intimate world of the 'past', but generate new perceptions of local arrangements, familiarity, size, and belonging among those who are or are not a 'group'. Each household retains a sense of 'independence' from neighbours, and defines the limits of its own economic achievement despite the sense of 'kinship' recreated with the gifts.

2.b Return gifts

In Kamikatsu there are differences of wealth between households, although they are not easily observable. Most differences are politely hidden, or the poorest households (see Moto's case below) are pushed, through gifts, to enter into the community. These people are politely forced to acquire new goals, such as to work or invest more than they actually do, or to participate more in communal events, which increases gift exchange. Differences in wealth are identified by looking at the obligatory return of gifts. Befu's well-known statement that 'most

gift-giving in Japan is actually gift-returning' (Befu 1966: 166) reflects the importance of obligatory giving and repayment of debt. He identifies the traditional sense of *giri* (obligation) as the mechanism behind the emphasis on returning gifts (see Chapter 2). This is, however, a partial interpretation. Returning gifts is also heavily constrained by the obligation to achieve and display economic status.[36] Moreover, in the context of town celebrations, those households with political prestige felt they needed to 'give' in order to contribute to the celebration, especially on occasions when return was sanctioned (by fear of bribery). As reciprocity did not take place, households with political prestige invariably gave, or returned, more.

Figure (J) shows the classification of gifts used in Kamikatsu, and the degree of return practised for each gift. Young generations (individuals between 22 and 39 years old) knew or used only half of the terms. In total, I noted 45 occasions for gift exchange in an average year in Kamikatsu. Those not included in the figure of 33 are communal and town related gifts, and memorial *service*s, which I examine in Chapter Six and Seven.

Figure (J) reflects significant differences in terms of practice of giving and returning gifts.[37] For example, marriage gifts have a popularity of 83.3%. (only 3.9% do not give or return gifts at the occasion), with the return of marriage gifts being the largest category with 83.3 % of the total of the sample. At the other end of the spectrum, occasions for giving help gifts after an earthquake, are not widely observed with only 6.8 making a return of some kind. There are also variations in the perception of return gifts for occasions of misfortune. People returned slightly more in cases of sickness than for funerals (see Chapter Six).

From the data in figure (J), figure (K) represents the patterns of return among men and women, showing how women perceive themselves as returning slightly more than men at marriage, birth and funeral occasions. Women and men are

nearly equal in their return of gifts for sickness, and men return slightly more in cases of natural disasters and burglary, and Valentine's Day.

Figure J

Answers to the question: do you return gifts at…?

Occasion for gifts

		Woman Y	N	Man Y	N	**Total Y**	% Do not return	% Do not practice	% Total Y return
1.	Marriage gift	49	5	36	5	**85**	9.8	3.9	83.3
2.	Birth gift	47	4	37	5	**84**	8.8	5.8	82.3
3.	Sickness	38	9	37	3	**75**	11.7	10.7	73.5
4.	Funeral gift	40	10	32	11	**72**	20.5	4.9	72.5
5.	Mid-summer	39	6	21	19	**60**	24.5	14.7	58.8
6.	New House	37	5	22	18	**59**	22.5	17.6	57.8
7.	New Year	37	5	20	20	**57**	24.5	17.6	55.8
8.	*Otoshidama*	21	17	10	26	**31**	42.1	25.4	25.4
9.	60 year-old gift	14	25	12	25	**26**	49	24.5	25.5
11.	New shop	14	11	11	27	**25**	37.2	37.2	24.5
10.	Fire	11	25	13	24	**24**	48	26.4	23.5
12.	Moving out	13	19	9	22	**22**	40.1	37.2	21.5
13.	*Orei*	11	17	9	25	**20**	41.1	36.2	19.6
14.	Girls festival	12	21	8	27	**20**	47	32.3	19.6
15.	*Osembetsu*	8	19	12	25	**20**	43.1	36.2	19.6
16.	Coming of age	13	25	5	30	**18**	53.9	26.4	17.6
17.	Autumn festival	12	18	5	30	**17**	47	34.3	16.6
18.	Boys festival	10	25	6	27	**16**	50.9	32.3	15.6
19.	Annualbirthday	8	24	8	26	**16**	49	32.3	15.6
20.	Souvenirs	11	22	5	31	**16**	51.9	30.3	15.6
21.	Burglary	6	21	9	26	**15**	46	37.2	14.7
22.	Passing exams	10	23	5	31	**15**	52.9	30.3	14.7
23.	Valentine *giri*	4	20	11	18	**15**	37.2	46	14.7
24.	Visiting gifts	9	23	5	31	**14**	52.9	31.3	13.7
25.	Birthday gift	8	30	5	30	**13**	58.8	27.4	12.7
26.	70 year-old gift	7	27	6	28	**13**	53.9	32.3	12.7
27.	80 year-old gift	7	27	6	27	**13**	52.9	33.3	12.7
28.	3-5-7	4	29	8	29	**12**	56.8	29.4	11.7
29.	White Day	5	18	7	18	**12**	35.2	50.9	11.7
30.	New Job	6	23	4	31	**10**	52.9	34.3	10.7
31.	Valentine h.	4	19	7	19	**11**	37.2	50	10.7
32.	Earthquake	3	23	4	28	**7**	50	41.1	6.8
33.	New business	3	17	4	23	**7**	39.2	51.9	6.8

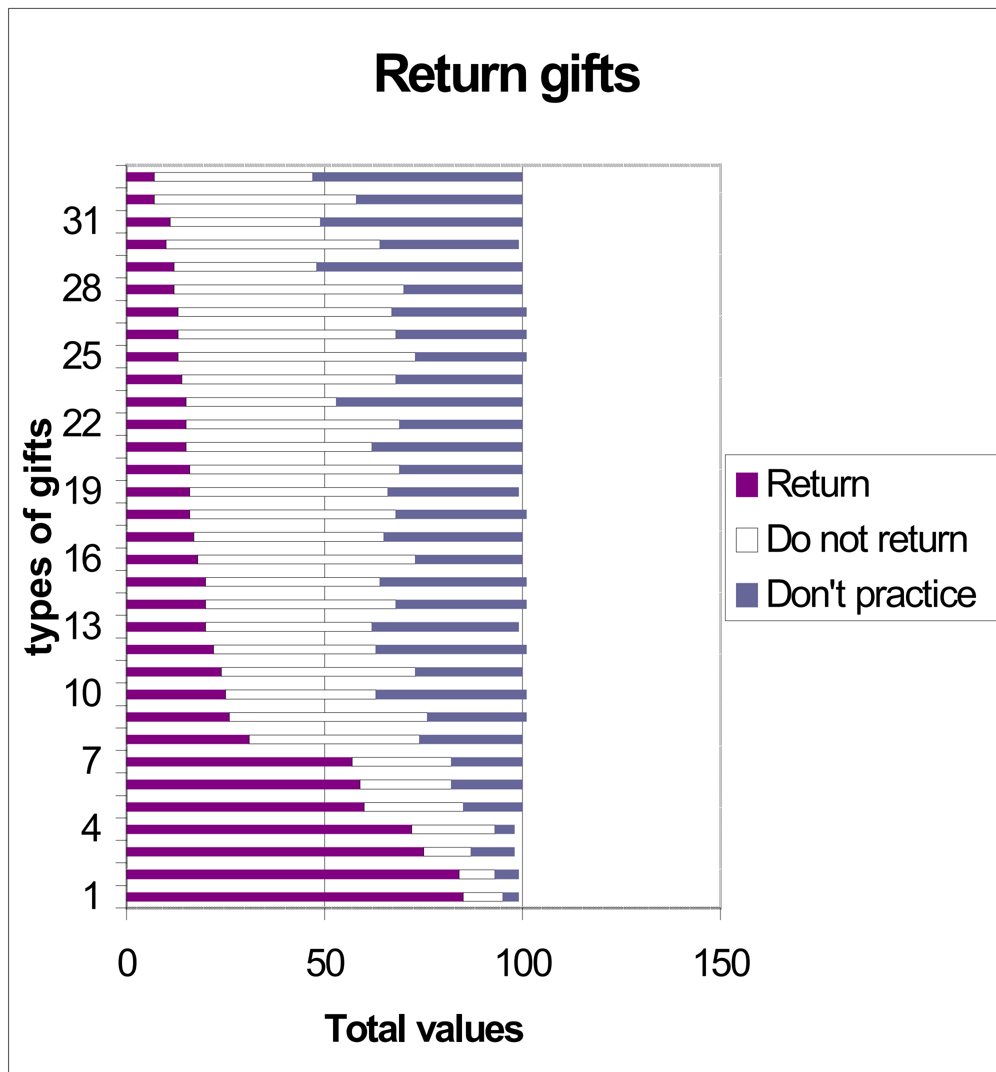


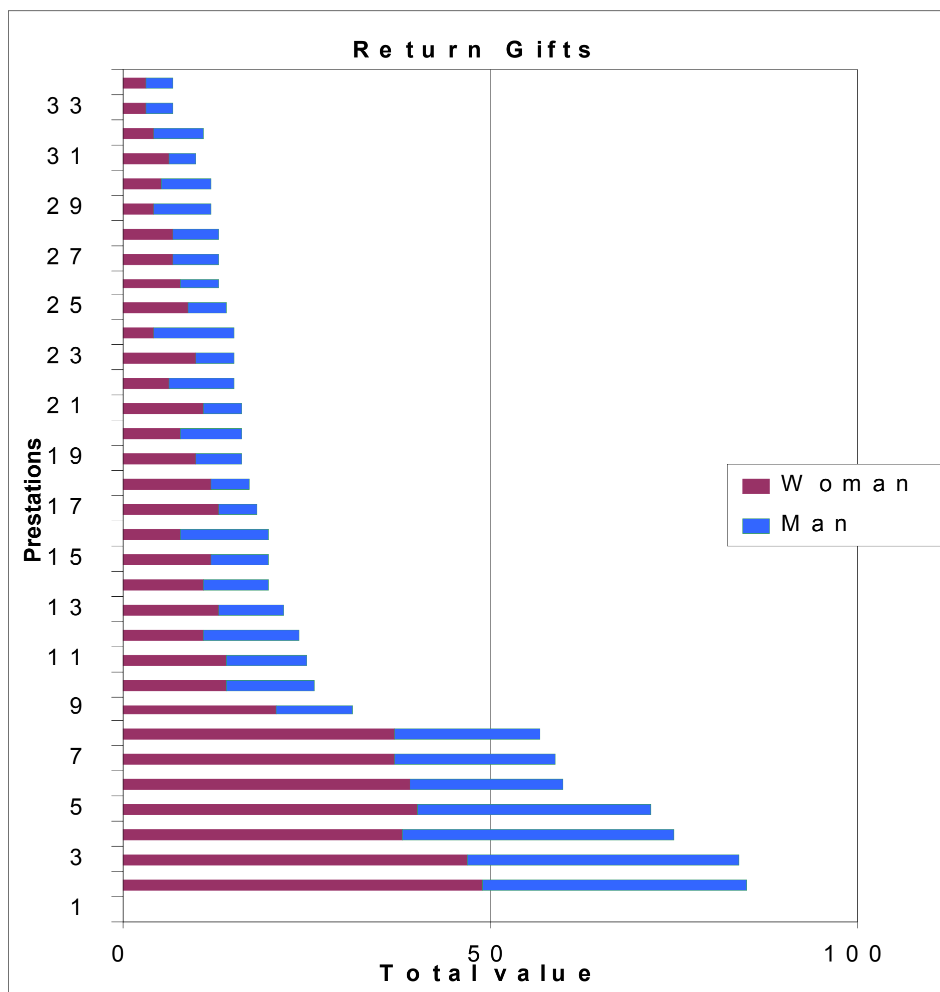
Figure K. Variations in the practice of returning gifts.

The most significant difference is between the first 7 types of returns and the rest, return rates dropping 30.4% between them. The percentage of difference in those people who answered that they did not practise gift giving between the first 7 and the others is 7.9%.Those who answered that they did not return gifts are

17.6%. *Otoshidama* (New Year gifts of money to children), are part of the group of prestations for which return was difficult to determine. It was less practised mostly due to the low birth rate and late marriage trends and the fact that there is no expectation of return for gifts given to children.

Informants' opinions varied about how to return gifts. Time was the most important aspect of returning, nearly as important as the idea of returning itself. Over half of the people said that gifts had to be returned fast, or as soon as possible, as a matter of politeness. Only six people said they never returned gifts.

Figure L. Return gifts in gender perspective



27% of informants said they liked to return gifts while 20% disliked it but did it anyway. Nearly 80% of people answered that *osewa* (thanks for help: I examine them in section 2c below) gifts were the most important ones for them.

Figures (J) and (K) show how most of the occasions for obligatory gifts appear to concentrate around marriage, the birth of children, sickness, funerals, mid-summer, and New-Year. These are the ones about which people emphasise the obligation to return. The return of gifts for the construction of a home appears very similar to the return of gifts at New Year. One of the features of return gifts in rural Japan is the minor importance of *omiyage*, business and certain 'age' gifts, since there are few occasions for travelling, and opening new businesses. Most informants thought of *osembetsu* as an old-fashioned practice. They were surprised to see how some people still gave gifts of money for helping before a long journey. Gift for fire and earthquakes were uncommon. These gifts were not recommended if the affected buildings were part of the property of the local administration. The differences in gifts for children indicate the degree of involvement of neighbours and kin in the celebration of children's occasions. Since celebrations of childhood take place among the immediate kin, most informants felt there was no need to return gifts.

The major problem with this questionnaire was that most people felt very uncertain about giving and returning gifts after number six (New Year returns). They seem to suggest that most gift giving and returning is based on the main six prestations. While the first seven prestations had clear gifts and return gifts, informants perceived the rest of prestations as gifts without expectation of counter-return. Informants did not see the necessity to counter-return gifts for previous gifts received (*orei*). Next, I contextualise these practices of returning gifts within the ideology of reciprocity that dominates exchange.

2.c The classification of reciprocity

When villagers talk about their relations with others, that is their neighbours, they often talk of gifts as ways of expressing the degree of reciprocity and involvement with people. They do not define their relations with other households with words or long discussions, but by reference to gifts they gave to them: 'My neighbours gave me an *orei* gift this morning, she is very kind'; ' I am going to give my second neighbour a gift of *sake*, to say *osewa* to them'. Or even more tacitly, the gifts lie at the entrance of the house with their wrapping clearly exhibiting the words, '*kansha*' (gratitude). They might point at the gift and say, 'it is just *kimochi*' from my niece'. Wrapping in this context is constructed as a form of displaying the narrative of reciprocity. The reason for the gift is written on it, requiring little explanation but classifying the gift and removing any character of ambiguity: *onkan*, *orei*, *iwau*.

The villagers of Kamikatsu classify gifts according to the levels of obligation, generosity, apology, and gratitude they feel they incur in their relations with others. From more obligation to less obligation, gifts in Kamikatsu are classified as *giri* (obligation and gratitude), *kansha* (deep felt gratitude), *osewa* (thanks and apology), *orei* (thanks of appreciation), *iwau* (thanks, congratulation), *onkan* (sharing and contribution to a happy occasion), *omiyage* (souvenir thanks), *kimochi* (feelings or from the heart gifts), *service* (thanks, customer attention) *ageru* (giving).

Giri and *Kansha*. Gifts that fall into the category of *giri* and *kansha* carry more connotations of asymmetric reciprocity and obligation to return. These gifts are usually wrapped in commercial *noshigami* over the shop's wrapping, and the content is not visible. The content is usually known from a standard range of products such as *sake*, coffee, tea. *Kansha* is a term used to classify prestations

said to be given to thank with deep gratitude. It is a term rarely used and tied to particular circumstances such as giving gifts to the 'community' usually from politicians. The importance of *giri* is reflected in the fact that during fieldwork 34% of informants over the age of 65 returned gifts because they felt *giri* and gratitude to people who had helped them. Only 26.4% of respondents considered themselves to be *girigatai* or keen on *giri* in their returns of gifts. Villagers did not consider being '*giri gatai'* a desirable condition, it had decreased in popularity and most people argued that it was only 'very traditional people' who followed these considerations when giving. Five in ten informants under 65 years of age argued that *giri* was not about repaying debts but 'fitting in' groups, giving because others give; and eight in ten said they practised it because it was tradition and because people expected them to. While some gifts classified as '*giri*' conform to norms, *giri* can also appear in the context of gratuitous favours (see Valentine gifts in Chapter Seven). Although the evolutionary changes in the perception of *giri* have puzzled many observers, Richie has argued that folk models of exchange and kinship make it 'possible to conceive of the obligation to give and the idea of redundant transactions as parts of a single notional package' (Richie 1981: 216,225). I hope to illustrate with the cases in the thesis that obligation was never detached from redundancy as a non-committal part of new ways of thinking about gifts and relations.

Simultaneously, the power exercised through gifts can be portrayed in a favourable light, if the intentions of the donor are easy to assess or his or her behaviour is not suspected of looking for favours. In this category fall *Orei*, *Osewa*, and *Kimochi*. These are the three most common classifications of prestations, meaning thanks, politeness and human feelings. *Kimochi* means 'feelings', conveying the sense that prestations are 'gratuitous' gifts from the heart. They are the opposite of *giri*, in the sense that *kimochi* do not contain obligation, nor should they create it. The meaning of *kimochi* gifts is that they

can be accepted 'for free' without return, having little market value. The idea *Kimochi* is part of the idea among Japanese that individuals should 'listen to other people's feelings', anticipating their needs and avoiding any loss of face or embarrassment of the recipient. *Kimochi* represent both the gratuitousness and personal care that the donor has for the recipient.

> During fieldwork I offered to keep an eye to on some friends' business while they were away for lunch. One of their temporary employees, Mie, unaware that her boss was away, came to ask for something. We talked for few minutes and she asked me if I was hungry. Twenty minutes later Mie, who was in her mid-fifites, came back with a plastic tray of food from the local restaurant where she also worked as a temporary employee. I thanked her. To my surprise, she unfolded a blue cloth, which was a beautiful hand-made bag. She explained that she made these bags for the restaurant for tourists. She gave it to me, insisting I should take it and the food. They were '*kimochi*'.

Kimochi gifts that are expensive are considered suspicious and re-classified, once the donor is gone, into the category of '*giri*', meaning a coercive gift. *Kimochi,* though, is a prestation given when passing by a house, a small prestation (usually unwrapped) added to a wrapped gift, sweets or small amounts of money to a child, a thank you card. There are many forms of *kimochi*, and daily life is full of them.

Orei. *Orei* has a variety of meanings, from 'bowing', 'custom' to 'respect' and 'thanks'. In most cases, a gift of *orei* and *sewa* are reciprocated by other gifts of *sewa* and *orei*, usually of similar or slightly higher market value than the first gift. In Figure (J) most prestations where classified as *orei*.

> Coming back home I found a box of cakes. I could see that the box had been opened by the giver and later wrapped again. At the moment of giving, the box was loosely tied with a purple ribbon. The box contained six cakes in beautiful silver wrappings. I asked Atsuko, my homestay host, who had brought the cakes. Atsuko replied that it was the man who had come to repair the roof days earlier, and in coming to collect the money he had brought the cakes. I was puzzled by the fact that someone who was coming to be paid for a job done felt he had to bring a gift. Atsuko found my numerous questions on debt, reciprocity and obligation about this gift a nuisance. The answer was much simpler, Atsuko argued: 'it was just *orei*' (manners, politeness).

Orei, was the answer most informants gave in relation to formal, casual and unexpected prestations, and most ritual gifts where obligation was not strong enough to be called *giri*. In most respects, although *orei* means politeness, it also encompasses the meaning of *ninjou* or human feelings (Doi 1967). To most informants giving gifts was a carefully balanced action between being polite, taking into consideration other people's feelings (*kimochi*), and anticipating the possible expectation of gifts of thanks from the recipient (*osewa*). *Osewa* was often used in conjunction with *orei*. *Osewa* means taking care, 'help', looking after someone. The term *itsumo osewa ni narimasu*, 'thanking you for the care you always bestow on us', accompanies most donations of gifts as the most important expression of politeness and sociability. In the questionnaires I distributed during fieldwork, *osewa* was at the top of the list of reasons for returning gifts of thanks with a total of 79.4% people answering they returned gifts, *osewa*, because they wanted to 'thank'.

> Oue Kanoko, a woman in her mid-sixties, took me several times with her to give gifts to their neighbours in order to teach me the importance of giving gifts among Japanese. We walked from house to house, delivering small wrapped parcels of fruits. She gave a box to each of her neighbours and acquaintances she thought had been kind, polite, and helpful to her during the year, like a fishmonger who always reserved for her the best fish for sashimi at a good price. She left two bottles of *sake* for two business associates who had given her advice in a difficult business situation. We visited each house, repeating *itsumo osewa ni narimasu* while giving the gifts, bowing and departing shortly after. When we finished Kanoko summarised her teaching by saying that *osewa* was the most important thing I could learn about Japanese gifts. *Osewa* was good for maintaining relations.

To her, giving and receiving gifts of *sewa* was the way to measure politeness, to show one's good will in a relation, to take care of other's feelings and to settle debts of gratitude. *Osewa*, unlike sickness gifts, was not difficult to give and she enjoyed giving and receiving gifts of *osewa*.

The importance of *kimochi*, *osewa and orei* is such that villagers comment how people classify bribes and any type of gift that pretends to coerce the recipient to accept it as such and to disguise the bribe:

> Yama, a thirty-four year old man, works at the main office, and Tomita, a neighbour of his, always complains he is – in semiotic gesture of pounding goma soy (to butter up someone). He is always making invitations to others to go to his house, and he spends most of his time cajoling those around. His gifts are suspect because he is complimenting others a bit 'too much'. His gifts always have nice wrapping, too. Usually from shops where the brand can be recognised, and thus the 'goodness', the market value, can be assessed. 'But you can't tell. He makes many *kimochi* and *orei* gifts to those around. He makes show of taking care'. However, Tomita does not trust those gifts for what they are. She thinks Yama is only taking care of himself, underneath all the *orei* and *kimochi* gifts, he should not be trusted. 'Many gifts are said to be *orei* and *kimochi* but they are not'. Tomita criticises those who give *orei* and *kimochi* when they mean to obtain something, but to some extent, Tomita acknowledges: 'we all play the same game, it is hard to say that Yama never gave an *orei* or *kimochi* that was just 'that''.

Relations of *sewa* and *orei*, like *giri*, start with the gifts and help an individual receive; however, reciprocity in *sewa* and *orei* is more short-term, and limited to help received usually in adult life, and during the cycle of a year. Specifically, *sewa* and *orei* are contracted through the gradual participation and inclusion of an individual into new groups, work, same-interest groups, and neighbourhood.

> In arriving at their village, my homestay family gave a set of pieces of *sake* cups, made by themselves, to the entire neighbourhood (made of 12 households), wrapped in a simple white hand-made paper. They reasoned: 'We went house by house offering the *sake* cups. With the gift we presented ourselves so they could know us, and we apologised for any trouble and noise our children may cause. We had to give a gift because the neighbours cannot say no to us moving in, so we apologise for our arrival and because we imposed ourselves on their lives'.

Once individuals have established initial relations with others it is easy to enter into non-reciprocal exchange, where the new member of the community is made the recipient of many prestations of *kimochi*, 'to make people feel at home'. As relations deepen, recipients might feel indebted to people's kindness, and wish to express themselves with gifts of *sewa* when visiting. *Sewa* in this context has

changed meaning. Gradually the individuals are incorporated into the neighbourhood and cease being only recipients of gifts to become people who 'return', 'thank', and thus show reciprocity as well as acceptance of social norms. These processes are fragile and prone to misunderstandings, and indirect coercion to 'fit in' as Moto, an artist in his mid-thirties, comments:

> 'When I moved to our house the head of the village came to visit me and brought me *sake* (unwrapped-he carried it with a *furoshiki*). We drank together and established good relations. My 'above' neighbour – a high ranking person, who had helped me find the house, introduced me to the town, and also came with a bottle of *sake* (also unwrapped). It was very good at the beginning. They kept coming every week, telling me about the village and its customs, they wanted us to participate in the neighbourhood. I did not want to participate so much into the village affairs, but they kept coming. They really wanted us to be part of the village, but there are many responsibilities, meetings to attend, festivals to go to. I would not mind barter, but gift exchange is too expensive for us…I came here to leave Tokushima, the busy life…I wanted to do my art, and live on my own. I cannot do it at all. Finally I had to make them understand that I did not want them to come anymore with the *sake*, but it has made life difficult for all of us.'

Hendry has argued that failing to make specific gifts, to display one's position and intentions, especially at the beginning of relations, might easily lead to misunderstanding and ostracism (1999: 63). However, this is also true of failing to accept gifts, or failing to avoid how not to be made a recipient. When Moto refused the gifts, he also refused the obligation and kindness that was created through them. He endangered his position in the village by cutting himself off from the source of *sewa* and *orei* gifts that would have followed.[38]

Service is a new term, adopted from the English word meaning customer attention, and it conveys behaviour ranging from casual customer *service* to *kimochi* to those one has casual relations with. *Service* is widespread in shops and market relations, as courtesy to customers, and many *chugen* towels are gradually being identified as '*service*'. Thus, this category has gradually incorporated gifts that are also classified as *orei* between customer and shopkeeper, if they are not very expensive (not more than Y 300). Although the value of the gift of '*service*'

might increase if the donor wants to use it also to apologise or to thank for a particular event that happened between giver and recipient, and emphasise the 'relation' between the two.

> The third time I ate at the local restaurant, a few local customers invited me for tea. They were curious about me and wanted to ask me about my country, food, and so on. After paying my bill, the owner's wife gave me Y 1,000 (more than the cost of my lunch). Responding to my puzzlement she smiled and said that it was '*service*'. Later on the year, when I asked a friend of hers about the meaning of such giving, I was told that she might have wanted to thank me for going to the restaurant, but also to apologise for her customers having asked so many questions.

To increase the value of '*service* gifts' 'too much' or 'too often' might lead also to suspicion that the gift is something else. Most villagers might decide to re-classify such prestation as '*giri*' rather than *service*.

Iwau, *onkan*, *omiyage* and *ageru*. These four terms are different from those examined before, in the sense that they are what Lebra defines 'specific reciprocity' exemplified by 'conventional gift-giving' (Lebra 1976: 96). I examine them here because of the importance they had for most Japanese during my fieldwork; and because they are used on other occasions where reciprocity is not specific. *Iwau*, meaning to congratulate, are prestations given among kin or neighbours for prescribed occasions related to life-cycle celebrations, birth, marriage, exams, and new buildings. In Kamikatsu *iwau* also include state celebrations and harvest festivals, which I analyse in detail in chapters five and seven. *Onkan*, which translates as 'I give (humble) to contribute' can also be read as 'please accept this humble gift to contribute to the joy of the event' it is similar to *iwau*, but it is restricted to neighbourhood celebrations which have a ritual character. *Onkan* gifts were prominent in celebrations for the elders in small neighbourhoods in Kamikatsu. There is not expectation of return of *onkan* because it is already considered a 'return' for the *service*s done in the course of a life-time. *Onkan* were shared among all participants, exhibited in the main hall of

the room, and presented to the assistants, like *iwau*, they were entered in an account book. The donor is usually acknowledged to have more 'power', both economically and politically. These gifts are said to contain some '*giri'*. Here, however, *giri* is not so much 'obligation' to give as obligation to maintain status. In all these cases *onkan* consists of boxed *sake*, wrapped in commercial *noshigami* papers, the name of the donor(s) printed on it.

Omiyage means a gift from a trip, usually given on return. *Omiyage* or souvenir is a particular form of 'return gift' of symmetric reciprocity but informants often called *omiyage* to small prestations, left-over food at parties, a couple of *mikan* when leaving a house. In this context *omiyage* is equivalent not to the souvenir but to *kimochi*. *Ageru*, is the indicative of 'to give'. The term, as in the case of the second meaning of *omiyage*, is used to define prestations the giver hands out of generosity, renouncing property rights over the thing. *Ageru* is a classification for the sudden wish to give, as in 'I give you this, take it, it's nothing'. It only happens in the context of familiarity, usually from a man to a woman, and from a woman to children with, no expectation of return. Things given, however, are not always 'small' in value.

Oue is a landowner in his late seventies and one of my closest informants. In a long discussion about *omiyage* presents, he asked his wife to fetch a present they had kept in their store room for over sixty years. His wife returned with a small parcel still wrapped in its original wrapping. Oue carefully unwrapped the parcel. The seal was broken with old age. Inside there was a wooden box, inside of which, wrapped in white paper was a gold *sake* cup with the emperor's house sign engraved on it. He explained that he had visited the Imperial Palace when he was very young, as his father had received a commemoration from the imperial house. The cup was part of the commemoration souvenirs they brought back for different people back home. Oue's father wanted to make sure there would be enough souvenirs for everybody, so he ordered an abundant supply, some of which were stored. After re-wrapping it he left it on the table, and with a sign that I should take it, he gave it to me. His explanation, '*ageru*' 'I give it to you' classified the prestation and the terms of the renunciation of the rights in the gift; but also the fact that the gift was now after fifty years of being in the storehouse, redundant and it was better to give it to me on account of my interest in gifts, and to show his friendship and generosity. When I was leaving, his wife added a series of cakes and sweets, fruits we had been eating, and a cake she had made to take to my homestay

family all of which was placed in a plastic bag. Laughing, she called the prestations *omiyage*.

Though these occasions refer to cases where it was mostly I who was the recipient of prestations, I must stress that these were by no means exceptional cases. They are a sample of a large collection of cases I gathered from other informants and myself. I use them here not to illustrate the nature of giving to foreigners, but the local notions of reciprocity. To the extent that it is possible to verify data about exchange by direct participation, I could observe that these forms of reciprocity were common among villagers in the same way as I experienced them in relations with them.

2.d Considerations on wrapping

I have indicated for each case the type of wrapping that the donor (s) used. It is important to note that there is a range of wrapping, not always conforming to the standard norms described in Chapter One. Wrapping depends on what the giver wants to convey on each occasion. In Yama's case, his 'nice wrapping' is part of his strategy to increase the commercial value of his gifts and thus try to exercise his power over those who receive the gift. However, Yama's neighbour did not emphasise wrapping but the fact the value was 'high' and that his manners, though polite was 'coercitive' or unclear. In cases of *kimochi*, on the other hand, what is given is an item for wrapping other things such as handkerchief or tissue paper, or something that does not require layers of wrapping.

It is possible to argue for the cases of *kimochi*, that the meaning of wrapping is related to the value (both commercial and social) of the thing given. The value of the wrapping should not increase the 'small' value of the thing given, thus gifts of items for wrapping are prefered. The use of profuse layers of paper is avoided.

The value of things and the value of giving is increased by 'adding' food and other prestations, rather than by wrapping. It is hard to argue in this case that social distance led to more wrapping (layering) and social closeness to less.

Mie (see p. 89) gave me things to wrap other things, as she 'wrapped' me into her life and those of the company. To her, I was socially 'naked'. She personalised giving me, by objectifiying the metaphor of wrapping into a reified aesthetic object (a bag). However, she did not either wrap the bag, or the food she gave me. The wrapping object itself symbolised the action of 'wrapping' me in. She used simple dialect forms, with none of the politeness relevant in Yama's case. Wrapping in Mie' s case is not used here to convey social hierarchy, but to convey inclusiveness. Moreover, she did not objectify our relation in terms of hierarchy or equality, but in terms of where we were both placed in relation to the company which we belonged. She and I were the two most marginal individuals.[39] Her action of giving identified our relative position; we were not 'socially close' but we were at the same 'end'. She was close to the margins, I was not merely 'naked' but placed outside their group. We were associated with the firm on a temporary basis. We had in common the proximity to this boundary of inclusion and exclusion.

By contrast, in Moto's case where inclusion was also an issue, there was no wrapping at all. The giver gave 'just *sake*' in order to attach Moto to the community and 'include him in'. Here it is important to mention that there may be a gender difference underlying the absence of wrapping for Moto and the use of reified symbolic wrapping for me. Moto was offered a 'man's drink' by another man. Although hierarchy and prestige were very important issues here, and indeed the donor had effective means to include Moto into the community, wrapping did not reflect them. The absence of wrapping was not only a matter of the social closeness the giver wanted to reproduce for the recipient, but a way of

mystifying ‘social closeness’. As Moto argued, giving *sake* was a manipulative act to make him ‘fit in’. Moto did not see the absence of wrapping as relevant in the matter of giving. It was the fact that he was forced to ‘drink’ that counted for him. The lack of wrapping was a way of disguising the well-intentioned manipulation of his neighbours conveyed in the gift. The action of wrapping someone into a group did not always preclude the giving of wrapping or the existence of wrapping objects, nor did the layering of wrapping increase to reflect the power diferential between giver and donor. Most of the action of ‘social wrapping’ came through the actions of ‘consumption’ in which individuals eat or drink, that is they partake of gifts. On these occasions wrapping and its absence can equally serve the purpose of convincing the recipient to accept the gift.

The equation between distance and closeness do not work either for the case of the *orei* box of cakes (p.90). The wrapping was not decided in relation to the differences in rank between giver and recipient, but in relation to the pragmatic intention to re-use the wrapping, thus diminishing the market value of the gift. In manipulating wrapping, and re-using it, the donor conveyed the impression that it was just ‘*orei*’ and ‘for the kids’. He did not pretend anything else (which I verified) in their relation with my hosts. On the other hand, Oue, in giving *sewa* gifts to her neighbours, applied wrapping consistently. It was neither an expensive commercial brand nor elaborate layered wrapping. The relation she has with her neighbours is ‘close’, as they mutually engage in returning ‘*sewa*’ gifts over time. Wrapping in this context was a way to show ‘*orei*’, that she cared. It slightly increased the value of the gift. This ‘increase’ is a frequent theme among neighbours. They always ‘fight’ to give a bit more. Wrapping adds value, care, but also disguises the escalation of return gifts that follow.

The Watanabe’s case is the most personalised one, as they decided on a personalised item, hand-made *sake* pots and hand-made wrapping. Their decision

to personalise the gift was taken to compensate the fact that these gifts are obligatory. In this way they removed the 'convention' by removing 'conventional wrapping'. They also removed the convention by giving a personalised item, the product of their trade, rather than the usual towel or soap other neighbours gave. They personalised the gift with personalised wrapping, but the obligation was by no means lessened. The opposite happened in the case of the *miyage* food where wrapping was pragmatic with no personalisation. The *miyage* prestation illustrates the idea of 'belonging':[40] these prestations are given after the recipient has been in the house. It does not define 'inclusion' but the closeness to the symbolic centre that the house represents. The profusion of wrapping is limited here, and plastic bags are mostly used.

Finally, Oue's case illustrates most things about traditional wrapping. His father had chosen a profusely wrapped gift (from the late 1930s), with 5 layers of wrapping materials, to give as *omiyage* as well as to convey to the recipient the 'officialness' of the gift received in Tokyo. The *omiyage* had been kept for nearly 60 years. However, in giving it as '*ageru*' and renouncing property rights over it, there was no further wrapping involved. It was not only that we had a 'close' relationship, in which social forms did not require politeness, but also that the value of a gift did not always depend on the wrapping. In fact, the *miyage* was increased not by being rewrapped but by having consumables added to it.

The final conclusion to this section is that the aspect of consumption of these types of gifts precludes the necessary extinction of wrapping. The presence and absence of wrapping are alike important in conveying the necessary persuasion to make people accept gifts. The value of gifts can be increased by adding wrapping, but also by not using wrapping. However, it is more important to increase the value of gifts by giving small redundant prestations. The value of these gifts also depends not so much on wrapping but on the prestige attached to the prestation,

in particular those prestations which 'bring people together', *sake* and food. The layering of wrapping (which I examine in Chapters Six and Seven) appears important in cases where the giver and recipient share a proximity to centres of power (the town office, business, the household), while layering of wrapping is less important among those people who exchange gifts at the periphery of these centres.

3. Case study: *mochinage* (throwing cakes)

In this section, I want to describe the case of *mochinage* or the throwing of rice cakes. *Mochinage* was one of the most popular forms of communal gift exchange I encountered during fieldwork, involving entire neighbourhoods. *Mochinage* is usually understood to be a kind of exchange that reflects the principles of vertical hierarchy. Cakes are thrown at the completion of buildings. Those who give, usually understood to be the patrons of the event, are placed on a roof or a high place, and those who receive are down (women, dependants, neighbours and children). However, *mochinage*, like gift exchange in general, cannot be reduced to these spatial considerations. In Kamikatsu, cakes are thrown from a high place, but on other occasions *mochi* are thrown horizontally, despite the actual rank differential among givers and recipients. Looking only at the moment of throwing, however, obscures the complex relation between those who produce *mochi* and those who throw it. The aim of this section is to look at this relation.

3.a Mochi

Villagers say that *Mochi* or *mochi* is a humble gift. It is small, it is not expensive, and it is auspicious. Ohnuki-Tierney (1993) describes how rice has

cosmological significance. Raw rice is identified with the *nigitama*, the positive power of divine purity and the origin of the acquisition of wealth. Rice provides sacred energy and power and it is eaten at when people need strength or in stages of regeneration (New Year) (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993: 55-74). *Mochi* is thrown from an elevated position in a replica of the folk belief that fortune falls from heaven (sometimes a shelf). Ohnuki-Tierney also argues that the production of rice, which makes *mochi* possible, is a cosmic exchange between man and deities (ibid.). Unlike metallic currency, rice is viewed as pure. Many authors have argued the problematic of giving 'dirty' currency as gifts, mostly money (Bloch 1989, Webbly 1993). Although Japanese do not have any problem with making gifts of money, currency is nevertheless perceived as somehow 'dirty' (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993: ibid.). As I argued in Chapter 1, Araki (1978) considers wrapping as what 'cleanses' the dirt. I, however, see the wrapping of money as a method of containing the 'dirt', mystifying dirt, allowing dirty things to circulate between people without contaminating the transactors.

To consume *mochi* is said to bring good luck, it is good for the body and one's health (Chapter Four). Throwing *mochi* complements the giving of *sake*. Villagers attach much importance to the pounding or processing of *mochi*. This is team work. *Mochi*-making is hard work and one that requires harmony among those that make it. Children are taught to make *mochi* from an early age at school. It is a process of co-operation that puts most of the ideas of 'hard work' and 'harmony' in circulation. However, these ideas of 'harmony' are not about burying differences. Harmony in these contexts means to decide who are the best pounders and makers of *mochi*, and how *mochi* is usually extracted from the makers and given to others that will throw it. It is a harmony of 'consent' in which the producers of *mochi* give away their rights over the final product and distribution.

Mochi is produced by boiling rice. Once the rice is soft it is put in a pounding mortar (or electric mixer) and pounded with large wooden pestles. The process requires at least one person pounding and another person folding the rice. Once the rice acquires a texture like a dough it is transferred to a table where another team of people cut and fold the rice. *Mochi* is understood to be a folded or wrapped prestation. While folding *mochi* Mieko, a woman in her mid-seventies, said to me:

> 'I will do the *mochi*. The way you do it is, well, not good. You must fold the edges together at the back. You should press them so the *mochi* will not unfold. A good *mochi* is nice and round, one that does not open up'.

As villagers talk about it, *mochi* is a wrapped prestation which is sealed and should not unfold. The goodness and auspiciousness of the prestation depends on the way a *mochi* is folded.

Mochi is one of the few prestations that is never bought in the market. Most *mochi* is produced either by hand at home or with machines owned by Japan Agriculture. These machines can be rented for private *mochi*-making, specially in cases when there are large donations of it. Most of the non-household production goes to Sunday markets for foreigners and city dwellers. Tourists buy *mochi* in the town market, as an expression of 'rural experience'. An entry in my diary reflects:

> Tourists pass with their cars through the town. There is a small shop at the entrance of Kamikatsu. They stop to buy. Tourists contemplate *mochi* pounding eagerly. Shy, a man in his mid-fifties asks to participate. He laughs and pounds with the villagers. He feels 'good' after pounding. He and his wife buy a large supply of *mochi* to take home. For most tourists and villagers, making *mochi* is an experience, as a friend put it, of 'being in contact with nature and the human spirit'.

3.b Mochi for the completition of a new house. Takaishi's case

Takaishi are a prominent family of farmers in Masaki village. I met Mrs. Takaishi and her children at an *eikaiwa* (English teaching) lesson. Though we did not meet very often, they were kind enough to invite me to the ceremony of making their new house. Mrs. Takaishi and I met at the post office by chance. It was the anniversary of the opening of the post-office in Masaki village. The extent to which *mochi* is important was reflected in the prestation given by the post-office to its customers. We were given a plastic box with two auspicious white and pink *mochi* and a calendar. Mrs. Takaishi was on her way to book the large machine for *mochi* making at the JA. She invited me for the following week. A week later, in the JA annexed building I met her and another eight neighbours, her mother and her husband's father. They had been working already for few hours boiling rice. They had paid for the rice as part of their gift as host, although they had received some gifts of money from neighbours to help out with the cost of the event. The room was so steamy it was hard to see. After a brief introduction we started working. We cut and shaped and folded rice. Relations between Takaishi and those helping them were convivial. The women from the neighbourhood who helped making *mochi* had their heads wrapped with white wrapping cloth *tengui* (see picture). As Hendry argues head bands indicate the sacredness of the work being done (Hendry 1993: 82). Takaishi women, however, did not make use of headbands. It is possible to argue that the difference in wrapping suggest a different approach to work. Takaishi owned the production of *mochi*. The rest of women received tea and fruits as 'thanks' for their help. They also participated in catching *mochi*. As I describe below, *mochinage* results in intense competition among neighbours. Thus, these women who worked at the level of equals had, later during *mochinage*, to compete among themselves to 'catch' the *mochi*. All women, alike, however, wore aprons, a plastic glove on their left hands (for cutting *mochi*) and a white glove (for folding). They used

gloves to prevent ‘dirt’. Thus, the *mochi* was clean and apt to be an auspicious prestations (see Chapter Four).

On the day of *tatemae*, several gifts of *sake* arrived at the Takaishi house. Takaishi counted them and left them at the store house. There were over 30 boxes of *sake* from different neighbours, kin and friends of the family. Takaishi’s head, his son, his brother, grandson and the carpenter ascended through the building structure to prepare an altar in the roof (see also Ashkenazi 1985). Takaishi’s wife, his son’s wife, and his son’s wife’s mother prepared the *mochi* in wooden trays and gave them to the men who took it to the roof. The carpenter, also the ritual specialist, prepared the ritual prestations for the deity. From below, none of us had direct access to the ritual in the roof. It was veiled. A Shinto ceremony was celebrated to ward off inauspiciousness. Takaishi offered *sake*, fruits, *sakaki* leaves, and vegetables (7 in total) to the deity, as well as several pieces of *mochi*.

Meanwhile, the men who had helped the carpenter, mostly neighbours and carpenter’s workmates, arrived and sat below the house. Takaishi asked the children to remain inside the *tatemae* (wooden frame) and wait there. Takaishi’s wife waited under the roof of the old house, greeting the women of the neighbourhood. These women waited in the left side of the house, next to the entrance. In total there were over 21 men who had either helped in the construction or given gifts or were neighbours, 15 women and over 15 children (Takaishi’s children’s friends). Women greeted each other. They knew each other very well, having met many times at *mochi* making and *mochi* throwing during the year. They all had their plastic bags ready to carry *mochi* home. They did not greet each other very formally, partly because minutes later they would be competing to catch *mochi*. The *mochi* were given both to ‘thank’ for help and to ‘apologise’ for all the inconvenience that neighbours had to put up during the construction of the house, and to celebrate the auspiciousness of the event. *Mochi*

were given to those who were the 'workforce' (in making the house and making *mochi*). It was a return prestation, 'thanks' and 'compensation' and 'apology' for the appropriation of labour and for their gifts of *sake*.

At the end of the Shinto ritual on the roof, Takaishi, dressed in a smart suit, threw large amounts of sweets to the children inside the *tatemae*. They were placed there for protection, as Takaishi, his son, and his nine-year-old grandson were going to throw large amounts of *mochi*, which were hard and could hurt the children. The children jumped in joy as the sweets fell from above. Children's *suito-nage* (throwing of sweets) shows that it is not *mochi per se* which defines the conditions of auspiciousness, but the action of throwing large quantities of prestations. There were more sweets than they could catch. Their hands and pockets were already full but the sweets continued to fall. Adults were delighted by the sight of happy children. They were also slightly nervous waiting for the *mochi*. Women and men looked for the best place from where to catch *mochi*. Takaishi threw over 30Kg of *mochi*, to the neighbours. Men and women hurried to catch as much they could; all politeness, status or any other consideration were forgotten. They competed with each other to catch more than their neighbours, stealing *mochi* cakes from each other if they could. All was done amid laughter but the pursuit of *mochi* remained frantic.

To conclude *mochinage*, two larger pieces, also given for good luck, were thrown. Those villagers that caught them would be given a bottle of *sake*. Men were now jumping to catch these *mochi*. Finally, Takaishi threw four large pieces of *mochi*, those that were to bring luck to the house. He threw one from each auspicious corner of the house. The fight for catching these four pieces was frantic. Neighbours threw themselves on top of each other. The prestation they caught was then bartered with a bottle of *sake* from Takaishi. One of the lucky men, with the bottle under his arm handled the *mochi* to an elderly lady. Another

man came and emptied his pockets full of *mochi* into my plastic bag. In all *mochinage* parties I went, men always seemed ready to give away (to women and to) me the *mochi* they had fought for.

Takaishi from above looked happily at the multitude catching cakes. As some neighbours said, it was a good *tatemae*, one where much *mochi* had been thrown, one that would bring auspiciousness to the house, and make neighbours happy. As they were leaving, neighbours would ask to each other, in very indirect semiotic ways, how much *mochi* they had. Most people returned home with their bags full, some with more than three kilos of *mochi*. 'Lucky them!' a man said, seeing how little I had got, 'elderly ladies know how to catch *mochi*, they are very fast' he concluded. With these words he gave me all his *mochi*. *Mochi* would last for many weeks and would make daily food more enjoyable and auspicious. Some people left eating *mochi* all the way to their houses.[41]

Plate 4. Three stages of mochinague. Women making mochi.

Plate 4 and 5. Three stages of mochinague. Men throwing mochi.
Neighbours catching (and fighting for) mochi.

From an analytical perspective, the competitive scramble for the cakes indicates political and social competition among those who wish to be seen in the prestigious position of providing for the well-being of their households. Since people believe that *mochi* brings good health and strength, villagers, especially women, fight to have these pieces of prestige food. *Mochi* are important for women because they are one of the few, or perhaps the only auspicious prestation they are able to bring into their households. *Sake* and other ritual prestations are usually part of men's ritual gift exchange. This exchange takes place mostly in the feast that the host offers to the men later in the evening.

The Takaishi women who had produced the *mochi* remained in the periphery of the house, catching some pieces but mostly watching. For Takaishi to achieve

prestige and to create a good atmosphere in their neighbourhood, the task of the women had been crucial. The *mochi* had been appropriated from them, both Takaishi and their in-laws. Through the women, other women in the neighbourhood had been asked to help. Another appropriation had also taken place. The women of the neighbourhood who had helped in making *mochi* had been forced to compete with each other, and the rest of neighbours, to obtain their compensation. The hierarchical relations of 'below-above' were not only manifestations of vertical rank. They hide the process of appropriation between producers and givers, men and women, forcing producers to become recipients and to cede part of their production. Furthermore, the carpenter achieves a position of mutuality denied to the spouse. Patron and carpenter become the ritual pair of the event (this is opposed to the ritual and domestic pair that husband and wife have as apex of the household). This differences become implemented in the later consumption of the gifts during the feast.

After the neighbours' return home, Takaishi would get ready for the feast later in the night. Around eight o'clock all the men who had helped in making the house, and all male close neighbours gathered for the feast. I was the only woman invited. Fish and other delicacies were served. All the bottles of *sake* received as gifts were taken by Takaishi's wife, and unwrapped in the kitchen. The gifts of *sake* were served to all guests. The spatial distribution was very important. In the seat opposite the main door and close to the place where *sake* had been kept, sat Takaishi the household head, his son, the carpenter and Takaishi's brother. Men sat in opposite benches in u-shaped arrangements. The group of men was positioned in opposition to another, guests to host, carpenter to workforce. At the periphery of this arrangement Takaishi's women served the food and drink. The women who had helped in producing the *mochi* were absent.

3.c Mochi for the elders and children at School. The case of the PTA

Early in the morning the PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) and members of the local administration gathered to organize *mochinage* at the school. The money for the rice had been paid out of the PTA/school budget. In teams of twos and threes men and women pounded *mochi*. A father prepared a large pan for making soup for the children's parents. Most women of the neighbourhood started arriving to help in the making of *mochi*. Like in the case of Takaishi, there was no consideration of rank in the working arrangements. All worked according to their skills. Unlike Takaishi's case, politeness was more stressed here. It was used to play down the differences between wives and mothers, and disagreements over how to prepare and who should prepare the *mochi*. A few women, especially those who already took care of preparing gifts and the presentation of events in the municipal office, set to organize the wrapping of *mochi* in boxes, which other women politely declined to do. Gossip was as important as politeness. People

talked about children, their performance at school, their parents, and teachers. The *mochi* pounded outside was moved inside the gymnasium where women had finally set up a production table. One woman folded the *mochi*, another cut it, a group of six women folded it, and finally three more placed it in pink/white combinations, and wrapped it with an irodori leaf, and placed it in a plastic box, covered with a wrapping paper with auspicious designs, and held fast with a rubber band. The boxes were left at the entrance, and Mr. Hiraoka, a PTA member gave a box to each of the families and elders attending the event. After making the *mochi* and soup, all the families and children were gathered inside the hall. The headmaster of the school and the teachers, members of the board of education and the PTA sat in a lateral area, with parents at the back of the room and children in between. A long ceremony took place to bid farewell to the school winter semester, and thank everybody for their participation. During the ceremony strict etiquette was observed and polite language was used. Rank was defined by the spatial organisation, with those of higher rank, being furthest from the main door, and teachers and the PTA forming a 'wrapping' layer of people around.

After the ceremony everybody relaxed and positions changed. Children, parents, and PTA members mingled together waiting for the *mochi* to fall. From the roof, the head of the PTA and the headmaster began to throw the *mochi*. They form another symbolic pair. The children, elders and parents all ran to catch *mochi*. The production of *mochi* was not as large as in Takaishi's case, but large enough for each family to go home with an average of half a kilo of *mochi*. Parent's and children's contribution to 'make the school' was rewarded with *mochi*. The throwing of *mochi*, as in Takaishi's case, was used to define the limits of the participation and the making of the community. The differences in *mochinage* reflect the differences in the definition of what is the community in each case.

At the school, soup was given to all families. The giving of soup was a small replica of the feast that takes place on other occasions instead of *sake*. Everybody sat on a large blue mat. Those who had thrown the cakes, some senior teachers and the headmaster, left while parents looked for a place to eat with their children. Unlike Takaishi's case, recipients did not partake with the hosts, nor gifts were allowed between parents and teachers or headmaster during the year. The channels for negotiation of their community are different. At the school most of the givers were absent. Women participated in the feast, as well as men.

Plate 6. Children learning to make mochi with the help of their parents and teachers.

Plate 7. Parents and children eating mochi and lunch, after being thrown.

With the two cases of *mochi* here I want to emphasise the process from the appropriation of gifts by patrons or figures of authority, to the consumption of gifts. The cases of *mochinage* seem to indicate that when figures of authority are present, women tend to be excluded from the public consumption of ritual prestations. When seniors/ patrons indicate the renunciation of prestige by leaving (or remaining peripheral), women have a much greater participation in public affairs. It is also possible to see how the pair of patron/ritual specialist substitutes for the domestic pair of husband/wife. This substitution also takes place at autumn festivals (see Chapter Five). Throwing *mochi*, in the two types of *mochinage* here, have different political implications depending on how givers and recipients imagine their community to be. Those who are the patrons have different positions of rank and renunciation. Their differences in production, distribution and consumption are to a certain extent 'creative responses' to their different needs as different communities.

I will argue that it is through the appropriation of *mochi* that patrons achieve their status and prestige as auspicious givers. The giver is presented as transforming the production of *mochi* into an auspicious food during the ritual of giving. The relation between giver and recipient might be represented vertically as well as horizontally when giving. There are several cases of *mochinage* at festivals where the donor is not placed in an elevated position. Relations between villagers before and after giving (during the production and during consumption) are quite void of the resonances of oppositional rank that are present at the moment of throwing. The community of villagers, usually compliant, helpful and attentive to their fellows, turn their backs on their neighbours in seeking individual, household, and gender profit. Neighbours are not those who live nearby, but those who compete with each other to gain the auspicious prestations thrown by whoever happens to be the patron of that occasion. Political power is achieved by becoming a patron. However, for a patron to be able to be a generous

and good provider of auspiciousness, he must have people (women) who will renounce (or be excluded from) throwing. This is reflected in the statement made by Takaishi's wife:

> 'My house is very traditional. When it comes to throwing gifts, it is only my husband's father, husbands' father brother, my husband, and my son that can do it. My daughter is very disappointed. She also wants to go to the roof and throw cakes to all neighbours. But she cannot. We have spent three days making the cakes but she cannot throw them. She does not understand why. It is not her place my 'in-law' says. I think it is not fair, but they are very traditional'.

Since both men and women work on equal terms in the production and domestic maintenance of a house, this exclusion has its consequences. The relation that each household has to the outside and the economic contracts it has with its neighbours are veiled. Women appear to voluntarily give their labour and market contracts, whereby commodities are obtained and generously given to their husbands and to the household.

Although *mochi* receives less ethnographic attention than wrapped gifts, the production of *mochi* tells us about important gender differences that remain less clear in other types of gift exchange. It also informs us of the relation between those who produce *mochi* and those who throw it as one of appropriation. The lack of ethnographic descriptions of the production and giving of *mochi* also reveals the pre-eminence that the exchange of wrapped gifts (usually commodities) has for most Japanese.

Cases in which women are patrons of events are rare. The only cases I assisted at, in which women took the role of patron of events, were in Tokushima city among women's groups such as English conversation classes. On these occasions patrons 'threw' cakes by means of giving large amounts of cakes, food and farewell gifts as parties. The host on these occasions, however, participated in the

feast and received many *orei* gifts in return weeks later. Prestations were bought in the market with the women's money.

3.d Wrapping mochi

When looking at *mochinage* ceremonies, the differences in wrapping *mochi* appear very important. The *mochi* to be thrown to the parents (including those who helped to make it) was wrapped in plastic bags; the *mochi* to be offered to the deity and neighbours was not. Takaishi had doubts about wrapping *mochi*. She argued:

> In the past, *mochi* was always thrown without any plastic. People pick it up from the floor and eat it. Now some people are concerned about dirt and use plastic bags. When we finish our house we might throw *mochi* in plastic bags because we care about what people may think. But we will not wrap the most important *mochi*. The big pieces, to bring good luck, will be thrown just like this with nothing else.

During recent years the idea that ritual prestations become polluted has appeared. Although 'dirt' is viewed by villagers as a physical substance, it also has symbolic meaning. Men and women at different stages must ensure that *mochi* will be 'clean', hence the use of gloves and the use of ritual specialists. When villagers speak about 'dirt', they speak of the unwanted qualities that affect things and people. Dirt, however, is not physical. It is a symbol for the existence of an 'outside' that manages to enter social life. I will argue that as Bloch and Parry (1989) have shown, 'dirt' comes as a result of the presence of strong market capitalist relations. Villagers wrap things to symbolically prevent 'the market' from coming 'in'. Once wrapped, things are imagined to be 'protected' from this aggressive agent. Villagers in paying for the use of machinery to make *mochi*, and other contractual relations, move out of the domestic sphere. As Dore argues, one source of difficulty in village relations is the mixing of neighbourly relations

with economic contractual relations: 'Neither a borrower nor a lender be – nor a buyer and seller' (Dore 1978: 268). 'Dirt' appears as a consequence of mixing these two sources. When 'dirt' appears, so does wrapping (hands, heads, food). With the wrapping of things (people and parts of the body) they represent their community as if it was 'untouched', a sphere of social life which is not alienated with the market, and where gifts *and* commodities are not alienated either.

I will insist throughout this thesis that wrapping is related to the idea that capitalist relations have introduced 'dirt'. The market is viewed as a form of symbolic 'danger', namely the alienation of objects, people and their production. The idea that something can be polluting is quite problematic for Japanese (see Chapter Four), thus they must do something to the market to remove the impression that it is polluting. The more the presence of the symbolic dirt created by market, the more the wrapping. This has important consequences for the understanding of gifts and commodities. When wrapping is applied, the final product is not only 'protected' but it stands for the personality of a personalised (as opposed to alienated) object. In capitalist societies, a wrapped gift, stands in opposition to the market (and the alienation of things). The differences in wrapping in capitalist societies tell us about different conceptions of alienation and differences in the production of objects for consumption. Wrapping can also be used to 'extract' things from the market, that is to 'mystify' things from the market, and to 'mystify' the presence of the market. I examine these themes in detail in Chapter Six.

Mochi, like all forms of wrapped gifts, is usually re-wrapped. The second layer (or plastic bag) protects the *mochi* from symbolic 'dirt' and mystifies the market, too. The wrapping, especially if it seals the prestation, or if the prestation is a self-sealing one, creates the illusion that the prestation is inalienable, the object is not only good but auspicious, it stands for all the 'sacred' qualities of things that

would exist without market. However, consumption requires that wrapping must be removed first. The case of *mochi* is simple, because although it is a wrapped prestation it is a self-sealing one. It can be consumed without having to be unwrapped. Wrapping can never be removed from *mochi*, making it sacred, suitable for exchange between people and with deities. Why is it then re-wrapped again, and why is there more 'dirt' nowadays? *Mochi* must be produced, rice must be bought, it must be boiled and elaborated. *Mochinage* implies a large throwing of *mochi* and requires people to do it, machinery, and money. The production of *mochi* is complex because a house depends on others to help to do it. Those who help in the production are not paid. They will, however, receive *mochi* later. *Mochi* here is not symbolic 'money', but symbolic 'wages' they have to fight to get. The patron is neither a borrower nor a lender, nor a buyer nor a seller. Although a patron in *mochinage* always aims to transcend the relations that can be acquired with contracts, villagers live in a society where their relations are also marked by contract and the market. The tension is, however, a product of the existence of such a market, and the preoccupation with 'dirt' reflects it. *Mochi* is a wrapped prestation but it must be re-wrapped, because in recent years, there is more 'dirt' that affects *mochi*. People's concerns with 'dirt' reflect their concern with the growing alienation of many aspects of their society, the breakdown of relations with neighbours, the power of central administrations and so on.

I will argue in Chapter Four, however, that 'dirt' is a concept that cannot be reduced to notions of 'pollution'. The market is not a polluting force as is in the case in western societies (Bloch and Parry 1989: 2). In Japan, the market can be seen as an agent of both, prosperity and misfortune. It would be more correct to say that people's concerns with 'dirt' reflect a growing alienation that comes as a result, not of the market being 'negative' or evil, but of the market having inauspicious qualities.

4.Conclusions

My aim in this chapter has been to make explicit the extent to which the process of living together and the process of giving gifts are inextricably related and constitute the main conditions for defining the relations among households and the classification of gifts. I have shown how the villagers' dealings with gifts within their immediate groupings is a carefully measured statement of the interference, coercion, and power that individuals manage to convey or to execute upon others. Looking at the classification of gifts, my ethnography shows how villagers have ways of negotiating such coercion and power by re-classifying each prestation, and thus manipulating the actual and symbolic value of gifts. The villagers' capacity to organize the production of ritual prestations is contrasted with their attitude to give and coerce others to accept prestations and fight for them. In the following chapters I attempt to analyse the structural relation between prestations, that is the generic links between those prestations that have a character of contingency in their production, distribution and consumption.

It is important to highlight that villagers' ideas about their life in common and about their relations to other groups and to institutions, are permeated by a kind of non-discursive attitude, in which things are discussed, not through elaborate verbal manifestations, but through manifestations of pragmatism, value, symbolism and aesthetic reifications experienced through gift giving. This was my experience in the field. During my period in Kamikatsu, villagers very rarely exchanged other things than gifts verbally or even semiotically. The town was made out of constant meetings and gatherings, tedious, rhetoric, sometimes irrelevant to other matters, where what mattered was not what was being said but what prestations were offered and by whom, how to evaluate them, and whether to accept them or not. Villagers appeared to spend most of their time worrying about the gifts they should give and return, or about the prestations they should

make and give, whether to wrap them and how to convince others to accept them. Hendry describes how words 'envelope' meetings among people as a form of wrapping (1993: 53). She points to the idea that direct and indirect communication is what wraps human relations. She extends the metaphor of wrapping to explain the nature of communication itself. People do not always talk. They communicate feelings and sanctions to others through indirect communication, one of which is 'wrapping'. By wrapping she means the enveloping of words and actions with polite words or body movements. However, gift exchange constitutes a basis of reference for which wrapping is meaningful, and without which wrapping can not be fully understood. Thus, it is alongside descriptions of exchange that wrapping emerges in this thesis. This thesis is based on the understanding that it is necessary to acknowledge the radical transformations and uncertainty of social outcomes in the life of the villagers of Kamikatsu. Examples of the fragility of villagers' adaptations to the fast and changeable demands of Japanese society can be observed throughout the pages that follow. The case of *mochi* shows how similar ways of giving can be used to define different aspects of community making and how power is negotiated. The political implications for *mochi* are very important for understanding the making of a neighbourhood. The very subject of this thesis, the villagers' understanding of gifts and wrapping, illustrates in many ways the complexities of their constant reformulation of their identity and community and how these affect their use and understanding of gifts. An important issue has emerged when looking at gift exchange: the character of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness that forces people to make prestations. It is because patrons want to ward off inauspiciousness and attract auspiciousness that they engage in these complex episodes of making and throwing prestations. Chapter Four examines the cultural construction of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness that is central to gift giving.

Chapter 4

Ways of knowing about auspiciousness and inauspiciousness

In this chapter I look at how ideas of pollution, good and bad fortune, and evil are an essential contribution to villagers' views about what gifts are for and how they should be presented. Yanagita (1975) and other folklorists have shown the importance these themes have for the Japanese (see Svastos [1999] for a critique of the folklorist approach). My analysis considers what Raheja (1988) has outlined for the case of Indian gifts, the idea that inauspiciousness and pollution are terms that presuppose different ritual and political principles, the former being much more taken for granted and just as crucial as the latter (Raheja 1988: 35-36). In this chapter I begin by addressing the issue of how to theorise the notion of the presentation of gifts. I examine the theme of auspicious and inauspicious presentation as a key preoccupation for the villagers, and for theoretical works on Japanese society.

1. Inauspiciousness and pollution

'Having just returned from a funeral, Oue San, one of my neighbours, prevented me from coming into her house. She said: "You must sprinkle salt around the house when you come back from a funeral. (Funerals are *kegare*, polluting). With these words, she opened a sachet of salt in a white and dark blue envelope. Starting from the entrance front, Mrs. Oue threw salt around the perimeter of the house, and on herself before coming into her house. '…At funerals, the family of the deceased must provide salt for all people who bring gifts of *koden* (incense money). We give *koden* to help them to pay the priest's fees. They give us *okaeshi* (return gift) to thank us for *koden*. In the past, after the ceremony, the priest would throw salt at you. You would return home and take some salt from your own house and put some in each corner and around the

house to keep bad things away. Now they do not do that any more. The bereaved gives us a sachet of salt with the *okaeshi* gift.[42] (…) Inside the house and after unwrapping the *okaeshi* gifts. Oue elaborated on the sadness she felt: "when someone dies in your family, you are cut off from the rest, you cannot go to *medetai* (fortunate, auspicious) events. Our neighbours (the bereaved family) took care of the Shrine, but this coming year they cannot enter the Shrine until **it** is over (meaning until *kegare* 'pollution' has been removed from the deceased's house with the departure of the deceased soul), it is really sad (*kanashii*). When my elder brother died three years ago, we had to send letters to everybody to inform them and ask them not send *medetai* gifts and cards at New Year. The house was *kanashii*, [43] and we could not go to festivals, or receive *medetai* (auspicious) gifts and cards.

The Japanese case of funeral gifts embodies one of the key analytical dilemmas of the literature on gift exchange: the extent to which ritual actions involving the giving of prestations are related to pollution concerns. Although pollution has been a relevant subject in anthropology since Mary Douglas's work (1966, 1992), only recently have anthropological debates considered the idea that the relevance of this concept hides the importance of other fundamental organising principles such as inauspiciousness. Raheja (1988, 1994) argues that the problem of gift exchange is not a problem about pollution in gifts, but one that confuses supernatural pollution with ideas about inauspiciousness. Such confusion is responsible for a serious misunderstanding of the political relations between givers and recipients, usually reduced to a mere vertical hierarchy (Raheja 1988: 152). Raheja's argument introduces a new and complex piece of analytical distinction between 'pollution' and 'inauspiciousness' as two different cultural categories, each underlying a different political strategy. Her distinction is not just a matter of ethnographic perception. I would argue with her that the debate on pollution and its relation to return gifts-cum-hierarchy seem to reproduce a vicious circle because the primacy of pollution has not been sufficiently questioned. Anthropological preoccupation with pollution has served to obscure the differences between it and inauspiciousness, expressed by Raheja's notion of poison. The latter is, after all, one of the two elements that Mauss described as crucial in the formation of relations of hospitality and the obligation to

reciprocate, and it is not necessarily the same as pollution. The distinction between inauspicious and polluting requires a difficult mental exercise because, as Raheja explains, there are other ways to interpret the relation of gift exchange than as one of hierarchy of clean/ unclean givers, recipients and gifts. She argues that in order to escape the circularity of the argument of hierarchy as being contingent on pollution or return gifts, it is necessary to focus on how relations between givers and recipients are viewed and organised in particular contexts without assuming that they are everywhere structured by the fact of a hierarchical ordering (Raheja 1988: 33-155). Tangentially, it could be possible to argue that the problem behind the distinction of pollution and inauspiciousness is what Bloch calls a problem of cognition:

> 'People are always prompted to dismiss the more familiar images of their culture, the knowledge of which is well known but not in an explicit verbalised way and which is transformed when put into words' (Bloch 1996: 6-10).

As anthropologists we should be concerned with 'how culturally specific knowledge is produced out of universal predisposition' (ibid.: 4). What Bloch seems to argue is that we have to be aware that although such knowledge, in the case of pollution, is important as a building block for understanding a 'culture'. It is important because it is one of the topics that first comes to the attention of anthropologists and informants. Other topics are likely to remain less obvious.

Recent works in the study of Japanese funerals have also cast some doubts on these ideas. As Bachnick suggests, 'ancestors constitute relationships rather than a 'belief system'. She detects an ambivalence in rituals surrounding death:

> 'This ambivalence finds expression in the possibility that the deceased will not become an ancestor, because he/she will not 'go from' the *ie*. This possibility is expressed in terms of the deceased never beginning the 'journey', but remaining near the scene of death. Such spirits are viewed as ambivalent (in fact ambivalence is what they represent), and potentially dangerous they may posses and afflict the living (Bachnick 1986: 115).

In her description Bachnick underlines the basic idea, that it is not pollution but the contingent character of inauspiciousness, the criticality and danger of all conditions that do not move over a ‘new beginning’, that most native narratives emphasise. Although she does elaborate on the importance of the ritual prestations given at funerals, it will be clear in this work that it is the set of ritual prestations given by neighbours, by kin to the deceased to expel him/her out of the house, that are the crucial element in passing over, and setting the *ie* free of the danger of keeping an ambivalent - what I call inauspicious - spirit, or Bachnick’s *muenbotoke* (those without a relationship). There is thus strong evidence to suggest that inauspiciousness is viewed as a condition where the self cannot establish a relationship with sources of strength like the household, kin, neighbours, food and wrapping, rather than as a mere contingency of supernatural pollution. It is the set of ritual practices around the giving and returning of gifts rather than the ideological concern with pollution, that to my understanding constitutes what Bachnick calls ‘pragmatic meaning’, the form of knowledge people use to think about social relations (Bachnick 1986: 108-114).

Once the ethnographic evidence is taken into account two main theoretical questions emerge. First, it becomes necessary to question the validity of treating the concept of pollution as the key element of cross-cultural comparison in the study of gift exchange. The material from Kamikatsu in this chapter gives a good illustration of how, although the villagers of Kamikatsu provide explanations about how certain prestations (i.e. of salt, clothes, paper) are good for dealing with pollution, it is really not possible to say that people accept gifts in view of their ritual efficacy in not spreading pollution. Our understanding of wrapping should not be reduced to the problem of dirt and pollution. I will argue through this chapter that the villagers’ understandings of gifts are based on a double principle. First, that certain ritual actions, wrapping, and prestations (usually unwrapped) are said to remove and ward off supernatural pollution, while more

implicitly other prestations (those conceptualised as 'useful' or 'helpful') are the main vehicle, recipient, through which auspiciousness and inauspiciousness circulate or return to impinge on the political relation between givers and recipients.

1.a Pollution, poison and funeral gifts

Kegare or supernatural pollution[44] is something that people acquire by participation in post-mortem rituals. *Kegare* is believed to be dangerous and it must be averted from entering the inside of a house (*uchi*). This is done by 'purifying' oneself and by tracing a protective boundary around the house, in the ritual throwing of salt. The idea of pollution also comprises physical dirt, sickness, and to some extent crime, uncivil behaviour and sins (Kodansha 1993). As Oue's case shows, pollution is not a 'substance'. It is a 'time process of contamination' that affects people while they are trying to break off relations with the deceased and the sick body, which is the sources of contamination. In the local perceptions of this process, isolation of the bereaved and the sick is the method imposed to 'contain' such contamination. The relation among auspicious/inauspicious occasions, prestations, and pollution is one of mutual exclusion. Whatever is polluting must be warded off from auspicious prestations and sacred recipients and vice-versa. This is reflected in a note from my field diary:

> This morning I went to the festival in the neighbourhood of Oue, one of my friends and informant. The festival, compared with those in larger neighbourhoods and villages, was small. We were nine houses altogether. I helped to brush while the men cleaned the Shrine, set up the banners and wrapped the Shrine. The *toya* arrived with the prestations of food to be offered to the deity. Everybody was in high spirits, happy and in a mood for congratulations. We were sitting opposite the prestations when the *kannushi* arrived. He took the prestations out of the boxes and showed the men around how to place them into the trays. I took a few fruits to set on a tray, under a leaf of white paper, when the *kannushi* asked the men something. Everybody stopped talking and turned to look at me while the *kannushi* was speaking to my host. The tension was

> palpable. My host casually asked '*Are you mens*?' It took me a few seconds to realise he was asking if I was menstruating. Since I was not I told him so, and everything resumed as before. The *kannushi* turned to me, and making a small purification gesture said that since I was not, I could touch the prestations. Blood was *kegare*, and it should not be brought into contact with a deity. (…) Later in the week I became a *mikoshigirl* (woman who carriers the portable Shrine). At the reception hall of the village, while we changed into 'happy' clothes, a woman gave us a wrapped sachet of salt. She would not give us any explanation, and everybody probably knew the reason. She refused to talk about it (it would bring bad luck to discuss such things). Later I verified that she had been given salt by the *kannushi*, to remove any pollution in case we were menstruating, or affected by any pollution we did not know about.

Villagers here, unlike in the cases of funeral gifts in N. India in Raheja's work, do not question in an explicit manner if pollution is returned with the gifts, or if it affects those that enter in to contact with the deceased family through gift giving. Moraes in 1916 (Published 1979) argued that the custom in Tokushima was to send flowers 'and other presents'. The return gift: 'is supposed to have come from the dead, or, rather to say, from his spirit, the gift will be covered with white paper on which the name of the donor is written. This is the first public action of the ascended spirit in his relation with earth' (Moraes 1979: 107). Villagers of Kamikatsu do not make explicit any connection between the return gift and the deceased person. There is indication though, from their actions of using salt, that they believe that pollution can move and can enter the house (or a Shrine). Since it is an aspect of relations rather than a core of beliefs villagers use to give meaning to their actions, it is possible to argue that it is the gifts that make the connection between the afflicted house and others. The fact that it is the gift which carries the 'poison' can be seen in the action of 'sending the gifts'. One of the practices at funerals is for those who are less close to the deceased and who cannot assist at the funeral, to send their wrapped gifts through a representative. This is very common among workmates. At work, each person who knew the deceased makes an envelope of money and gives it with the rest of the envelopes to a representative who takes it to the house. The representative is given as many return gifts as there were envelopes, each of them containing salt. On these

occasions the recipient throws the salt through the window and on him/herself, as one would do coming out of a funeral. Gifts, then, become vehicles of transmission of the poison that exists because of the existence of a dead person.[45] The important aspect of these gifts is that the gift, as I elaborate, helps to pay for the rituals. The function of these rituals is mostly to 'remove the deceased' and to 'show him or her the way out'. Many wrapping papers, some with a finger pointing the way out, are put around the deceased's house, indicating the way for the soul to go. The gift then helps to break off the connections, and it is the return gifts which reconnect individuals to those around who have helped. While the deceased is the source of pollution, like menstruation in festivals, what the gifts create is not pollution but *inauspiciousness*. The poison or inauspiciousness that gifts cause to circulate is of a different nature. The inauspiciousness it causes can not be resolved by throwing salt or other purification rituals. Villagers differentiate between the pollution acquired by contact with the deceased, and the 'poison' that return gifts create. They also distinguish between the pollution created by the presence of a corpse and the inauspiciousness generated in these circumstances. The poison that it creates it is of an 'economic' nature. The gifts returned are usually redundant and their prices escalate according to rank. Two men argued:

> '*okaeshi* (return gifts) are a problem. They are an expression of thanks, and people give back depending on rank, but we shouldn't send gifts based on price and quality'. 'When someone is in the most unfortunate situation he/she is exhausted both physically and mentally. So at that time we should have more sympathy with them without pressure (of having to return and calculate the suitable return)'.

They all agreed that gifts helped people to connect with each other, but that such connections were too based on price and status, thus making the gifts redundant and meaningless, or, as most saw it, a 'fight for status', for showing that one can give more than their neighbours. In a dramatic sense, gifts at funeral occasions are not about pollution, which the ritual specialist deals with, but about

the poisons of rank and redundancy and the inauspiciousness, the physical and mental sadness people experience.

2. Auspicious, inauspicious: definitions and gifts

The most colloquial references to auspiciousness and inauspiciousness are *medetai* and *kanashii*, happiness and sadness respectively. These terms make reference to the conditions of fortune and misfortune that affect people during the course of their lives. Being ‘happy’ or being ‘sad’ are not only emotional states but also culturally constructed perceptions of the physical conditions that make it possible for an individual to participate in social life or be excluded from it. This construction is made through discourses of how the body and spirit are ‘strong’, ‘healthy’ or ‘depressed’. These discourses and the construction of states of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness happen through the ritual giving and ritual consumption of prestations that ‘make the body’, that is give strength and health, and thus provide happiness and good fortune. These prestations are always the same for auspicious and inauspicious circumstances: money, rice, *sake*, cloths. The ritual action of giving is complemented with the ritual action of wrapping. Wrapping the body, on sad and happy, occasions constructs the body as an auspicious vessel of the prestations that are given. As I illustrate in these sections, wrapping constitutes the ritual action which constructs the body and spirit of people as ‘related’ to others or ‘without relations’ to whom prestations are given to ward off inauspiciousness or bring auspiciousness.

To talk about *medetai* and *kanashii* means, primordially, to talk about representations of fortune and misfortune through gift exchange. In villagers’ understandings the distinction between auspicious and inauspicious is viewed as the logical consequence of moving over critical times, and ‘from an end to new

beginning', and of the gifts given to remove the criticality of such times. The best example of this kind is *setsubun*.

On *setsubun*, the eve of the winter solstice, Japanese throw raw beans to a masked evil spirit, a neighbour or relative, who threatens to enter the house and bring bad luck. When throwing the prestations, the people chant '*fuku uchi, oni soto'* (fortune come in, evils out). The evil spirit also throws beans, which are then consumed by those in the household. The beans are said to be 'good for the health' and to 'bring luck', and people hurry to catch them and eat them for good fortune. To my observations, the masked evil is a form of carnival coercion by those in a neighbourhood to exercise control upon the moral qualities of individuals: their capacity to work and produce prestations. In Kamikatsu the masked evil, enacted by the elders, is expelled with the raw beans which the evil uses to return and hit those in the household. The children or recipients usually wear a mask of *otafuku* or a fortune woman with a red, healthy appearance, signifying the structural opposition and complementarity of the recipient and giver. The ritual throwing is complemented by fighting to catch and consume. The evil is unmasked with the throwing of prestations, and it goes away.

This idea that 'throwing out' is a ritual action that provides auspiciousness and wards off inauspiciousness (weakness, evil, laziness, sickness, bad luck) from affecting the self and the house is perhaps the most pervasive idea behind ritual actions of 'throwing' in Kamikatsu (see also Hendry 1999). This form of throwing complements the throwing of rice cakes (Chapter Three). However, there is a crucial difference between the two. From a structuralist position, following Lévi-Straus (1969), the raw (beans), is opposed to the cooked (cakes). This opposition is reflected in the role actors take in throwing the cakes and beans. Beans are thrown in a way that assumes giver and recipient are equal, where both transform and coerce each other to give and consume prestations and

moral qualities. Cakes symbolise a wrapped prestation. They are folded. On the other hand raw beans are never wrapped. The structural symbology of Lévi-Strauss, by which raw beans account for the regeneration of plants in spring, thus 'nature', while cakes reflect the 'cultural' transformation of rice, has no value here. Raw beans do not merely represent 'the natural', and equality among neighbours, and cakes cannot be reduced to 'cultural' and hierarchy. The relation between the two is more complex. The 'natural' and 'equality' in *setsubun* is a carnival transformation of actual relations of dependence, and evil is disguised evil. This is perhaps more obvious in the national versions of *setsubun* where pop stars and politicians throw raw beans to people from 'high' stands, and where masks are only used symbolically rather than metonymically, or not used at all; and where there is no reciprocal action of throwing. *Setsubun* and *mochinage*, throwing cakes, are two representations of the theme of throwing to achieve auspiciousness while warding off inauspiciousness, but their difference lies in how *mochi* and beans are produced. Beans are obtained by the household, as part of their 'subsistence' production. *Mochi*, in Kamikatsu, are produced by the collective of neighbours who celebrate the event, but they are usually appropriated by those who throw them.

The classification of fortune and misfortune exemplified in *setsubun* is both lineal and circular. It provides individuals with a sense of continuity of prosperity throughout a lifetime and through crises. To the observer, the idea of auspiciousness or inauspiciousness seems a fluid relation of time and events rather than a dichotomy. From an analytical position, the notions of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness appear to be categories of the supernatural and the natural:[46] they encompass understandings about relations with growing, being healthy and lucky, maturing, being old, dying and returning as a deity after death. However, they are more than categories of the natural and the supernatural. They are made up of culturally specific ideas about gifts. They are culturally

constructed ideas about gifts and how they bring auspiciousness. The distinction and oppositionality of auspiciousness/inauspiciousness are only analytical: the villagers only use them to specify the boundary, the criticality of certain ages, seasons, and roles: the gifts they must give to move along this process. When villagers speak of happiness or sadness, they speak of one single episode, that of giving prestations to achieve the continuity of the main units of social reproduction: the body and the self, the household and the neighbourhood (or any larger grouping of households). They do not implement an analytical difference between the two concepts. I use Bachnick's idea that these episodes are better called 'organisational dynamics' that give meaning to rituals (Bachnick 1986: 138 and 1994). My difference with Bachnick's approach lies in the fact that I see gift exchange as the main 'organisational dynamic' of the process of moving from end to beginning.

2.a Sources of auspiciousness: medetai

The words that define auspiciousness, *medetai* and *omedetou gozaimasu*, occur as adjectives meaning 'happiness' and they indicate the positive qualities associated with the outcome of auspiciousness, that is fortune, physical strength, good health, good marriages and vitality. During a festival I asked Tomaru san about auspicious, or what he calls 'happy' *medetai*…

> '*Medetai* is happy, the clothes are *medetai*, the colours, the papers, the fireworks, the *sake*…yes, *medetai* are all these things. *Medetai* is giving things to make people happy, and the food as well. We have *medetai* music, and the dancing of the *mikoshi* is also *medetai*. We do not talk of *kanashii*, sad and inauspicious things, during a *medetai* event. It would bring bad luck'.

Other terms associated with 'goodness', in particular *umai*, the adjectival form of *umaku*, also occur in daily talk to refer to the achievement of well-being and

food given as a prestation. *Medetai* is most frequently used in the honorific construction of the interjection '*omedetou gozaimasu'*. *Omedetou gozaimasu* is usually translated in English as congratulations, although its meaning as a derivative of *medetai* encompasses more than the English idea of congratulations. *Omedetou* is an indispensable clause for the introduction of ritual episodes, to initiate the giving of gifts, and to conclude the ritual of gift exchange. Most villagers describe '*omedetou gozaimasu*' as Hendry's idea of 'verbal wrapping' (Hendry 1993); without the saying of *omedetou*, the presentation of gifts and events is 'naked'. This concept of nakedness is intertwined with the concept of the criticality of a beginning. *Medetai* clothes are complementary to auspicious words. They are used to wrap the body of people on the occasions on which they experience the maturity and growing of their identity, the critical ages in which they move from one stage of maturity to the next (see Chapter One). These clothes are always referred to as *medetai* and have one or more of the colours and symbols considered auspicious. Papers imprinted with auspicious symbols and in combinations of auspicious colours are also elaborated as *medetai* and they are complementary to the gifts usually wrapped in them. *Medetai* is also elaborated upon in the written words on the papers and clothes. *Medetai* is specially elaborated in the ideographic sense of *saiwai*, future happiness. The term *saiwai* occurs as a noun, and it is mainly painted at the top of wrapping papers for gifts, either on its own or in combination with *koufuku* (happiness) or with *koun* (good fortune) on amulets and divination papers that people obtain in temples when they seek consultations about fortune (Swanger 1981). The references are thus polysemic and incorporate a strong association between auspiciousness, fortune and good luck.

2.b Sources of inauspiciousness: Imikotoba, yakudoshi, katagae,and other perceptions of inauspiciousness

References to inauspiciousness appear in discourses concerning taboo words (*imikotoba*). These are usually related to Buddhist practices in the contexts of funerals. The word *kegare*, 'pollution from death and blood',[47] and the word *hotoke*, Buddha, are taboo in Shinto ceremonies. Homophone associations to numbers nine and four, which sound like the word for painful (*kyu*) and death (*shi*) respectively also occur as *imikotoba*, called *imikazu*; actions that mimic funeral movements are also sanctioned. Japanese spend much time counting and calculating as ways of forecasting and defining auspicious and inauspicious occasions. This is not mere superstitious attachment to numbers. Crump (1993: 2) following Geertz (1973) has argued that these calculations provide 'internal models of reality', involving specific cultural patterns that guide meaning in daily life. Numbers, which are the base for the phonetic associations of auspicious and inauspicious names and words, are metonyms, they reflect some attribute of the thing they reflect. References to misfortune, *fuun*, are made through reference to unfavourable numerical associations. References to *yaku*, misfortune, appear in discourses concerning unlucky years (*yakudoshi*) (Lewis 1986). Unlucky years are said to affect men and women twice in life, making the individual more vulnerable to external influences, illness, bad luck and so on. The *yakudoshi* years are for Kamikatsu, 25 and 42 for men and 19 and 33 for women. They last the whole year. The years before are known as *maeyoshi*. The years before and after a *yakudoshi* are perceived as potentially unlucky or critical years. The ages of 42 and 33 are perceived as the most critical of all. There are also two other critical years, 61 and 70, which some people believe to be *yakudoshi* while others do not. During *yakudoshi* there is a strict observance of visiting temples and acquiring adequate amulets for protection and to ward off evil, with petitions to deities known as *gankake*. Like all observances against misfortune, they start with the making of prestations of folded papers to deities and finish with a celebration

of longevity in the form of festivals, when auspicious foods are given to the *yakudoshi* people to mark the end of the crises. In general, *yakudoshi* are perceived as '*shikata ga nai'* (things that can't be helped). All misfortune during the year is blamed on them and people are advised not to start a new business at that time.

Inauspiciousness also affects places and directions. *Katagae* or taboo directions happen during the procession of ritual offer in of food and gifts to the deity at harvest festivals. I consider this more extensively in Chapter Five. References to inauspicious animals, are ethnographically common in other parts of Japan (see Ohnuki-Tierney's (1987) concern with monkeys). The animal which is perceived as 'dangerous' and evil in Kamikatsu is the *tanuki* or racoon dog. Representations of *tanuki*, pictographic references, statuettes in parks, grafitti in roads, and statuettes at entrances to houses are many, and they are used as 'charm', or 'talisman'. Again, as in *setsubun*, auspiciousness and inauspiciousness are not opposed but related. The basis of the relation is the 'domestication' of the racoon dog, like the domestication of the individuals that are lazy and evil in *setsubun*.

Misfortune is also associated with crossroads and bridges. Powerful *kami* are said to inhabit rivers and crossroads in mountain passes. A passage from a field note reflects this:

> There are two statuettes of a guardian *kami*, each in one of the main bridges in town. The two different statuettes are both said to have been found in the river. They are placed at strategic points on the bridge, one on its left, the other in the middle to protect both sides from evil. These statuettes are protective, but also are extremely powerful. Mr. Oue says that the one in Fukuhara village is so powerful that it causes misfortune if one looks directly into the eyes of the *kami* from the other side of the river. Weekly donations are made to these deities by a few elderly women who live nearby, in the form of milk, shoyu, coins and rice to sooth its power. Members of temples, or neighbours close to the liminal places mentioned usually organise rituals of giving to the deities for the protection of bridges, and collect the donations once or twice a year. The Buddhist ritual that I observed on my first visit to Kamikatsu next to the river was to 'smooth' the guardian. Two elderly women held it. They were from the house

directly opposite to it, at the other side of the river. The donations to these statuettes were of the same kind, rice, coins, milk, *sake,* as those found in the temples.

The same concern is applied to crossroads and dangerous spots in mountains. Statuettes of *kami* are erected in these places, to sooth the mountain *kami* that controls the sliding of mountains, the falling of rocks and trees, woodfires and floods. Boundaries between the marginal places at the periphery of temples, usually geographically determined by a meeting between a river and the entrance into the woods, define the most inauspicious location for a house to be built.

As well as sources of inauspiciousness, there are also inauspicious mythological beings. Evil spirit*, oni,* is an ambiguous category that defines natural beings or beings which reside in natural environments, woods and forests, and which can be powerful like deities. Closer to human beings and the household is the *tengu,* another evil spirit which resides in the forest and is invited to enter the Shrine at festivals with *Otafuku*, or fortune women. This pair, which constitutes another reference to auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, are the crucial actors at most festivals (see Chapter Five). To most villagers *tengu* and *otafuku* are mythical beings which are invited to participate in the festival, thus integrating them into the life of the village, in turn introducing the woods and the surrounding areas of the household into the neighbourhood.

The common aspect of all these references to inauspiciousness is the liminality or criticality of all the elements involved. They are manifestations of lack of connectedness of those spaces and conditions that blur the relation between what is outside (the forest) and inside (the neighbourhood). Rivers, mountains, the deceased before departure, crossroads, are all 'intervals' or 'spaces in between', which deny relationships between places and people. These notions of inauspiciousness are clearly based on the notion of 'marginal spaces' and

'dangerous, powerful substances, and words', all of which are dealt with by the giving of prestations to soothe the danger, or to obtain protection from deities.

2.c Belief in auspiciousness and inauspiciousness

According to villagers, the sources of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness can be outlined in several categories. There are auspicious and inauspicious words, numerical references and combinations of numbers, ages associated with numbers. Certain colours, animals, flowers, trees, and mountains are also perceived as auspicious and inauspicious. There are also inauspicious and auspicious zodiac signs, combinations of zodiac elements, dates, directions, blood types, and places. Auspicious and inauspicious circumstances call for gifts. Prestations are given to individuals and deities for the success of a favourable occasion… Villagers do not regard these references as something one should contemplate often. Individuals should not make use of these associations and ideas out of the context of 'new beginnings' or actual 'criticality'. In relation to this an informant argued:

> 'Moto san uses *tannuki* (racoon dog) skin and other things to protect himself from 'evils'. He always sees 'evils' around his house, he is what you say in English 'superstitious'.

Moto's use of the racoon dog was criticised by some of his neighbours. I was surprised by the criticism that his ideas inspired because there were six public representations of racoon dogs in Kamikatsu, including one close to a local school. One giant racoon dog was given as a 'good luck charm' to a mushroom factory at its opening. All representations of racoon dogs had in common that the animal was 'happy', it waved, it smiled, it danced, it was dressed like a child and it was 'festive' wearing lucky head bands, like those that men and children wear

at festivals. By contrast, the actual animal was the only[48] animal considered 'powerful' and 'dangerous', and as such it was chased by most villagers. The villagers always commented that racoon dogs damage fields, and specially that they affect the outcome of garden harvest. Despite the legal sanctions against traps it was never possible to walk in the forest without finding empty traps or racoon dogs trapped in them. If the racoon dog was 'hated' when wild, it was much loved when used as a symbol of good luck. To my observations the racoon dog represented the 'wild' aspect of the forest that had been 'tamed', a process of domestication of the forest. The reason why villagers saw Moto's concern as superstitious, but did not see their use of racoon dogs as such, tells us something important about the form of their belief. Villagers have many beliefs about things and conditions that bring fortune and misfortune. They turn to gods in times of misfortune. They give prestations to gods in times of crisis and at recovery. They 'throw money' to buy charms and protective amulets against fire, bad luck, exams, new jobs, new business, harvests and at new year. They claim not to be religious nor superstitious. Reader (1991) has argued that most forms of belief in Japan are predicated upon the idea that each individual is able to choose a combination of gods and actions of giving to suit her individual needs in times of crisis (1991: 107). However, as Reader further suggests, ritual action precedes belief and is not expressed as dependant on it (Reader 1991: 16). The amulet surprised Motos's neighbours for different reasons. Villagers use amulets of many kinds such as folded papers with names of deities, statuettes of racoon dogs and cats. Amulets are bought at Shrines to ensure its ritual efficacy. However, the ritual efficacy of all amulets is always related to the actions of giving or throwing money, to deities or temples. Moto used the amulet without any reference to giving a prestation. One of my informants, argued that Moto should not be so worried about the perils surrounding his house: 'Individuals have luck and strength if they perform certain ritual actions to ensure so but there are certain

times and actions for these. Evils and misfortune should not affect individuals if one has performed these actions'. It is these 'actions and times' that I examine next and in Chapter Five.

3. Wrapping as an auspicious force

During fieldwork I was told many times that 'during sickness you should fold one hundred cranes in the hope that sickness will pass over once they are done'. The making is not a mere representation of the belief in the auspicious qualities of cranes, and their longevity, but an action of intention of recovery. It represents the capacity of the sick person to do 'auspicious things' such as fold paper in auspicious shapes. Wrapping is understood to be a form of 'embedding'. ideas about health and the self into the actions of folding shapes said to be auspicious. Thus, what we have here is not merely a form of a 'belief system' concerning auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, but a reification of the process of locating the self in the context of good health, luck and fortune, and creating a definition of health in terms of wrapping.

Although wrapping is not an auspicious or inauspicious activity per se, the reification of wrapping into auspicious designs, and the use of white paper for the representation of deities, makes most people associate folded paper and cloth with the auspicious aspects of life, festivals, good health, marriage and prosperity, new beginnings, or the termination of inauspicious occasions. In the transformation of paper and cloth into shapes, people also transform ideas of the self into meaningful expressions of auspiciousness, shifting from a form of belief into a pragmatic set of ritualised references about the position of the self in a process of folding: moving over in repeated directions to form a shape, and shaping the self into healthy and prosperous 'forms'. This effect of wrapping, as a process of

giving auspicious meaning to ritual processes, takes place in auspicious as well as in inauspicious circumstances. Wrapping not only reflects conditions of inclusiveness, being a metaphor for human relations (Hendry 1993), it also works metonymically, in a tangible form, as an indicator of auspicious relations. Although wrapping is important in replicating meaningful auspicious forms, wrapping and shapes must first become prestations, or complement prestations, to have this effect. Folded cranes, and folded paper, must be given as ritual prestations to deities. As such, cranes are hung next to altars, or in Kamikatsu cranes are, in addition, hung inside the main community buildings, as tangible forms of the relations that the town hopes to achieve for its members. In the idea that things move 'from an end to a new beginning', and gifts are crucial for moving throughout, the basic formulation of both belief and practice takes effect also giving meaning to the actions of folding.

The main way of knowing about auspiciousness and inauspiciousness is then manifested through a process of giving prestations to deities, or sources of strength, but also being the donor or recipient of prestations, in which the process of presenting these prestations, either verbally or through wrapping, is very important. In the next section I examine how people learn about auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, starting at conception and birth, and during the stages of maturation. I considers the sets of prestations and the actors involved in dealing with sources of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness. In Chapter Five I move on to adult life, to the harvest and the New Year as the most emotive and ritualised expressions of auspiciousness.

3.a Throwing and wrapping in funerary rituals

There are four main rituals concerning the dead in Kamikatsu. Funerary rituals when someone dies, memorial rituals at mid-summer when deceased ancestors return and are politely expelled (through gifts) from the household, war memorial rituals for those who died in the war, and unborn baby rituals. These rituals are defined by both inauspiciousness and pollution. They all have in common what Raheja calls ‘the removal of inauspiciousness’ by returning something to certain recipients - deities, neighbours, kin - who make gifts to help during the crises. In these contexts, ritual prestations are given to ‘break off’ the connections with the sources of inauspiciousness and expel or remove the source of inauspiciousness and pollution away from the household. Bloch argues that, contrary to the idea that ancestors return and leave the house, Japanese expel ancestors after *obon* is over:

> The point of Japanese ancestor worship is rather, to placate the ancestors by sharing with them to a certain extent, for example by offering a little food on a daily basis. This sharing, however, occurs only because it is not yet possible to get rid of the dead completely. Japanese ancestor worship is above all concerned with the removal of the pollution which the dead inevitably imply, and, above all, with sending the ancestors on their way, however unwillingly they might be to go (Smith 1983: 40, 1967)’ (Bloch 1992: 55).’Bon is therefore not so much a celebration of the ancestors as a celebration of their expulsion’ (ibid.)

As Raheja has argued, the problem of pollution overshadows our view on how the actual inauspiciousness is removed from the context of ordinary life. Rituals for inauspiciousness, which I define as the episodes of culturally constructed sadness or breaking of ties with others who share a sense of belonging, are not different from rituals in auspicious cases and never dependant on the issue of pollution. This proposition is difficult to examine in cases of funerals because of the emphasis on pollution, thus I look here at another case of death rituals, that of

unborn children, in order to understand the pattern of the ritual action of inauspicious occasions.

3.b Unborn children

From the moment a woman knows she is pregnant, a decision is made to have the child or abort it. Junko, woman in her mid-thirties in Tokushima, complained about the fact that abortion was the culturally accepted way to resolve unwanted pregnancies, because, as she saw it:

> 'There are not many contraceptive methods I can use. I have two friends. Both had abortions, and one cannot have children because of it. Here in Japan everything is left to men to decide, and men do not take any precautions. For me, being single, it is very difficult to get prescription pills or any other method [of contraception]. Women are expected to have boyfriends, have sex, be careful, and not get pregnant. But sometimes you are unlucky. I think that even after marriage most women have abortions if they cannot afford to have children. It is all left to the woman, really.

Pregnancy, unwanted pregnancy and miscarriages are constructed as different aspects of luck and misfortune that women alone experience in the course of their adult lives. Though they rarely talk about it, women's notions about fortune and misfortune are very much tied to their experiences of having or not having children. Women, like men, also think of fortune and misfortune in connection with other critical events such as passing exams or getting married, but these refer to their personal and social success as individuals. Misfortune in pregnancy, like sickness and death, constitutes a more fundamental case of references to inauspiciousness, which relates the individual to aspects that transcend their social success as an individual. The kind of 'sadness' that affect individuals on these occasions stops them from being able to 'share' with others the auspicious and happy event in life, isolating them until such inauspicious presence is over. Sadness - *kanashii, omoi, kurushii* - are emotions, but they are also forms of

culturally constructed inauspiciousness which affect individuals. Unlike the case of exams or work, where the individual goes to a Shrine and makes a small donation, offers a prayer, and buys a tablet (Y 300 to 3,000 - £1 to £15 -), these occasions require more complex actions of giving to deities, and more expensive prestations. After abortion, most women buy small usually very expensive statuettes of sleeping baby Buddha, which they might keep secretly from their families, and visit alone to pray for the soul of the unborn baby. Women offer prestations of flowers, toys coins, and drinks of milk to the statuettes. They also wrap their bodies once or twice annually in the hope that the child's soul will be protected. Visitors at temples throw coins to these statuettes even though they are not theirs. In giving, they express the wish to create a connection for the soul of the child. In particular, by giving a symbolic donation people express their concern with the *nebutoke*, 'those without connections'.

In Kamikatsu statuettes are found at the entrance of temples, although other statuettes in cross-roads and mountains also deserve attention. Statuettes are often kept or erected by a neighbourhood, regardless of any actual pregnancies or miscarriages. Walking around the rice fields of Kamikatsu, one often finds statuettes at the crossroads of fields, enshrined in a stone or in wood. The sudden appearance of these figures always conjures up ideas of a lost child. The 'child' seems lost as it is placed at the boundaries of inhabited areas, at the crossroads between Shrines and neighbourhood, in the liminal spaces that define the beginning of either a sacred place (the Shrine or temple) or a human place (the neighbourhood). Raheja, for the Indian case, mentions how cross-roads are used as 'particular spaces' where prestations to remove 'inauspiciousness' (those connected with death) are left (Raheja 1988: 160). These prestations are not given to remove the impurity of the death that 'ends'. A death ritual as enacted by the giving of prestations to statuettes, also 'breaks the connection' with the deceased and creates a connection with the auspicious deities *kami*. In maintaining a ritual

Fig. 8. Unwrapped prestations for a wrapped Jizo. The Jizo is wrapped in several layers of baby cloths, hats, and festival *hapi*. At her feet there are sweets, coins and rice thrown by the villagers to ask for the protection of children ad prosperity in general

by which the statuettes are wrapped and given things they like (sweets, drinks, cakes). As Raheja argues for the Indian case, in Japan, these ritual actions are the same for happy and auspicious as well as for death and sickness regardless of the presence of *kegare* in Japan, or 'impurity' in the Indian case (Raheja, ibid.).

Jizo are always wrapped in baby coats resembling those given to children at their first visit to the Shrine. The only difference in the wrapping is that the clothes for visits to the Shrine always have auspicious motives. However, wrapping is necessary as a ritual action to establish a connection with the born and unborn child alike. Villagers treat *Jizo* like they treat deities at Shrines and like they treat small children. As the picture shows (previous page), *Jizo* are wrapped in layers of cloths, and hats, giving the impression that protection increases as wrapping increases. In a way, wrapping here symbolises ritual action itself. The concept of deities and children as recipients, to whom money, food and clothes are given to strengthen their soul, is perhaps the most pervasive concept villagers manifest in the quest to enhance auspiciousness and avoid inauspiciousness at critical times.

3.c Pregnancy and the child as an auspicious force

Another aspect of the construction of the self as recipient, and a more interesting aspect of parts of the child as prestations that protect the household, is seen in the prestations given in the initial stages of pregnancy, and in childhood. During pregnancy most mothers will make their pregnant daughter a prestation of wrapping cloths for the belly. These cloths, white and with the *shiawase* 'fortune' imprinted on them, are wrapped in a ritual sequence of folding the cloth around the woman's lower abdomen. This is to ask for the happy delivery of a healthy baby. Although not all women follow this practice, many women will keep the

cloth folded in the same cupboard where they keep their own and their children's umbilical cord. Teeth, which mark the physical growth of a child, are also used as prestations to be thrown. Atsuko and Gufodh, my hosts argued once:

> 'The first teeth of the children must be thrown out between the foundations and the floorboards, and between the roof and the ceiling, they say these are the two inauspicious places in a house, to keep evil spirits away'.

These cases, and the case of wrapping *Jizo*, exemplify how the body can be defined in relation to the idea of criticality that I outlined in the case of the *setsubun*. The concept of inauspiciousness appears here as something that is not necessarily outside, as in 'outside the genkan', or *soto.* Within the household the categories of inauspiciousness are the roof and below the foundations. The use of teeth is indicative of people's understandings of auspiciousness and the body/household. The teeth, like prestations themselves, are thrown, to ensure auspiciousness and ward off inauspiciousness. It is possible to conclude that the use of aspects of the self which can be detached as prestations underlies the general Maussian principle in which prestations are said to embody aspects of the self. However, in this case the can also be said to embody aspects of relations of the self with the household and aspects of the critical nature of new beginnings. The categories of auspicious and inauspicious are constructed as in a relational and simultaneous opposition, and come to involve a relation of giving, 'throwing' and wrapping in different stages of life and different aspects of the self. They have a clear ritual purpose, rather than being restricted to the mere identification of happy or unhappy occasions.

3.d Gifts to the child: prestations and gender achievement in childhood

The child's first birthday is said to be the happiest, and the most critical moment in the growth of a baby. This is the moment when and child is given its first and most important gift. A prestation of fish, *sake*, and tea is brought by the maternal

and paternal grandparents with a gift of a presentation toy, usually a tiger, helmet, or girl doll. These prestations are very similar to Kyburz (1988) classification of *engimono*, *miyage*, *omocha* (Prestations from temples, souvenirs and toys). Presentation toys, like prestations from temples, souvenirs from journeys and toys are linked to the idea of *en* (destiny), and they are all bought and given to achieve prosperity.

For the villagers, toys (or rather presentation toys) for children are a crucial aspect of the growing of a person. These presentation toys are used for display rather than for playing. Villagers celebrate the first birthday with toys that define the character of the identity of the boy and girl, in which ideas about strength and fortune in marriage occupy a central place. Ideas about auspiciousness define in turn perceptions of gender. Boys receive armour, and boys dolls in samurai clothes (which might cost from 60,000 to 200,000 yens - £315 to £1,052 -). The boys' doll, placed in a crystal box, is exhibited in the main room while girls' dolls are locked up in cupboards, and only displayed on girls' day when they are unwrapped and exhibited. Only then can girls play with them though the game only allows them to arrange the dolls. Girls' dolls follow the theme of the royal couple, in which a bride and groom are displayed at the top of a ladder. Down the ladder there is a hierarchy of guests and musicians. At the bottom, the bridewealth of the bride is exhibited along with large pieces of *mochi* in red and white auspicious colours. These are a replica of the pieces that will be given on the day of the actual wedding to celebrate and hope for an auspicious marriage. The different ways of exhibiting the dolls during the year reflect conceptions of the visibility and exhibition of gender.

Boys' dolls and girls' dolls replicate the self and certain conceptions of gender. A man should be strong and have a prosperous household and girls should marry and carry their bridewealth into the new household. The importance of these toys,

however, is that they must be destroyed or purified when the boys and girls reach the adult age of eighteen. It is then that dolls are given away to temples, to remove inauspiciousness, or given outside the town. In Kamikatsu, most dolls are given to the neighbouring Katsuura hall. foreigners are usual recipients of these dolls. If no recipient is available, the toy is thrown into the fire. A field note reflects some of these issues:

> At a friend's house I was given an impressive doll. It had cost around Y 100,000. My host said the doll had to leave the house when the children turned eighteen. 'We must give it to someone else, or throw it away My host said that he gave it to me because 'you will take it away, if we do not throw the toys away our children may not marry'. Driving to Tokushima I stopped in Katsuura to see their display of 'thrown away' dolls. They had turned it into a cultural event and 'new festival'. A huge room in red and white contained dolls from all over the Japan. People had found a way to 'throw' them and making of it a 'culture day'. (Few days later) Karen and all ET (English teachers) were given a doll, one for each of the teachers, as a 'gift' after their school concerts. The Katsuura hall organisers were also 'throwing them out'. To keep these things is certainly problematic. Some people choose to leave them in Katsuura, others throw them into the fires in temples, the rest go to foreigners because they live 'away'.

The fact that the doll must leave the house when the child is eighteen (or it must be re-wrapped and stored, but never unwrapped again), reflects the idea that the doll embodies the character of childhood. Being single is constructed as an inauspicious condition. Prosperity is constructed by and associated with the fact of getting married, more even than being strong and beautiful during youth. The throwing of the original gifts of toys away in order to promote adult life and a good marriage follows the same ritual structure as *setsubun*. The dolls are thrown 'out' into a Shrine, in a neighbour's house, or kept in a store room until they can be thrown out- in order to remove the inauspicious condition of being single, in the hope that 'fortune' will come in (*uchi*) through marriage. The fact that those ritual prestations which are necessary to ensure the growth of the child must be disposed of after a certain age underlies a principle whereby the condition of generation, as in many other cultures, is a process of stages people must move

over, rather than a mere continuous trajectory. In this process ritual prestations must be given and thrown away at each new beginning.

A second set of prestations, food and drink, are also offered to children on their birthday, money at New Year, and many commodities. All during childhood children are wrapped and they are offered prestations. It is this sentimental, physical point of reference about the self and its positioning in the world as a wrapped recipient of auspicious prestations on which most individuals base their sense of obligation to return gifts in adult life. Villagers' ideas about prestations encompass wider understandings that portray 'throwing out' as at least potentially a communal activity, inherently much sought after. Villagers view gift exchange as part of the making of social persons as much as they view the person as a process of being an auspicious recipient to a giver of gifts for the well-being of the community. Auspiciousness becomes a process of embodiment through wrapping and through the throwing and consuming of prestations.

4. Conclusions

I started the chapter with the suggestion that it would be inappropriate to look at the material on ritual prestations through the lens of pollution that has permeated so much anthropological thought on gift exchange. Both during and after fieldwork I had great difficulty in trying to understand wrapping solely in relation to pollution, as a method of cleansing and in using the classification of 'happy' and 'sad' gifts depending on their classification of wrapping. Although I believe that the problems I experienced in trying to adapt the dual classification to a less dichotomous and clear-cut understanding of gifts result from the particularities of the material under consideration, I also think that a similar problem is inherent in other anthropological works.

Here I have tried to basing gift exchange on an ideological core (pollution), and I have considered auspiciousness and inauspiciousness as forms of pragmatic knowledge which define a framework for considerations of gifts. I believe that in order to move forward in the debate on the nature of the return and production of gifts, we need not take for granted the primacy of pollution that has dominated our understanding of Japanese gifts, and in particular of wrapping. This does not imply that one should ignore how the concern with supernatural pollution and dirt affects people's perceptions of the layers of complexity in gift exchange. The cases of *mochinage* in Chapter Three are a good example of how 'dirt' is not about pollution, but about the auspicious qualities that the giving and consumption of prestations bring about. It is the relation between ritual prestations and ideas about what gifts are for that has to be understood in each particular case, rather than the relation between different types of ideologies. Villagers' types of gift giving are permeated with understandings about which prestations belonging to the category of 'good' and 'helpful' are thought to be useful for removing certain critical conditions. This is made explicit in the practices of giving to deities and ancestors, even more so in practices such as wrapping the body and people. *Setsubun* and *mochinage* are perhaps the two most powerful examples; they show how behaviour, gratitude, obligation, status and political distribution of patrons are distinguished through the giving and sharing at occasions which are a kind of tabula rasa, the beginning of social relations. The prestations are wrapped (or self-sealing), in order to be exchanged. Prestations move within different social spheres recreating the idea that wrapping wards off the inauspiciousness of the market. My view of the situation of givers and recipients is reminiscent of Bachnick's interpretation of the layering of cores in ritual contexts where *uchi*/*soto* reciprocity is enacted through the distance between the household and those who assist. Her view of ritual as being marked by 'a ritual continuum from beginning to end' and the actors who manage to stay

along this ritual continuum appears to me as highly relevant and I will expand on the political implications of such reciprocity in Chapter Seven.

In this chapter I have argued that the villagers define prestations in relation to critical times, and that the way they give gifts does not correspond to the ideal picture that was prevalent in the literature. For the villagers gift exchange is crucial in the creation of a set of references about pragmatism and 'organisation in practice' of actors and events. Gift exchange is not purely an ideological core of attributes (pollution, inauspiciousness). Instead, the practices of throwing contribute to the formulation of the course of events, distribution of actors and the process of moving over new times. These sets of practices, however, are most important at festivals, where each household must present itself as providers of auspiciousness for their households, villages and towns. I consider these points in the following chapters.

Chapter 5

Actions of wrapping and unwrapping. The ritual structure of giving auspicious gifts

In the previous chapter I argued how villagers' primary understanding of prestations is associated with ideas about fortune and critical times. These are rooted in a particular view of time, of what moves from an end to a beginning and of the prestations that are given on these occasions. These prestations in turn defined the conception of outside/inside of households not as a space but as a relational process with neighbours, deities, and children as the main recipients of prestations.

Here, by contrast, I focus on festival gifts. I look at the Shrine festival, or *jinja matsuri*, as the communal point of reference for the exchange of gifts. Being part of the Shrine, participating in its festival and being strong, are central to an individuals' social identity. This is a process we saw starting at birth, and becoming consolidated with the gradual incorporation of the young into the festival rituals. Finally, the young become hosts of Shrines themselves, and main distributors of gifts in the village. Festival gift giving is the most important social practice in Kamikatsu, one that the villagers consider the highest expression of sociability and local identity. Here I deal with one aspect of exchange that provides villagers with an experience of sacrality and communality quite distinct from those they experience at the level of work and kin.

I start by looking at the concepts of festival and deity worship, and describe the roles of givers and recipients of gifts. I describe the ritual structure of an autumn festival and how gifts move along a process of layering, a wrapping space, and

individual people to reward those that represent the vitality of the community. I follow Hendry's idea that a ritual process starts by approaching, and thus unwrapping, the layers of sacred centres. Ritual centres are usually wrapped, spatially and architecturally, by many layers of walls and gates. Ritual centres are symbolically wrapped by a series of rituals of 'approaching the centre': purificatory rituals, the offering of prestations, and the avoidance of bringing dirt into the Shrine by removing one's shoes. As Hendry argues, 'reaching the centre is hardly ever the object of the exercise, and unwrapping usually only proceeds so far' (Hendry 1988: 146). To some extent, then, unwrapping is not a process that finishes with the entrance to the Shrine. The actions of wrapping and unwrapping represent the structure of a process, a way or path. In the experience of wrapping and unwrapping people learn about the layering of a process, the wrapping and unwrapping of time, space, as well as ideas about the sacred, but not about the content or core. However, the material below also makes clear that villagers are not confronted with a single model of 'wrapping'. Villagers wrap and unwrap things in manners that may appear traditional but their ways of wrapping are also 'creative responses' to particular social and political needs. One of the aims of this chapter is to make clear how prestations move along a process of layers of wrapping of actors and time, and what are the conditions in which gifts can be wrapped and unwrapped.

In this chapter I often say villager 'wrap' (i.e. they wrap time, people, ritual events, words, buildings, relation with other people). Thus, here we deal with different uses of the word wrapping. Wrapping is often used to talk about the actions of folding paper and cloth to objects and people with the word *tsutsumi* (wrapping). Wrapping is also used to explain the experiences of being part of a community 'being wrapped by a community' or by 'someone' through the use of polite language and actions and linguistic characters that indicate *tsutsumi* (Hendry 1993a). Wrapping is however, a word that identifies an experience that is

never expressed in words. Wrapping for most villagers is a form of indirect communication. I do not use 'wrapping' as a metaphor. My use of wrapping in this chapter is then, an interpretation of an experience never expressed in words, but 'felt' and apprehended non-verbally. I am confident that villagers would agree that my description of the ritual structure as 'wrapping processes' reflects their own experiences and understanding of these processes. My description of these events as 'wrapping' are not based on my sole interpretation. I discussed my ideas about wrapping with villagers themselves during the festivals. They reactions and discussions about wrapping were fundamental in creating the model that I present here.

1. *Matsuri*

Matsuri or festivals are auspicious and happy events celebrating harvests. They revolve around the worship of the local deity or *kami*, through the giving and receiving of auspicious prestations. The community or household gives to a tutelary deity in return for protection, good fortune and prosperity. Although deities known as the *kami* are usually described as living virtually anywhere, *kami* are usually enshrined in Shrines at the limits or boundaries of the village. The *kami* is a paradoxical entity. It can be both a positive agent, *nigitama,* or a negative or violent force, *aramitama* (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993[49]). *Kami* bring good luck if treated right. Thus, auspicious prestations (mostly rice, coins and sounds of music) are offered to the *kami*. Physical dirt, menstrual blood, and *kegare* are averted in order to ensure the 'purity' of the *kami*. In order to ensure that a *kami* in a Shrine is well looked after, several houses rotate to perform the duties of cleaning and offering prestations on behalf of everyone in the community. The presentation of offerings can be done individually, but villagers see festivals as the most efficient way to manage the worship of the *kami*. Ashkenazi (1993)

argues that festivals weave together religious belief in the *kami* with ritual performances as social facts:

> Rituals makes sense through reference to moot entities - the *kami* - who are addressed as social beings, thus making the ritual comprehensible to participants. Religion is not too important to most festivals. Religious behaviour is an extension of recognised social arrangements and interactions or as parts of a different institution, festival, which in turn is seen consciously as part of the expression of a community's identity and unity (1993: 149-161).

The structure of ritual giving and receiving can be understood through an analysis of the community's recognised social arrangements and interaction, and specifically as these are expressed through the management of gifts.

Festivals are the main arenas of communality, but as Ashkenazi (1995), Johnston (1974) and Norbeck (1967) argue they are also the arenas for status display, dispute, and thus social change. Festivals as described by Ashkenazi and others are the 'occasional release' of the tensions of living in a village. Such tension is expressed through dances and symbolic fights; people drink until they show their real feelings (Moeran 1984) or in Hendry's terms 'unwrap' feelings (Hendry 1993a: 144). However, this analysis is very problematic. As I describe them in this chapter, festivals are not occasions for releasing the tensions built up during the year. Festivals are controlled events, everything from presentation of gifts to drunkenness happens within a frame of accepted behaviour. There is very little 'release of tension' and most release is effectively controlled and channelled. People are on in their best behaviour even when drunk. According to Moeran (1984) and Hendry (1993) unwrapping feelings during times of drunkenness, is a time of social closeness. However, as I show in section 3f, it may also lead to effective forms of control and social sanction. Festivals are often compared to carnivals, and like carnivals, they are not about disorder and tension but about how to control the environment, both physical and social, and how to exploit this environment for the benefit of certain groups, households and

neighbourhoods.[50] The harmony of the village expressed in festivals, however, is not a product of artifice, a façade of an ulterior reality (see also Dore 1978: 267). For villagers, harmony is their reality as self-restraint, avoidance of tension, and mediation. Although festivals are 'happy' events it would be unfair to depict villagers as happy people who do not feel contradictions or are unaware of tensions and clashes of economic interests, in addition to enjoying a good quality of life. Festivals put these paradoxes into circulation and make them palpable.

Gift giving at a festival reflects the many changes in neighbourly relations: changes in the composition of a village; discrepancies among households in relation to the politics of a festival, the arrival of new residents, and the influence of the town office in village life. This mixing becomes more problematic as households are more or less dependant on each other. This is reflected in the changes in giving at festivals. Despite the importance of festivals, villagers often complain about dwindling participation and decreases in gifts. While collecting festival gifts, a *toya* once told me:

> 'This is a good village. There is always plenty of *sake* at the festival. Festivals have changed. In the past, we would collect several tons of *sake*, hundreds of litres. Today we collect maybe sixty litres in total. People are falling away from the village festival.'

Some villagers seem to suggest that decreasing participation in festivals is less a consequence of new social arrangements and more due to the role of festivals in creating political tension. Only those who are dominant givers and recipients of gifts participate fully in festivals. Atsuko, my host, in relation to a large festival in town argued:

> 'Most people do not participate in festivals. You just stand there and watch. Whatever happens inside and outside the Shrine may be important but you are not part of it. It is very different from Catholic Church rituals where we go on Sunday. There you feel that you participate in the ritual. You read, you sing, you help to collect the money, you pray with the others, it feels like a community. Before I was a Catholic, I always felt I did not participate in festivals. What most people do is just take the children, buy them toys and drinks, wait for the *mikoshi*, [*mochinage* if any] and the fireworks.

The observation made by Atsuko (as well as other informants) reflects how participation in festivals revolve around those who have direct control of the ritual aspects of festival making: praying and collecting gifts. The decrease in population, and the decrease in giving gifts has lead festival organisers to try to include newcomers, and women in particular. Kamikatsu is famous for having a '*mikoshigirl*' (a team of women carrying *mikoshi*, usually guests from outside town), and many *mikoshi* children. However, only a few festivals have women and newcomers in positions of *sodai* or administrators of festivals. The future of festivals, an issue very important for all villagers, will depend on how each village manages to include the different households in the core tasks of festival making.

The problem with festivals is that festivals are about the political legitimisation of village boundaries. Inclusion of newcomers and women is not an easy task. Bloch (1992) argues that Shinto rituals are performances about the young and the strong and are outwardly directed, fertile and aggressive. Shinto rituals (i.e. festivals) are processes in which the participants 'consume the environment', either by symbolically consuming food and fish (the 'natural' environment), or by symbolically consuming their neighbours (giving and receiving gifts). Thus, enacting the legitimisation of the state, in the first case, and the legitimisation of the rulers over the ruled, in the second (Bloch 1992: 61). The nature of Shinto rituals makes the inclusion of women and children (who are conceptualised as potentially polluting and weak) and newcomers (who are conceptualised as 'foreigners') difficult, although not impossible (see chapter four). The shortcoming of Bloch's approach is that those who perform in a Shinto ritual are not always the young and strong, but the elders. In fact, as the ethnography will show, 'seniors' appropriate the qualities of strength and aggression from the young and use it to collect gifts and outline the boundaries of the village. The festivals I describe in this chapter are occasions in which *sodai,* the senior

households that are dominant givers of gifts, 'wrap' younger members and women of the village into certain roles. They use their strength to appropriate the gifts that are used to achieve household prestige at the festival.

The ethnography illustrates Bloch's idea that Shinto festivals are occasions for displays of strength and consumption. They are about households negotiating the legitimisation of their power over certain other households in the village. They are about coercing villagers to make and to accept gifts that will determine which households are responsible for the creation of well-being in the village. Precisely because of this display and consumption, festivals are a source of tension. However, it is not a kind of tension that villagers refuse to accept, or try to diffuse with politeness and mediation. This tension, or rather I would call it a political principle, is important for defining the extent of the political and contractual obligations villagers have towards others in the village and town.

2. Strength, age, gender and ritual roles

Autumn festivals are organised by a group of household heads. These men (only exceptionally women) take up one of the four main ritual roles: as *sodai*, *toya*, *danjiri*, *mikoshi*. They are divided on the lines of age and seniority. *Sodai* are 'seniors', *toya* between *sodai* and the 'young', while *danjiri*, or *mikoshi* men are understood to be a kind of 'peer group' below '*sodai*'.

Basically, *sodai* (members of the Shrine) are the main administrators in a festival. They wrap and unwrap the Shrine, account for gifts received, organize fireworks and direct the teams of *mikoshi* and *danjiri*. They are in charge of paying the *kannushi*, the Shinto ritual specialist, and offering ritual prestations to the deity for the well-being of their households and the village as whole. They are the only villagers who participate on the *naorai* or offerings to the deity, and who

receive the auspiciousness of the deity and its protection. They use *mikoshi,* a portable Shrine, to bring the deity into the village (the festivals take place at the boundaries of the village) and thus bring the auspiciousness of the deity to all. While carrying the *mikoshi*, they collect the gifts of *sake* from villagers. The *sodai* then distributes the *sake* to the men who carry the *mikoshi* and play *danjiri.*

The *sodai* decide who should be the annual *toya.* The *toya* (also a word to indicate the owner of a house) is the symbolic guest of the *sodai*. The *toya* role is taken by a household head of the neighbourhood, close to the other *sodai.* The *toya* is in charge of bringing the main ritual prestations for the deity and making *mochi* and *amazake*, sweet rice, (if given). The *Toya* cleanses the Shrine and offers the first sip of *sake* that guest take at a festival. This offering is given in 'return' and 'anticipation' of the auspiciousness that the event will bring. At different villages women have a minor role in assisting *toya* and *sodai* during the stages of *naorai* in the forest, helping to move the prestations (3.c).

The *mikoshi* are those who carry the portable Shrine. They carry a large and heavy reproduction of the Shrine through the village, showing the strength of the deity, its main auspicious attribute, to all. These men (and only occasionally women and children) do not enter the Shrine and must be purified by the ritual specialist before they can touch the deity. They are wrapped in white cloths.

Danjiri are ritual performers of music. They are the largest group of people. They perform music outside the Shrine. Their *danjiri* house (where they perform) is wrapped and treated as an extension of the Shrine, and thus is purified by the *kannushi* and wrapped with similar cloths, paper, straw and *sakaki* leaves. Donations of *sake* are also given to the *danjiri* house. The music is thought to be a prestation for the deity, which attracts, and seduces the deity out of its confinement into the village. The *danjiri* are wrapped in white and blue tapi jackets, and all their instruments are wrapped in white and red, auspicious cords.

Sake is given to them at the end of the festival as compensation for their job. All the four groups meet together at the end of the festival in a feast organised by the *sodai*.[51]

2.a Age and gender

Villagers usually describe festivals as traditional activities marked by age and gender exclusion. Depopulation changes have affected the political composition of festivals. Although *sodai* are men over fifty years old, some *sodai* may be as young as thirty. Men in *danjiri* and *mikoshi* are usually younger but there are many villagers in *mikoshi* tasks who are older than some of the *sodai*. I will argue that seniority is determined by the ability of certain members of the community to use others' strength for the benefit of the community. Seniors are those who do not carry *mikoshi* or other works of strength, which they leave for the 'young'. *Mikoshi* is the way *sodai* use to collect gifts from neighbours (see 2c). The *sodai* use the strength of those who carry *mikoshi* to collect the gifts. Being strong and carrying the *mikoshi* is opposed to being a senior and being inside the Shrine collecting gifts. Seniority and youth are not about age but about how gifts are collected and by whom.

In some villages boys and girls instead of men play the *danjiri*. Girls stop playing the *danjiri* when they are thirteen or fourteen, while boys become integrated into heavy *mikoshi* roles at that age and play *danjiri* throughout their lives. The mother of one girl, who had become the most skilful player of drums, said her daughter would have to stop because she was 'growing' and soon would have too much homework. Homework was not the real reason why girls stop at that age. *Danjiri* and *mikoshi* are men's activities. They are about being strong, including the idea of sexual strength. In 'men only' activities there is always

sexual joking and comments about sexual performance. When I participated in these events I was aware that my presence imposed certain constraints on men's behaviour. A *danjiri* and *mikoshi* are not a 'girls' place. A woman's place in the festival is to show off her beauty, politeness, restraint (in drinking) and modesty. Women demonstrate these qualities by leaving the festival before heavy drinking starts, which effectively cuts them off from the main arena of political discussions. The exceptions to this are younger women employed at the local administration. Most younger women working at the local administration drink at festivals and parties. In doing so, they show their capacity to 'participate' in the event, and increase the sense of 'democracy' of the festival (most festivals are only-men events). Children play an important role in festivals as recipients of gifts, they carry a replica of *mikoshi* or play at the *danjiri*.

The most striking difference in terms of gender participation in festivals is that, while women participate by carrying *mikoshi* and helping in the kitchen, cleaning and sometimes drinking, they never play music inside the *danjiri* house. Playing music for the deity is giving to the deity. Adult women never play for the same reasons as they do not carry *mikoshi*. Men and women give gifts on different occasions and to different recipients. Men make gifts to other men in the course of festivals, and ceremonial activities, as well as mid-summer and New Year, while women give gifts to other women and men only on non-festival occasions. Although Ashkenazi (1993) compares *fiestas* in South America and Spain with Japanese festivals, a clear difference emerges when looking at gift exchange. Men in *fiestas* or the rest of the year, very rarely make gifts to other men. In Japan, unlike South America and Spain, men give gifts as frequently as women (see Chapters 3 and 6). Lebra (1969) has argued that in Japan men and women give gifts to the household rather than to individuals, but this is a misconception. The household, like the Shrine, is important as a unit, but gifts clearly target men as consumers: as politicians, administrators, heads. *Sake* may be given to the

household, but it is a man's drink. He drinks it or invites other men to drink it with him while they do business in a relaxed way. I Chapter Six I show how women, in their attempts to engage with men, give chocolate instead of giving drinks. Woman may drink *sake*, but in villager's perceptions giving *sake* is a male political statement. It is always a man who makes the first toast, and who goes with bottle in hand, to pour the first glass of *sake* into of other guests. The emphasis on giving gifts to the household hides the fact that most gift giving of ritual character is organised and exchanged by men. Men's gifts at festivals count in the prestige of his household, and women share this prestige. However, gifts that women make maintain relations with other households and these 'relation gifts' are not always related to household prestige. Women's gifts consolidate the connections between houses that start at festivals. Their gifts during the year are as crucial as the gifts of *sake* at festivals. At festivals, however, women have the crucial role of making the food offerings.

Festivals are occasions where households compete with each other to see who is a good provider of auspiciousness. Marshall (1994) has argued that co-operation and competition are crucial in festival making. Competition is both covert and exposed. The gifts that each household makes are written down in large lists of donors, which are exhibited on the outer walls of the Shrine for all to see. Men and women spend time reading these lists, learning what their neighbours gave and how much. The degree of each neighbour participation is us exhibited and compared with others. The *sodai* are in charge of writing and display in this list (another form of patrons enhancing competition like *mochinage* in Chapter Three). Covert competition takes place through displays of food. At festivals households present themselves to each other through large trays of food. Women spend many days before the festival buying the best and most expensive fish, and making beautiful wrapped parcels of sashimi and sushi. I spent hours in my informant's kitchen rolling out rice and fish, decorating boxes, wrapping food and

trays. Twice the effort is used in the presentation of food than in the presentation of gifts of *sake*. The emphasis on the giving of *sake* at festival veils the importance of these prestations. While *sake* is placed in the hands of the *sodai* for communal distribution, food is not. Men and women bring their *obento* trays, carefully wrapped in wooden boxes and *furoshiki*. The food is put on large tables, a feast to the eyes. Although the food is spread out, people rarely try their neighbours' food unless they are very good friends, or drunk. For politeness' *sake*, people might taste a little from another tray. Food symbolises the capacity of each household (and women) to produce and display auspiciousness. The rivalry about food between houses is polite but intense. Each house claims to cook differently (see 3f.) from the other, and each house says they present food better or more deliciously to the eyes than their neighbours. The anthropologist sits in the midst of luxurious trays of food, and each neighbour turns to me with a plea to try their food. Nothing makes neighbours prouder than the comment that their food is delicious, and I am asked to try all sorts of food. I was always struck after tedious rituals and receiving little attention, to become the centre of numerous offers of food: 'try this, this is the way we cook in our house'. And being the only one able to sample all food.

All these actions, however small, point to the fragile relations between people. Economic contractual relations, what to pay, how to use the money, who gives gifts, are crucial issues in the making of a festival. Men and women discuss household status through the display of food and the use of *sake*. Festivals are happy, but tense and controlled episodes in which each household displays its capacity to provide auspiciousness for themselves and others, and define relations among households.

3. *Aki matsuri*. Ritual structures and participation: wrapping and unwrapping time, gifts and events

Villagers' understandings of the *kami* worship imply recognition of a ritual structure: in order to carry out the worship a process of rites and ritual actions must be followed and performed. These are learned through observation and, I will argue, different degrees of participation and closeness to centres of symbolic power such as deities and *sodai*. Ohnuki-Tierney (1993) has outlined a basic ritual structure for Japanese festivals:

> The three essential components of most Japanese rituals and festivals, whether folk or imperial, are sinsen (or *kyousen*), offering to the deities; *naorai*, comensality between the officiant of the ritual and deities; and *utage*, the feast with the host and the guest (…) rice and rice products are indispensable for all three (p.58).

For the villagers, *shinsen*, *naorai*, and *utage* are important, but from an 'insiders' view'. A middle-age woman said about them:

> 'In my life, I have only been inside the Shrine twice: when I was 3 and 7. Usually we go to the Shrine with my family during festivals, but we do not go in. What happens inside is only for those who pay the *kannushi* to perform a ceremony for them. It is very expensive and it is so long that some elders just sleep through it.'

For most villagers what counts in a festival is not only *shinsen, naorai* and *utage* but the process of wrapping and unwrapping of layers around this tripartite core of ritual actions. I will argue that festivals cannot be reduced to Ohnuki-Tierney's structure. Instead, the ritual structure of a festival must also include the process of unwrapping to approach the deity and to be wrapped and unwrapped from the ritual process of giving and receiving prestations.

I see five stages of wrapping and unwrapping. The first is the unwrapping of the Shrine. The second is wrapping the Shrine to make it adequate for receiving prestations and for the *kami*. The third is the wrapping of the deity into the *mikoshi*. The third is divided into the journey of the deity through the village, a

journey that symbolically unwraps the way, and the collection of prestations of *sake* followed by the return to the Shrine, wrapping each household into the journey of return. Fourth, is the unwrapping of the deity, the Shrines and the gifts. The fifth is the wrapping of people into the feast with the drinking party, with a final unwrapping of emotions and acquisition of new obligations and the end of the festival. These forms of wrapping and unwrapping create a dimension of folding and unfolding of events that Hendry calls a ‘spatio-temporal layering’ (Hendry 1993: 99-112). The ritual structure of a festival is a complex process of wrapping and unwrapping time, space and people, in order to create the path through which prestations are given and received. In Kamikatsu, this layering can be both lineal and simultaneous, with actions of wrapping and unwrapping taking place at different times and in different ways depending on the degrees of participation and observation, with people experiencing different degrees of wrappedness and closeness to the Shrine.

3.a Preparing the festivals: unwrapping the Shrine

Harvest festivals, or *aki matsuri*, start with a levy of 8,000 to 10,000 yen (£42 to £55) on every household. This money is said to go towards the cost of the fireworks, Shrine maintenance, and preparation (*hanabi to jumbi*). If the village is celebrating the construction of a new *mikoshi* or portable Shrine, the fees goes up considerably. The new *mikoshi* in Asahi village during my fieldwork, weighed over 80Kg and cost 300,000 yen (£1,578), 214,000 (£1,126) for the *mikoshi* and 90,000 (£473) for the *osari* or ribbons and golden plates, plus the *kannushi* fee which can cost as much again. Villagers are told informally how much they should pay. Although in some villages *sodai* collect the money, it is more common that neighbours pay by post office postal-order, a system which is similar to the one they use when paying taxes.

On the eve of the festival, most women prepare the food, *sashimi*, *sushi*, *shitake,* and rice. These are put into obento or wrapping boxes for the next day. They also wrap bottles of *sake* with auspicious papers. On the eve of the festival, there is a meeting of the *sodai*, *toya* and *danjiri* at the temple (six to eleven men). They meet to do '*jumbi'*, the preparation for the festival which is basically a replica of the ritual process that takes place the day after. They rehearse the music, talk and drink heavily until late in the night.

The next morning the ritual process starts with what Hendry (ibid.) has labelled 'unwrapping' or approaching the Shrine. Each village has several deities, with one main Shrine and smaller reproductions of Shrines for less important deities. Shrines are located on mountaintops, or inside island-like forests. They are cut off from the neighbourhood and placed in a remote place. The forest, the distance, and the altitude of the Shrine are not just natural phenomena but a conceptualisation of wrapping. They presuppose different layers of accessibility. The forest is a wrapping forest, it envelops the Shrine in it. At different layers of proximity, trees are cut and gates are erected to trace the way to enter. The way to the deity is a way of wrapping or unwrapping the different layers. In Kamikatsu, the deity is represented by white folded paper on a tablet of wood where its name is written (other places use mirrors, see Hendry 1993: 111). This figure is usually encased inside a box, sealed by a rope. A veil covers the place. The room where the box is found is at the top back of the wooden structure of the Shrine. The deity is wrapped by the box, the veil, the top wooden structure, and these are in turn wrapped by a set of layers of walls, an ascending set of stairs, a middle locked door, the full building of the Shrine, which in turn is closed with a final door. The Shrine is then wrapped by the succession of entrances to it and guarded by two statuettes of lion-dogs and by the whole package of the forest.

Bognar (in Hendry 1993) has pointed out the importance of this layering and wrapping of Shrines: ‘Shrines are not meant to be spaces to enter, but rather remote places to approach and arrive at’ (Bognar 1985 in Hendry 1993: 112). However, at festivals, a Shrine is a space to unwrap. It is unwrapped by the *sodai* and *kannushi*, in order to attract the powers of the deity out of the Shrine into the village.

To ‘reach’ the deity which is the symbolic centre of supernatural and political power involves a process of unwrapping and offering. By unwrapping I mean moving through the layers of this wrapping structure and carrying gifts. A festival starts by getting ready to unwrap the Shrine and move through its layers. First, villagers ‘wrap’ their bodies in their best clothes, their feet in their best socks and shoes, then wrap the prestations they want to make. They use small wrapping bags for rice and coins, and auspicious papers for *sake*. In Sezu village, a procession of scarecrows lines the entrance of the festival, layering the way with funny representations of the main topics: children going to school, the *Aum Shinrikyo* sect, young salary-ladies, a naked drunkard with his erect penis, a peasant working away. A scarecrow representing an *obaasan*, elderly woman, holds a dead crow in her hands. Next to her, a sign is written to expelled the inauspicious bird. They inject a note of carnival air.

In ‘unwrapping’ the process of ascent, villagers leave rice and coins at each of the gates and for the lion-dogs, to signal the stage of unwrapping. In reaching the Shrine villagers cleanse their hands (and some their mouths) and proceed through the last gate. Further on in the main area there is deity-stone, wrapped or circled with ropes and white paper strips. Women in particular throw rice to the deity in the stone. They walk round clock-wise direction (auspicious direction), to ask for a good harvest and household prosperity. A few *sodai* and some *danjiri* are now in the woods, offering prestations of fruits and *sake* to deities. Other men are also

in the woods. Firework shots resounds all over the valley, announcing the beginning of the festival and calling for the deities. *Sodai* are inside the Shrine unwrapping the wooden structures that cover the Shrine. Some make individual petitions to the deity at the entrance door, throwing rice and coins, clapping to attract the deities' attention, bowing and making a prayer.

3.b Unwrapping the layers of the Shrine

The *toya* proceeds to remove and burn old paper and old ropes from last year. He also collects the money. With the help of a *sodai*, he collects the coins, drinks and rice thrown to the deity during the year. Then, they wrap the rice in white paper and write down the amount of money collected. After this, they finally open the Shrine and any annexed buildings. This can be understood as unwrapping the first layer of a Shrine. The Shrine, like a gift, is now open and 'the objects inside' ready for people to see and use. The atmosphere is one of pragmatism and conviviality, villagers greeting each other with words of *omedetou gozaimasu*, (congratulations) and going to work hard and silently. The first layer of unwrapping is done. The Shrine is opened. From inside the Shrine *sodai* remove ritual regalia, wrapping clothes, the *danjiri* (musical stand) and the *mikoshi* (portable Shrine). Men and women enter and leave the open Shrine with ease, always leaving their shoes outside.

Sodai and *toya* meet in the kitchen and have a discussion about the presentation of the ritual prestations. They check the Shrine's information and arrange the trays and prestations. The *toya* explains while preparing it:

> '[you] take the tray, and find its front. The prestations must be given to the deity by the front. Then [you] put a layer of white paper around the bottom of the tray, and put the ritual prestations on it. The ritual prestations are seven: one for each of the products [of the environment]: rice, fish, plants from the sea (seaweed), plants from the garden

(vegetables, daikon, lettuce), fruits from trees (*mikan*, apples, bananas), household produce (rice cakes).

An additional prestation of salt, water and *sakaki* leaves is also kept ready with two white ceramic jars with water and *sake*. These prestations correspond to Bloch's symbolic consumption of the environment in festivals, and they are the main prestations to be offered to the deity.

Sodai start by wrapping the building of the Shrine, *mikoshi* and *danjiri* structures with the cloths they have removed from inside the Shrine buildings. Ropes are put up to define the boundary between the reception area where people leave gifts and the kitchen, and the ascension area towards the deity. *Sakaki* leaves and branches, wrapped with a cord around a second altar in the forest, empty at this stage. *Sakaki* is used as a ritual prestation that signifies the presence of deities. *Sakaki* also wraps or defines the boundaries of the place of a deity. People say that: '*sakaki* leaves trap deities with their move' or 'they show the presence of the deity with their move'. A huge blue and white striped cloth is put up around the Shrine, wrapping its face, paper lamps are made, the name of the village and deity is written on them and they are hung. Exceptionally, in some villages *sodai* cut the paper strips that symbolise the sacrality of the place, auspicious flags, and set them ready for later. Finally, the *sodai* takes a tray with one of the seven prestations to each of the smaller Shrines and other representations of strength and luck such as statues of horses.

In the meantime, more villagers and other *sodai* arrive. They walk with their wrapped bottles of *sake* under their arms. The *toya* leaves his job and bows to them: '*omedetou gozaimasu',* they greet each other. By now all the buildings are wrapped and people begin to bring their gifts of *sake*, although some enter through the kitchen and some gifts were left there the night before. The *toya* makes a gesture of humbling himself before he takes their gifts. Another *sodai*

will be writing down the names, noting the *sake* and amount of money, and placing the gifts in the altar. The *sake* with the name of the household represents its donor and is given as both 'thanks' and a petition for help to the deity and to the man who organised the event. One of the *sodai* goes to the kitchen to pay his fees. Hastily, the *toya* counts the money. Some *sodai* come to tell the *toya* that he should set some money aside for the ritual specialist's fee. The *Sodai* or *toya* brings an auspicious envelope for this money and the envelope is kept out of sight.

The contents of the first layer of the Shrine are now on display for all to see. Much time is spent assembling the wooden parts and the structure of the *mikoshi* and *danjiri*, and wrapping both with cloth, *sakaki* leaf, and paper. The *danjiri* men also wrap their bodies with blue and white tapi, and proceed to ascend into the *danjiri* and start playing. In the next three hours eight to twelve men from the neighbourhood will arrive. They are the *mikoshi* carriers. *Sodai* will help them to wrap their torsos, legs, head and feet with white cloth. They will also wrap a second portable stand with a large barrel of *sake*, a gift from the *sodai* to the festival. This is wrapped in white strips of paper symbolising the deity and its auspiciousness. In some festivals, children's *mikoshi* and children's *danjiri* are also prepared (if there are enough children). From now on only *sodai* will stay inside the Shrine and proceed to further unwrap the distance that separates them from the *kami*. This is crucial if gifts are to be offered. During this stage, the essential aspect of the ritual is to unwrap the gifts so they can be symbolically consumed. The wrapped Shrine has become the path through which prestations will travel from villagers 'up' to the deity. Wrapping provides the ritual context for gifts to be unwrapped, given to the deity, and later returned to the *sodai*, *toya*, and the rest.

What most villagers experience at a festival is that after the arrival at the Shrine they cannot unwrap their way further into the Shrine. Instead, they must surrender their gifts into the hands of *sodai* who will pass them on to the deity. Gifts are left between certain layers of wrapping and at a certain distance from the deity. The relations with the *sodai* are here formal and polite, with a great degree of ritualistic behaviour such as bowing and a hierarchical understanding of the 'distance' or layer where people are. Entrance in to the wrapped Shrine, although the prerogative of the *sodai*, is not restricted to them. Guests enter with the *sodai*'s permission when families want to make direct petitions for good luck and health to the deity. They must make a substantial gift of *sake* and money to the *sodai* and pay an additional fee for the *kannushi*. They receive wrapped talismans that contain the name of the deity, which they can take home and place in the domestic altar for protection as they do at New Year. In some villages, two symbolic guests are also invited to the Shrine. Two villagers, masked as the evil man of the forest *tengu* and *otafuku* or fortune woman, partake of the *shinsen*, *naorai*, and *utage* inside the Shrine. They are invited to enter as 'guests', and they are asked to offer a prestation of *sakaki* leaves. I was invited as a 'guest', too. Villagers always preferred to invite me inside the Shrine, rather than leave me outside. However, I was never allowed to bring any gift, as a *sodai* once put it:

> No one expects it from you, you are not a neighbour and you have not paid the fees that neighbours must pay for the maintenance of the Shrine.

In my perception, the masked figures represented the primary couple[52], the centre of the household. They are the two sides of village order, drunkenness and prosperity, making a fundamental connection between *sake* as gifts and prosperity. As in the *setsubun* in chapter four, and the use of scarecrows, the neighbourhood is introduced into the Shrine, 'masked' as the honoured guests. By contrast, I was a foreigner,[53]I could enter but had no obligation to make gifts.

3.c Unwrapping and wrapping the deity: the power of gifts in attracting the deity into social life

When all the buildings have been wrapped and the gifts received, the *sodai* will stay inside the Shrine and wait for the *kannushi*. The *kannushi*, like the deity, is treated very generously but ultimately controlled by gifts. He or she is introduced into the community, offered prestations, has his or her auspicious aspects extracted (the *kannushi* gives talismans to *sodai*), and departs again. *kannushi* are not usually from the village or town and, although some *kannushi* are women, in the different festivals on which the following description is based the *kannushi* was always a man.

On arrival, the *kannushi* washes his hands and mouth, makes a initial prayer to the deity, and the *toya* bow to him from inside the temple. The *kannushi* enters and sits in the upper right hand side of the room, with the *sodai* sitting opposite him. He speaks a few congratulatory words and sets to check on the disposition of trays and the number of *sake* bottles. He also check the set of cords that 'wrap' and separates the stairs from the reception area where gifts are lined up. Cords made of straw signify the sacrality of an area, and in that sense they 'wrap' (create a layer) between one area and the next. A mat of dried rice is layered out on the stairs for him. He then unwraps his ritual wear and hat and proceeds to dress up, while the *sodai* patiently wait. The dress is white and blue (or orange, depending on the Shrine and occasion) and layered in a succession of robes. Ritual tools, such as tablets with sacred words, are kept within these layers. Once he is properly dressed, he begins the process of cutting *gohai,* or several strips of white paper for purification purposes, and a multicoloured auspicious flag. When that is finished, he makes a small prayer in the direction of the deity and altar, then he turns around, congratulates everybody with a bow, and states the date and the name of the village. Thereafter he makes a first prayer, and the first action of

purification, cleansing the *sodai*. He then leaves the Shrine and purifies the *danjiri*, while the *toya* follows him with salt and *sakaki*, sprinkling water to purify the way. Inside, the *danjiri* men await in a formal bow, looking at the floor, until the *kannushi* returns to the Shrine. With his actions, he has wrapped the *danjiri* into the Shrine. From that moment the *danjiri* men will play arduously and strongly to attract the deity and please it.

Back inside, the *kannushi* starts his ritual chants, musical sounds, and purification (he bangs the taiko drum or plays a recording of the chants). Later he unwraps the *sake* and water, which will be offered as shinsen and naorai to the deity. He also makes several actions of unwrapping the way up the deity to return back to the prestations. In the meantime, *mikoshi* carriers bring the *mikoshi* to the entrance, and the *kannushi* 'blesses' the *mikoshi*. The *kannushi* then moves towards the top, and the *toya* form a human chain to move the prestations up to where the deity is hidden. The food is placed directly in front of the deity, wrapped and separated only by a single curtain and box. The deity is supposed to enhance the qualities of the food received, which is taken down again. Finally, the *kannushi* provides a symbolic offer of *sakaki* leaf. The giving of *sakaki,* which is reproduced in weddings and all Shinto ceremonies, even death memorials, is a symbol of the unity of the worshipper with the deity. It is an expression of 'humble' giving. All the guests go on to offer one leaf, which is ritually turned face-down before being given. The first stage of offering or *shinsen* and *naorai* is completed.

After *shinsen*, the *kannushi* proceeds to remove the *sakaki* and the gifts, and ascends again to unwrap the different layers towards the deity. He pulls the curtain that hides it and breaks the seal. He then cleanses, offers more words and purifies the space. The deity is now visible. Villagers are forbidden to look at the deity, and bow their heads on their knees. The deity is a bare strip of paper

attached to a piece of wood. The 'core deity', wrapped and sealed by so many layers, is now unwrapped. The ritual specialist (the *kanushi*), who can only touch it with gloves and must wear a face mask, is the only one who can see this inner form. Hendry and others argue that unwrapping is not a process of reaching a core. However, the process of unwrapping the deity is done to reach the core, not in order to exhibit. Although it is now wrapped, the action of wrapping the Shrine acquires meaning. The specialist re-wraps the deity again, to protect it from view, with golden brocades. He then wraps it once more within the layers of clothes of his dress. Inside his dress, the *kannushi* transports the deity to the portable Shrine. The *kannushi* makes a humming sound, representing the sound of the deity. Everybody averts their eyes from it and the *kannushi* places it in the *mikoshi*.

3.d Wrapping the deity into the mikoshi

When the deity is inside the *mikoshi*, the *kannushi* seals the portable Shrine with a small ribbon. If the *mikoshi* is a new one he places a mirror, which refers to the mythological story of the first deity/emperor *Amaterasu*. For a new *mikoshi* he wraps the door with a white cloth. The carriers take the *mikoshi* downstairs carefully. At this moment the deity starts showing its strength and power. The portable Shrine moves, shakes and jumps fiercely, showing all its power and magnificence. The carriers are thrown form one side to the other, stumbling through the forest. The *mikoshi* dances and jumps threatening all those around, and specially the *danjiri*. The *danjiri* men play hard and loud. The *kannushi,* followed by the *toya,* take the prestations and start a procession into the forest. There they make a second offering. In some villages, especially if the *mikoshi* is new, pieces of *mochi* are thrown to all participants. The throwing forces them to compete in catching the auspicious cakes. Hendry argues that 'the portable Shrine represents, rather than carries the local deity, and it is to be admired from without

rather than penetrated to some sacred core'. I agree that the deity is not 'carried', but as villagers say, 'the deity moves the Shrine with its strength'. The deity wraps the community with its journey. In the journey into the village, more gifts circulate. The *mikoshi* stops at each household. The neighbours come out and see the spectacle. Men and women offer wrapped bottles of *sake* to the *mikoshi*. They place them either at the *genkan* of the *mikoshi* or give them to the *sodai,* who follow with a truck and write down the names and prestations. In a break from the long journey, a smiling man came out with a box of beers and cups of *sake*. He said to me:

> I do not go to the Shrine, I am too busy with my restaurant. The best part of the festival is when the *mikoshi* comes to the village, though. When the *mikoshi* passes by, I give *sake* to the *mikoshi*. We also bring beer and *sake* for the *mikoshi* men, because they are thirsty after so much effort, we give them the drinks, sometimes money, to thank them for their 'help'. He gives me soft drinks and a box of sweet corn. He thanks me for my interest in going with the *mikoshi*.

At this point of the ritual, we meet an inversion. The remote wrapped Shrine, always peripheral and 'above', is now right at the margins of the village, clearly in contact with the households.

The collection of *sake* is crucial at this time. Villagers at the margin of the Shrine are compelled at the sight of the *mikoshi* to come out of their houses and offer a prestation, 'to thank' and 'to ask for the auspiciousness of' the deity. The opposite is also true: the *sodai* are coerced to wrap the village into the festival process by having to 'descend' to the village and collect the gifts. Seen in this way, the festival collection of gifts becomes a battle for the management of gifts, and the limits of the interdependence between households. The relations among neighbours are more informal here, and they thank each other with a bow. Villagers return to the inside of their houses. Gifts are central to the villagers formulation of the political relations among households in a village. It is the

sodai's role to renounce the power they acquire through gifts by moving and making a display of the power of the deity.

This kind of relation, in which *sodai* are the organisers and beneficiaries (recipients) of gifts, who manage to convince the young members of the village to use their strength and carry the *mikoshi* and play music for auspiciousness, and the villagers, who ultimately decide to 'thank' them or not with gifts, epitomises the villagers' way of organising themselves as a community. The understanding of how to organise a community is then paradigmatically based on how to extract strength from the young (as well as to decide which house is 'young' and which is 'senior'). *Sodai*, as well as most figures of seniors, such as school teachers and local politicians, obtain their political vitality by negotiating how to extract the vitality and strength of others, with the consent of the village through their bestowal of gifts of *sake* as 'thanks'.

3.e The mikoshi returns: inverting the process - unwrapping the deity out of the mikoshi - wrapping up the Shrine

After the *mikoshi* arrives, the names of the givers are outside the Shrine walls. Women and men gather around and read out the names, gossiping about the amount of prestations given by each neighbour. Children play around, buying toys, food, and fishing or playing fish games. Once in the Shrine, an inversion of the process begins. The deity is unwrapped and put back in its place, and the wrapping cloths are hidden. The inversion also happens for the Shrine: all that had been unwrapped in order to meet the deity is wrapped again. The *kannushi* proceeds to wrap what he had unwrapped, he seals the box, pulls the curtain and hides the wrapping cloth he used inside his travelling case. He ritually finishes his purification, states the date, and congratulates the *sodai*. The *toya* brings the *sake*,

the tea, and the trays of wrapped food. The *toya* or a *sodai* also gives the *kannushi* an envelope with his fees. The *kannushi* accepts it with a bow and cleanses it with a ritual gesture. He puts the envelope into his case with no delay. As the *kannushi* leaves,[54] the *toya* and *sodai* leave the Shrine to meet the *mikoshi* and the *danjiri*. They unwrap the Shrine, dismantle the *mikoshi* and the *danjiri* and put everything back into the Shrine. The rhythm of work is soft but persistent. Men work together, matching their abilities to push and carry without showing tiredness. They seem to forget the intoxication of the *sake* while carrying the *mikoshi*. In less than half an hour, as sun begins to set, in the twilight, the Shrine is finally unwrapped and sealed again. The feast continues inside the annexed house.

3.f Last 'wrapping': social obligations at the drinking party

Every village has a 'feast' and entertainment or *utage. Utage* can be understood as a form of unpacking the formality (Hendry 1995) and conversely as wrapping the distance between the Shrine and villagers. The atmosphere on these occasions is semi-formal, with people sitting around middle tables, and women coming in out of the kitchen (or close to fires) with *bancha* and prepared food (toasted tea). As Hiraoka, an informant, told me:

> Festivals are a good way for you to experience the different cultures of Kamikatsu. You will see how each household has different ways of cooking. They also have different *bentos* and *furoshiki*, each house is different, every festival is different, we have a varied culture in Kamikatsu.

This theme of food is much commented on by everybody. An elderly woman argues: 'After marriage women have to learn the ways of cooking of the house of their husband'. Basically there are subtle differences in the ways of boiling rice, wrapping fish and adding flavour and colour to dishes. The host begins by

offering a ritual sip of *sake* to the *kannushi,*[55] and proceeds by offering *sake* to everybody. The atmosphere gradually becomes relaxed. There is theatre, songs, karaoke, dances, sumo, competitions to win gifts, and fireworks. The *sodai* have their last private ritual. During the eating and drinking, they begin to discuss in low tones who is going to be next year's *toya*. They thank this year's *toya*, and decide who should be next. Villagers also become more talkative and most formalities are abandoned. The advantages of this were mentioned by Atsuko, my host:

> 'As we are Catholics, we do not pay the full maintenance fee. Because we do not pay, we do not go to festivals, either. This year however, I went for my children's *sake*. I found out that when people share food and drink *sake*, villagers talk openly. I did not know, for instance, that they did not like the way we maintained our road and parked our car. I learned that I have to trim the vegetation of the road, because it is a communal road; and we will have to move the car into our entrance yard. Although the other place is right at the entrance of our house, it does not belong to the boundaries of the house, it is part of our neighbours' land. I did not know this at all. So, it was a good thing that I went to the festival. I would never have known about these things and tension would have built up without us knowing. People here are too shy, and they did not dare to tell me all these things. They are polite. But these things caused tension. They came out in the festival. It is done in a way that people do not feel bad about it, you do not take it the wrong way.'

Atsuko presents the drinking parties as occasions when she felt she was 'wrapped up' into the community, as opposed to the rest of the year in which 'everybody keeps to themselves', and 'we do not know what happens, people would not tell'. It was the beginning of an experience of 'wrappedness', rather than just nakedness, of social dispositions. Relations during the year were tightly wrapped around her, but did not include her more than marginally, so she could not see what was going on. It is possible to argue, as in Hendry's view, that they had 'unwrapped' the usual package of relations that was not available to her before. They were wrapping us around the concept of how to present the household and the boundaries. The consequence was that more social control on the external aspect of my host's household and its boundaries was applied. What

appeared to me as an initial 'unwrapping' of feelings was in fact a way to correct the presentation of the house and the trespassing of which we were unaware. The festival unwrapped the package of sociability, its rules and obligations.

4. Conclusions. 'Untouched' package

There is nothing as surprising as what happens when a festival is over. After villagers have left, the Shrine remains as silent, clean and uninhabited as the very morning of the festival. It is hard to believe that there was a happy, loud, playful crowd hours earlier. This would be, for example, an unthinkable concept in fiestas in Spain, where after the fiesta the place is never fully deserted, with people sleeping in the streets and the streets littered with all kinds of food and drinks. The Shrine appears like an untouched package.

The final stage of the festival is not one of unwrapping, but of wrapping up and closing, of reconstructing the original packaged Shrine as found. Wrapping up is a process of moving away from the Shrine, and the last stages of 'unwrapping feelings' take place when most of the layers of the wrapping of the Shrine have been concluded and the Shrine is only inhabited by the deity. The final wrapping takes place, and although the Shrine remains untouched the community does not. After the festival villagers know what obligations they have, how they have to behave and present their households. The festival process of unwrapping and wrapping is also a process of internal change and creation of the right conditions for gifts to be exchanged and consumed, and thus acquire the strength, obligation and moral character that is seen as 'good' by the community. Ritual prestations play a crucial role in defining the conditions under which individual households are said to participate in the festival process. Ritual prestations are given in order to enact the symbolism of rebounding violence and to enforce the conditions in

which 'strength' and vitality are extracted from the young, and the *kami* (foreign deity and state) are incorporated into local affairs.

Festivals are packaged events. A festival is made up of several interrelated ritual processes of layered events. Wrapping is the symbolic time frame through which gifts move, and define the position of the actors in relation to others. I argue that in village festivals, the *mikoshi* travels tracing the boundary of the village. It displays the control of the *sodai* in their expansion into the rest of the households. Throughout the return of gifts villagers fight to contain the *sodai* within the Shrine as well as to pull them out of their confinement. Festivals are in Bloch's sense about the strong and young, but the appropriation of gifts also takes place at more levels than those of the *sodai*, the *mikoshi*, and the *kannushi*. Women's gifts are veiled in the process although they are equally as important as the gifts made by men at the moment of the exchange of *sake*.

The *sodai*, connected to the expression of the state and culture through wrapping, express their reproduction through the conquests of their immediate neighbours, those who give gifts to them. The *mikoshi* fight against the *danjiri* to offer their strength and power, and these are clearly opposed to the senior *toya*. This political battle, though, dies out at the festival, and only in the cases where the *sodai* and members of the Yakuba coincide in the same individual does actual political expansion through power take place (see Chapter Seven). Finally, the structure of wrapping and unwrapping reflects, in my opinion, concepts of inhabiting, making space habitable, and transforming the Shrine. In wrapping and unwrapping the process to the Shrine, the journey and its return, villagers have different degrees of closeness to the Shrine. Gifts such as *sake* and food reflect status differentials but also facilitate the unwrapping of feeling and the acquisition of social obligations. The structure of wrapping on the different process of layering and unwrapping means that, at the drinking party, all villagers

alike moved themselves to the last layer, the one farthest from the centre, and that sociability was re-enacted and gifts finally consumed. Relations of power are not so much re-enacted by wrapping but by the capacity of actors to move the gifts and keep them in different layers of the process, sometimes as collectors, sometimes as those 'thanking'. They force the *sodai* to use the young to move the Shrine into the village. Villagers move away from giving in the Shrine into other experiences of wrappedness and sociability in the annexed house. During the festival each villager is in a different layer of proximity to the Shrine. As the festival unwraps towards the centre, some villagers are excluded from being close to the centre. The relations between people in the different layers are clearly hierarchical and formal, and a great deal of politeness comes into play. However, as people wrap up the shrine and move to the houses at the periphery of the Shrine, those inside the shrine and closer to the centre move gradually to the periphery to join the rest of men and women there. There, when most of the village meets at the same distance from the centre, politeness, formality and hierarchical relations cede. So I would conclude that the last stages of a ritual are not stages of unwrapping objects and aspects of the Shrine. The last stages have political significance for the neighbours of a community. This stage place all the actors at the same distance from the centres of sacred and political power. There is little difference between *sodai*, *dangiri* and the rest of neighbours. There they finally consume the main gifts collected through this process of layering distance from it. Social obligations are re-acquired at this last stage.

Six stages of wrapping and unwrapping a festival:

Plate 8. Sodai giving sake to the deity (and to each other) inside the shrine

Plate 9. Horizontal giving of mochi by the toya after the above ceremony has finished. Mochi is given to celebrate the auspiciousness of the event, and include those people that were left outside the Shrine, but also made gifts to the festival.

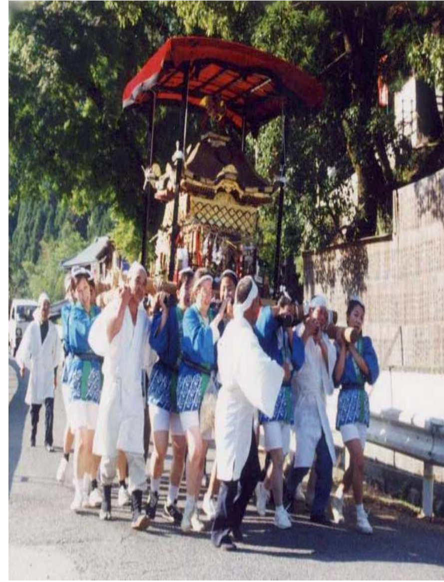


Plate 10. Top left: wrapped dangiri with musicians playing to please the deity. Top right: the new *gerumikoshi*, women carrying mikoshi (including myself). Middle: Unwrapping the shrine at noon. Bottom: feast at a small festival, unwrapping of feelings in my village.

Chapter 6

Naked commodities and profusely wrapped gifts

In the previous chapters, I concentrated on the villagers' understandings of gifts in the context of deity worship and festival exchange. In this chapter I discuss the organisation of household economic life and the extended net of alliances with kin and work. In particular I give detailed examples of *chugen* and *seibo*, the two main gift-giving seasons. I argue that although most analyses of Japanese gift exchange look at gift giving as a single model of exchange, several models and ways of knowing about gifts and 'commodities as gifts' exist. In this chapter I touch on the links between the ideas of debt, obligation through gift giving, and the issue of commodities and commodity exchange. The pages that follow are premised on the acknowledgement that although 'gift giving' and 'commodity exchange' represent different sets of social practices, which might overlap in capitalist societies (see Chapter 2, Section 2) they are not homogenous models of exchange. In this chapter I address the issue of how to theorise the relation between these multiple models or ideas. It is misleading, for instance, to present Japan as the industrialised 'society of the gift'. According to Carrier (1995),

> People came to construct and see the realm of the commodity (economy), as distinct from and opposed to the realm of the gift (society)(…). The dominant cultural constructions of these realms exaggerate the changes that occurred and the resulting differences between these realms (Carrier 1995: 201).

This character of exaggeration of changes and differences affects not only the way a society is depicted internally as having different spheres of exchange, but I argue it is also responsible for presenting Japan as exaggeratedly different from other industrialised societies. The material in this chapter shows that it is

analytically useful to ask to what extent gift exchange and the notions of obligation in Japan are not a 'survival' of the 'society of the gift', but on the contrary embedded in capitalist commodity exchange just as much as in other industrialised societies.

I start by identifying some of the forms of associations and annual gift giving occasions that are relevant to the villagers. I locate the groups and associations within the wider town context, and discuss the patterns of exchange among households as well as and the role of kin ties in the exchange of gifts. I then deal with how the notions of obligations and debt enter into villagers understandings of what gifts are, and how they conceptualise 'commodities as gifts'. Finally, I examine the changes in the notion of *giri* or obligation as a crucial theme in Japanese gift exchange. A discussion of Valentine's Day gifts and funeral gifts or *okaeshi* sheds light on the new ways, 'creative responses', of thinking about gifts and obligation.

1. Groups and day to day co-operation: thanks gifts

The idea of 'group' is a key aspect of anthropological analysis of social organisation in Japan. Historically, there has been a tendency to emphasise 'group' as a loose concept of units and unions among people. Household, work school, village, and leisure groups. Nakane (1970) defines corporate groups as a set of households closely connected through economic activities. Ben-Ari (1989) defines groups as 'heterogeneous gatherings, existing collectivities or organisations' (Ben-Ari 1989: 44), which include gatherings of kin members, workmates, age-mates and those with common interests. Groups appear to be defined by a 'number of mechanisms - like drinking, recreation activities, or rituals - which facilitate the relatively smooth creation of solidarity and a climate

suited for close interaction' (ibid.: 60). More recently, anthropologists have emphasised the importance of groups beyond the household:

> An individual's overall status in the world outside his or her *uchi* groups depends to a large extent on membership in and therefore association with those certain groups (Hendry 1987: 80-81).

Status in urban areas is affected by associations to groups beyond the immediate neighbourhood and companies at work (ibid.) This is also a characteristic of rural areas, where individuals extend their relationships outside their traditional neighbourhood. Nakane's (1970), Lebra's (1976) and Bachnick (1994) - among others - distinction of *uchi* (in-group) and *soto* (out-of-group) emphasises the character of opposition of such units depending on where they are positioned in relation to others and to '*soto*' or outside. According to Ishida (1984: 23 in Ben-Ari 1989) the boundary between the in-group and out-group is flexible. Belonging to one group or another depends on both individual status and how members of a given group negotiate the *uchi*-*soto* boundary to integrate or exclude out-group people. Both the sense of belonging to a group and the shifting boundaries of groups are constantly reconfirmed through daily rituals, with a considerable amount of peer pressure to conform and to remain in-group (Hendry 1987). This pressure usually focuses on allocation of responsibility, legal status, influence on decision making, and personalisation of conflict' (Ben-Ari 1989: 58-59). In short, the literature presents groups as constructions, the contexts in which people reproduce social microcosms 'within'. However, groups are not mere units of people but processes of interaction, where people learn to relate to a constant 'idea' or 'construct' of a group despite moving successively and concurrently through many actual groups (ibid.: 60).

These points are significant for the analysis of gift exchange. Villagers' practices of gift giving revolve around the emphasis on thanking those who provide work and affines. These considerations are expressed mostly at *chugen*

and *seibo*, the mid-summer and New Year seasons. Gifts in these contexts are measured both emotionally and economically. Gifts are used to help people and to express emotions. From this perspective, groups in Kamikatsu can be characterised as a set of localised networks in which gifts play a key role in determining the gradual incorporation of individuals into a group. In this context it is possible to identify patterns of gift exchange which are typically made up of reciprocal delayed exchange, asymmetric reciprocity to seniors, and communal giving to those who 'help' and 'teach'. Gift giving revolves around the theme of compensation for assistance, compliance, and help (see for instance, the discussion of '*sewa*', '*orei*', '*kaeshi*', '*kimochi*', '*(o)miyage*', and '*service*' in Chapter Three). My use of the term 'gift exchange' refers to the processes through which individuals incorporate identities, emotions and experience throughout their lives – and not merely to the moment of giving a gift.

1.a Uchi and gift giving patterns

The primary group, *uchi,* or 'the House'[56] is central to villagers' ideas about gift giving. The 'household' has been extensively debated in the literature and is central to anthropological analyses of gender, kinship and exchange. The basis of 'the family system' or *ie* as the main socialising unit is one of a continuing line of generations. The continuity of the *ie* is the main preoccupation of the individuals in a House, with house needs being of more importance than individual needs (Hendry 1987, Bachnick 1986, Nakane 1967). In Kamikatsu there are two types of households and kinship organisations. The first, which villagers call 'traditional', is normally formed by an elementary patrilocal family made up of a married couple, their eldest son with his wife and unmarried children and their *shinriu*. *Shinriu* or relatives are family members related through a bilateral

extension of kinship who may or may not live in the same building. Although families are patrilocal, there is a strong tendency to maintain some form of exchange with the husbands' affines. 'Traditional' families have recently become more 'nuclear' in character, with the eldest son and his wife living separate from the older couple. The gradual break down of extended patrilocality has intensified gift giving among the different households.

> Yoko is a married woman of 33 living with her husband and two daughters of 2 and 5 years old. She visits her mother-in-law twice a year. She takes her a wrapped cake or good quality tea when she visits, and sends a mid-summer gift of around Y10, 000. Her mother-in-law reciprocates with a similar gift and gives her fruits every time she visits. Her mother-in-law also bought dolls for girl's day. Yoko visits her own mother much more regularly, with her husband and girls, and takes her mother cakes. She says that compared to her mother's generation, she is well-off, she does not have to live with her mother-in-law and can visit her mother as often as she wants. She never returns home empty-handed. Between both families she is given food that lasts several days a week. However, she resents the two grandparents' competition over gifts to their daughters, as they have to spend too much money on gift-giving and returning gifts. They want to show that, despite living away, they 'care', and that they care more than the other grandparents.

Young married couples and 'new-comers' receive a large proportion of gifts from maternal and paternal grandparents, the elder and younger brothers and sisters of bilateral grandparents, and first cousins and second cousins. The maternal and avuncular branches of the family are closer to the parents' branch, as they meet through their visits to the nuclear family. Non-traditional families make very little use of layered wrapping when giving, and most gifts have the flavour of 'home made' or personal gifts. At *chugen* and *seibo*, these gifts may be layered in commercial *noshigami*, but some families prefer not to do so. Some informants complained that they always had problems with the shops because the shops insisted on wrapping each gift with *noshigami,* when for them simple wrapping would be enough. Return is less obligatory when gifts of money are made. In 'non-traditional' families, communal sharing with family and friends appears more important than obligatory gift exchange, and personal help during

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Figure M. Details of differences between a 'traditional' household's *chugen* gifts and a 'non-traditional' one.

Income gifts. Bon Mid-summer. August 1995		
GIFT	DONOR AND RELATION WITH RECIPIENT	AMOUNT
BEER (1CASE) 24 CAN BEERS	WATER GROUP. THEY USE WATER FACILITIES FROM THE RECIPIENT FOR THEIR FARMS. IT COMITEE OF 7 PEOPLE WHO MADE A JOIN GIFT.	Y 6,900 £36
BEER (1CASE)24 CAN BEERS	FROM TANAKA, WHO IS TOP WORKER IN RECIPIENTS JOB. THE GIFT WAS FROM THE WORK AS A RECOGNITION FOR HAVING EMPLOYEED HIS SON.	Y 6,900
BEER (1 CASE) 24 CAN BEERS	WATER PIPE OPERATOR. HE IS A TECHNICIAN WHO OFFERS HIS *SERVICE*S TO THE RECIPIEN	Y 4,000 * £21
BEER (1 CASE) 24 CAN BEERS	ELDER SON OF MOTHER'S FRIEND OF THE RECIPIENT	Y 4,000
NORI (SEAWEED)	STORE MANAGER THAT SUPPLIES FOOD DURING THE YEAR. THEY HAVE A CUSTOMER RE HE WAS GIVEN A TOWEL.	Y 3,000 £15
CAKE (OKASHI)	RECIPIENTS YOUNGER BROTHER	Y 3,000
CAKE (OKASHI)	RECIPIENTS OLDER BROTHER	Y 3,000
JUICE (1 CASE OF CAN JUICE)	RECIPIENTS YOUNGER SISTER	Y 7,000
FRUITS AND JUICE TEA	RECIPIENTS WIFE'S MOTHER (MOTHER IN LAW)	Y 6,000 Y 5,000
TISSUE PAPER	ANOTHER STORE	Y 200
COMPLEMENTARY STORE PRESENTS: VEGETABLES, CAKE, TOWEL, SOAP, FISH	RECIPIENTS EMPLOYEES. HIS 30 EMPLOYEES GAVE INDIVIDUALLY TO HIM. SINCE THE AM IT IS TOO DIFFICULT TO MEASURE A 10% OF Y 200 HE WILL NOT MAKE THE 10% RETURN T HE WILL GIVE THEM FOOD AND DRINKS DURING THE YEAR.	Y 200 £1

Outcome gifts Bon Mid-summer. August 1995		
GIFT	RELATION WITH RECIPIENT	AMOUNT
BEER (1CASE) 24 CAN BEERS	IN-LAWS	Y 6,900
BEER (1CASE)24 CAN BEERS	SENIOR COLLEAGE AT WORK. FOR HELP IN DRIVING HIM DURING THE YEAR, FOR FRIENDS BEING A GOOD PATRON TO HIM.	Y 6,900
MIKAN (ORANGE) A BOX	RECIPIENTS YOUNGER BROTHER	Y 4,500
MIKAN (ORANGE) A BOX	RECIPIENTS ELDER BROTHER	Y 4,500
MIKAN (ORANGE) A BOX	RECIPIENTS YOUNGER SISTER	Y 4,500
SOMEN (NOODLE PASTA) A BOX	NEIGHBOUR	Y 3,500
SOMEN (NOODLE PASTA) A BOX	FRIEND AND PATRON AT WORK, WHO TOUGHT HIM IN HIS WORK. ALSO RECIPIENTS WIFE HIM FOOD DURING THE YEAR	Y 3,500
NASHI (PEAR) A BOX	CHEF KITCHEN ABOVE FOR HIS GOOD WORK AND FOR THE RELATIONSHIP THE RECIPIENT FATHER	Y 4,500 £23

TOTAL: INCOME Y 49,000 £258
: OUTCOME Y 38,800 £204

NON TRADITIONAL HOUSEHOLD.

1 box of grapes, sent by post with no *noshigami* wrapping, from a close friend with whom they usually exchange fruits during the year. They sent out fruits of the season a few days later of a similar value.
1 BOX OF 8 CAN BEERS WRAPPED WITH *NOSHIGAMI* FROM THE WIFE'S ELDER SISTER WHO HAD RECEIVED IT FROM A GROUP SHE USUALLY GOES TO. NO RETURN.
1 TOWEL FROM JA, WRAPPED IN COMMERCIAL JA PLASTIC BAG FOR CUSTOMER LOYALTY. NO RETURN. 14 TOWELS FROM A NEIGHBOUR (NEIGHBOUR DID NOT NEED THEM). NO RETURN.
1 TOWEL FROM A SHOP. 1 BOX OF TISSUE PAPER FROM THE GARAGE.
CAKES AND OTHER FOOD FROM THE RECIPIENT'S MOTHER WHO HAD RECEIVED SEVERAL GIFTS OF *CHUGEN* AND COULD NOT CONSUME THEM ALL.
SEVERAL MID-SUMMER POSTCARDS FROM FRIENDS. SENT THEM POSTCARDS IN RETURN.

harvest or the construction of buildings is returned with invitations to a meal at New Year or barter.

> Atsuko went to her friends to help them with their harvest. Their plot is too small for machines and they needed extra hands. A storm was approaching, and the harvest had to be finished quickly, so they worked hard for several days. Every day she took her obento with her so as not to give anyone the trouble of preparing a meal for her. Her friends, who are also cake makers, came once a month or every two months after the harvest, bringing home made cakes, beautifully wrapped in a bamboo case. The cakes were not just to 'thank', like an obligation to return something, Atsuko argued, 'it is just to show appreciation, they are very kind people and would have brought it when they came to visit, anyway.

In non-traditional families friends are crucial in the exchange of mutual help, including day to day assistance with work and children. They are more important than kin, who usually live too far away. They engage in symmetric exchange of food and drink, with wrapping, but no layering of papers. Some households, like the Watanabe, make a point of not using too much wrapping, plastic bags, or commercial products. Atsuko and other families created strong relations through barter rather than obligatory gift exchange. These kind of relationships, however, take place as a result of the capacity of people to switch to new forms of relations with their neighbours, which would not have been possible in a more 'traditional' setting. The Watanabe and other families indicated on in numerous occasions that they wished to use barter, as a more 'human' type of exchange. They hoped to transcend the utilitarian and consumeristic nature of gift giving, especially the excessive and useless gifts of obligation. The attempt of these families to return to a more 'natural' economy is a clear reflection of the existence of capitalist relations of production and exchange. Their ways of thinking about gifts are only possible in capitalist exchange, where individuals aim to transcend it. Market commodities such as kitchen utensils and new gadgets, immensely popular in other households, are avoided by them. Instead, garden food, home-made gifts, and re-cycled items are exchanged. A field note reflects this:

Atsuko would also go to help the Shibata family, the bakers, to make the hand-made organic bread which they sell at the onzen in Kamikatsu and in the few organic and ecological shops in Tokushima. They do not exchange any traditional gifts at *chugen* or *seibo*. Their relations are based on mutual help. Shibata gives bread to Atsuko at any time of the week, fresh and leftover bread, helping each other out in their domestic economy. In this way, they reduce each other's domestic expenses.

There are substantial differences in how traditional and non-traditional families approach gifts, the amount of gifts and wrapping being most important. Non-traditional families developed strong alliances without the expenses of gift giving. They looked 'poorer', and they were poorer in economic terms and they did not always 'fit' in.

Looking at the Figure M, *chugen* and *seibo* constitute the main domestic expenditure for any traditional or non-traditional family. Over 60% of the gifts are said to be *giri* or obligatory (although I discuss the changes in the perception of *giri* below). There are many traditional and non-traditional families who are gradually cutting down on *seibo* and *chugen* by limiting them to kin and only those who 'help' and leaving *giri* gifts aside. *Giri* gifts occur differently in most of the non-traditional families. First, they are distinguishable by the fact that kin members are not always expected to make *seibo* gifts. There is a strong tendency to organise *mochi* pounding, the production of which reduces the asymmetry of age and gender. Instead, considerations of team work and mutual co-operation emerges. On these occasions, all members of the family become active producers of prestations and gifts. Relations among kin are redefined as much closer in terms of mutuality. Another example from my host family illustrates the different attitudes to obligation and mutuality between kin at New Year.

The Watanabe invited their kin to have the New Year meal with them. Atsuko prepared a vegetarian meal and bought the rice for pounding *mochi*. Earlier in the day her mother, her mother's sisters, came to help with the pounding of *mochi*. Her sister and mother, with whom she exchanges help and food during the week, brought a bottle of vinegar and some fruits, all unwrapped. Gufodh's friends and first cousins were also invited to the meal. The first cousins arrived at the meal with a friend and children.

> Gufodh was in charge of boiling rice. After the boiling of the rice, teams were assembled to make *mochi*. Atsuko's mother and mother's sister helped in folding the *mochi* and filling it with sweet beans. The others played on the patio, or walked in the garden, talked about herbs, and took turns at *mochi* pounding. Everyone kept coming and going between the pounding and folding of *mochi*, and eating the already made cakes. Two rounds of pounded *mochi* were consumed while producing it. Afterwards they sat in the porch and ate lunch. After the drinks and talk, kin and friends start leaving. Atsuko gave several trays of *mochi* to each of them (around two kilos), as well as garden vegetables, for which they thanked her heartedly.

All families, traditional and non-traditional alike put great value on the gifts and leftover food that they take home at the end of the day. The crucial character of giving 'small' gifts which all have helped to produce, reveals the central place of mutual help in the formulation of exchange.

2. Work and kinship ties: notions of tradition and obligation

Within the frame of kin, alliances are often built along the lines of repayment of gratitude at mid-summer and New Year. Mid-summer and New-Year gifts are not always about 'repaying' gratitude. The two gift giving seasons constitute the main context for the expression of the internal relations with members of one's group, *uchi no kasoku,* as well as those who form the immediate group of reference outside, *shigoto no hito, tonari no hito, tomodachi* (those at work, around, neighbours, and friends). Thus, debts of gratitude and obligation to repay come into play in this context, but they are a reduction of the complexity of relations among kin.

> The Azuma family is a traditional household composed of a young household head and his wife, (both between their late thirties and mid-forties), Azuma's mother and grandmother and three children, a young boy of three, and two girls of seven and ten. The Azuma couple work together at the town office as well as in their gardens. Most of their end of year work bonus is spent on obligatory *seibo* gifts to kin and to those whom the family wanted to 'thank'. Part of their bonus is used to buy drinks, clothes for the children and food. As with many other families, *seibo* gifts are the main economic

> strain on their domestic budget, although as both spouses worked it is not a serious problem. At new year, their house is busy with the visits of neighbours. They bring small towels with the words *omedetou gozaimasu itsumo osewa ni narimasu*, congratulations, thanks for your day-to-day help. Azuma arranges the gifts at the altar. In the altar there is already a group of seven wrapped towels, from five of the neighbours, the co-operative and post-office, three profusely wrapped boxes of *sake* from Azuma's colleagues. The first day of the year Azuma also makes a gift of money at the village temple to ask protection for the household; as well as organising several rituals of offering to deities in the house, annexed buildings, forest, and garden. In the afternoon of the first day they travel several hours to offer a gift of a cake to the sister of Azuma's grandmother, who has not heard from her for several years (her memory had deteriorated with old age). The elderly lady is surprised at the unexpected visit. She immediately reciprocates with money for the children and several smaller prestations of fruits and vegetables. The next day, the closest kin arrive for a meal. Azuma's late father's elder, and younger brother arrive with their wives and children. The first offers a gift of wrapped money, and an expensive piece of furniture. On entering the house, Azuma's elder brother gives an envelope with money, *otoshidama* for all the children and young people. Minutes later, the younger brother also gives *otoshidama* to the children of Azuma and Azuma's father is elder brother. Azuma himself, and the two grandmothers also give *otoshidama*. The kids run happily into another room to count the money. They got more than 6,000 each!, and whisper this to their mothers who gently hush them. Azuma's father's younger brother offers an expensive futon from his own business. Wives of each brother offer gifts of cakes and drink to Azuma's wife and mother through Azuma's father elder brother. A meal is offered to the hosts (the families or branches of the younger and older brother) in which Azuma's elder brother is offered the seat of honour, with the rest of the guests sitting in less clearly ranked order, and women mostly cooking. Personal gift giving, rather than *giri* or obligatory and commodity exchange is something that also comes out of drinking and relaxation. Azuma, touched by the elder brother's words of remembrance of his father, feels grateful and indebted to the point of giving him a 'personal gift'. He removes his own expensive gold bracelet in an unusual gesture of spontaneous wish to 'thank' and be 'grateful', and gives it to him. Drinks continue until late in the afternoon, when all leave after a picture of the family, the group, is taken. When leaving, Azuma requests her in-law's to stay for a few more seconds. She returns after a while with three plastic boxes of fruits and vegetables for them to take home, after bowing a few times to thank them for their generosity, they leave.

Azuma's New year gifts illustrate most of the features of Japanese gift giving to kin and the different approaches to obligation and reciprocity. It is usually argued that these kinds of gifts reflect a lack of differentiation between business and family. Carrier (1995) argues that in the context of Christmas (and New Year) 'gift exchange and shopping are cultural activities that spring in large part from the perception of an alienated realm of work' (Carrier 1995: 179). In capitalist

societies, people shop and give gifts on these occasions to remove the sense of alienation. Indeed, Azuma like many other people spent most of their New Year season shopping. As Carrier argues, one of the features of Japanese seasonal gift exchange is that the bulk of year's end gift giving is outside the household, '*particularly*[57] important are gift transactions between superiors and inferiors within the firm' (Carrier: ibid). However, villagers and other Japanese do not think of 'firm' or 'outside' gifts as being particularly important. Villagers say that these gifts are *particularly* tiresome and necessary. Watanabe's refusal to exchange *chugen* and *seibo*, for example, springs precisely from their sense of awareness of the conditions of alienation at work. My host family, like many other young families, had given up office and corporation jobs, and attempted to make a living out of their own domestic produce. In some cases, these young families developed their new lifestyles into new alternative 'family businesses', others kept a simple domestic mode of production with little surplus and little savings. Azuma's case (see also Figure M) shows how most gift giving is not outside the house, but to kin, and specially to male members of the kin group. These are much more important gift transactions to Azuma and other villagers.

Carrier is right in saying that gift giving on these occasions (i.e. *chugen* or seibo) is the result of the experience of alienation at work. People make gifts to separate what is work from what is home. The giving of towels is a good example. Towels are only exchanged among people who have business relations, but they are not given to those at home. While the presentation of the towel speaks for the specific cultural construction of wrapping (Hendry 1993), the action giving in the context of customer loyalty is not culturally specific. In most capitalist societies, customer/patron relations must be emphasised through gift and commodity exchange because the market and the alienation of things always threatens to dissolve ties between customers and patrons (see Herman 1987). Japanese give

towels also as a result of the experience of alienation in business relations they hope to transcend (see Chapter Two).

Most analyses of Japanese exchange for *chugen* and *seibo* gifts are prone to assume that individual sentiment is not part of gift giving because sentiment is not verbally expressed. Most observers assume that where a 'Westerner' applies feelings a 'Japanese' applies obligation (Benedict 1977). The argument runs that in western societies, givers make a point of giving 'personalised' things, which they see as part of themselves. They sacrifice a part of themselves in making the gift. This sacrifice is a means to social ends: people in western societies consolidate friendship, love and other social goals. Japanese make a point of not giving personalised things. In fact, Azuma's wife showed contempt for her husband's action.[58] The paradox for most observers is that in Japan, however, non-personalised gifts are a means to social ends, too. Japanese make the point of giving 'expensive' things, which are a very important economic sacrifice in itself. Gifts are a means to social ends: people consolidate prestige, mutual help, patronage and so on. The argument concludes, Japanese must be hierarchically-orientated because of their traditions concerning obligation and westerners are 'horizontally orientated' also because of their traditions concerning romantic love (see Chapter Two). However, both share the same capitalist gift ideology: gifts are given with a certain sacrifice. The return can be symmetric but symmetry is not always the issue[59] (on *chugen* bosses do not always return). The return for both, Japanese and Westerner, is a return in social benefit. Love for solidarity, obligation for stable forms of patronage.

The difference between love and obligation baffles us. As I argued in Chapter Two, this difference happens because we insist on looking at Japanese gifts with the ethnocentric distinction of 'home and work', gifts and commodities. Gifts of obligation are not different from gifts of love in that both are given to solve the

alienation of particular spheres of social life. Azuma's case shows how emotive relations of exchange can be. The problem of obligations and emotions is the result of a lack of understanding on how emotions, in general, are construed through gift exchange. Azuma, and the hypothetical westerner share a capitalist gift exchange ideology, but within capitalist societies they reflect different conceptions of the self as the place for/of emotions, and objects as means to emotions. It should be clear from previous chapters that gender (at the different relations of production, appropriation and exchange) is one of the main elements affecting the creation of sentiments towards gifts. It should also be clear that objects become means to emotions through the process of wrapping and unwrapping.

3. Wrapping commodities and the morality of debt

According to most villagers, Obon,[60] the mid-summer season, and *chugen* gifts exemplify the character of obligation and the morals of exchange in Japanese gift giving. The commodities given as gifts in *chugen* must always be wrapped, and wrapping is always ritual in character. *Chugen* gifts, like *seibo*, are said to 'repay debts' accumulated during the year: people must 'thank' all those people to whom they owe something. The case of Hanako below shows a case of 'traditional' gift exchange from an important firm (family business). It shows how most decisions concerning gifts have a strong 'economic' character of compensation for 'customer loyalty', and how dependant a family may be on their relatives, and points to gifts as a source of social and economic income and prestige and the different notions of debt and obligation that take place.

> Hanako is a married woman aged 68, grandmother of four children. She takes responsibility for most economic transactions in her husband's business. When the bank employees do not come to her house to settle their accounts[61] with her husband,

she drives to Tokushima to sort out their finances and carry out other tasks related to customers and payments. In *chugen* and *seibo* she receives numerous *giri* gifts from affiliated businesses and banks, mostly decorations and things she has little use for. She looks at the presents admiring their quality, good taste, or style. She keeps them as she hopes to give them to her daughter and son. She remarks that these gifts cost the banks very little, they obtain them from wholesale retailers who sometimes give them for nothing as part of business. She expects to receive towels from the post-office, the co-op, and several stores where she usually shops.

Hanako also has to make arrangements for giving *chugen* to people she wants to maintain good relations with such as providers who offered better deals when they had no reason to, neighbours who bought things from their shop, customers who made large investments in their business, and all her kin and most neighbours. The only *giri* gift is to her sister in-law, and if she could she would not make any as their families do not get on well together. Hanako will buy her something expensive from the catalogue and have it sent, so she will fulfil her duties, despite her sister-in-law having neglected many aspects of their relationship and gifts. Hanako buys gifts from catalogues as its saves time and they wrap the gifts. It also gives her pleasure to see the pictures of gifts (always food) and to be able to check the prices in the catalogue. Nights are spent going through the catalogue and prices. She chooses to order a set of melons for her sister-in-law (Y 15,000). Everybody knows that melons are one of the best gifts. They are certainly the most expensive. She will show her in-laws and everybody else that she can give generously and that in her heart she cares about them. She only buys three *chugen* gifts herself, the rest she orders through catalogues. The gifts that she buys and gives in person are a box of *sake* for people of her firm, because they 'helped the business'. They are not 100% *giri* because she also owes some favours to one of her employees' father. She travels to the city to the winestore of her maternal kin. She wants to contribute to make 'their business' by buying from them. She asks them to wrap it for her, as it saves her time. Because of the amount of *sake* she buys she receives a *chugen* discount. 'It is good to make business with kin, with people that take care of you (ie. your domestic economy)'. It is a reciprocal action that counts as day-to-day help, although they see each other only five times a year. The other two shops she goes to, buy more *sake,* do not offer her a discount, but give her a towel. She does not complain at all: 'I will find some use for them, there is always something to clean'. Finally, she has to deliver the gifts, which she finds a less pleasant task. That is what she likes about Sogo department store facilities. They wrap and deliver the gifts. Her house is full of *chugen* gifts. She enjoys receiving cakes most. This year she received eight boxes of cakes, some of excellent quality and from distant parts of Japan. The one she likes most has motifs of children's day on it. She feels proud when she has so many cakes in the house and gives them to guests and family. Like many *chugen* gifts, there is no return to make. She is happy because these gifts reflect that other people think of her as kind and respectable, someone to whom they owe thanks and from whom they would not expect a return.

Hanako's *chugen* serve the purpose of repaying debts and measuring obligation. It can take the form of symmetric reciprocity, with a return of a gift of a similar

value, or asymmetric reciprocity with no return at all. Debts, however, are an ambiguous classification of emotions of gratitude, antagonism, social compliance between givers and recipients. Obligation is something that Hanako must aspire to. Obligations provide a framework of moral responses to relations that would otherwise be defined by the impersonality of the market. Hanako makes the alienating world of office and work more bearable with 'obligations'. Relations she acquires with others through gifts would be too impersonal and alienating without obligations. Her *chugen* shopping is her means to create a sphere of relations of obligation that give faces, feelings and moral attributes to individuals who would be faceless and market-led. Hanako perceives commodities given as gifts such as cakes and *sake* as measuring kindness and feelings. She, however, uses the value of the commodity to measure status and rank. The obligation to make a gift is not just an obligation to acknowledge past debts. One of the advantages of *chugen* is that the recipient is not forced to unwrap the gift or consume it. He or she may decide to give it away or never use it. *Giri* gifts may not be 'sentimental' from a eurocentric point of view, but they are not appropriated as 'personal' gifts either. The recipients are aware that the *chugen* gift is not a 'personal' gift. The recipients' use of a *giri* gift at *chugen* is very different from the use recipients make of other obligatory gifts, for example, children's birthday toys (Chapter Four). Children's toys are 'personal' gifts. The recipient must not throw them away until they have exhausted their capacity to provide prosperity and to 'wrap' notions of gender with it. The recipient must not keep it either. On the contrary, *chugen giri* gifts can be kept, unused and unwrapped for many years.

> Mr.Mima in my first homestay opened his storehouse to show me all the *chugen* gifts he had there. He took a half unwrapped box and showed me the contents: 23 pieces of soap, one was missing because it had been used 'to try' the gift. Mr. Mima argued that perhaps he could give it to his nine-year-old daughter at her marriage. However, he then added: 'by then, she might want new things'. That was the fate of *chugen* gifts. They remained partially opened, partially used, saved for a time of need.

Since most *chugen* gifts are not 'personal', the recipient is free to re-cycle them and use them again for making gifts. Marco's case illustrates the difference between obligation and appropriation, personal gift and sentimental gift.

> Marco, a young South American research student, was faced with the dilemma of having to give *chugen* gifts. After reading one of the many manuals about gifts in Japan, he understood that he had to thank his seniors for help given, the gift had to be expensive and well-wrapped. In relations of clear rank differential he should not expect a return. Bosses did not reciprocate. Accordingly Marco chose a gift that would reflect 'thanks', an expensive silver cup he imported from his country, and had it carefully wrapped. No return was made. Later in the year, the professor retired. At a farewell party, the professor opened up a cabinet where there was an array of gifts. He told the students to help themselves, 'throwing' the gifts out to them. Marco was furious to find 'his' gift in the cupboard being re-cycled. He had no consideration for the 'gift', thus no consideration for the giver. Marco's feelings were really hurt. He knew that in giving the gift, he lost rights over the thing. Still, he argued 'you would treat a gift with 'respect' and keep it.

The conventional approach to this problem is to say that Marco and his Professor were separated by a hierarchy that made gifts 'obligatory', void of sentimentality. However, Marco reflects Carriers (1995) idea that in western capitalism, not everything can be reduced to capitalism. People feel sentimental towards objects (see Chapter Two). In Japan, as Hanako and Azuma show, people have sentimental feelings towards objects including perishable goods such as cakes. Rank asymmetry is not a pre-condition for objects to be treated without sentimentality. Azuma's father's brother was revered as the elder, and hierarchy was an essential part of their relation.

The problem with *chugen* gifts is that most observers insist in analysing them as 'gifts'. I will argue *chugen* 'gifts' of the kind Marco gave, which exemplify most gift exchange at firms and offices, are in fact 'shopping'. They are very well wrapped and presented items of shopping. They can be used as 'gifts' because these items are wrapped several times. First, the commodity is wrapped (with plastic and cellophane, second, the wrapped commodity is re-wrapped with commercial papers, and finally, the gift is wrapped in *noshigami* papers. In a

simplified way, in Carrier's model Christmas shopping (which is seen as lacking sentimentality) proves that people can create a sphere of love in the face of a world of money. Shopping transforms commodities into gifts. Transposing this model, it is possible to argue that *giri* giving (which is also seen as lacking sentimentality), proves that people can create a sphere of impersonal obligations in the work sphere, thus creating a sphere of alienation within work. They also aim to transcend it by wrapping the whole process of exchange, from shopping to giving the gift. *Chugen* giving is responsible for converting obligations into shopping items, but wrapping is crucial in mystifying the commodity and mystifying the market.

4. Changes in the morals of exchange

In 1977 Morsbach defined a basic belief about gift exchange among the Japanese:

> *It can be expected that many gift-giving customs will prevail as long as on and giri (debt and obligation to repay) are strong and serve to hold society together* (ibid: 132)

I discussed in Chapter Two how '*giri*' is periodically rediscovered. I proposed in that chapter that *giri* was a reflection of the tension between the gift as a means to reproduce social worlds, and the gift as a means to transcend the smallness of such worlds for wider goals. Every now and then, '*giri*' re-emerges, it fades, it re-emerges again. In 1996, nearly fifty years after Benedict's account (1977) informants still reported changes in the perception of *giri*.

> 'These things you ask about *giri* and obon… it is only the *ojiisan to obaasan no jidai* to *kaishas no shiki*, things that the generation of elders and big corporations do. I do not observe them. Another informant said: 'My parents still do *seibo*, they spent many hours in Sogo deciding on their gifts. (…) it is not because of '*giri*'. I think it is just '*orei*', they want to be polite and do what most people do.

The informants who said they did not observe *giri*, however, all said that gave *giri* gifts at Valentine's Day. This was not a contradiction. They were speaking of different conceptions of *giri*. The *giri* of their parents had been the key to the reproduction of small, familiar worlds in firms and corporations when Japan was trying to recover from the losses of war. They represented the harsh and alienating conditions of work (workers are forced to use part of their salaries to give to bosses, who have already extracted their production) and the aims to transcend it (the boss was a father figure who took care of the employees). I will argue that Valentine *giri* is used for different purposes. Employees try to break from the alienating conditions at work (especially male dominance), without losing the protection of bosses. *Giri* is not about 'obligation' in the conventional sense, but a reflection of the tension of trying to achieve two goals which are antagonistic in principle.

Giri is at the root of many of the claims about the 'uniqueness' of Japanese society, and the miracle of its economic success while holding on to its traditions (Reischauer 1977, Kosaku 1992). This claim is not wrong in detecting the tension between two antagonistic principles, but to reduce it to 'modernity' and 'tradition' makes our task of making sense of it too difficult. What villagers do and say about *giri* and Valentine's Day reflect more than 'change' in tradition. *Giri*, as expressed in the case of Valentine's Day gifts, appears to have less to do with 'tradition' than with a way of conceptualising how men and women participate in gift exchange. As I will argue, Valentine's Day gifts are a creative response to the tensions expressed through the idiom of *giri*.

4.a Valentine giri and hontou gifts

The case of Valentine is one of the paradigms of modern gift exchange in Japan. On Valentine's Day, Japanese women give heart-shaped chocolates to their

bosses and male acquaintances at work. Bosses reciprocate, only if they wish, a month later, on White day (15th March). Women and men call these chocolates *giri-choco* (obligatory) gifts of chocolate. Women give *giri choco* to their bosses to thank them for the help given during the year. *Giri choco* cost between 300 and 600 yen (£4). For Japanese women these gifts have a similar value as a drink or a coffee. Women also give *hontou-choco*, real (sincere) gifts of chocolate to their lovers and friends. Many women do not count husbands as recipients of *hontou-choco*. Husbands, like the male boss at work, receives *giri,* obligatory chocolate. Only young women (and students) give *hontou* chocolate to spouses, friends and males at work (or teachers and boys at school). Only in very rare cases, do women give *giri* or *hontou* to a single male recipient.

Valentine's Day was known to Japan through contact with European and American travellers. In 1936 Morozoff, a Kobe-based chocolate company, launched the first chocolate selling campaign, mostly targeting the needs of foreigners. He imported Valentine's Day from Europe as the day of 'romantic love' in which lovers exchanged chocolates and cards. There are many disputes among chocolate-selling companies as to who was the first chocolate company to introduce Valentine chocolate campaigns successfully. Valentine's Day did not take off until late 1970s. This coincided with three major social changes. The nuclearisation of families, women working outside the home in office work, a decrease in arranged marriage, and the economic success of Japan which allowed women to spend money on commodities such as drinks and chocolates. In 1996 estimated chocolate sales were of 23.2 million tons or about Y49.6 billion (£ 261,000 million) worth of *giri*-choco. According to a 1991 survey (by Morozoff Ltd) 83.8% of women gave Valentine's Day chocolate to people who helped them (always male) Only 27.5% of these women said they gave chocolate to their lovers and spouses.

Valentine's Day gifts are an 'office tradition'. Valentine's Day, however, soon become widespread, in what some commentators saw as a 'consumeristic fashion', becoming one of the most interesting sociological events in recent Japanese history. Observers argued that the development of *giri* and *hontou* was as a result of the practice of arranged marriages. Romantic love was something that only few men and women contemplated, this being the main reason behind the 'particular adoption of Valentine's'. However, this does not suffice as an explanation. From the ethnographic material I argue that imagine in Valentine's Day as women use Valentine's gifts to 'tease' men.

During fieldwork, all the means of communication, television, newspapers and foreigners criticised Valentine's Day as betrayal of its original concept. They argued that Valentine's Day was not romantic because the main recipients were bosses and teachers, it was obligatory and consumeristic: the idle pursuit of women (salary ladies) with new economic power in a hierarchically given society (Asahi Shimbun 1996[62]). The criticism against being 'not-romantic' because *giri*, blurred observers' attention to a very important fact. As seen in Chapter Three and Five, gift exchange has predominantly been a male activity, with women exchanging only with their kin and in-laws, children deities and elders. Men, by contrast, exchange gifts with other men at political events from which women are mostly excluded. Valentine's Day is one of the first occasions in which young people (children at school) and women give. By giving they coerce men to accept gifts, and thus contract certain obligations for a return and thus establish relations. Women exercise some control through gift giving which was until now unavailable.

4.a 1. Valentine in **Kamikatsu**

Valentine's Day in Kamikatsu is not as widely celebrated as in Tokushima city or other parts of Japan. A large part of the population is elderly and does not follow any particular fashion. Some farmers do not know about Valentine's Day, or White Day either. In contrast, Valentine's Day is widespread and well known among women, people who work at the administrative office, children and young women and men. As in all forms of exchange, villagers emphasise its character of '*itsumo osewa ni narimasu',* the day-to-day co-operation that is necessary to define the immediate community of givers and receivers.

In 1996 Valentine's Day was observed by seven main groups: the town-office, the schools, shops, Japan Agriculture co-ops, Onzen hotels, post-offices, elder's homes, with a total of less than 150 people. Out of a total of 98 people interviewed (52 women and 46 men), women gave 320 pieces of chocolate (both hontou and *giri*) and men reciprocated less than half of them. The differences among women were important, with most women giving one to three gifts to one man at work, in addition to their husbands and friends, to a few women giving up to 17 gifts of chocolate to nearly all the men they had daily contact with. In order of importance, women gave *giri choco* to male bosses at work and 'those men around ' *tonari hito*, 50% (meaning men close to their desks and offices); 25% of chocolate was given to male friends; 5% of *giri* choco was for husbands; 2% for their own children, with 1% giving to the *ie* (ounces, grandparents). Of all these men, only a few bosses at work, and 'men around' reciprocated the chocolate on White's Day. Some gifts of chocolate to husbands and bosses were said to be *giri*, but some were 'light *giri*', they contained 'real feelings' for the person and were not mere 'obligation'. *Giri* as such was not a matter of strict 'obligation'.

An employee of the town-office, a young woman in her mid-thirties explained: Hiraoka, my boss, is the most kind. His manners are gentle, and he always remembers you. He helps me during the year, every time he goes on a trip he returns with an *omiyage* gift,

and offers it to the office. I will give him a *giri* chocolate. It is it a good occasion to 'thank' him. People enjoy *giri* chocolate at the office, too. We laugh and it is exciting, we tease the young men, too. When I was at school it was very scary, but now it is fun and I find *giri* is very light.

Different ideas of obligation emerge from this picture. *Giri* is presented as 'light' and having few social repercussions. As an adult woman, she thinks *giri* is a good way to thank her boss, but it is also good to classify man. Young men are teased, people enjoy the gossip and the fun. In the same group of women as the informant, other women argued that they gave for three reasons: because the men had helped during the year '*tetsudai'*, to thank them '*arigatou'* and it was funny, odd, interesting '*omoshiroi*'. These three conceptions clearly indicated different ways of thinking about 'obligation' as responses to different qualities of help and thanks.

Valentine's Day has had the greatest impact at school. The extent of chocolate giving, however, caused a minor commotion. The school authorities were shocked to realise that most if not all of the students at the primary school were exchanging chocolate inside the school. Children were terribly excited. Girls from the secondary school answered that they gave because it was '*tanoshii*' (amusing), *osewa* (to thank for help), '*kansha*' (gratitude) (especially from young girls to their teachers). Indeed, one of the particularly good-looking teachers had received gifts from almost all of his female students. One of the senior male teachers who overheard our conversation came to speak to me: 'Valentine is so popular, that we have to stop it. [Children] start giving Valentine's gifts as early as six and seven years old. We do not want small children spending their money on Valentine's gifts. So they cannot do it at the school'.

However, Shouko, the seven-year old girl from my household, gave a different account. According to her account children of all ages gave each other chocolate. It was not only girls to boys, but mostly girls to their friends of either sex. She

had come back home with two pieces of chocolate from her two best girlfriends, to one of whom she had also given chocolate. One girl in her class had given chocolate to nearly all her girl friends. Atsuko, Shouko's mother, said that this girl was well known for giving things to other girls. In short, Valentine's gifts are not only a 'creative response' women use in most office context to coerce men to engage in new types of communication. Valentine's gifts are also used by children as a reflection of their wish to give. From birth until late in youth, children are recipients of gifts. Here children express their awareness of the importance of giving which they know exists around them. As I witnessed, children used games of giving and receiving gifts to replicate adult behaviour, especially to mimic models of politeness.

Finally, those who exchanged Valentines gifts at post-offices, shops and elder's homes, said that they gave obligation chocolate because: '*omiyage*' (it was like a souvenir), '*ureshii*' (it was a happy thing to do, it caused happiness), *mainichi no orei desu* (thanks for every day help) and *orei*, (thanks for help). An informant summarised these different views by saying: '*giri* gifts give pleasure to people, *giri* is forgotten, it is *zembu*, all in one, *giri* and *hontou'*. As this informant seems to point out, Valentine is another way to think about prestations and obligation. It resembles *omiyage* in their spirit to bring 'enjoyment' to others, and it resembles *orei*, in the sense that it has the function to thank.

For women, it was also interesting to see how men would accept a 'sweet'. As Cobbi (1995) has suggested in her analysis of ritual gifts to the deities, Japanese classify themselves in *amato* (soft-taste) and *karato* (strong-taste). People who are amato like eating sweet things like cakes, while karato are people who like drinking *sake* and it strong taste and the salty dishes that accompanies *sake* Cobbi 1995: 206). Japanese representations separate men and women, both in their tasks, their attributes - strength and beauty, taste, strong taste and soft-taste. She

argues that finally, the *kami* (Shinto deity) are karato and Buddhist deity are amato (ibid.: 207). Men accept chocolate from women, although they might not always consume it. Like many *giri* gifts, they pass them to others or re-cycle them. Men give Valentine's Day gifts to their spouses, and in some exceptional cases, share some of it at the office before taking the rest home for their spouses. However, the importance of Valentine's Day resides in the capacity women have to make Valentine prestations within the community. It is through them that giving is generalised to individuals beyond the self and the immediate group (i.e. office). They are a good example of 'creative responses' to a new situation.

Because Valentine's Day has so many romantic overtones, people are prone to dismiss the view that shopping for Valentine's is crucial to the creation of the ideology of romantic love. What I suspect most Europeans and Americans find disturbing about the way Japanese understood St. Valentine's Day, is that it reveals that 'romantic love' is not always about love in the West either. Most newspapers in Japan for foreigners talk about Valentine day as: 'imported from the West…and subsequently transformed into a decidedly less-romantic question' (Asahi Shinbun 1996). For most observers, St. Valentine's Day in Japan is not about love. It is about 'obligation'. Western types of St. Valentine's Day might be commercial in nature, but romantic love is rarely put into question.

I will argue that the Japanese case illustrates at its best that Valentine's Day is about shopping, and that shopping is the key element in the romantic construction of love. Following Carrier's argument for Christmas I would argue that romantic love is constructed in opposition to the world of commercial relations. At Valentine's Day most Japanese newspapers, for example, question why the 'western' ideology of romantic love has not been reproduced in Japan?. This is however, a misleading question. Japanese Valentine's Day is as much about romantic love and consumerism as any other type of Valentine's Day. To deny

Japanese women the capacity to manipulate through shopping ideas about the relation between men and women, because it does not 'look' romantic according to western standards, is to deny them their capacity as consumers and active members of their society. As a friend put it: 'after all, we do have *hontou* chocolate don't we? Yes, I give many *giri* at the office, but I also give my husband a home made chocolate cake, only to him, it is very romantic. I will argue that *giri* chocolate is the way heterosexual Japanese women have of getting around a strong ideology of male dominance. *Giri* chocolate are small pieces of bribery to figures of authority, to attract them out of their distant position, to force them to renounce to their power in arranging marriages. They are, in Mauss' word, 'poison'. As I describe in 3.a, villagers do not find it difficult to separate home and work. Their gifts indicate, however, that they find difficult to separate categories of male authority within. Women place bosses at work and husbands on the same list of recipients of gifts on Valentine's Day, not because of a lack of distinction between home at work, or house and kin. In fact, women put bosses, husbands, uncles, grandsons and all males they have relations with, in the same category of recipients of obligatory gifts. Women give 'romantic' chocolate to those men who have fallen out of the general picture of male authority, lovers, young teachers, young male employees and male friends.

The importance of Valentine gifts is that, for the first time, women are seen actively 'giving' outside domestic contexts, having a large measure of control over their expenses, and using their general affluence to spend money on gifts on their bosses. This is something which, until recently, was out of reach for women.[63] Thus, *giri* in this context is not only a manifestation of 'gratitude', but also a veiled form of resistance and social change.

5. Dramatic disputes: return gifts and the sanction of *okaeshi*

Just as there are several conceptions of obligation, so there are changes in the perception of return gifts and the way money is used for gift giving. I know of families where the money used for gifts is not a burden, and where the basic use of money is for buying gifts. In others, money is the main gift, with villagers seeing the giving of money as an obligation one has as one acquires responsibilities inside one's groups. In these cases gifts of money are usually not wrapped. Festivals, as seen in Chapter Five, are occasions in which money given as a gift and money given to pay the expenses of a festival are treated much the same and not wrapped – gift, economic transaction and the obligation to pay taxes being treated in the same way. They are also exhibited for all to see. To throw money in order to ask for useful things is not morally wrong; on the contrary, it provides people with a set of social and supernatural processes that contribute to the welfare of one's household (see Chapter Four). *Mochi*, a form of 'pure currency' is thrown, forcing neighbours to compete with each other while those who give achieve prestige as providers of well-being (Chapter Three). Other households perceive gifts as a burden. Gift exchange at the school, and children's use of money for personal gifts, are not seen as good practices. Underlying these variations, however, there is a growing concern about the use of money for buying commodities for return gifts.

Until recently, to return a gift was seen as one of the best moral actions which exemplified everything about Japanese gifts. It gave thanks and expressed rank and respect. *Okaeshi* epitomised the considerations of rank, obligation, and politeness. To a certain extent *okaeshi* was problematic but it had a social function. The problem with *okaeshi* was that It created a snowball effect, as most returns were made in order to acknowledge rank. The higher the rank of the recipient the more people returned.

The problem of *okaeshi* is best exemplified by the case of funeral gifts, which are accepted only on the condition that they can be returned. Around 10% of the value of the original gift is returned after the funeral. The case of sickness follows the same logic. Gifts for inauspicious occasions are usually gifts of money, and occasionally small gifts of fruits and flowers. They are always wrapped in 'sad' wrapping papers. Close neighbours, friends, workmates and relatives give gifts on these occasions. Funeral gifts are called *koden* or incense money; sickness gifts are called *mimai* or 'sympathy' gifts. They are always returned, but never in the form of money. Return gifts for funerals in Kamikatsu were commodities such as pens, envelopes, calculators or anything the giver may see as 'useful' or 'needed' for that occasion, and salt. It is interesting to note the construction of usefulness: pens are useful to write on the envelopes, envelopes are needed to wrap the money, calculators are helpful for calculating the value of the gift and its return, salt is useful to ward off pollution. Traditional *koden* were used to pay for the incense sticks used in mortuary rituals. Nowadays *koden* gifts are used to cover any expenses the bereaved family may incur. The bereaved family, pays in advance for returning gifts using their own money. Thus *koden* money becomes a 'compensation' for the expenses incurred (for the funeral and the gifts), rather than 'help' for expenses to come. In theory, both gifts 'help' economically as well as psychologically. In practice such gifts are a burden, and many of the worries at funerals and in cases of sickness revolve around the gifts given and returned. Gifts are a burden because villagers insist they cannot accept them without a return, usually immediate. In order to return the gift immediately, *kodenokaeshi* gifts are usually bought in advance, before the funeral takes place, and before visitors and family arrive to give their condolences. The *koden* gifts are given to a 'secretary', a friend or neighbour who greets the visitors, collects their gifts, writes down the amount and name and gives the return gift usually on departure. The problem lies in the fact that return gifts must be bought before the actual gift

is received; givers anticipate the expenses this will cost and add more than they would have originally intended. As a result, giving and returning becomes tedious and expensive, exacerbating the psychological stress of the occasion. A fifty year old informant exemplified what most villagers think about these gifts: they are given to 'keep the connection, or relations with people although they are a nuisance, *mendoudakeredo hito to hito no tsunagari wo tsutsukerutameni wa hitsuyoudesu.* The following case exemplifies the kind of problems with gifts on these occasions:

> At a funeral in town a bereaved family bought twenty five return gifts from a firm in Tokushima, which specialises in funeral return gifts. The commodity chosen on that occasion was a calculator. The gift was wrapped in a cardboard box shaped like a book. On the left hand side of the book's sleeve there were words of condolence. On the right hand side was the calculator itself. The book was the actual wrapping container of the commodity, sealed with a second layer of cheap *noshigami* which held the sachet of salt. Givers of *okaeshi* gave a wrapped envelope with money. Both appeared as exchanging equally wrapped commodities. Tanaka san argued that *okaeshi* are not useful, and they are, sometimes useless. It is a problem with the companies that take care of memorial *service*s. They arrange the gift for the bereaved family, the wrapping. It is all very expensive.

The level of affluence of the Japanese society means that return gifts do not always bring benefit to the recipient. The gifts also make people feel 'sad'. Mie, another informant argued that she felt 'bad' (*kimochi warui*) that the bereaved family had had to spend most of the money she gave them to return her a gift. They had invested her money in buying something that, for her, was not very useful. She said, however, that return gifts would not stop, '*naka naka kawaranai'*, because people felt a strong obligation to 'thank'. Such is the problem of such redundant gift giving that in 1996, during fieldwork, local administrations made a serious pledge to abolish *okaeshi*. In the style of the local administrations their pledge, said:

> 'Please keep the rule. We made an enquiry about [the presents of] return gifts. We are conducting a campaign to abolish *okaeshi* in the town by mutual consent. Let's abolish *okaeshi*. Some groups in Kamikatsu unfortunately don't keep to these rule. Let's

> abolish the *okaeshi* of *omimai* (sickness) and *okuyami* (condolences) in the town completely again. Let's put useful things in the envelopes. Let's put *kokoro zukai*, cards instead in the envelopes to express our sympathy from the bottom of our heart *kimochi woo osame*.

After this pledge, the town office offered an alternative solution to returning gifts, by sending a sympathy card. The words were published for the villagers to copy:

> Please accept our modest thoughtfulness. We anxiously await your return home. We do not need *okaeshi* [consideration]. Our Kamikatsu town, village of *ikkyu* and *irodori* (fun and maple leafs) aims at simple hearts and comfortable life in as much as we continue the campaign to abolish *okaeshi*. We would like to ask you to understand this main point of the campaign and approve it.

This letter, which in theory each villager should send instead of sending a gift or receiving one, was an important point of discussion. Villagers in general considered it a good idea. Those who had connections with the town office stated that they were no longer sending *okaeshi* gifts. The reactions were many in favour and against it. The general opinion was that *okaeshi* would not stop or only a few people would stop. Villagers say that they should 'change their minds', some saying that either they do not 'like the meaning' (competition for status) or it has 'no meaning anymore' (people live democratically). The issue of status and democracy was always present:

> A eighty-nine year old man said conspicuously: 'I think it is an expression of thanks to send a gift back, which should be in accordance with your grade/rank. But we shouldn't send too much, or send gifts based on price and quality. I think that in some situations we may have to obey the government's office (yakkuba)'.

While some villagers feel that there is strong pressure from the government to stop, others feel that the pressure will not change a life-time habit. The problem, however is that individuals cannot 'stop' *okaeshi* by themselves. *Okaeshi* is a 'communal' or 'social ' problem as a sixty year old woman lamented: 'it will be a pressure for me to have to stop giving *okaeshi*. I can not do it alone'. *Okaeshi* can not be stopped because it is too embedded in the social fabric:. 'It is like a circle

we can't stop'. But if the economic cost is too high, the social cost of loosing *okaeshi* is also high because 'it makes people connect with each other'.

Okaeshi is an 'embedded' practice because it is used to express feelings and also because there are market and economic constrains to it. A seventy old woman argued in long and indirect style:

> 'The problem with *okaeshi* is that for the price of a gift I received I have to think about the price and kind of my *okaeshi*. It is going to be difficult because even if we talk about stopping it, in fact we think it is against the obligation [*giri*], so we are keeping it. But I hope that everyone will stop for ever'. A very elderly lady sitting next to her admitted what many are reluctant to say: 'some of the gifts are useless'. And to make the point, she added quietly: 'there are a lot of gifts in my closet!'

While some argued in favour of the obligation, other villagers were completely against it. A fifty five year old men saw the impersonality of the gift as the main problem. He makes clear that gifts without sentimental value are not good return gifts. He sees obligation and redundancy aspects of the same phenomena:

> 'Giving among people should be a matter of the human heart, it should come naturally. An *okaeshi* is not an *okaeshi* if it does not include the human heart. A gift is not a gift when a person presents useless goods. We should be free from custom. We should share good foods and many things with everybody. I think it is good idea to change such a custom'.

Villagers good intentions to 'stop' *okaeshi* clashes with the reality of their practice. As Figure (N) below shows (see also Chapter Three), *okaeshi* was practised by 74%[64] of the population. At a quantitative level, the results reflect not only *okaeshi* but also some *tatemae* (public façade); at a qualitative level I hope to have reflected the some of the complexity of *okaeshi* as villagers experienced it

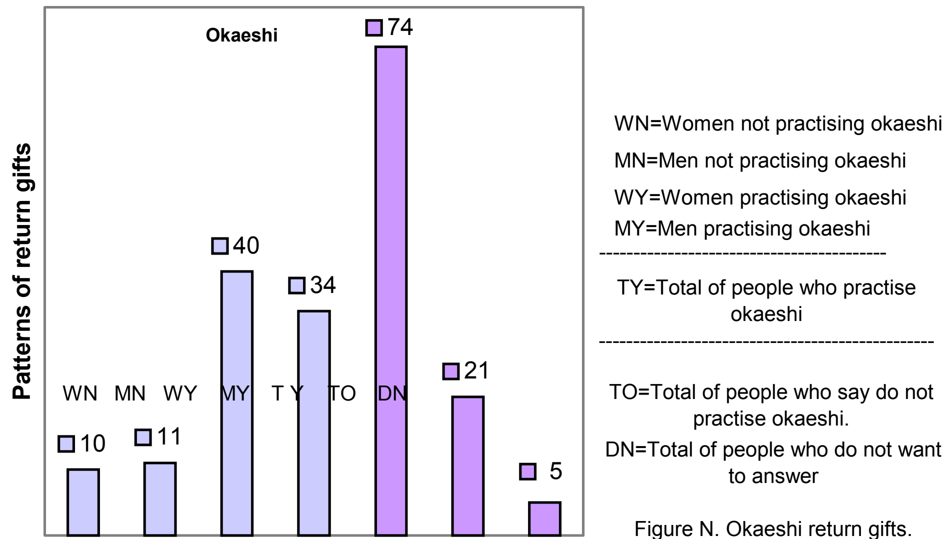


Figure N. Okaeshi return gifts.

The town-office solution of sending a card did not take off, and left the question of *okaeshi* unresolved. The reason why villagers could not stop *okaeshi* was because, despite the fact that it was excessive and expensive, *okaeshi* was a good medium for expressing their preference for certain types of dominance within a neighbourhood. Commodity exchange, as in the case of Valentine's Day gifts, facilitated the expression of relations between households and individuals in a group. It was certainly more expensive, but as villagers know, social life is expensive. To send a card was not perhaps the best of ideas. A card was not a substitute for a gift.

The paradox with *okaeshi* is not the sanction. The problem is that other return gifts such as wedding gifts, which are as redundant as funeral and sickness gifts, are not sanctioned. Why then are only funeral and sickness gifts sanctioned? A first observation is that we are faced with the opposition between auspicious and inauspicious gifts. Funerals and sickness are inauspicious times, and gifts are given to sever relations and re-create relations with those with whom relations have been severed. I cannot, however, reduce the explanation to the belief in

auspiciousness and inauspiciousness. What it is easier to argue is that a certain amount of redundancy, like wrapping, is inevitable and desirable in capitalist gift exchange. It is through this redundancy that people ‘keep in touch’. The necessity for redundancy, however, is social and not economic. Those informants, such as Moto in Chapter Three, who refused forms of exchange that were useless, coercive and redundant, became marginal to the neighbourhoods and town.

Why then is *okaeshi* sanctioned and not the other forms of redundant exchange? What would happen if funeral and sickness *okaeshi* were eradicated? The question that worried me during fieldwork was answered by the local administration. It offered to create a team of volunteers to help in cases of distress. The town office reduced the matter to one of economic redundancy. To reduce *okaeshi* to a matter of economic redundancy is useful because it reveals the fact that it is the state, through administrative bodies, and the households that work in these bodies, that have organisational power within a neighbourhood. This would, in theory, help to remove the class distinction that is so profoundly veiled in a neighbourhood.[65] When villagers argued that they would not stop *okaeshi*, in their polite way they were saying that they wanted to maintain the differences among them, and veil them at the same time. Villagers might want to maintain class differences among groups. They do not always want to cede control to the households that are in the local administrations. Villagers clearly understand the power of these new administrations in transforming their villages for making a better town. Debates about the future of *okaeshi* were still raging when I left the field, and today many households still debate whether to send cards instead of wrapped commodities.

I have not so far mentioned wrapping. Wrapping was never an issue for villagers at funerals. It was what the large hotels and businesses did. Wrapping here reflected the same kind of redundancy as that contained in the action of

giving. It did not add a new meaning to the gift. Many of the wrapping papers for funeral gifts were torn and discarded as soon as the recipient arrived at her/his house and opened the gift, whose fate was to be left in some cupboard. Wrapping, for these villagers, was as redundant as the gift itself. Villages, however, thought that to take care of the envelopes for gifts of money was important. They used small wrapping cloths to wrap the envelopes. They distinguished between the kind of commercial wrapping applied to gifts, and the action of unwrapping the gifts before giving them. In approaching a funeral house, the visitors, friends and kin would bow to the receptionist table, show their sadness, and unwrap their envelopes from the cloth, and hand the envelope to the person in charge. The action of unwrapping the cloth was a meaningful action that spoke of the sadness, care and feelings of the donor and recipient. Unwrapping, unlike giving, is usually a silent action, one that is done in private. To me, unwrapping the gift, seemed an expression of sentiment, of revealing in public, the human and material condition (money) of their relationship.

6. Conclusions

The household, its bilateral extended family group, neighbours and *shinriu,* are the context in which day-to-day help and villagers' ideas about repaying and returning 'help' are made relevant to the evaluation of the morality of gifts. As I have underlined in my definition of groups, it is the process of extending one's relations with people outside the *ie,* as well as extending relations of familiarity within the different cores in a group.

The material I have presented here illustrates how difficult it is to have one single conception of obligation. Villagers' perceptions of what is a gift revolve around how debt is repaid, but also how money is used to carry out such

repayments. Considerations of the obligation that gifts carry are also measured by considerations about the usefulness and redundancy of gifts. Thus, to a large extent, most gift giving practices discussed here follow the pattern that Cheal (1988) has labelled 'industrialised commodity exchange'. The ethnographic descriptions in this Chapter raise two sets of issues. The first has to do with the possibility that the use of wrapping affects the representation of commodities as 're-cyclable gifts'. It also has to do with the possibility that villagers' exchanges and representations of debt and obligation may indeed be different from those that are articulated at the corporate level. I have detailed, through the cases discussed, how within the household as a group, relations of gift exchange are predicated on multiple and complementary sets of relations that transcend those between a head and its subordinates.

The material I have presented suggests that, in order to understand villagers' patterns of exchange, as well as their conceptions about gifts and the morals of exchange, it is necessary to start by considering the minute details of their process of exchange. In Kamikatsu, villagers do not form a clearly defined group, each household presents itself as singular and different in its ways of doing things, such as wrapping and managing money. Despite the fact that gift giving seasons could make them look homogeneous to other households and groups within Japanese society, they have their own ways of using gift exchange to challenge the situations they face in their daily life. Although there are ideas that depict gift exchange, especially where *giri* is a prevalent notion (such as *chugen*, *seibo*, *valentine*, and *okaeshi*), these ideas underline divisions among villagers in terms of gender, class and age. My description of gift giving patterns has shown how, for men and women, the young and old, daily life takes the form of imposing gifts on others and negotiating to what extent one is a recipient of other people's gifts or their competitor in returning them. Gift and commodity exchange are also presented as contextually defined, where people do not just give 'up' or 'down'

for reasons of rank, however important rank is to them. Less obviously to them, gifts may have implications for how to negotiate a group's interference in the affairs of others. This has important implications for office Valentine's Day gifts and *okaeshi* gifts. In the case of Valentine gifts, villagers describe the overlapping oppositions of men/women and boss/employee in two ways, either stressing the lack of obligation or underlining the positive aspects of giving. This turns the event of gift exchange into an arena where people feel relaxed, and where one group, women, can manifest a power of giving to men, and forcing them to reciprocate, which in other contexts is not possible, though using the same language of obligation as on other occasions. Thus, what people do with gifts, that is to manage to convince bosses and men to enter a new type of exchange and dialogue, and the ways people portray obligation, are different. The degree of interference of women in men's affairs can be contrasted with the interference of the town office in village and intra-household affairs at *okaeshi*. Underlying the problems with *okaeshi* there is a tension. The tension is not only about superfluous gifts, but about who is to take control of villager's affairs, the neighbourhood or the local administrations.

Two main consequences arise from the study of the uses of *chugen/seibo* and the practices of *Valentine/okaeshi*. First, it is clear that exchange does not stand alone as a set of categories based on the differentiation of rank and status, itself based on traditional precepts that mirror the household. Although gift exchange reflects hierarchical and unequal relations between people in groups, and by age and gender, it is necessary to understand the particular interest of a group or household and the ways they want to present themselves to others. Gift exchange constitutes the greatest interference in people's affairs, which determines the degree of dominance of one group over another. Women exercise this control on Valentine's Day. Ideas about gifts and their morals are clearly used rhetorically by people, and this rhetorical use has to be taken into account when considering

explanations of obligation. This is a key theme in Chapter Seven, where I deal with the sets of gift exchange that take place in the process of making the town, as one of the contexts where households and local administrations define their boundaries and have an impact on one another.

Chapter seven

Making the town

My aim in this Chapter is two-fold. I want to contextualise what I have written so far by providing a picture of what can be described as ‘political’ household-town relations in Kamikatsu. This is in part triggered by the recent transformations of villages into towns and the exogenous nature of their relations with larger national and international processes. This process has come to be known as ‘making the town’ or *machiotsukuru*. Recent ethnographies have defined ‘making the town’ as the process in which practices and ideologies governing rural communities are appropriated, packaged, and presented as ‘national traditions’. Knight gives a view of this process when he writes:

> Through the folkloristic appropriation of the legends, remembered customs and old beliefs of its constituent villages, the modern rural municipality acquires a traditional past. There is a place for village particularity in the new rural communities providing it is detached from any sentiments of village exclusivity. Once fiercely separate villages are now textually listed and serialised and so many items of folklore which together become the traditional past of the municipal community. No single source can be deemed to have a hegemonic power of representation of this process (…) because the locality has its own representational interests (Knight 1996: 14-21).

My perspective here is to examine this ‘appropriation’ and the community-building programmes as well as the practices through which people make sense of a group. I look at how these processes are not made without challenging the ‘representational interest’ of the dominant group, that is the various households which are involved in municipal administrations. My approach differs from Knight’s in that I look specifically at the relations between households (rather than the relations between villages) because the tension between village and town has led to the re-emergence of the household as a key element in rural identity. This introduces my second aim, which is to discuss how, among the villagers, ideas about gift giving come into play at different levels in the making of the

town, and especially how gifts are used to mediate conflicts between households and administration. The importance of using 'profuse wrapping' in the contexts of 'making the town' frames the discussion. Therefore in this chapter I emphasise the links between the mediation of conflict, wrapping, hierarchy, and political representation through the exchange of gifts ocurring in the context of making the town.

A major problem I faced in writing this chapter, and the thesis in general, has been the definition and theoretical treatment of 'wrapping'. My understanding of wrapping has been affected by the way villagers exchange and present gifts. I use the term 'wrapping' to refer to understandings of practice, and transformations of commodities that adjust to perceptions that are mostly prescriptive, that is ideas about what wrapping is and should represent. Wrapping is therefore a descriptive rather than a normative category of actions. Hendry notes that specialists in wrapping consider that the ways people wrap, unwrap, and present gifts are not always correct: 'this is sometimes due to the ignorance of the people making the offering, according to specialists' (Hendry 1993: 61). This was a constant fact during fieldwork: villagers would not unwrap a gift where a specialist would, they sometimes did not write the names of donors on the wrapping papers, and on two occasions they used auspicious and inauspicious papers for exactly the same celebration. As anthropologists we cannot reduce these matters to mere 'ignorance'. Instead, we are forced to consider the possibility that villagers have a perception of wrapping that includes more than its normative aspects. The aspect I concentrate on here is one that follows from the last chapter, brought to my attention by villagers themselves. It started with a conversation with Atsuko about *noshigami*. Atsuko argued that few people knew about the meaning of *noshigami*. They used it because without it 'it would look like they just took the things off the market shelf'. This attitude was shared by most of my other informants. Anthropologists working in Japan have argued that Japanese

perceptions of the market, and thus of gifts and commodities, do not have 'negative' connotations and the market is not understood as 'evil' or a 'dangerous' place that dissolves traditional spheres of exchange (see Bloch and Parry 1989). The most relevant example here is the importance of giving money as a gift, which has positive and auspicious connotations, as we saw in Chapter Four. However, as Hendry notes, in order to be a 'gift' money is usually 'wrapped'. It is possible to argue that the money's character of 'market shelf' is mystified, as in the case above. Furthermore, the cases I have presented of the taboos against the redundancy of commodities cast doubts on the assumption that market relations are perceived as inherently positive in Japan. What is interesting about the villagers' comments is how they recall the literature on exchange and consumption of gifts and commodities. As Strathern writes:

> Preserving the social anonymity of market goods is of course fundamental to the supposition that goods are available for all. That such goods can be appropriated by the consumer and fashioned to the ends of personal identity - the wrapped present, the exhibited taste- is part of the cultural interpretation of consumption as consumerism (Strathern 1997: 302).

Most of the Japanese people I encountered believed that goods were available to all, and economic differences were due to the laziness or oddity[66] of a particular household; all hard working households had access to the same degree of market goods, prestige being acquired as a result of becoming a dominant donor (see Chapter Five). This chapter will describe many instances in which villagers, and especially municipal administrations, appropriate goods and 'fashion' them to personify the identity of the town through wrapping. As argued in earlier chapters, most of the particularities of consumption are to be explained in terms of 'auspicious consumption'. However, my understanding of wrapping is that, although it helps to appropriate goods, it is not merely used to present the personal identity of the donors, as Strathern proposes for Euro-American gifts, nor to represent or recreate the locus of power, as Hendry proposes for Japanese

wrapping. I see wrapping as playing an important role in mystifying the process of production and appropriation of goods for exchange, but the practice of wrapping objects does not always recreate a given hierarchical order of donors and recipients. I must make clear that my use of 'wrapping' here is restricted to gift exchange, and although I borrow Hendry's metaphor on some occasions, her use of the word extends beyond the analysis of the 'wrapping of objects, notably gifts' (to borrow her language), while mine remains in the sphere of gift/commodity exchange. However, I think that the crucial nature of wrapping objects as a process of mystification of commodities and relations tells us something that transcends normative understandings of wrapping. By emphasising both the normative and non-normative aspect I hope to complement our understanding of the wrapping of objects, notably gifts, and thus contribute to a better understanding of wrapping as a human metaphor for social relations. In the pages that follow I try to contextualise this debate by focussing on the kinds of gift exchange that takes place in the context of making the town. I discuss how the municipal administrations have generated new patterns of leadership by mystifying relations of power, specifically in respect of who are the main givers and providers of welfare in town.

1. Matchiotsukuru and the rural dream. The contextual character of household-town relations

> 'What do you think of Kamikatsu and its traditions?' Hiraoka San asked me in English during a casual talk about making the town. 'It is difficult to say, really, I find that every village is quite different from the others', I answered. Hiraoka San nodded his head and added, 'so desu ne (I see), there are a lot of traditions in Kamikatsu, every family is different, as you go to visit their houses you will see… they have their ways of cooking and doing things, very different in each family. There is also the tradition of festivals (*matsuri*) in the town. Kamikatsu is rich in many traditions.'

This fragment of a conversation with Hiraoka San, a respected officer of yakuba, encapsulates the two main themes through which most villagers define themselves: as immersed in singular household traditions, and as belonging to the 'town'. This dual form of affiliation encompasses a preoccupation with the household that is new in anthropological accounts. In the recent literature on rural towns, it is the village and its opposition to and integration into the town system that emerge as the main object of interest. However, during my fieldwork, villagers emphasised that the *ie no dento* (the household tradition) was much more central. One could argue that it is no coincidence that the emergence of discourses about the household appears in the consolidation stages of town making. Thus I speculate that the household tradition has gained centrality in people's sense of identification in the process of removing 'village exclusivity'. Ethnographic evidence exists that the discourse about the household revolves around the concern with the serialisation and textualisation of knowledge. Household traditions are being constructed as different from each other and 'appropriated' to add to the pool of traditions in the town. They are another source of tradition that the town appropriates in order to define its internal and external image. In this section I describe some of the villagers' ideas about the relationship between households and the town in order to provide a context for my discussion of wrapping and commodities. Taking *machitsukuri* as a starting point is useful if the links, as well as the conflicts, between town and household are acknowledged. My premise is that the household is best understood as made up of multiple aspects and relationships, rather than as unitary. Despite the household's being a unit whose members refer to it as an encompassing group, its relations with the village and town coexist at different levels and points of reference (see Chapter 5). My perspective contrasts with earlier ethnographies which have tended to privilege the unity of the household, and thus of any group, as the key organising principle of Japanese society. The villagers of Kamikatsu,

in their exchange of gifts, emphasise in different ways the multiple facets of the household in its relations with the town. These views coexist with those that underlie the significance of the continuity and emotional attachment to the *ie* as a model of relations. In what follows, I look at how the process of making the town and the appropriation of traditions has resulted in a gradual reorganisation of the relations among households and with the town administration, as well as among household members.

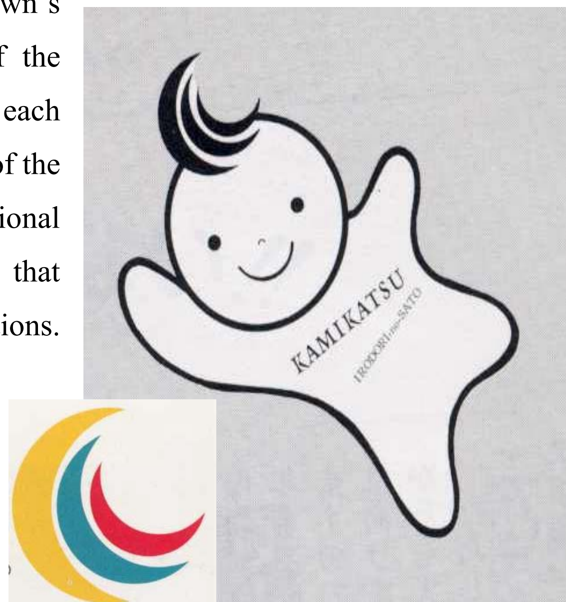
1.a The production of the town's image. Appropriation of the environment

On 26 October 1995, Kamikatsu celebrated its 40th anniversary as a town. It was the largest ceremony in its history. Over three hundred villagers of all ages gathered in the multipurpose sports hall of the Fukuhara School. At the entrance, the town office had arranged plastic bags for shoes, and green plastic slippers, a detailed information pack with the day's events and a small token of participation, all wrapped in *noshigami* envelopes. The room was furnished with chairs and cushions, with officials sitting in the first row of chairs on the right, behind several rows of mostly unoccupied cushions on the floor. As in all town events I attended, most villagers, with the exception of a few elders, for whom the cushions are laid out, sat in the last row of chairs.

Following some introductory comments, the Mayor gave a speech and introduced the main guest: a distinguished historian who, wearing a *hapi* jacket, delivered a three hour paper on Japan, tradition, and the towns of Shikoku and Kamikatsu. The whole-day event was followed by numerous comments from the Mayor, the councillors and the town office delegates. Their speeches exploded with energy and optimism. The local dialect was used, mixed with honorific speech, in the endless comments on the importance of people in making the town,

and contributing to its strength, health, and prosperity The event concluded with a performance by a famous Japanese singer, which cost Y 2,000 (£10). The event was filmed and observed by several reporters, being the main subject of the October and November issues of the town magazine. School children were asked to produce drawings and short essays about the town of Kamikatsu. These decorated and 'wrapped' the perimeter of the room. Behind the main stage, surrounded by six huge sequoia trees and decorated with flowers, the logo of the town framed the view of the event.

The event was, in fact, about the logo. The series of introductions and speeches wrapped time and event in order to unwrap and present the new '*karakta*' (character/face) of the town to the villagers. The logo, a smiling cherub with three locks of hair resembling three moons in three colours, green (tree/sudachi colour), silver (moon's colour) and red (momiji's colour), was presented with all honours. It was introduced as the town's 'character' or face: the image of the town. Three dolls of the cherub, in each of the three colours, sat at the feet of the presentations table, with traditional hachimaki and white stripes that resembled Shinto paper decorations. The character not only added to the previous repertoire of images: the bonsai tree, the maple leaves, the national flag and the prefectural logo of the town. The character spoke for the achievement of an image, for the consolidation of the town as an all-encompassing social entity. The town is presented as more than



a collection of five or more fragmented villages. The town is presented as an enterprise. The character created by the town office, depict the 'essence' of the town's identity: *ikyou to irodori no Sato* (the town of the maple leaves and fun). Fun, *ikyou*, was a new concept. The addition of the cherub and the word 'fun' suggest a reformulation of the town' s image, one in which the economic specialisation is complemented by a new specialisation in 'tradition' and human resources, the festival and its people. It was a felicitous metonym, incorporating nature, the people, and the traditions of the town. In the following months the logo appeared on all official correspondence, in magazines, schools and post offices. The tunnel at Fukukawa (a village in Maskaki) was re-made to include the decorative motif of the town. Underneath the nearly invisible golden Shinto replica of a temple (put there to protect against inauspiciousness associated with bridges and tunnels) a large sign of welcome was placed. Next to it appeared the written logo of the town, '*irodori no sato'*, and the smiling town's character with the three moon-shaped locks of hair.

If the creation of the character summarises the consolidation of the town system as the main political frame for the villagers, it also represents the town's appropriation of the environment, of traditions, and of the administration of human and economic resources. Appropriations are said to be 'improvements' of the town. They target the economic and tourist development of the town as a whole. The 'improvements' are not always welcomed, especially by new residents. For them, the incursions of tourism and ecological change, with the appropriation of landscape and production means they have lost their privilege to be in an 'ideal countryside', as Mie San, a woman in her mid-thirties put it:

> 'I came to Kamikatsu because I thought it was far from Tokushima, no sight of heavy industry, far from consumerism. I wanted a place to go back to simple life. They are making the town now, and I wonder if it will be good. (…) They spoiled the landscape, tore down a lot of trees, the natural trees which changed colour in autumn, now there is sequoia all over. They changed the roads, put cement all over the place; it looks so ugly

> with cement, really. They don' t want to know it, really, they only want to make the town.'

It is possible to argue that the success of Kamikatsu is due to the efforts of the local offices to appropriate and transform the 'image of the town'. This can also be seen in the economic appropriation of the town's product. Kamikatsu, due to its geographical conditions, cannot rely on a single product. From the administrative point of view, then, it is necessary to convince farmers to adopt the new mode of production, to specialise in their farms. As household economic specialisation becomes an integral part of town-making, a degree of appropriation of this production takes place. Each household is not confined to the town, having economic interests and investments well beyond the region. Most of the efforts of the town aim to retain most of the local produce within the boundaries of the town and its Japan Agriculture co-operatives. Furthermore, not only 'production' but also distribution is somehow appropriated.

2. Appropriation of production

From the images of the town projected in brochures and other media it appears irrelevant who the producers of the products are. Household economic specialisation is not taken into consideration: the producer is a global 'farmer', who sells to co-operatives and local businesses. Villagers as farmers or *nokyou* are presented in the abstract. They are producing 'the town's products', but it is the town office and JA who acquire the image of the product and present it as part of the image of the town and its global development. The homogenisation of the diverse local produce in town-making hides the fact that households have specialisations which vary according to season and demand (both internal and external to the town), and affect the internal organisation of the household[67] and how each member extends her/his relations to the larger community:

Takamura is a traditional family. Takamura Yoshi is sixty-four years old. He is both a farmer and a road engineer, offering his *service*s to a company outside town. His links with the road companies make it possible for him to have a say at the town's meetings. Kimiko is Yoshi's wife. She is in her late fifties. In recent years she has more than doubled her household tasks. Since early in their marriage, she has helped in all domestic and rice-related tasks. However, when town making started Takamura converted several fields into large gardens of kiwi and sudachi, and the care of these became Yoshi's task.

In the autumn Kimiko takes care of making *bancha* (roasted tea), picking and all the processes of roasting. Her husband helps her when he is around and sometimes her mother-in-law also helps, although she is too elderly now. Earlier in the season and in spring, she also collects maple and cheery leaves. They recently acquired a packaging machine. They package their own trays of leaves, which they sell at the onzen and in one restaurant of the prefecture. Furthermore, she has acquired new tasks in the town as she helps the women's group to entertain the elders – although not as regularly as other younger housewives directly connected to onzen, town office and school.

Kimiko sees herself as having a crucial role in the household, which is acknowledged by her in-laws. Despite the fact that Yoshi is household head and Kimiko speaks of him with respect, there is no household decision and task in which she is not involved (with the exception of her husband's hobby of chasing momiji, taking pictures of leaves, in autumn). Although her family is very 'traditional' she participates in some village-town administrative meetings, which in the past only Yoshi attended. Yoshi, who until recently was a *toya*, *kannushi* and head of village, participates in most of the town's events, helping out. He does whatever is needed, from putting out tables, offering tea to guests, and making gifts of *sake* when there is a large ceremonial town making event or festival. Although his household is an important asset to the town, he also maintains a large degree of independence from it. He has refused a post as administrator in town events, although he will probably have to do it sometime in the future. In the last years he has been offered tasks at town meetings, usually reading out and taking minutes.

Kimiko commented that since the beginning of town making, she only sees Takamura late at night. Recently their production of leaves and fruits has been going mostly to the local Onzen, where it is sold to tourists. Their names as producers do not appear on the final package. Their production is appropriated for the good of the town. Kimiko's and her husband's work, skills and connections outside the town are also used for the benefit of the town, and to that extent their internal household diversification reflects that of the town.

Household production, specialisation of production and roles, is invisible in most accounts of town making. It is not the household but the town that acquires the prestige of being the main 'producer' of *omiyage* goods, fruit and leaves. The local administration can appropriate the produce of household business by

mystifying the actual producers, who are mainly women. Work and help is compensated with small prestations. Women who work in town-related activities receive tokens of 'thanks' such as onzen tickets, leftover food, and towels. These prestations are described as things that 'help' the household in minimising expenditure on their purchase – although most households can acquire these products by themselves and some give them away (see Chapter 3).

Appropriation of household production takes different forms, the most common being the control over packaging through JA, Onzen and town affiliated business.

> The Nakamura are a young family with three children. Nakamura started a business of mushroom growing in 1992. After their training in mushroom production, they applied to move to Kamikatsu, where they built up a small mushroom farm.[68] As the demand for mushrooms increased in the prefecture, and new technology made production faster and easier, Nakamura's company rocketed. Two more families joined in. In a few years they had a small business working at full blast. Nakamura spent over 18 hours a day, seven days a week in the production of mushrooms, both spouses and children working around the clock to pick, weigh and package mushrooms.
>
> The economic success of mushroom cultivation challenged the town and JA. Other farmers started mushroom growing at home. Surplus mushroom cubes (artificial compost for growing mushrooms in the shape of a cube) are offered to the school as 'gifts' for the children.[69] In 1996, as the business was expanding, the JA, with the help of the town office and outside investors, opened the town's mushroom growing and packaging factory, offering direct competition to smaller households. Mushrooms became one of the products of the town, being widely advertised in the prefecture's media. The town constructed one of the biggest chain production-packaging buildings[70] in the region.
>
> A large party was thrown at the opening of the building. A Shinto ceremony preceded the event to ensure the auspiciousness of the business. Nine prestations of best quality *sake* were made at the altar by different investors and politicians. Money did not feature in the ceremony. A giant racoon dog holding shitake was offered by the business investors and JA as a 'good-luck' charm, after being unwrapped in the formal opening of the mushroom 'packaging-farm'. The largest and most expensive party ever was thrown for everyone, where politicians, businessmen and households connected with the business were invited. Prestations of wrapped commodities, along with information about the enterprise, were left in bags on each seat during the ceremony for all the assistants, with the main prestation being the lavish feast and drinks that were a return for the *sake*, the investment, and generally to celebrate the event. The name of the donors was clearly visible on the wrapping. The 'participation gifts' were well-wrapped

and the content was not visible. I was referred from one secretary to another before being politely sent away with no answers.[71]

Hierarchy was an important issue, with all members placed according to rank and political prestige around the main table. Layering of gifts was as profuse as in cases below but wrapping sealed the object. The participants carried the bags, waiting for the inaugural speech. After the inaugural speech by the mayor and the main investors, a *Kampai* (toast) was offered to the success of the firm. Nakamura and the rest of the families involved in the mushroom business were also invited and treated to free food and drink. As in many other town events, the highest in rank were the first to leave the party. Their participation in the feast is mostly symbolic. In a very similar way to the *kannushi* in festivals, they attend only to make the speech, to present gifts, make toasts, have some of the food and drink, listen to a little music and go. They clearly have no further contact with the recipients of gifts and those at the periphery of the business, like Nakamura. Nakamura was one of the last to leave and was not upset at the decision to have a new packaging industry, despite the effect it would have on his own businesses. The mushroom business is getting bigger, we do not have enough hands to package it. We hope we will make a good town'. As people left, large quantities of food remained, and the catering *service*s gave people boxes of take away food. When I was leaving the field, another factory had opened. It is not yet clear what effect the large packaging factory will have on smaller household production and mushroom sales in general.

The importance of the appropriation of the packaging and the presentation of the produce as a 'town produce' is crucial for making the town. However, despite its positive overtones, the process of packaging is no longer in the hands of the small producer of mushrooms. Takamura and Nakamura, despite having no interest in the political production of the town, relate as households in different ways to the process of town making. Takamura is largely in control of his own household production, and close to the town office, while Nakamura is clearly marginal, having had to cede one of the crucial aspects of production, packaging, to the JA and the households who manage the enterprise. Their relationship to prestations is also quite different, with Nakamura being the main recipient of town and JA prestations, while Takamura retains part of the character of dominant donor by avoiding being made into a recipient. The two households are similar in that the women in them have acquired new responsibilities, being crucial in the specialisation of the household and its interdependence with the

town. The two households are alike in that both have their time appropriated by the town through communal work and meetings, and in that women's work and prestations are ranked below those of their husbands.

2.a Appropriation of festivals and the making of tradition

Making the town in Kamikatsu revolves primarily around the definition of an image that summarises the identity of the town. It is in the process of re-enactment and appropriation that gifts are key elements of mediation of all 'appropriation', 'communality' and 'town making'. The main example of this is the santainotsuki (three-moons rising). I consider this example in detail to illustrate the kind of gift exchange practised, and to bring out the complexity that is usually lost when looking only at the moment of exchange.

> The three moons rising festivals takes place in mid-August in a remote Shrine in one of the most remote districts of Kamikatsu. The festival is based on the theme of moon watching, a popular pastime in many areas of Japan. The difference of this festival is the natural phenomena associated with it. Late at night, when the moon comes out behind the mountains, it is possible, from a distance, to see not one but three moons rising.[72] The magic character of the almost forgotten festival was taken up by the town office, and three moons were adopted as the town's logo. The participation of the town office in the festival is disguised. It is done through one or two of its representatives, who bring some presentations as prizes in games during the event, or else finance the *sodai* who open the festival. These prestations cost them little, some being obtained at a reduced price from sellers who want to be seen as 'giving' and making the town. The two main prestations are a book, onzen tickets (donated by the onzen) and mushrooms, which are obtained from the JA.
>
> The festival starts with an arduous climb to a small temple, where people living in the vicinity have left offerings of *sake* and fruit, similar to those offerings made at the autumn festival. The *sake* was bought at a shop at no discount, and the vegetables were from the garden, making up for the expense of the *sake*. The offerings are made individually by the *toya* and *sodai* of the area without the participation of any of the assistants. A few local households and villagers (mostly associated with the town office), the English teacher, and tourists and journalists start arriving shortly after ten, bringing their *furoshiki*, bentos and drinks. The atmosphere is convivial and relaxed,

with people greeting each other as they arrive, sitting inside or outside, depending on the weather, with their friends and family. Plays and songs are performed.

Takochan, a charismatic and talented young man in his mid-thirties, performs and entertains at these festivals. He organises games of chance in which prestations of 'no-value', bells, soap, tickets for the onzen, are won. *Janken* (stone, scissors, paper) is the most popular game of chance. Takochan manages to make them all play *janken*, to everybody's enjoyment. Number games and word games are also played. Villagers sit sharing their drinks and bento with their neighbours, and as alcohol takes effect, people move around offering more drinks. Takochan starts a new round of games of *janken* in which a *noshigami*-wrapped shitake (mushroom) is offered as the highest prize. The following year the *noshigami* wrapped box of mushroom was contributed by a local householder who had bought it at the market. Takochan and the *sodai* house thank the neighbour, who makes a shy gesture of deprecation and disappears to the back of the house. Another neighbour comes and after greeting everybody is invited to join in. After a short talk he approaches the *sodai* and very discretely offers him a wrapped prestation of money. The *sodai* thanks him and hides it underneath his wife's *furoshiki*. My host does not want to talk about it, but says only that it must be 'help' towards the cost of the festival. Several people film the event with professional video cameras. One of the young men filming hopes to make a promotional video. People greet new visitors with their fans, and the English teacher receives one fan from a neighbour as a '*kimochi'*, a feeling donation. foreigners are put on a stand and asked about their age, hobbies, countries, food and family, as part of the entertainment. Takochan translates even when one teacher speaks good Japanese.

As the hours pass, some people move around the dark forest with torches, commenting on the age of trees, and a few others make donations of coins and prayers to the deity in the Shrine. A woman in her mid-forties sitting next to Junko, a nine year old child, gives her part of the prestations of soap she got in *janken*. At the other end of the room one neighbour gets drunk and starts telling his friends about his sexual prowess, and his wife's enjoyment. Everybody laughs and the English teacher expresses surprise at the openness of his sexual jokes, but no one listens – festivals are not occasions for opinions and rational thought. Jokes, songs, shyness, laughter, polite and medetai conversation, and word-play are much preferred.

The entertainment continues until half an hour after midnight, when the moon should appear. Expectation grows, and everybody gathers at the only spot from where the moon is visible. No politeness is expected, people fight to get the best positions with little embarrassment. After minutes of intense staring into the black sky, the three moons rise. A word of banzai (hooray) and three ritual clapping, and joy explodes. After few seconds the moon disappears again and Takochan gathers all the assistants. In a circle and hand in hand, they say farewell by thanking everybody, rejoicing in the success of the occasion or hoping for better luck next time, and raising their arms three times with *banzai* (hooray!). A final clapping from everybody finishes the event and the circle dissolves. In a few seconds the *furoshiki* are full of bento and other items and the

Shrine is closed. *Omiyage*, left over food and cans of drinks, are given to the young and the foreigners, and people say goodbye to each other.

The *Santainotsuki* festival is a good illustration of the kind of exchange relations that are encountered in town festivals. Prestations in this context are ones in which 'things' are given as prizes for participation and *kimochi*, with no obligation involved. Money and other wrapped gifts are also classified as *kimochi*, although those who make the prestations feel that obligation is part of their duties as neighbours and town members. The prestations here, despite being the same as those encountered in the village festival in the autumn, define donors and givers as the 'community' of the town. The references to the village are played down. Ceremony and ritual are lacking and local dialect and directness are used instead. Donors of prestations to the group are not known. The figure of the 'entertainer', a person who leads the event in the most gentle and 'happy' of all possible ways, is crucial in defining the mystification of the main giver of prestations. The role of entertainer-cum-speaker appears on all occasions when gifts and commodities are given on behalf of the town. On another level of relations, onzen tickets and commodities like towels and soap are offered to entertainers and those who 'help' during the year or after the event, to 'thank' them for their work. It is important to stress that villagers consider games of chance as a socialising activity. Luck is not presented as a random event but as a measure of the individual's skill. Winning prizes is one of the processes in which individuals are in a gentle and indirect way coerced to accept prestations, and as such coerced to appropriate the goods the town throws to them as a group. The fact that games of *janken* among others are constructed as '*tanoshi*i' (amusing), rather than an obligation or a competition, diffuses the feeling that individuals are actually made to play and enter in competition with each other. I want to stress that these practices, just like the throwing of *mochi*, appear insignificant in accounts of exchange, but they are immensely popular and constitute one of the most important occasions of the communal manifestations of ideas about

exchange and gifts. They are particularly significant for the understanding of gifts as compensatory elements of social relations.[73]

3. Conflicts in making the town. Gifts and conflict resolution

Making the town is not without conflict. Transition from village system to town system has been marked by individual households maintaining a double system for a long period of time. While they appeared to agree on a democratic system based on new local administrations, they maintained practices of the earlier village system.[74] The transition was almost completed by 1995, and by the time I started fieldwork the town was the main frame of political action. Conflict between villages was non-existent, although conflict among households and between households and the central office continued, both overt and covert.

> Tamon is a household head in his late sixties. He runs a private business in farming and logging. On his return from a town meeting he said that he was happy he had spoken at the meeting. He did not like the town office organising a meeting to discuss the price of wood and other related products. After all, it was their business, and it was the private business of the farmers. The farmers had their own union and corporations, they did not need the town office arguing on the price of products. He liked making the town but he wished the town office would listen to what villagers had to say. As he put it: 'They do not listen very much. When they come with a project they want to do the project. They ask your opinion but they go ahead anyway. This time we have made a stand, I hope that since we complained, which is rare in these meetings they will not go ahead. No prestations of *sake* or food were offered after the event, thus no further negotiations took place. The project was re-examined and postponed for few months.

Conflicts varied over different subjects. Complaints arose most commonly over the town's interference in public and household affairs and the amount of ceremonies and gatherings involved in making the town. Most conflicts over the degree of interference by one household into the affairs of another were usually anticipated by using gifts of apology. If conflicts were not resolved, households

resorted to methods of ostracism.[75] Individuals gradually learned to leave or resolve the situations they felt uncomfortable with:

> Abe, a woman in her early forties, wife of a traditional household had been working at the town office for several years. She worked with people who, with a few exceptions, came from prestigious village families. She left all of it behind for the enterprise of making the town. The town had to be a 'democratic' and an 'international place'. She had enrolled herself in English classes in order not to let down her office colleagues, who pushed her into it with the excuse that it would benefit her children who were later enrolled in it. However, the timetables interfered with her domestic duties and family business. Gradually she grew unhappy with the activities of the municipal office. Every day she had several meetings and many functions to attend. Her duties at the office were many and not always fulfilling: arranging decorations at meetings, buying presents for the guests, assisting her boss in matters to do with the making of the town. Most of her activities consisted in attending events and contributing to gifts. As I observed while I was with her at the office, gift giving was constant, marked by the many travelling *omiyage* gifts, and the 'free' gifts received from other institutions. However, after many arguments with her father-in-law, who perceived the town office as overly interfering in the farmers' affairs, she decided to stop working there and return to farming and staying at home. She was not completely happy with the way the office handled its relations with the co-operative and with the farmers, and although she did not want to speak out she was clearly not happy with her place at the office either. Finally, both she and her husband left their work both at the JA and the municipal office and went back to work on their farm. She received many farewell presents that 'thanked' her and her husband for all their work. After the event, Abe said she could not feel 'bad' about the town office, because in their gestures they had 'thanked her', and that is what counted. She insisted, that she and her husband were better off at home.

The set of prestations received here are clearly of a different nature from those of apology. They specify the character of 'breaking off' relations that took place, and trying to 'smooth' over and resolve the rupture. Like most gifts of thanks they are ambiguously placed at the boundary of apology, coercion and obligation to belong to the town. However, not all conflicts are about the town's interference. Conflicts may also arise as a result of the households' interest in seeking prestige.

> Yoshimoto, the sixty-seven year old wife from a prestigious old family and a keen gossipmonger, did not feel very happy about the way things were done in town, because her husband felt marginalised in decision-making. Their family had been politically influential for decades, but could never achieve a full political post through

democratic elections. The did not have enough people supporting their candidature. Their opposition to town matters never took the form of public confrontation, but they tried to attend town events as little as possible. She did not want to be disrespectful, and did participate in the events which the town organised for their district, especially those to do with respect to the elders and village traditions.

From the point of view of the town office and the political representatives of the town, to make the town is an arduous business. As one officer argued, 'I think we work more than a *salaryman*, we have to make everybody happy'. The relation between households and municipal officers is a complex one which cannot be reduced to one of mere antagonism or interference, although a degree of both takes place. It would be simplistic to see their relationship as merely oppositional. Rather, households and the town office try to win each other over to their communal and personal goals.

3.a Obligation and ambiguous commodities

Gifts of participation and gifts of apology are the basic items of identification and prevention of conflict. They are substantial, perhaps revealing not only a preoccupation with resolving conflict but also exposing hidden conflict. Unwrapping the character of the usefulness of such gifts and revealing the rhetoric and redundancy is problematic. During fieldwork, my closest informants received an average of twenty prestations from different events. These were always classified as 'useful': a box of tissue, a plastic bento box, chopsticks. Villagers acknowledge that they are 'useful' but that they certainly do not need these prestations. In becoming recipients of the 'useful' prestation, villagers also acquire the obligation to return to further events, to show their thanks for the thankfulness of the town's office. It is interesting then to note that the conditions for the creation of obligation in capitalist societies such as Japan do not depend on the existence of a traditional gift economy, but on the capacity to mystify

exchange. Wrapping the commodity with *noshigami*, and wrapping the explanation with politeness of *service* and *kimochi* reflect the same concern. People were coerced or persuaded to take the commodity as well as the awareness campaign as gifts, as an extension of the town office's sense of welfare.

I want to stress the importance of coercion in commodity giving as the process that creates obligation (here obligation is a 'relation' rather than the quantification of debt). In the context of commodity exchange, the gift is created by coercion and persuasion through the wrapping mystification of commodities as 'useful' and 'ritual', through the use of plastic wrappers and *noshigami*. Conflicts in town-making are always 'wrapped', not only by the use of politeness but through the endorsement of a multitude of 'useful' commodities. All town-making events are marked by the giving of many 'useful' things, such as plastic bentos, organisers, towels and so on. The making of the town is a 'positive' and constructive enterprise in which everyone should participate for the benefit of the whole. Town-making becomes almost synonymous with image-making, producing 'gentle', 'happy', 'traditional' images of villagers through commodities that are wrapped in *noshigami*.

These ideas about conflicts of interest and the usefulness of commodities are reinforced by ideas that centre on affection and actual thanking for help. At one level, direct participation in making the town is unavoidable and unproblematic: villagers are called upon to participate, prestations are given in compensation for their attendance, wrapped commodities are given as prizes for good luck and participation in games, and the atmosphere is one of positive interaction and rejoicing in the progress of the town. Individuals who manage to achieve this goal of harmony and positiveness are regarded as good, and giving to them is regarded as giving for 'thanks' rather than giving for status. Simultaneously, villagers stress the idea that meetings and closeness to the symbolic centres of the town

generate responsibilities. Time spent in the town's festivals and meetings is considered fundamental in shaping the kind of relationships that individuals linked through the town will have with each other.

3.b Case study: Elders' day, gifts to the community and the concept of respect and compensation

Elders' day is one of the most ceremonial events in town. There are other events in which ceremony and ritual features predominantly, such as sports day, fire brigade day, and constitution day. All have in common a large redundancy of wrapped commodities, as we have seen above. Elder's day is constructed around the idea of 'thanking' and 'respecting' the elders. The day starts with most elders being taken by the local bus to school sports hall, a different school each year so that each gets a turn. On entering the hall, elders are given a new pair of slippers and plastic bags to carry their shoes to a the chairs and cushions. Those in their 80s and 90s and couples who have been together fifty or more years sit in their assigned places, while younger elders sit at the back as observers.

Different coloured ribbons are given at the entrance, with the schedule of the event, and a wrapped gift – a towel, a health booklet. Attendance is noted down carefully. Each elder is photographed individually, and the date of the event is featured predominantly. Elders are helped to their places by the local politicians, elders' club secretaries and employees of the town office. The elders are clearly at the centre, 'wrapped' on each side by the rows of politicians and secretaries. I want to emphasise the character of this centre, as it is here that gifts are given, whereas in other contexts (such as Sports Day and Fire Brigade Day) the recipients are forced to move out of their places and approach the stand where the speech and gifts are given. The event consists of two hours of presentations and

speeches, delivered by each of the councillors and the Mayor. The prestations are acquired by the town office in large stores, where staff wrap the gifts in several layers of wrapping. In addition, two layers of *noshigami* are used. The town office also produces the medals and commemoration diplomas that ritualise the giving with the date, the name of the donor and the reason for the gift. The office also provides *furoshiki* in the medetai colours of pink and white for the elders to carry the large wrapped gifts home. All these are put in the far right corner of the hall, close to the secretaries of the event, who run up and down to ensure each gift is given to each elder.

Gifts are given according to age. The most expensive gifts, futon mattress, are for the eldest, with a selection of cups and towels of different sizes for the rest. Only one secretary is aware of the content, and it is she who decides on the wrapping styles. The stage where the speeches take place is decorated with a bonsai, a national flag, and the prefectural and the town's logo. People rise to listen to the national anthem, and sit to prepare for the long speeches. Then gift giving begins. The name, age, and village of origin is announced, and the elder rises up to receive the gift. The Mayor motions to the elder not to rise. Some elders refuse to remain seated, as for them the Mayor is a respected figure. All elders bow deferentially several times, usually lower than the Mayor, who tries to bow even lower to reduce the hierarchical distance that villagers enact with their bowing. It is the elders who are being 'honoured', not he. A 94 year old lady sits with her back bent over with arthritis and bone and knee deformation caused by many years of hard work and sitting habits. On hearing her name she rises to honour the Mayor, who is bestowing on her the honour of giving her the gift. The Mayor asks her to sit, he will kneel instead. She refuses, and stands up bowing deeply, which the Mayor also does. The next elder allows the Mayor to come down on his knees to give the gift, and both bow. Elders place their gifts above their heads in humble acceptance, and receive the diploma. The prestige accorded

to figures of authority is an important aspect of the elders' perception of the event and themselves as recipients.

Rank, deference and humility are present in every action of receiving in this context. Three secretaries follow the Mayor, making a chain between them. They hand the gifts and diplomas to the Mayor, to accelerate the presentation process. An employee in charge of the town office magazine takes pictures. Wrapping here expresses care and the ceremonial nature of the event, being perhaps one of only three events in the villagers' lives in which profuse gifts are given and received. (The other two are wedding gifts and fire brigade prizes). The gifts are wrapped in many layers of paper. Only in this context do elaborate wrapping and hierarchy appear to correspond, as in Hendry's argument (1993). Gifts also have a different origin and destination than on other occasions. These are 'national' prestations, from the nation to the elders, through the Mayor as a state elected head. The giver transcends individuals and the immediate community.[76] In the back room, the employees' wives and the elders' in-laws prepare wrapped trays of food, *sekigohan*, *sake* and *bancha* (auspicious rice, rice-made alcohol, locally grown tea), which are distributed by the women and the employees. The Mayor and councillors, as in cases of school *mochinage*, leave the function.

On these occasions wrapping is multiple and layered, reflecting the temporal proximity of the elders to the sources of prestige in town. These gifts are complemented with the flow of prestations women and employees distribute. This second set of prestations, given in the absence of the Mayor, is auspicious food. Elders change their assigned seats and move closer to their friends and fellow villagers. Small groups of women emerge. They gossip and eat. Some of the elders sit silently wrapping their already wrapped gifts and return home, while the rest remain and enjoy the food and talk. The young women are now behind the stage, ready to entertain the elders. Their giving of *service*s is less obvious than

the wrapped gifts. They offer a succession of plays and songs from the elders' youth, with a few dances, comic sketches about the farmers' youth and romantic songs. Finally, everyone leaves. Back home, elders who have not left their gifts at the genkan open them, others leave them unwrapped for their children and grandchildren.

Conclusion.

The contexts for making the town have multiple layers of exchange. As I described, there is an array of prestations given to particular households and individuals on account of their *service*s as mediators. These layers of exchange multiply on the ceremonial occasions I examine, where the relation of periphery between givers and recipients is acknowledged ritually, and where givers and recipients are clearly stated, and clearly separated by rank and hierarchical considerations. Understandings about gifts are predicated on understandings about the relation between the giver and the recipient, and especially on the distance between giver and recipient but also on those who help to create the occasion, who wrap, cook, dance and offer prestations of *sake* and tea. The first, can be understood in terms of rank and prestige, although these are difficult to assert in conditions where the giver is absent or veiled through intermediaries. I use the ideas of 'core and periphery' proposed by Gill (1999) in their model of Japanese workforce. In their model, individuals who are close to the core enjoy the security of their relations with the main institutions (I suspect where gifts have profuse layering), while other workers at the outer rim of peripheral relations can be hired and dismissed at will, giving the centre a flexibility to use and discard workforce depending on changing economic conditions. It would be interesting to know which kinds of exchange happen at the periphery, but I suspect from Moto's case (Chapter Three) that it involves barter and ritually

wrapped commodities that 'revolve' among people. One could speculate that arrangements would resemble those where patrons are removed or absent from the symbolic centre. Although it is unusual to use ethnographies in urban industrial contexts for analysing the rural process, I think the model describes a form of oppositional identity that I encountered in Kamikatsu. The flexibility of this model in encompassing relations of inclusion and exclusion within group forces helps to centre the discussion between households and central administrations, in which households found themselves either close to the centre or peripheral and easy to discard. I imagine that given the circumstances of town making in which all members must contribute to the making of the town, the relations between centre and periphery, and the different layers of proximity to these centres or cores, are less clear-cut and more inclusive.

Hiraoka's first comment embodies the representational interest of the town office. The town is one and its multiplicity and complexity are reduced to the town's image. The town's image is made of five different villages, all equal in their importance (from the point of view of the town office). The practices and knowledge of each village, district, and household are examined by the town office. Those practices and knowledge that appeal to the town office as 'interesting' or 'representative', and therefore fitting into their conception of the 'town's image', are placed in a pool of knowledge and traditions. Any interesting feature a particular Shrine roof, a sumo fight at a festival, a belief in natural phenomena, the beauty of a spot, the convenience of a valley for tourist recreation, ways of making and throwing gifts, household production of fruits and vegetables becomes a feature of the town itself. The rest is rejected, unless someone finds a way to 'exoticise' or 'culturalise' a particular piece of knowledge, place or activity for the benefit of the town. The town's serialised knowledge is then presented in brochures, meetings, gatherings, maps, local magazines, as the town's image. Wrapped gifts are offered on the occasions when

the town office must implement these changes and incorporate villagers into the town. Any criticism of this image is perceived as a criticism of the town's identity. In short, the preoccupation with the town's image reflects a strong sense of identity crisis.

The importance of the town seems to predominate over the previous institution, the village. A village is said to be 'integrated' into the town. This integration is articulated through the idiom of festivals and town making. Each village has its autumn festivals, its practices and folklore described as *mura no dento*, the 'tradition of the village'. These co-exist with town events, *machi no dento*, 'traditions of the town', which are made up of new festivals, gatherings, ceremonies, and economic production and the constant invention of tradition.

The richness of traditions in Kamikatsu is both a product of the amalgamation of villages and a recreation of traditions. Town making is a process of constant renegotiation between villagers and the town office in which events, images, economic production and traditions define the town. It is a not a given aspect of villagers' life, but one which is fragile and constantly discussed. Knight (1995) perceives the context of making the town and town revival as one 'in which the past is negotiated' (Knight 1995: 10), and upon which traditional heritage and nostalgic appeal to tourists are enacted. In Kamikatsu this traditional heritage is appropriated in the context of festivals and ceremonies. Village amalgamation, as Knight also describes, did not take place without a certain opposition of localities and districts. The memories of the villagers of Kamikatsu support this picture. Their descriptions of the amalgamation process portray a life-style of arduous work and constant cession of power from village units to individual households and local administrations. In these contexts gifts are the negotiating pieces. Villagers are made to accept gifts in order to introduce them to the common task of making the town. In these contexts the layering of wrapping increases the

closer the giver and recipient are to the core centres of power – the administration, the Shrine, tourist resorts. Their participation in these processes is minimal, they are the recipients of numerous donations, and can only approach these centres through gift giving. Wrapping, however, is distinct from the actions of adding layers to this political core. Those at the periphery of town making make use of wrapping, but the layering is mostly absent. A distinction is made between profuse and less profuse layering and between layering and wrapping. While wrapping is important for all actors, wrapping is not always a synonym of layering, but a reification of auspiciousness for those who seek social prestige. Although wrapped gifts are important pieces in the discourses of town making, the tension of achieving a sense of unity is perceived as a kind of paradox, since most villagers perceive themselves as culturally having little in common but fighting hard to make the town into their shared community.

Plate 13. The Major of Kamikatsu giving a wrapped prestation to an elder to show respect and to 'wrap' elders into 'town-making'

Elderly woman wrapping her wrapped gift with pink furoshiki paper

Chapter eight

Conclusion

The main aim of this thesis has been to build up a picture of how gifts are produced and exchanged in different social contexts among the villagers of Kamikatsu. I have focussed on practices and discourses concerning wrapping and obligations, and on the commodities that articulate most relations of exchange. I have wanted to contribute to the ethnographic understanding of Japanese society, as well as to the theories of 'exchange' and 'wrapping'. In this conclusion, I do not want to 'wrap' the thesis or unwrap the argument. I want to look at some of the issues that I believe are important for the general understanding of Japanese practices of gift exchange.

The link between the two central themes of this thesis, the villagers of Kamikatsu and the analysis of the relations between gifts and obligation, is contained in the ethnographic material itself. The villagers of Kamikatsu appear to exchange gifts in a manner that would be only partially understood when gift giving is looked at as a 'traditional' practice that 'transforms and maintains itself' through 'modernity'. I am addressing here what many anthropologists have considered the paradigm of Japanese society, a peculiar blending of 'tradition' and 'modernity' described for example by Smith (1983) and Befu (1969). It is clear that there are many elements in Japanese society which are embedded in the language, images and textures of what is constructed as tradition. Wrapping and the concept of obligation (*giri*) are perhaps the most paradigmatic. Modernity is exemplified by the incorporation of new fashions and practices, for instance Valentine gifts which are said to have a 'modern' façade but hold traditional principles such as *giri*. Throughout the thesis, I have wanted to highlight the fact that each practice of gift giving has to be understood within two contexts: that of

capitalist production of gifts as well as commodities, and the historical context of making the town. I have emphasised the crucial importance of commodities in the Japanese understanding of gifts and exchange, because I believe the paradigm of 'traditional' versus 'modern' society has forced us to dismiss the strong character of capitalist production of gift exchange in Japan. I am aware that gifts are not external to the discourses of tradition and modernity, rather they are embedded in them, but my concern here is that gift exchange might be in danger of being overlooked if our attention centres around the ideological platform of these discourses.

As Hendry (1999) has said of other areas of Japan, the villagers of Kamikatsu seem to be regularly engaged in the 'throwing' of prestations: all through fieldwork I was struck by the facility with which villagers gave things away, literally threw away auspicious prestations. Both constructions, throwing and auspiciousness, intersect in a series of discourses about the morality of obtaining prestations. Prestations are obtained in ways that force the producer(s) of these prestations, neighbours, kin, spouses, to renounce throwing them. Givers extract the work and prestations from individuals who produce them. These prestations tend to be treated as good and natural and they are shared as a way of compensating for the ways prestations were acquired for exchange and prestige. Other prestations follow in which recipients thank donors. In giving and in receiving givers and recipients are not always related vertically. Recipients might have contributed in producing and returning prestations. By throwing gifts away villagers emphasise the character of their participation and their belonging to the celebration of auspicious consumption. They define the moral economy of accumulation and thus the degree of boundedness between households. The processes of throwing away defines to a large extent the political division of groups of people; how the welfare of the community is negotiated and organised, and by whom. The experience of gift exchange is not linear though some

prestations take place in the course of life-cycle events. Gift giving is mostly an experience about the centrality and the peripherality of producers, givers and organisers of prestations. Thus, most relations of gift exchange are not necessarily predicated upon the differences in rank between the giver and recipient, but also between the periphery and centrality of producers, the presence and absence of givers and the level of competition expressed between recipients of gifts. When giving wrapped gifts, givers coerce the recipient to accept a commodity and therefore to accept certain obligations to return it. The magic of their gift exchange lies not so much in coercing the recipient to accept a gift but in wrapping the gift, in adding value to the commodity and gift. Politeness and rank are important when giving and receiving a gift, but gift giving targets the reproduction of intimate relations between givers and recipients.

Villagers' identity is thus predicated on the assumption that belonging to their group(s) is intimate and reproduces some of the conditions of 'help' and mutuality expressed within the main residential group, and conditions of mutuality between spouses (rather than between senior heads, ritual specialists and dependant members). Individuals in their groups behave properly according to villagers' formulations of giving 'thanks', fulfilling obligations to return gifts and participating in the welfare of their families and the group. Villagers' concepts of group draw on two key understandings. First, villagers stress obligations to and feelings about others as constitutive of their belonging and moral behaviour. Gifts are thought to make possible the definition of such obligations, to make them tangible and valuable. Secondly, villagers make a conceptual integration of the individual, the group, and their bodies, as layering or wrapping actions. These two understandings make up villagers' concept of the group and the personalised self in the group. Moreover, gift giving works to attract and coerce people into nets of activities and ritual practices, to use their capacity to produce and obtain gifts, and by return gifts to coerce them to return

to their positions of centrality and periphery. This is not restricted to villagers and it is visible in many aspects of social organisation in Japanese groups. These shifts between gaining centrality and being removed to a peripheral position through gifts were interpreted by those who made me the recipient of their gifts as part of a larger process of the definition of each individual's place in a group. What I, and other villagers, experienced as a successful integration into the town, and a gradual dislocation of such privilege, was articulated through a set of prestations, the categorisation of which 'shifted' ambiguously from 'thanks' to 'apology'.

The enterprise of 'making the town' has had a key impact on the way households are able to relate to others and imagine themselves as a community, and to objectify their identity. The enterprise provides them with new occasions for exchange, ones that link the central administrations with each household on an individual basis rather than a communal or village basis; the villagers are said to be equal members of the town, with strong emphasis on democratisation of participation. The transformations, both politically and socially, have not affected the villagers' perception of gifts as crucial in defining relations of power. Cheal (1988) has underlined how among people in Winnipeg the practical assistance of gifts is a solution to the contradictions in the rationalisation of exchange. He puts forward a functional approach in which the conditions for the rationalisation are largely related to the many irregularities of raising support in collectivities that are fragmented or 'weakly articulated'. My analysis stresses the fragility of the villages and households, and how they have been fragmented through the process of town making. I wish to underline that transformations of relations of power in gift exchange are not always expressed in the language of wrapping, and sometimes have no representation of their own: it is in the management of the production of gifts, rather than their presentation, that relations of power lie. Whether local administrations will manage to abolish certain practices for the

benefit of making an egalitarian community would be the topic of further research. For the present, the town of Kamikatsu lives in a constant and dramatically changing society, where much effort and inventiveness are put into finding ways to 'move forward'. Inventiveness and resourcefulness are two features that define making their town into the success story that it is. However, there were many occasions in the process of making the town where this enterprise engulfed many villagers in arduous tasks. These are situations difficult to resolve without dispute, ostracism, and indifference. In daily life villagers tend to move within multiple relations and boundaries which are not fixed, such as the neighbourhood, the village, and the town, in constant renegotiations and adaptation to national needs. Villagers appear to have sacrificed many personal and household needs and relations to the political and social endeavours to move out of their villages and into the town and prefecture.

In Chapters Three and Six I have described how the villagers' use of wrapping fulfils a basic need of presentation of commodities and a presentation of a rationalisation of commodities as redundant. I do not wish to reduce my analysis to this sole consideration. Villagers of Kamikatsu tend to present their world as an expression of their identity which revolves around considerations of rank, politeness, and hierarchy. In their exchanges they take up semiotic expressions to indicate the position of humility and respect. These expressions are also specific to the moment of giving, the very moment in which wrapped gifts exchange hands. Visualisation of rank through semiotic gestures is always present. The opposite is also true; some exchanges are not predicated on the recipient being humble and 'down', and the donor respected and 'up'. The donor and the recipient may place themselves 'close' to each other even when semiotically they show respect. They exhibit this closeness in different ways, usually articulated through the notion of 'entering the house' and sharing auspicious prestations. If we focus on the moment of exchange it is easy to dismiss the people who also

participate in producing and the different context of participation and consumption. The extent to which wrapping reflects the locus of power relations manifested in the exchange of gifts is hard to establish. The villagers' use of wrapping for gifts, as well as politeness, are crucial in the theory of wrapping. However, it is difficult to assert that increased layering of wrapping reflects an increase in the distance between giver and recipient as a reification of power and rank. The wrapping does not reflect the existing relation, because most of the existing relations are usually mystified in the process from production to consumption. Wrapping reflects models of communication, but exsiting relations of power are not always replicated by models of wrapping. Wrapping reflects certain relations of pragmatic power, in which layering of wrapping might be enhanced or disregarded depending on individuals' positions within a group. Wrapping has lost some of the power of representation that it may have had because gift exchange is not part of a traditional economy. Rather gift giving is based on the necessity to construct and deconstruct the boundedness and limits of groups of people. This does not deny the importance that wrapping has in capitalist exchange as it provides the means to mystify the appropriation of commodities and work from people in groups. I assume that this power of representation might be more heightened the closer one is to 'core' centres of power, however such closeness is rare in social life. Japanese feel very distant from those who organise their groups and politics. In daily life, wrapping is always mediated by cultural understandings about objects and gifts. Most of the objects and gifts that are wrapped in daily life are deeply affected by considerations of the commoditization and economic value of such objects and gifts.

The emphasis on wrapping as a meaningful action upon things is perhaps the most powerful and transformative action on objects as well as people, as Hendry (1993, 1999) has shown in discussing language in Japan, and Raheja (1994) on

songs in Indian. The features of Japanese wrapping as symbolic, aesthetic and ritualistic, makes it different from wrapping in other industrialised societies. However it is certainly true that Japanese rules about wrapping are shared to a certain extent by most European capitalist societies. At birthdays, for instance, gifts are not always unwrapped in front of the donor; they may be left on a table in the lobby; wrapping cloths like *furoshiki* are still functional in Catalonia. Wrapping paper is a preoccupation in capitalist exchange, although usually veiled in western capitalist societies. Wrapping gifts is personal, obligatory and commercial. I am not denying that the cultural construction of wrapping in Japan has significance for structural combinations of symbolic elements that came about in pre-modern Japan, or rather in the romantic reconstruction of pre-modern Japan, that people in the Meiji period invented. Indeed, wrapping is made of *noshi*, elements of symbolic nature which define the symbolic consumption of the gift. However, *noshi* is used in many original ways. Far from following convention, villagers make adaptations to their needs to deal with commodities and relations of power in industrialised societies. Their wrapping looks unprofessional and incorrect, but these are small but important cultural innovations. According to those who look at wrapping in its traditional and ritual meaning gifts can only be consumed, in symbolic terms, if they are free of pollution.

In Chapter 4, I emphasised the necessity of contextualising the symbolic importance of pollution. I stressed that the villagers make a distinction between normative and ritual knowledge with their daily needs of wrapping. The concern with pollution occurs only in certain conditions and stages in life, it is by no means the main concern in relations of gift exchange. As Raheja argues for North India, despite the great emphasis that most societies place on pollution, relations of gift exchange are more concerned with notions of fortune and misfortune, auspiciousness and inauspiciousness. It is in the prestations' capacities to shape

relations of continuous prosperity and protect the household and its members that actions of exchange gain most of their meaning. It is the appropriation of products which are mostly thrown away, and not only the particular moment of the presentation of a gift, that dictates what is the meaning of wrapping and the character of obligations. However, it is this appropriation, like the objects' market origin which is removed from sight or enhanced in the moment of shopping and the moment of giving. As anthropologists, we stress the performance of givers and receivers, their gestures of lowering and raising a gift, as reflections of relations of power at the moment of exchange. The show of humility and politeness when giving is necessary to most villagers, as they indicate how individuals respond to something they view as inherent to all social relations, the inequality of status and respect of status. However, as villagers are aware, such performance is embodied in their persons and communication. It is mostly intended to convey an impression to others and influence others. However, the value of gifts, their pragmatism, usefulness, market value, ability to create obligations, their emotional value, is a final statement, one against which most villagers match the performance of an individual. As important as politeness, wrapping, and considerations of rank, is the capacity of an individual or household to acquire gifts and put them into circulation. Thus the power of any individual to affect others' actions depends not only on her/his communication skills, knowledge of wrapping, and place in the hierarchy, but also and more crucially on her or his capacity to appropriate the production of gifts, either by being in control of production, extracting it from others, organising others to obtain gifts, or inducing the acquisition of more goods through the creation of debt and obligation.

By concentrating on the relation between those who appropriate objects and persons as gifts, and those who might not be visible at the moment of the presentation but who were crucial in the production, I have wanted to

demonstrate a point for future cross-cultural comparison. I do not want to suggest that we should privilege the sphere of production as the analytical core of our interpretations, in favour of other spheres such as exchange and consumption (Campbell 1997: 7). As Carrier notes: 'circulation pervades production in a way that production does not pervade circulation [of gifts]' (Carrier 1995: vii). However, our emphasis for circulation and the moment of exchange should not take for granted the importance of production, either.

For comparative purposes, I have looked at the concern with auspiciousness and inauspiciousness when giving gifts. I have used 'obligations' to refer to relations created by the production of relations of exchange, rather than as the quantification of the amount of debt and gratitude in the exchange of gifts, encompassing different categorisations of such relations as *giri*, *orei* to *kimochi*, free gift and *service*. I have been explicit about the fact that the moment of exchange affects our perceptions of wrapping and its use. I have established a dialogue between my interpretations of the nature of gifts and how they are produced and exchanged, and the lives and voices of the villagers. With the debate of gift-commodity and the necessary inclusion of wrapping for anthropology, I have tried to address the need to revise the tools, language, and paradigms used in our task. I have tried to keep in mind the necessity for reflexivity in enthographic description, ethical relations in the field, as well as the dangers of intellectual fashions. The ideas and meanings that we as anthropologists try to grasp about the different societies and people are both strongly embodied in practices and deeply rooted in conventions. It is not only in the liminal place that the anthropologist achieves during fieldwork that these conventions and concepts are challenged. The narrative process through which we represent this whole process is capable of revising and improving our perspectives and ways of thinking. One of my premises has been the double idea that I should reflect on this constant challenge and that it should make a

contribution both to studies of Japanese society and to anthropology. I have based my work on the axioms that 'societies' are not homogeneous and that within them there is always a strong sense of fragility and contradiction; identities of people and groups are neither clear-cut nor bound to single representations of sociability.

I started this thesis by saying that Japanese gift exchange is often described as a 'particular' type of gift economy. My ethnography shows that Japanese gift exchange is not a gift economy or a hybrid between gift economy and capitalist exchange. Japanese gift exchange is a capitalist gift exchange. This may seem an oversimplification of the differences and similitudes with other capitalist and traditional societies. I have demonstrated, however, how obligation and wrapping, the two main pieces of articulation of gifts, are essential for giving meaning to social relations. The Japanese case of gifts is a good example of the relations between gifts and commodities in capitalist societies, how commodities and relations are appropriated and veiled.

The way villagers of Kamikatsu exchange gifts and use wrapping is a process of embedding capitalist gift exchange into discourses of tradition. The Japanese case shows how gifts are necessary in a capitalist society to define the identity of changing relations and overwhelming transformations. Wrapping and obligation have been used to present capitalist gift exchange as a recognisable discourse of tradition and modernity. Villagers do not use wrapping as a given tradition but there are many instances when wrapping and obligation reflect 'creative responses' to new situations and relations, such as 'making the town'.

Wrapping, and obligation do not have much power in the formation of groups but they are key pieces of discourse about the self and relations. I have in particular analysed the contention that the wrapping of gifts is a metaphor for the market and the alienation in the core ties of work and home. Obligations are defined in relation to how people perceive alienation at work and at home.

Obligatory giving is made to visualise the existence of a sphere of alienation within work relations and household relations. By means of wrapping, people aim to mystify and thus transcend this alienation, creating a sphere for human relations. This sphere is not 'outside' work and 'outside' home, but a sphere of alienation is found inside each of them. The closer that individuals are to these inside centres of alienation, through gifts of obligation, the more these gifts are wrapped. In the other spheres and distant from the main 'core' of a group or place, gifts do not require so much wrapping. In this thesis I have looked at different types of giving, and different notions of reciprocity. I have shown how new and traditional types of gift giving, such as Valentine gifts are not mere 'adoptions' from Western societies. They have a development of their own and tell us about how men and women negotiate their social positions. Many aspects of gift exchange have gender as an underlying preoccupation.

Throughout this conclusion I have demonstrated that the Kamikatsu villagers locate in their sense of obligation the link between the identity of a group and community, as a relation acquired with others through gifts. One of my aims should now be clear: to convey a sense of how wrapped gifts are vehicles through which the aspect of 'obligation' becomes a form of consumption. The importance of wrapping in coercing the recipient to accept a prestation, blurring the nature of the object given as a gift, is crucial. The meaning of wrapping and unwrapping objects we define as gifts depends on our capacity to transcend the moment of the exchange and integrate the history of the things, the process of production, appropriation of objects, persons and relations, that make exchange possible. I hope this thesis does not merely reflect the lives of people such as Oue, Hiraoka, Atsuko, Abe, the group of elders, employees and children with whom I established relations and by whom was wrapped. But it is their personalities and their gifts that have given shape to this thesis.

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[1] The ceremony for war memorial in Kamikatsu was carried out by Buddhist priests and Shinto ritual specialists. The gifts offered on these occasions were fruits and *sake*, wrapped in auspicious and inauspicious wrapping papers. This is one of the few occasions in which villagers used auspicious wrapping for a celebration of the deceased. The reason why auspicious wrapping was used was that deceased were conceptualised as having achieved the character of deities or *kami.* Like all prestations offered to *kami*, wrapping had to be auspicious (Chapter Four and Five). This occasion breaks down the conventional divide between polluting/sacred, and the use of wrapping to signal pollution/sacredness, a theme that I examine in Chapter Four.

[2] http://atn-riae.agr.ca/public/htmldocs/e1796.htm

[3] Aprox. £15. Exchange currencies fluctuated very much during fieldwork. When fieldwork started on 21, July 1995 Y3,000 were £21. From mid 1996 to my last day in Japan on 17th January 1997 Y3,000 were £15. All my calculations here are based on 190Y for £1 (or Y3000=Y15). Late 1999 and year 2000, the exchange rate is up to Y3000=£18. Day to day fieldwork however, I converted all my currency into Spanish pesetas.

[4] Ueda, Emiko '*Japao Interessante'*. JTB 13.07.1996 (News supplement)

[5] Asahi Shimbun 'Dating games' 6.2.1996, 'Sweet Obligations' 5.2.1996 and 'O'love's sweet loss to the company's boss' 7.2.1996

[6] For weddings, *kekkon iwai*, gifts of money were preferred in a 75.4%, spending between Y 20,000 and Y 30,920 (£105 to £162). Those not going to a wedding reception, friends, co-workers, 31.5% sent Y5.000 (£26) and those going to the reception 30.7% gave around Y 10.000 (£52). Bosses, ranked recipients and kin assisting to a reception gave over Y 30,000 (£157). Very similar amounts were given at funerals with an average of Y 8,770 (£46). Superiors at work and co-workers sent Y 5,000 (£26), with distant co-workers and acquaintances sending Y 3000 and Y 5000 (£15 and £26). Maternal and paternal kin gives an average of Y 50,000 (£263), brothers and sisters Y 30,000 (£157) with an average of Y 39,450 (£207).To celebrate the birth of a child (shussan iwai), the majority gave Y 5.000 (31.4%), followed by Y 10.000 (21,7%) and Y 8.000 (16,3%), with a total average of Y 7460 (£39). Although grandparents might spent over Y 100,000 (£526) with toys for the children. For students entering a new course (nuyygaku iwai) they were offered Y 5,000-10,000 from their parents and kin. Children in primary and secondary level received around Y 9850 (£51) increasing through university up to Y 15,130 (£79).

[7] Ueda, Emiko '*Japao Interessante'*. JTB 13.07.1996 (News supplement)

[8]Notes on wrapping and wrapping papers. http://www.ogasawara-ryu.com/en/ome.13.html and www.kto.co.jp, www.origami.net: 'complete origami' by Eric Kenedy 1987.

[9]Notes on the history of Origami.

http://www.rug.nl/rugcis/rc/ftp/origami/lists/history.html by Joseph Wu (1994, 1995, 1996, 1997)

[10] Ibid.

[11] *Mizuhiki* (ceremonial paper cords) in Shikoku. http://www.ehime-iinet.or.jp/ehime_e/trad/trad01/trad01.htm.andhttp://www.city.kanazawa.ishikawa.jpbun

ka/beauty/mizu/mizuE.html.andhttp://www.pref.ishikawa.jp/shofu/intro_e/HTML/H_S52501.html

[12] Notes on wrapping and wrapping papers. http://www.ogasawara-ryu.com/en/ome.13.html and www.kto.co.jp, www.origami.net: 'complete origami' by Eric Kenedy 1987.

[13] *Farcell* is mostly used in rural areas. It was a highly popular carrying method at the turning of the century, until gradually multipurpose bags took over. In the areas where it is used *farcell* is said to be very useful for two reasons. First it is practical for carrying virtually anything, it is strong, and flexible –similar reasons found in Japan. Second, it hides the shopping. As my informants argued, plastic bags are not good for concealment, thus, they maintain the use of *furoshiki*, which hides the contents. With *farcell,* they can simultaneously buy in many shops while maintaining a sense of continuity and loyalty. Other wrapping cloths like 'bosses de pa' (bread bags) have followed similar patterns, although bread bags are still much more popular among young people than *farcell*. (My own research. Unpublished). It must be noted that unlike the Japanese, Catalan people prefer direct verbal communication, they do not to use polite constructions and gossip is much preferred forms of communication for.

[14] English is studied by all children at school, and it is spoken by a 1'5% of the population (mostly by officers of the central office and up to 12 households (between mid-thirties to late fifties)

[15] Villagers crossed the mountains on foot to go to festivals (usually harvest festivals marked by gifts to deities) in other regions (particularly Kamiyama). According to informant' s memory of their ancestor's tales, marriage took place among people from the actual villages as well as from all neighbouring mountain villages. Also according to informants, it is not until Meiji that villagers start marrying people from further into the region, especially from Anan and Komatsushima seacoasts

[16] The figure (E) is extracted from cf. *Ikkyotoirodorinosato: Kamikatsu* (1992). The trend between 1990 and 1997 is mine. I added to the original figure. Figure G and H are from www.netnihon.co.jp/tokushima/kamikatu/gyosei/index.html

[17] Warm and mild through the year, the temperate climate osciles with an average of 19 degrees Celsius The environment is very rich in aquatic resources, with rainfall conditions that reach an average of 1178 mm per year, with the village of Fukuhara registering nearly 3,000 mm in an average rainy season

[18] The substantivist debate is part of the debate known as formalist/substantivist debate, which is an extension of an earlier debate between neo-classic and political economy that lead Mauss to his investigations. Formalism is a development of neo-classic economics, opposed to substantivism. Substantivism argued that formalism could not account for the process of production and distribution in non-capitalist societies, which would operate in totally different principles. Substantivism takes a step further than the positions of political economy held by Mauss. Capitalist societies are not seen at the end of an evolution, but it is reciprocity in gift exchange, which is placed along a continuum of closeness and remoteness with others. (see Clammer 1978 for a contextualization in this debate).

[19] Parry argued that anthropologist place too much emphasis on the ideology of reciprocity. Parry claims that what is being addressed in Mauss theory of the gift is the

ideological model of a free-gift that 'emerged in parallel with the ideology of a purely interested exchange'. The ideology of a free-gift is a product invention of highly differentiated societies with an advance division of labour and a significant commercial sector'. According to Parry, Mauss invented a non-existing dichotomy in the hau notion between gift and spirit, person and thing (Parry 1985: 465). In Parry' s Indian gift, asymmetry, rather than reciprocity is the key issue of the problem in returning gifts. In the Brahman theory of gift, things must be alienated and the 'spirit' of the gift must not return. According to Strathern the problem behind reciprocity and the hau is that the real Melanesian thing is the irrelevance of the dichotomy between spirit and thing. (Strathern 1992: 173). However, Perry and Strathern have been equally criticised by doing what they criticise in others. Parry's model of the Indian gift, has been said to reproduce the 'ideology of Caste' also found in Dumont disguised as pragmatic rationalism (see Raheja 1988:30, Quigley 1993 for different critiques on the 'ideology of Caste').

[20] Strathern model is of actors exchanging social totalities, exchanging perspectives and views. The difference between economies is complicated further through the ambiguities of discourse about the ethnocentric perception Europeans have about obligation and market (Gregory 1982, Thomas 1991).

[21]In order to draw this radical contrast, Strathern uses two arguments. First, that persons, the body of persons is partible in feminine and masculine elements and it is the body where people deal with debts, thus debt is personified - attached to the human body. Second that a gift economy is based on the substitution of units, which are personified parts and must be partible, rather than on a ration between things.

[22] Strathern has criticised this view. Inalienability of things does not presuppose inalienability of the actors. Further, suicide in Hagen, speak of a clear alienation of person when they fail to adequate the tension created between kin groups and their political organisation expressed with and by some means of exchange. In the context of some of this means of exchange the roles of wife and sisters and conceptualised and sanctioned depending on the efficiency in the resolution of the levels of reciprocity between the kin groups (Strathern 1988: 283-284)

[23] It is assumed that the historical advent of industrial production discovered a new relation. In the societies defined by the core of the supposedly impersonalisation of market exchange, the category of the "commodity" seemed metaphorically, to substitute what in non-market economies, the gift did not manage to reproduce. An atomisation of individual choice and in Marx terms, alienation of the means of production, and implementation of the alienation in the sphere of social relations. However, Appadauri criticised that "modern economy, ostensibly orientated towards utility and material needs is predicated on the existence of a specific scheme of values and it is a system for the production not only of things but of meaning" (quoted in Harrison 1993: 197).

[24] The *on-giri* model is presented as a case of moral rules of exchange (see Parry and Bloch 1989). It is perceived as a case where the economy does not hold 'an autonomous domain where moral precepts apply' (Dumont in Parry and Bloch 1989) thus it has lead many observers to think that Japan is a kind of 'embedded' type of society. As I argue in this chapter, moral precepts might apply in economic domains, not so as to legislate action but in order to reconstruct an intimate world one that resembles kinship and moral dependency.

[25] There has been much discussions on the validity of Benedict' s models I can not pretend to examine here. I agree with Geertz (1987) that Benedict' primary idea was to confront American culture. In her emphasis to oppose two cultures, she managed to deconstruct some of the universal validity of western modes of thought. She exposed the ethnocentric views Americans hold about Japanese and social order. The validity of Benedict model is that it is a testamentary witness of the paradigms of its time. It expresses the profound transformations of the Japanese society under a political regime that was being consolidated, not yet stable. The circles of obligation are not an invention of Ruth Benedict but the way Japanese presented themselves in exile and at home throughout military contacts and literature. The circles of obligation tell us that the Japanese society had powerful intellectual representations of the modes of articulating groups and individuals in the totalising frame of the Japanese State. With the rules of obligation Benedict, captured implicitly, the Japanese Leviathan.

[26] A claim which has been used emphasise the character of Japanese uniqueness.

[27] Carrier seems to argue that American people believe work should not be alienating, in the sense that work is a place where people can' t be themselves. I use the word in his sense but I include what is less obvious to most observers, that work is alienating, not just because people can't be themselves but because the product of one's labour is taken.

[28] Here I do not mean total concealment. Partial concealment of commodities and gifts Commodities and gifts are only partially concealed. This concealment is not about 'covering' the gift but embellishing the commodities, embellishing the gift and even the wrapping papers. The market is also embellished, through the giving of profusely wrapped prestations, politeness and the rethorics of obligation. By embellishing objects and the market, as well as the embellishment of market relations (i.e. patron/customer relations through the giving of wrapped gifts), commodities are mystified. The negative and inauspicious conditions of the market are also mystified (although unlike Western societies this mystification takes place without concealing the object).

[29] Wrapping is a traditional element of many societies. The action of wrapping gifts might have predated the existence of the market. Still, most evidence (see Chapter One) seems to point at that the actual styles of wrapping gifts emerged at a time in history when the presence of market and transactions based on money become more poignant in Japanese society. My interpretations, however, are concerned with the kind of present-day contradictions and ideas expressed by people in Japan and other capitalist societies in relation to gifts and wrapping.

[30] By economically and socially rational I mean that recipients of gifts make choices over either to keep a wrapping paper (a waste) or to keep a commodity; to give away the commodity or to throw the paper. In Japan and Western societies, the two solutions apply. Individuals make choices about what is more 'rational' to do with the gift and the wrapping. Some choices can be made using an 'economic' rational -a wasted paper- or 'emotional' rational - people do not want to make visible the commodity or the mistakes in giving-. To my observation, what is done to the commodity and to the wrapping materials (stored, untouched, given away to charity or to other recipients) is based on considerations about how can our actions/'rational' help us improve social relations with others.

[31] Raheja has argued that in India, words for wrapping the body are used for styles, colours and patterns in women's speech and songs. Wrapping epitomises female modesty neutralising women's sexuality but protecting women. Using the metaphor of wrapping for wrapping words in songs becomes primarily beautifying, enticing, also becoming the source of women's resistance and expression (Raheja 1994: 49)

[32] There is a suggerence in Murasaki's account (1010) that the layers of white paper might have originated as forms of folded letters from the recipient to the donor. Murasaki describes: ' They also prepared a roll of *kuroboo* scent, cut both ends untidily, and then wrapped it in two sheets of white paper making it into a sort of folded letter. Lady Tayuu was asked to write the following: Among the many ladies at the 'Banquet of the Flushed Faces' Your pendants were a source of shinning admiration'. - If you are going to give her a present like that', said Her Majesty, 'you ought to make it more attractive; add some more fans or something'. No ', the women replied.' It would not do to make it too exaggerated. If it were a gift from Your Majesty, there would be none of these hidden allusions in any case. This is our own little private affair. Murasaki (1996: 42)

This case illustrates not only the potential of folded layers of white paper as symbolic statements of privacy, indirection and intimacy, letters form the heart. It also contains a very good example of the giving of prestations to 'add' value, rather than adding wrapping. In this case, wrapping adds personal value, while gifts given –fans or something else- make it more attractive. Nowadays wrapping is quite the opposite, it makes the gift more attractive, while folded paper has lost its direct significance it had in Murasaki's account. On the other hand nowadays it is the additional prestations define the extent of the 'private affair' among parties (Chapter Three).

[33] Josephides, L has rightly pointed out that this is very different from Papua New Guinea Highlanders, where bank notes are exposed on long canes (personal communication). The comparison certainly illustrates not only the relation to market but also to concealment. In Melanesia, where non-market gift exchanges are predominant wrapping, concealment and presentation is predicated upon different cultural and aesthetic performance. Mystification of wives' labour, for example, are not constructed in the language of wrapping gifts. Nevertheless, wrapping and decoration (e.g. the body) is certainly an important issue in Papua New Guinea. The concern with controlling the market by controlling what is done to objects affects the visibility of commodities (concealment in the Western societies, embellishment in Japan) is more predominant in cases where the market is an important agent). This is very different, for example, of the kind of control around gift exchange in PNG, where individuals (e.g. Big Man) fight to control other aspects of gift exchange (e.g. the time when gift exchange has to take place) (Josephides, L personal communication)

[34] An argument which confuses inauspiciousness with pollution.

[35] Befu argued that since the roles of individuals are by and large defined in particularistic terms, its is more effective to take advantage of traditional values as *giri*. He speculated that altruism would remain insignificant as 'the basic value orientation of the people does not change from particularism to universalism'. This is certainly not true. Altruism coexist with *giri* or other 'traditional' values.

[36] I do not have quantitative information, as it was not possible to obtain, in the actual economic differences from household. Nevertheless economic status was always a major concern for all my informants, and all discussions about gifts, invariably made reference to the prestige of a certain donor or recipient

[37] Previous analyses have tended to interpret data in relation to age differences. However, I perceived that there were differences in relation to how woman and man perceived the return of gifts thus, I decided to focus on gender differential. The table is produced on a sample of 102 people, 57 woman, and 45 man. The age group was between 98 to 22. With, the largest group being those born between 1912 and 1960. The criteria for age selection was based in relation to the composition of Kamikatsu although very few people from the ages 22 to 38 wanted or had time to answer the questionnaire. These people form the largest bulge of informants in the Valentine case in chapter six, complementing with their answers this questionnaire. The questionnaire was given hand by hand at each house, and I was present when answering in most cases. I wrote down additional comments men and women made from the questions I asked. The first five columns reflect how many men and women answered yes or no, at each given occasion. Columns 6 and 7 reflect the percentages of people (men and women) that do not return, do not practice each gift occasion in general. They are obtained from the addition of column 2 and 4 and the difference. The differences in gender no-return can be seen in column 2 and 4 but are not written as a percentage.

[38] In his own time, Moto and his wife started a chain of reciprocal exchange, based on barter and *kimochi* gifts with some of his neighbours and head village, refusing after the second year, to participate in festivals where larger donations of communal gifts are made. The neighbour who had mediated their arrival to the town was put in a position of serious compromise in front of others as Moto did not wanted to ‘fit in’, and visited them in many occasions with gifts to try to ‘smooth’ things for the good of the village. However, the kind of independence Moto aimed to was an impossible ideal. Few neighbours always censured Moto’s dislike of ‘Japanese customs’, gossip grow creating suspicion. Further on the year, when his origin as burakumin (Japanese minority) was known it caused few of the people he bartered with to stop having dealings with him. Part of his wish not to engage with gifts was to avoid to be in the centre of social life, thus to be known and ostracised because of his origin. After his origin was known, some very prejudiced people felt their suspicions reassured. He could only retain relations with others that were also marginal to the town. His ‘manners’ and prejudice against Burakumin isolated him and his wife tremendously. As gossip escalated, his number of people whom he barted were reduced to few. Diana, his wife, was deeply depressed on their neighbour’s reactions, fearing they would be forces to leave. Only two neighbours, the head of the village and a common friend came at New Year to bring a gift and share *mochi* with them. Month’s later one prejudiced neighbour telephoned the police to ‘check on them’ because they were ‘strange’. This lead to an arrest for growing marihuana for private consume, and breaking the law, which Moto denied. A neighbour left a basket of fruit and vegetables in their door as a sympathy gesture in times of distress. Another remaining friend visited them in Jail bringing them fruits, cakes, colour pencils, and paper. At their return to the town the social and specially psychological pressure, made Diana’s fear a reality and they left the town.

[39] By marginal I refer to the fact that she worked for the company on a temporary bases, and although she worked very hard in a job which traditionally was 'a man's job', and tried to have the job more regularly she was only called when there was work to do, like other male and female workers. She was between jobs - at the restaurant and the factory- when she met me. To her I was also temporally associated to the factory - although I did not do any job or received salary-. We were not close but were in a category of 'sameness'. However, since I was alone and it was lunchtime, she took 'care of me' as if I had been to visit her at her household.

[40] Belonging here is not a category of 'equal '; people belong to groups at very different levels of the proximity to centres of power or at the periphery of it. They do not become 'equally' into a group, but temporally, as they switch between inclusion and exclusion the margins, or closeness and distance from the centres.

[41] *Mochi*, eaten in great quantities, has certain laxative qualities. Japanese believe that 'clean' intestines are a sign of good health. *Konnyaku* roots are a delicacy among Japanese for the reason that they 'clean' the inside and have virtually no calories. The idea that the inside of people must be clean and that there is dirt outside is a common feature of many societies and one of the basic human symbolic boundaries.

[42] The sachet of salt is placed under the first layer of wrapping paper, which like a pocket holds the wrapped sachet of salt. The sachet can be taken out without unwrapping the gift, and it is thrown to the house and self before one enters and unwraps the gift inside the house.

[43] Oue San, like most villagers used the euphemism of sadness to avoid the use of *kegare*, although they are very aware that sadness and *kegare* are different things.

[44] Although *kegare* is usually described as both pollution and supernatural pollution. Here I present then, dirt, menstrual blood as ideas about pollution that are not necessarily supernatural, nor associated with post-mortuary rituals. I think that ideas that *kegare* is associated with the failure/success by the kin of the deceased to conduct the elaborate post-mortuary rituals is one that encompasses the complexity of the example above. I would add that one of the post-mortuary rituals is precisely to provide with salt for those who enter in contact with the bereaved family through gift exchange regardless or not of the actual physical presence of the giver of the *koden* prestation. Thus, it is the actual fact of giving a gift that brings donors in contact with *kegare* which is removed by a return gifts which has a sachet of salt added to it.

[45] In India salt also plays part in condolence rituals. It signifies 'being of the same body'. Quigley,D (personal communication).

[46] As many authors have argued these two categories are not opposed, but overlap, being the distinction between the 'natural and the supernatural' a unclear one, although the natural and supernatural is different from what is the 'social' in human relations.

[47] Usually menstrual and birth blood. However, Blood types are perceived like zodiac animals, to be informative about the reasons for the lack of vitality, strength, hard work, and carelessness in individuals. If a boy or a girl is lazy, careless or stubborn these are said to be due to the blood type. I spent many hours debating the nature of my host stubbornness because his particular B gata, and his careful and meticulous nature when dealing with his pottery also due to it. Blood types are popular because they bring both medical and modern considerations about types of blood, and Japanese considerations

about the auspicious and polluting nature of blood. Villagers understanding of blood is that something that can be both polluting and prosperous, depending on the individual control to remove what is polluting from what is prosperous in blood.

[48]There were no references to wolves or monkeys. Horses were considered as powerful and given prestations as deities during festivals. Monkeys were considered 'dangerous' but villagers believed that they did not live in Kamikatsu. When I saw them and brought them to the attention of an informant who was one of the largest owners of forest, he argued that he was surprised to hear that there were still monkeys, but he knew about them and they were 'dangerous' and not good. However, there were no further references to them, nor they were used in anthropomorphic representations, statuettes or drawings. There were several representations of monkeys in Tokushima capital, mostly representing 'King-Kong' escalating the buildings of the city.

[49] The predominant interpretation of Japanese deities is that deities have a dual power, although as Dr. Kay Milton brought to my attention nigitama and aramitama are paradoxically presented as agent/force, thus implying two different deities. Orikuchi (1965 in Ohnuki-Tierney 1993: 53) has argued that a particular deity *marebito*, brought good luck although he was potentially dangerous. It is not clear from the literature if marebito is inherently dual or if once a marebito is not treated rightly (giving it gifts) the violent god separates and becomes a new deity.

[50] The most important carnival in the Tokushima region (also for Kamikatsu) is the *Awa Odori* festivals (mid-summer *obon* dances). The Awa Odori has an ambiguous origin. According to some accounts it originated as an expression of public revolt against Feudal lords with people taking the streets and dancing like fools to give the impression of that that population of Awa had gone mad and thus, the Lord lost interest in taking the region. The other version is that one of the local lords offered a gift of *sake* and people took the streets and danced like fools leading to civil unrest (Welcome to Tokushima 1993). Awa dances have become the annual 'carnival' (people use this word). To the spectator odori dances are a very regulated event, which presents different groups and trade unions as dancing groups, as fools. In Kamikatsu, villagers are all invited to be fools, and prizes for the 'foolish' dancer are given. Nowadays Awa Odori carnival are not an expression of civil unrest, like carnivals, they are a representation of politic order, a subject that I hope to explore in future research.

[51] These feast are different for each village. There are villages where *sodai* joins danjiri and *mikoshi*, women and children (sometimes also the ritual specialists joins in), where in some villages *sodai* does not share food with the rest of men and women. The differences speak for the relations of power and dependence among neighbours. Due to the large number of festivals in Kamikatsu, I leave for a future work a comparison between festivals and their political implications.

[52] The theme of the couple is also crucial in elder's day and children's day. The couple is also central to most legends and tales which they always have the elder man and woman as main characters (e.g. The crane that bestow its gratitude, fortune from heaven, fortune from earth). The couple as Robinson (1989) suggests is central to the understanding of the household. This is reflected in the invitation *sodai* make to have the two masked beings into the festival, and them as aspects of good fortune'.

[53] Yoshida (1981) has proposed that foreigners, stones, and drifting materials are conceptualised as *marebito* or foreign deities, and invited as such to participate of the festival. My experience was that I was always invited to participate in a festival as a matter of courtesy. I imagine that any neighbour would be also invited if he or she would spend time helping or being around the Shrine as I did. However neighbours do not want to be seen as 'tiresome' or 'impolite' so they leave as soon as they have made their gifts or the event is over. In this respect I don' t think my inclusion owes much to the idea of *marebito* but my hosts sense of politeness. Only one in over 45 festivals I assisted I was formally asked to donate *sakaki* leaf to the deity. The gift that the symbolic guests and actual guest make to the deity. I think this is a very important aspect of the distinction between foreigner and outsider. As an outsider I could never make a gift. As a foreigner I could. This can also be seen in the fact that the masked couple and *sodai* are the only ones to make a gift. I think that only in this one occasion I was treated like something of a *marebito*. It happened out of the insistence of a very kind *toya* and everybody did not welcome it. The *sodai* accepted it because that Kamikatsu was getting 'international' and they had to include the new members, me. Only in this respect, the foreigner, the international being - from beyond seas - I represented was a *marebito* and as such it is included in the festival. Such symbolic inclusion I must stress only happens through gift giving. In the rest of festivals I was merely an outsider and the issue of internationalisation was never mentioned at all. The pair of guest *otafuku* and *tengu* may also suggest the dual nature of deity/society/household, although villagers can separate them individually as well.

[54] like many other people, he also takes the unconsumed food wrapped in *furoshiki* back home

[55] In several villages the *kannushi* moves to the annexed house for utage. In other villages *sodai* and *kannushi* are separated from *mikoshi* and danjiri. In larger village's *sodai* partake with *kannushi* separately but they offer entertainment, songs, and dances to the villagers. The differences speak for the kind of political implication of *sodai* into the life of the village. The more separation between *sodai* and *mikoshi*, the less they share food together.

[56] Henry has defined *uchi* as an expression of the house in the sense of 'The House of Windsor', or 'the House of the Tananka. This definition is very apt to the way villagers view their houses in Kamikatsu and I use it here to define both, the building, the domestic unit of production, the continuos line of descendants that the word *ie* connotes (see Hendry 1996a for further reference).

[57] Emphasis mine

[58] For Asuma, her husband did not have to lose property of a thing that was his, just because he felt emotional. He had already made proper gifts to the uncle. The uncle most surely did not need it, it was not practical. However, as both said 'Japanese are very sentimental'. Indeed, sentimentality and being sentimental was a highly desirable quality and men and women show they had sentimental qualities by pleasing others, such as singing at a karaoke, to cry when happy, remember past times, recall the distance between people or how long people had not seen each other, or eaten a particular food. Being homesick was also seen as a good value, a sentimental one. This is a subject of research that has not deserved much attention but it appears to be very important for all

Japanese people I met. Most informants gave personal gifts when they felt sentimental. People did not want to give too many personal gifts in order not to be seen as 'too sentimental'. They saw excessive sentimentality as a kind of personal 'drunkenness' and lack of individual control. To most villagers, sentiments like drunkenness have their own contexts where they are better expressed.

[59] This is very different from the conceptions that other societies where capitalism is less pronounces have of gift giving, see for example Strathern (1992), Harris (1990), Josephides (1985). Although I agree with Carrier and Jolly that the gap is not as radical as Gregory and Strathern propose, gift exchange is clearly not predicated on ideas of exchange ration and equivalence of value.

[60] Bon is a festival to remember the souls of departed ancestors. Wives and families that do not live in the extended family system travel at this time of the year to their natal houses to offer gifts to the ancestors. Kamikatsu receives a great affluence of 'returnees' during obon. Although obon coincides with the traditional custom to repay debts at mid-summer, obon is no longer used to pay economic debts but only to acknowledge debts of gratitude accumulated during the year through kinship and laboral relations.

[61] There is no cash corners or branches of any bank in Kamikatsu. Most villagers prefer cash to other types of transactions and large amounts of cash are kept at home. Villagers have bank accounts in the only office of Katsuura town or in Tokushima city, but they mostly use it for savings. Most farmers use the post-office and Japan Agriculture for savings rather than Banks. The amount of bank transactions is thus limited. Instead of opening a branch, banks send delegates once a fortnight to Kamikatsu to deal with their customers. The town office leaves a room at the entrance of the office for farmers to come and settle and check accounts, withdraw from or lodge money to their bank accounts. Well-off villagers, do not like the idea of having to go to the town office, a public place, to set accounts. They prefer a more personalised business, thus, few households have private arrangements with the bank representative. Banks send their delegates to the houses, privately. Banks tend to give more expensive *chugen* gifts to these customers than the usual farmer than goes every fortnight to the town office.

[62] 'Sweet obligation' and 'O'love's sweet loss to the company's boss' Asahi Shimbun 7 and 12 February 1996

[63] It is important to mention that women give chocolate, which is classified as sweet. Man usually make the statement that they do not consume sweet things, they are a feminine thing. Certainly, most men do not consume the chocolate (although they might eat one or two) and give it to their wives or other women. The fact that they do not consume the chocolate but they give it away for others to consume does not deny the idea that they are, nevertheless, forced to accept the gift and make a return.

[64] One of the problems in the gathering of data and its analysis was the fact that some people who say that do not practice okaeshi, do in fact, practice it. I found impossible to verify in some cases if it was a case of *tatemae* (people giving opinions they imagine to be the 'acceptable' opinion in that context despite what they believe or practice themselves) or what they thought I wanted to hear, or what the town office was asking them to do. The difference between people not practising and people saying that do not practice was thus, difficult to establish, and here they refer to the same data. I can

only acknowledge the fact that many people did not like to admit they were still practising okaeshi because the town office was against okaeshi, but they did not know how to stop it.

[65] It is also really veiled in the country to the extent that in mid-eighties one of the most popular ideas was that Japan was the country of the middle class, where 80% of the people were equal in their economic power. As later historians and economics and anthropologist have argued this is not true. There were large economic differences not only in Kamikatsu but Tokushima. Such differences though were the most veiled ones.

[66] My household was considered an oddity as their members, after living in Nepal, had reduced their consumption of products to the minimum, with little use of plastic, and followed a vegetarian diet. Their wish to be ‘poorer’, that is to eliminate what they though was economically superfluous was a source of gossip and they were generally misunderstood in their approach to household economics.

[67] Around 85% of middle age women, usually the wife of the household head, take care of most of the new products, as well as the traditional horticultural garden and rice. Recently, women are also working in road making as addition to their tasks in production and household maintenance.

[68] Mushroom cultivation is made with stocks of earth in cubes, which hold the funguses that allow the mushroom grow. These cubes allow around 24 mushroom each that has to be picked up as soon as the mushroom is ready. The fungus has a life span of several weeks in which the cubes must be replaced by new ones. The cubes are placed in large green houses where they are kept at humidity and warmth level. Once the mushroom has been picked it is left into a series of containers into a packaging building. The mushrooms are picked by hand and put into plastic containers wrapped with leafs, weighted and wrapped in cellophane ready for sale.

[69] Other gifts for children at school from private households were pens with the name of each children engraved in each pen. Many small prestations like this are given seasonally from households - some of which have no children - to the school.

[70] Although originally a private enterprise, Business as such are like the onzen have several main sources of investment - private, town’s and extra-local, in order to assure a balance of power between investors.

[71] This happened also in most ceremonial town making events. The refusal to tell me about the commodity reflected the kind of attitude to ‘unwrapping’ and making not gifts but commodities visible. Unwrapping the gift was thus an action of removing the meaning of gift-value created with the wrapping. I only managed once to overcome the skilful moves of secretaries and get some answers. In Elders day, after pestering all three secretaries I was told to meet an early forties women at the town office - who had been clearly avoiding me in previous occasions -. Using polite language the secretary gave me no clear answers and sent me away. I could see from where I was standing that she had a full list of the purchased items. In my third approach to her the secretary gave out two of the several items: (a futon, a collection of bath towels). Later at home of some of the informants I was impressed with the ease that informants unwrapped, torn and throw away the wrapping with little consideration. The reaction from one of them was clear: ‘yappari, towel desu’(Again a towel). The prestations were put into another room until they could be used.

[72] Two versions exist of the phenomena. One in which the moon is said to triplicate itself wit no explanation being part of the myth of the power of natural life. The second argues that the mountain where the viewing takes place is at an angle that allows to see the moon reflected in both the sea and the fog, causing a tripartite mirror effect. Since the distance blurs the difference between sea and sky, three round moons rise during few seconds and disappear. Of the two occasions in which I was present, only in one was it possible to see the two-moon reflection. The second, to the disappointment of a few children did not happened due to weather conditions.

[73] *Janken* is highly preferred because it is a 'soft' competition, where individuals can both lose or win without entering in any overt conflict or quarrel. Competition is disguised or made less visible with *janken*.

[74] Talking about the transformation of gift giving patterns in rural Japan I met a missionaries who argued that transformations occurred very slowly with people following both 'traditional' and 'democratic' arrangements simultaneously. To explain this he told me that he had been the local priest in a neighbouring town for over fifteen years until he moved to another town. Ten years later - in 1989 - he returned to the town. During his visit many people who remembered him came to thank him and gave him *kimochi* and *orei* gifts. In total he received over 270,000 yen (£1,421). I am inclined to agree that despite democratic transformations giving for 'status' as well as giving *orei* to 'thank' for past favours is still practised.