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Seeking for a Peaceful Eternal Resting Ground for the Dead Among the Urban Migrants in Japan: from a Research Study of the Nishiamuro Village Graveyard in 2016

[*abstract]

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Abstract

This study demonstrates how Haka-jimai (dismantling a family tomb) in the home village may lead to the disorganisation of the ‘Extended Village Community (hereafter abbreviated as EVC)’. EVC is the term which explains the relation between urban migrants and their mother village. This concept of EVC conveys a social system organised by the villagers, both those in and outside of the home village, enabling a circulation of their products, money, and culture to be extended beyond the boundaries of the village itself to urban settings.

In order to demonstrate this hypothesis, Nishiamuro Village in the Amami Islands was chosen as a case study place through field research conducted from September 5-8, 2016. This small village was relatively self-sufficient and geographically isolated. According to 2014 data, Nishiamuro Village contained only 63 households with a population of 102.

There is a graveyard for the villagers in Nishiamuro, where urban migrants from the village are buried. In 2016, 193 gravestones were located in graveyard. Typically one grave contains the remains of one family and its ancestors. Our research discovered that 2 graves had no names on the gravestones, however we could not ascertain if any human remains had been interred within those graves. And another 8 graves had been exhumed and abandoned or “Haka-jimai.” These 8 graves were carefully examined and 7 of them had belonged to former members of the migrants’ association (EVC). It was by way of discovering the Haka-jimai in the local graveyard that was a key indicator concerning the dissolution of the EVC.

There are two Nishiamuro migrants associations in Hanshin area comprised of 163 households and 592 members. In the Tokyo area another migrant association with 105 households and 229 members exists. And, in other areas of Japan, there is an additional

migrant association of 63 households with 135 members, according to a listing of members from 2005. All together then, the Nishiamuro EVC, consists of the home villagers, the members of the Hanshin and Tokyo migrants' associations, and migrants living in other areas of Japan.