Japan: Seijin & Identity

Interactive Qualifying Project

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Abstract

The initiation ceremony in Japan, the Seijin-shiki, has experienced a decline in participation and increase in disruptive behavior displayed by the youth in the past 10 or so years. This has resulted a questioning of the need to continue the ceremony. The goal of this project was to find the reason behind the deterioration of the Seijin-shiki and provide recommendations on how to alleviate the problem. This was accomplished by exploring the relationship between the post-modern Japanese society in the 1990s and its effects on the "monster" youth of the era. This analysis was then applied to the Japanese youth of today.

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Executive Summary

The continuation of the current initiation rite in Japan, the Seijin-shiki, is being questioned by the Japanese society. This is due to a recent participation decline and rude behavior seen in ceremonies throughout Japan. If these problems are not addressed, the traditional initiation rite that has continued since the Meiji era may come to a halt.

One of the reasons why the youth participation rate of the ceremony is decreasing is because the ceremony simply does not appeal to the current generation of youth. The Seijin-shiki, mainly comprised of ceremonial speeches, is boring to the youth, and they would rather hang out with their former classmates and friends that they haven't met in a while. To combat this problem, some areas in Japan have started to implement events that would give the youth incentive to participate, such as having the ceremony take place at Disney Land. This tactic seems to be effective in raising the participation rate of the youth and I recommend that other areas of Japan also "remake" their annual Seijin-shiki to combat the participation decline.

A major factor in the crisis of the Seijin-shiki is the rude, and sometimes violent, behavior of the youth during the ceremony. The participating youth often talk, play on their cellphones, and sometimes even go up on stage during the ceremonial speeches. Some of the worse cases involve the police, where numerous youth get arrested at the ceremonial hall. Through research on the youth of 1990s Japan and the appearance of "monster" children within society, I have concluded that the problems seen in the Japanese youth and society during the 1990s can be applied to the youth and society of the 21st century. That is, the Japanese society is unable to incorporate the youth into a stable economy that promises them a bright future, which results in violent behavior at nationwide events such as the Seijin-shiki. To help alleviate this problem, the Japanese society must adapt to the current youth trends and acknowledge their modernization.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

The Seijin-shiki[1], a Japanese rite of passage marking entrance to adulthood at the age of 20, has encountered quite a few problems in the last decade. The two major problems are the participation decline and increased rude and disruptive behavior of the youth at the ceremony. Both of these problems contribute to the decline of the ceremony, as more people in society see the Seijin-shiki as an empty event that does not reflect the traditional meaning of initiation rites in Japan. Participation rates have dropped since the 1990s; the same time when outbursts of rude behavior at the ceremony started to surface. While some of these incidents were playful jokes meant to liven up the bland ceremony, others were serious offences that required police involvement. The mass media picked up on these incidents and relayed them to the Japanese society, which in turn questioned whether the ceremony is truly needed in modern day Japan (Kobari, 2005). The existence of the Seijin-shiki is being challenged by society because of these rude and out of control youth.

Many published articles, books, essays, and dissertations exist on the Seijin-shiki discuss its decline since the late 1990s. The content of these sources ranges from the history of initiation ceremonies during pre-Meiji era Japan to an analysis of the "ruined" ceremonies of the 21st century. Through these sources, the transformation that the Japanese initiation ceremony went through becomes apparent. A good example of an element of the initiation rite that has changed throughout the years would be the definition of "adult". Pre-Meiji era Japan's definition of "adult" had an emphasis on the physical change of the youth (Haga, 1991). On the other hand, the current day definition of "adult" seems to put more of an emphasis on the mental and economic standpoint of the youth and others surrounding the youth (Nakamura, 2003). Another example would be the contents of the ceremony. The Seijin-shiki's that took place when it was first created in the mid-1940s mainly consisted of a ceremonial speech. However, recent Seijin-shiki's have started to implement entertainment events in order to make

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[1] Seijin-shiki (成人式)is a Japanese word but will not be italicized because it is pervasive.

the ceremony more appealing to the modern youth (Nakamura, 2003). These changes that have occurred in the ceremony reflect the Japanese society as it progresses towards building a truly modern society that accommodates its youth.

While plenty of sources on the past and present initiation rites exist, not many explore the relationship between the Japanese youth of today's society and the formation of the term "monster children" in the 1990s. This term refers to the youth in society that were in a moral meltdown and conducted various crimes ranging from prostitution to murder. Many sources indicate that the research done on the "monster children" can be applied to today's youth, but none explicitly state the relationship. Therefore, these connections were uncovered through extensive research in both fields. Through this research, I intended to comprehend the complexity within Japan's transition into modernity and the effects it had on the youth of that generation.

The process of untangling this complicated mystery contained three main steps. First, I gathered information on the successive initiation ceremonies and youth of Japan through the internet and the WPI library. I also personally went to Japan and, as a Japanese-American 20 year old, participated in the local Seijin-shiki with former classmates from the junior high school I enrolled in every summer from 2005 to 2008. I also conducted interviews with participants and relatives who have participated in their initiation ceremony to gain a broader spectrum of opinions on the ceremony. The next step consisted of research on the "monster" children and the state of Japan's society during their generation in the 1990s. This gave me a base understanding of how these "monster" children came about and their similarities, if any, to the youth of modern day Japan. The last step within the process was to take the problems seen in today's Seijin-shiki and apply it to larger a societal issue, that is the crisis that the Japanese society faced in the 1990s. I accomplished this by connecting the societal issues Japan had in the 1990s to those of the 21st century, some of which carried over into the current Japanese society.

My research has shown that the Japanese society is currently in the process of debating whether the Seijin-shiki should continue on or not. The disruptions in the ceremonies are not exactly common throughout Japan, but the seriousness of each incident is gradually increasing. If these incidents continue to occur, it is only a matter of time until a youth commits a very serious crime at a ceremony that is supposed to commemorate the youth. Therefore, it is necessary to pinpoint and analyze the cause of these problems and whether it is a continuation of the societal problems experienced in 1990s Japan or a completely separate issue unique to post-modern Japan. To accomplish this, I first established an understanding of the Seijin-shiki (and past initiation rites) and how the current youth behave during this coming-of-age ceremony. I then proceeded to go back in time to analyze the societal issues in 1990s Japan and the birth of the phenomenon known as "monster children". Finally, I brought everything together to extrapolate how these societal issues can be applied to modern day Japan and whether there are any remedies to the declining of the ceremony and uncontrollable youth. I hope that my research can help uncover how the Seijin-shiki is being affected by larger societal issues and identify the faults within the modern society of Japan.

2. Background and Literature Review

For the past 10 years or so, the media has turned their attention to the Seijin-shiki, mainly the negatives of the ceremony, when it takes place in January. They criticize the "childish-ness" of the youths that participate and ask the public "Is this ceremony really benefitting the youth?" (Nakamura, 2003). Those that read an article full of criticism will likely have a negative opinion about the ceremony, particularly blaming the youth for the current state of the once traditional initiation ceremony. However, exploring the history of the Japanese society will uncover that the youth are actually not to blame for the deterioration of the ceremony.

2.1: Initiation Ceremonies in Japan[2]

An initiation ceremony or rite of passage ceremony is a ceremony that marks the growth or transformation of the participant into a new group or society. The ceremony can also give the participant a new role or further responsibilities in life. Japan has had many different rites of passages, but the three main ceremonies are the *Genpuku/Mogi*, the conscription during the Meiji, and the current Seijin-shiki. All three of these rites of passages involve the transformation of the youth into full grown "adults".

2.1.1: Genpuku/Mogi

Japan has had many different traditional rituals, but the *Genpuku* (元服)[3] and *Mogi* (裳着)[4] are said to be the roots of the Seijin-shiki. The *Genpuku* was an initiation ceremony for boys between the ages of 12 to 16 and started in the Nara period (AD 710-794). The *Mogi* was a separate initiation

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[2] This section is presenting information that is widely available in multiple sources, such as (Haga, 1991), (Igeta, 2003), (Kobari, 2005), and (Nakamura, 2003).

[3] "Gen" (元) means "neck" or "head" and "puku" (服) means "to put on". It refers to putting on the traditional Japanese crown, the Eboshi (烏帽子), to mark maturity.

[4] "Mo" (裳) is a traditional Japanese piece of clothing worn woman and "gi" (着) means "to wear".

ceremony for girls which also took place between the ages of 12 to 16, although it started in the Heian

period (AD 794-1185). Both of these ceremonies are very different compared to today's Seijin-shiki and

contain traditional Japanese events to mark adulthood in the youth.

During the time period the *Genpuku* and *Mogi* took place, age was not counted on your birthday,

but rather at the beginning of the year. This is one of the reasons why the *Genpuku* took place on

January 15th, which was said to be the day the New Year began during that era. The *Genpuku* consisted

of a ceremony where the boy would wear adult clothes, change their hair style to show they have

reached adulthood, wear a traditional crown/hat, and change their name. After going through this

ceremony, the boy was considered to be an adult man by society.

The *Mogi* was the female version of the *Genpuku* and included similar practices. The girl was to

wear a traditional formal *Mogi*, raise her hair, and show that she is an adult woman. The ceremony also

indicated that the girl was ready for marriage. The *Mogi* did not take place on any certain day because

the family would chose a day that has a sign of good luck and have the ceremony take place on that day.

After the Edo period, the *Genpuku* took place of the *Mogi*, and young women went through the

ceremony at the ages of 18 to 20 or when they got married. They no longer wore a *Mogi* but a simple

Kimono, did not raise their hair but changed it to a traditional Japanese hair style, put on makeup, and

colored their teeth black to show that they are not yet married.

2.1.2: Conscription during the Meiji

During the Meiji period, boys who reached the age of 20 (although you could apply at the age of

17) were required to become soldiers and go through a physical examination to see whether they were

fit as a soldier. This physical examination took place of the *Genpuku* for boys, and they were considered

to be an adult if they passed the test. After the physical examination, each individual was ranked based

on their physical specifications which indicated how fit they are as a soldier. There were five ranks,

where the bottom two ranks indicated "not physically fit as a soldier" and "recovering from illness".

Boys who were given these ranks were required to take the exam again in the following year. Those who gained the highest rank were admired by other boys and soldiers because it was considered an honor to be ranked high at the time. However, they also had a higher risk of being called into battle because of their above average physical status. After World War II, the youth were no longer required to take part in military service, which led to the formation of the Seijin-no-hi in 1948.

2.1.3: Seijin-shiki/Seinen-sai post World War II

The Seijin-shiki (成人式)[5] is the most recent and current form of the Japanese initiation ceremonies that the youth go through. The roots of the Seijin-shiki are the Seinen-sai (青年際)[6] that took place in the Saitama prefecture on September 22nd, 1946, shortly after the war. The purpose of this ceremony was to "encourage the youth who will live in the upcoming era and give them bright hope" because Japan had just had to render an unconditional surrender and was occupied by the US, making the future look somewhat dull. The ceremony was targeted towards the youth that would reach the age of 20 between the previous year's Seinen-sai and the current year's ceremony. This Seinen-sai eventually led to the enactment of the national holiday called the "Seijin-no-hi", or day of the youth, on January 15th, 1948. This day was chosen because it corresponded with the date the Genpuku took place. In 2000, Seijin-no-hi was moved to the second Monday of January due to the implementation of the Happy Monday System. The purpose of this holiday is very similar to that of the Seinen-sai but also included that the youth "would become self-aware that they are adults". The target audience slightly changed in that youth that would reach the age of 20 between April 2nd of last year and April 1st of the current year were able to participate in the respective year's ceremony. This change occurred because the school year in Japan starts in April. Both ceremonies (including the present day Seijin-shiki) consisted of ceremonial speeches where the host (usually the mayor of the city) commemorated the youth.

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[5] "Seijin" (成人) means "adult" and "shiki" (式) means "ceremony"
[6] "Seinen" (青年) means "youth" and "sai" (祭) means "festival"

2.2: The Vague Boundary between Adults and Youth

The Seijin-shiki's main purpose is to have the youth gain self-acknowledgement that they are now an adult individual[7]. It has the role of marking the transition of a youth into an adult, which in turn marks the "wall" or boundary between the two groups. Thus, an important question to ask is "How does one become an adult"? In the recent years, the media has reported that the boundary between the youth and adults is vague. This is largely due to the changes in society Japan has seen since the creation of the *Genpuku* (Nakamura, 2003, pg.50).

During the period that the *Genpuku* took place, the youth were presented with many responsibilities as a new member of the adult community. These responsibilities marked the boundary between the youth and adults, and introduced the youth to a new place in society. In present day Japan (especially in the city), these responsibilities and the introduction to a new place in society are diluted or completely missing. This results in the boundary between youth and adults to become vague and also creates vagueness in the definition of "adult" (Nakamura, 2003, pg.51-52).

2.2.1: The Definition of "adult"

The factors that constitute whether one is an adult have drastically changed throughout Japan's history. Many of the old factors and "tests" would be considered out of the question in modern day society because of the different moral values. Pre-Meiji factors focused more on the physical aspects of the youth such as virginity while modern day factors include economic independence and being recognized as an adult by others. The content of these indicators of adulthood have been shifted towards the less extreme spectrum due to the change in society (less focus on physical factors). These factors directly affected how the initiation ceremonies took place, and is one of the main reasons why the ceremony has changed to fit today's society.

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[7] This is stated in multiple sources pertaining to the Seijin-shiki, such as (Haga, 1991), (Igeta, 2003), (Kobari, 2005), and (Nakamura, 2003).

Noboru Haga emphasizes that pre-Meiji Japan viewed being *ichinin-mae* (一人前), or "becoming fully qualified" and "standing on one's own", as a very important stepping stone in life. It was the main factor that decided whether one was an adult, and the initiation ceremonies (mainly the *Genpuku*) were carried out to make the youth go through this transition. Men were recognized as adults when they left the house and joined an apartment with the other youth to participate in labor. They were also taken to older women to lose their virginity, which was the final step in becoming an *ichinin-mae* man. Women were recognized as adults when they were physically ready for marriage and to bear a child. They too lost their virginity as the final step in becoming individual woman through an arranged marriage (Haga, 1991, pg.137-138).

What it means to be an adult is very different in modern day Japan. Unlike past Japan, virginity does not play a large role in determining whether one is an adult. Shingo Nakamura conducted a questionnaire that consisted of various factors that were related to "becoming an adult". He asked his subjects to choose the factors that they thought were important, and then further narrow their choices to one factor. According his questionnaire, the most common answer to the question "What is the top priority that is related to becoming an adult?" was "economic independence" (Table 1). The 2 choices that are related to the Seijin-shiki ("reaching the age of 20" and "participating in the Seijin-shiki") do not have many votes, which means that the general public does not seem to think that one becomes an adult just by reaching a certain age or by participating in a ceremony (Nakamura, 2003, pg.51).

Table 1: Questionnaire on factors that constitute whether one is an adult

		Number	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Accumulated Percentage
	What is the top priority that is related to becoming an adult?				
Valid	Reach the age of 18	1	0.3	0.3	0.3
	Reach the age of 20	28	8.0	9.7	10.0
	Not a student anymore	6	1.7	2.1	12.1
	Find employment	16	4.6	5.5	17.6
	Economic independence	133	37.9	46.0	63.7
	Get married	17	4.8	5.9	69.6
	Have a child	16	4.8	5.5	75.1
	Participate in the Seijin-shiki	2	6.0	0.7	75.8
	Live by yourself	1	0.3	0.3	76.1
	Pay taxes	10	2.8	3.5	79.6
	Physically mature	1	0.3	0.3	79.9
	Recognized as an adult by others	34	9.7	11.8	91.7
	Other	24	6.8	8.3	100.0
	Total	289	82.3	100.0	
Unknown values	Invalid	62	17.7		
Total		351	100.0		
					(Nakamura, 2003, pg.51)

2.3: The Public Sphere and Intimate Sphere

The way the adults and youth of Japan interact with one another has changed drastically since the 1980s. This phenomenon can be explained by the transformation of the public and intimate spheres within the Japanese society. In his essay "On the "Ruined" Coming-of-age Ceremonies", Makoto Kobari explains how this change in relationships is connected to the problems seen in the recent Seijin-shiki ceremonies (Kobari, 2005).

2.3.1: A Change in Relationships

Relationships that the youth hold with their community, family, and personal friends have changed as well. During the period the Genpuku took place, family and lineage were very important to each household. Initiation ceremonies also held a much bigger role than that of today's ceremonies. This is because the child of each household would inherit their family's lineage through the initiation ceremony and were expected to pass it down to the next generation as well. "Family" was highly

respected over "yourself"[8], which is almost the opposite of present day Japan (Nakamura, 2003, pg.51-52).

In present day Japan, individuality is considered very important by the youth. This has drastically changed the relation between the public sphere[9] and intimate sphere[10] of the youth in Japan. In the 1960s, when community had higher importance than individuality, the public sphere had a greater degree of influence than the intimate sphere. This means that the youth were controlled and followed manners in public because they were conscious of others around them. However, in the 1970s, the public sphere started to crumble due to more focus on fundamental human liberties and rights, which effectively increased awareness of individuality. This is due to "…Japan's transformation into one of the most affluent societies in the world" (Yoda, 2000, 36). As Japan progressed into the 1990s, individuality continued to increase in importance and the public sphere became almost invisible while the intimate sphere increased in size. This has caused the youth to see others[11] that are not within their own intimate sphere as complete strangers that don't seem to even exist, which is directly related to why the youth misbehave at the Seijin-shiki ceremony (Kobari, 2005, pg.123-125).

2.3.2: The Spheres and the Youth

Tomiko Yoda also mentions the creation of the intimate sphere and how it is linked to the youth's violent behavior. Japan's transformation into one of the wealthiest nations in the world also caused them to experience a decrease in work ethic, respect for hierarchy, and sexual mores. In contrast to this decrease in postwar values and norms, individual identity and lifestyles (the formation of the intimate sphere) was a popular trend within the Japanese society. Yoda states that many of the social

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[8] In this case, Nakamura defines "yourself" as 個(Ko), or "one" to emphasize the separation between a family/community and an individual.
[9] The space in which public character and value is used. As quoted by Kobari, Jurgen Habermas states that this public sphere includes "civil public nature", which is in short, the interest within people to build an ideal society.
[10] The opposite of the public sphere, where you can be "yourself".
[11] Kobari uses 2 different terms to differentiate "others"
他者(Tasha) or 赤の他人(Aka no tannin): strangers or people that have nothing to do with yourself
意味のある他者(Imi no aru tasha): Significant others that you actually care about, i.e. follow manners in front of.

calamities of the 1990s can be linked to this transformation going out of control, especially within the youth of Japan (Yoda, 2000, pg.36).

She also references Shinji Miyadai, a famous cultural critic in the 1990s, on how the cultural landscape of the 1990s was no longer comprised of leaders and followers of trends but instead consisted of individual groups with specific interests who did not communicate with one another. This means that the youth participated in what was pleasant to them (their specific interest) regardless of what was considered trendy in society at the time. The people within these groups were called *Otaku[12]*, and were characteristically numb towards people outside of their group (the public sphere). Miyadai claims that this de-socialization of the youth is one of the major factors that can lead to violent behavior and indifference towards others. These changes in the spheres, along with other factors in the society of Japan in the 1990s affected the youth in drastic ways (Yoda, 2000, pg.37-38).

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[12] Otaku (オタク) is a term used to describe someone that is obsessed with a specific subject of interest, such as anime or trains. They are often indifferent towards anything that falls outside of their focused field.

2.4: The Society of Japan in the 1990s

In the 1980s and 1990s, Japan faced a major economic crisis due to overvaluation of asset prices

and the bankruptcies of many banks. Naturally, the citizens of Japan were widely affected by this bubble

collapse and the economic future of Japan was looking very dull. Japan was in economic turmoil, and it

psychologically affected many of the Japanese, including the younger generation. However, the

economic turmoil was not the only problem Japan faced in the 1990s. The moral meltdown within the

youth of Japan proved to be an issue far greater than anyone imagined and was at the center of

society's attention in the mid to late 1990s.

2.4.1: The Effects of the Economic Crisis

The effects of the economic crisis on the Japanese society were very apparent. The society of

Japan was in a dark era, and many citizens were losing hope for a stable economic future. Harry

Harootunian goes into depth on this issue in the following quote (Harootunian, 2000, pg.103):

> The acceleration of suicides among the cohort of middle-aged males; violence in the schools,
> Especially among children; and ceaseless corruption at all levels, which were all read as social
> Signs of a troubled present and a darkly uncertain future that could only be avoided by rectifying
> the past through true memory and history.

He also adds that the high unemployment rate resulted in the collapse of the "social contract that had

once assured workers in major industries of lifetime job security" (Harootunian, 2000, pg.106). As the

older workers resorted to suicide, the youth resorted to violence and bullying to relieve their

dissatisfaction with a society almost completely based on educational achievement. Tomiko Yoda also

states that educational reform plans[13] were proposed in the 1990s because many leaders of Japan

agreed upon dismantling the costly education system that was designed to produce an "evenly

disciplined population". These plans contributed to the immense stress on the youth, eventually making

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[13] One such plan aimed to round up and expel the lowest performers while creating an accelerated plan for the
highest performers. This shows how focused Japan's society was on educational achievements.

them burst and become a target of national anxiety (Yoda, 2000, pg.42). All of this lead to the moral meltdown of the youth, which could be considered a larger issue than the economic crisis.

2.4.2: Moral Meltdown of the Youth

Two major incidents shook the nation of Japan in the 1990s: The sarin gas attack of the Aum Shinrikyo and the brutal child massacre of Shonen A. Both of these events drew much attention to the Japanese youth, and the way society viewed the youth changed dramatically from this point forward.

In 1995, Japan experienced a shocking incident when members of the Aum Shinrikyo, a cult organization set on searching for a "spiritual utopia", released sarin gas into the Tokyo subway. The incident killed 13 people and injured thousands of others.

A key point to note is that many members who executed the attack were young, well educated men and woman who had a good life ahead of them. This incident raised concerning questions, as quoted by Tomiko Yoda: "How did society fail to instill basic ethical and social consciousness in these seemingly intelligent, serious, and ordinary young adults? And why could it not offer them a more compelling and meaningful vision of their lives and their future than to follow the millennialist delirium of a charismatic cult leader?" (Yoda, 2000, pg.21). In this quote, Yoda states that the society of Japan is to blame for the sarin gas incident because it did not support the youth through adulthood nor offer a future that was worth pursuing. Thus, the "lost" youth decided to follow the Aum Shinrikyo that promised a brighter future than what they saw was offered by society.

Haruki Murakami attempts to analyze the youth that were involved in this terrible crime in his book *Underground: The Tokyo Gas Attack and the Japanese Psyche*. Through information he gathered by interviews, he explains that most of the members regret what they have done and despise Shoko Asahara, the leader of the cult. Interestingly, however, they state that they do not reject the basic aims of the organization. This is because they "…found a purity of purpose they could not find in ordinary society" in the Aum Shinrikyo (Murakami, 2001, 360). This explanation supports Yoda's claim that the

Japanese society is responsible for the disaster because the youth did not see a meaningful future ahead of them if they continued to live "normally".

This cult attack was not the only example of the youth becoming "monsters" of the generation. A fourteen year old, known as "Shonen A" (Youth A), murdered 2 children and injured 3 others after losing control of himself in 1997. This is only one of the more extreme cases of the various violent crimes committed by Japanese boys at the time. Girls on the other hand conducted immoral acts in the form of prostitution (which also displays a breakdown of morality at the adult level). They sold themselves to older men in exchange for money to pay for karaoke bars and luxury goods. Japan was experiencing a "moral meltdown" because of the acts of the "monster" Japanese youth (Yoda, 2000, pg.21).

2.4.3: The "Monster" Children

The terms "monster children" and "wild child" were used extensively throughout the Japanese society in 1997 due to the Shonen A incident. The "child" was at the center of society's attention, and household terms such as "children are turning strange" and "collapse of classrooms" represent the social anxiety that Japan was facing in the late 1990s (Arai, 2000, pg.216).

According to both Arai and Miyadai (quoted by Yoda), the concept of "monster children" is not unique to Japan. That is, the weakening of shared values and moral codes can be seen in the youth of many different modern societies other than Japan. However, Miyadai claims that this is especially problematic in Japan because "…Japan does not have a transcendent system of values…" and "what glued Japanese society together instead has been the codes of collective moral beliefs and customs rooted in pre-modern Japanese communalism…". Post-modernization, the national community had taken over the role of traditional collectivity while collective morality absorbed the values that mobilized Japan's modernization. However, both of these were broken down when Japan overcame its material needs and maturation of consumer culture, resulting in nothing to counteract the effects of capitalist

19

modernity (Yoda, 2000, pg.38). These statements go back to the previous section where I explain that the Japanese society of the 1990s was clinging onto the outdated standards of pre-modern Japan. They also directly blame the inability of the Japanese society to adapt to the post-modern changes for the formation of these "monster children" that greatly shook the nation (Arai, 2000, pg.217).

Arai focuses on the Shonen A incident when exploring the "wild child" in Japan. He explains that for over a month, society assumed that the one responsible for severing the head of Jun-kun was a male between the ages of thirty and forty because it was such a horrendous case. When the public learned about the capture of fourteen year old Youth A, their relief quickly turned into a need for information, as nobody expected someone as young as fourteen to be the perpetrator of the recent string of murders. Society turned their attention to the inner psyche of the child, something that was unknown up to this point (Arai, 2000, pg.221-222).

Many people in society saw the child as an object of fear after this incident in 1997. This isn't surprising at all because not only did Shonen A brutally kill and wound innocent children, he left a note in the severed head of Jun-kun publicly stating "Everyone, the game starts now. Just try to stop me. I really love killing" (Arai, 2000, pg.223). However, Arai looks at this from a different perspective. He states that although the child's actions are indeed something to be afraid of, the "real" danger is the possibility of a major problem within the Japanese society that caused this "monster child" to appear. The fact that Shonen A was brought up in a regular family with regular parents that were strict in raising him (in a "know what's right and wrong" way), yet an event like this occurred was a subject of concern for many different households. Parents realized that what they thought they knew and was so familiar, the deep interior of their own child, actually may not be anything near what they imagined (Arai, 2002, pg.222-226).

Marilyn Ivy goes in depth into the psych of Shonen A in her essay "Revenge and Racapitation in Recessionary Japan". She focuses on the fact that he emphasizes himself as a "transparent existence

(tomeina sonzai)" set to take revenge against "compulsory education" and the society which gave birth

to "compulsory education", seen in the following quote by Shonen A (as cited in Ivy, Revenge, pg.205):

> Thinking "I'll do it," I was able to enjoy killing someone, alone, without anyone noticing it. The fact that I've purposely gathered the attention of the public is that I'd at least like to have my self recognized as a as a real, living human being, even if only within the fantasies of all of you – I, who until now, and from now on, continue a transparent existence. At the same time, I haven't forgotten, too, the revenge toward "compulsory education" which made me a person of transparent existence, nor the society which gave birth to "compulsory education".

It is clear that Shonen A was in an identity crisis, trying to be recognized by society through becoming a

monstrous killer. He also claims that it was society and the compulsory education system that made him

into "Shonen A, the monster child". He states in another quote that "If I had been [allowed to be] myself

from the time I was born, I probably wouldn't have taken such explicit actions as putting the head in

front of the school" (Ivy, 2000, pg.205). This is a clear indication that Shonen A committed these

murders to take revenge on the Japanese society that wouldn't let him be "himself" and forced him to

be a transparent existence that is not recognized as a "really existing human being" (Ivy, 2000, pg.204-

205).

2.4.4: Identity Crisis and the Youth

One of the reasons why some youth decide to disrupt the ceremony is because they are in an

identity crisis. An identity crisis occurs when one asks the question "Who am I?" and cannot come up

with an answer that feels right. The opposite of this can is when you grab a sense of your identity and

feel "This is the true me" (Erikson, 1959). These two feelings can be described as "Satisfaction" and

"Dissatisfaction" and are opposites of each other (Ozawa, 2003, pg.81).

Identity crises are commonly seen in the adolescence stage of life. This is because changes in

physical, mental, and relations, coupled with denial by society/others create a feeling of dissatisfaction

within one's self. In addition to this, meeting new people and being exposed to the real world stimulate

a change in one's psycho-social value, inherently creating the feeling of dissatisfaction. During

adolescence, this psycho-social value is lost when one fails to answer "How should I live in today's

society as an adult", which in turn raises the question "Who am I?" (Ozawa, 2004, pg.85).

In his book *Shaberitai Wakamonotachi Shaberasenai Otonatachi (The youth that want to speak*

The adults that do not let them speak), Hara (as cited in Kobari, 2005, pg.122) focused on the fact that

many of the youth who decided to disrupt the ceremony had a point in common: many of them did not

have a job, did not go to college, and were considered to be "Ochikobore"[14]. Hara explains that these

youth disrupt the ceremony because they contrast themselves against their former classmates who

were considered as "good kids" and "honor students" by sustaining a strong identity as the

"Ochikobore". To sustain this identity, they try to show that they "have extraordinary energy and guts",

"finish things completely and do not leave it halfway", and "do not fear authority" by standing out in the

ceremony, i.e. disrupting the ceremony and being under the "spotlight". Hara also interviewed a youth

who took part in disrupting a Seijin-shiki, where the youth explains why he did so in the following

comment (as cited in Nakamura, 2003, pg.56):

> It is hard for people who did not go to college, like me, to participate in the Seijin-shiki. Because
> we are dropouts. If we participated normally, we would look shabby compared to the others
> that went to college. It was hopeless to go to college because I did not like studying, but to be
> honest, I didn't *hate* studying. It's just that my middle school teacher thought of me as a fool.
> That really pissed me off, and I stopped studying. I now realize that I wasn't mad at the guest
> speakers, but I was actually just irritated at this Seijin-shiki where only the college students
> stood out.
> In the end, only people who didn't go to college disrupted the ceremony, but I think if we hung
> out with the college students beforehand, we wouldn't have thought to ruin the ceremony. We
> probably just feel inferior to those that didn't run away from this society where standard scores
> mean everything because we gave up at an earlier stage.

The youth explains that "dropouts" like himself are hesitant to participate in the ceremony because they

would be compared to their successful classmates and feel inferior. Thus, they decide to disrupt the

ceremony to stand on par with the other participants. He also states that the Seijin-shiki only puts the

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[14]Ochikobore (落ちこぼれ) means "leftovers" or "odd ones out", but in this context, "school drop outs" or
"students who could not keep up with the class"

spotlight on college students because they succeeded in the society where educational

accomplishments mean everything.

2.5: Initiation in the 21st Century

Since the 21st century began, many problems concerning the Seijin-shiki have been reported by

the mass media. Two of the major problems are the participation decline of the youth and the rude,

sometimes even violent, behavior displayed by some of the participating youth. The gradual decrease in

participation by the youth indicates that the ceremony does not appeal to 40% to 60% of the youth. The

disruptions in the ceremony are of a more serious matter, as they seem to display the youth's

dissatisfaction with society. These problems are causing the Japanese society to question the very

existence of the ceremony, and it is becoming evident that these problems much be addressed for the

ceremony to survive.

2.5.1: Participation Decline

Fluctuation in the participation rate of the youth in the Seijin-shiki can be seen throughout the

history of the ceremony. This fluctuation was largely due to the changes in the Japanese economy,

which directly affected households that could not afford the proper dress to attend the ceremony.

There was no set "formal wear" for the Seijin-shiki, but many girls did not want to participate without a

Kimono or Furisode, which are very expensive. They refused to participate because they did not want to

be embarrassed being surrounded by other girls dressed up (Ishikawa, 2002).

However, in recent years (since around 2000) a decline in the participation rate can be seen,

where the participation rate ranges from 40% to 60%. This is likely due to the fact that the ceremony

does not appeal to the new Seijin. The youth decide to skip the ceremony and instead meet with their

old friends that came back to the city. One of the reasons why the youth do not seem to show interest in

the ceremony is because many politicians come to the ceremony to give their greetings and speeches,

since the new Seijin gain the right to vote and drink at the age of 20. Other than small gifts such as pens

and folders, the youth usually do not get anything else out of the ceremony. The Seijin-shiki became a

place where politicians could make their debut, and there was not much incentive for the youth to

participate (Ishikawa, 2002).

2.5.2: Rude Behavior

In addition to the participation decline, another problem seen in the participating youth in

recent Seijin-shiki's is rude behavior. Despite the ceremony being a traditional, formal ceremony, many

youth talk to their friends and use their cell-phones during the congratulatory address. Some youth even

go as far as disrupting the ceremony by going up on stage and stealing the microphone, fighting with

other youth, or bringing alcohol and party crackers into the ceremonial hall. Worse cases have involved

a number of Seijin getting arrested and led out of the ceremony by the police because of serious

offenses such as assault and property damage. Below are a couple of recent examples of incidents

where Seijin-shiki ceremonies were ruined due to disruptions by the youth.

1998: During a concert held at the Seijin-shiki in Kanagawa prefecture, three drunk Seijin ran up to the stage and struggled with the staff which caused a pause in the ceremony. Two of them were arrested for assault.

2001: During the ceremonial greeting given by the prefectural governor of the Takachi prefecture, many Seijin chanted "Leave the stage". No one was arrested; however the media picked up on this incident very quickly.

2001: 5 males used firecrackers at close range against the governor of the Kanagawa prefecture while he was giving his congratulatory address. All 5 were arrested.

2002: 5 people were arrested when they tried to bring in a barrel of alcohol into the ceremonial hall and were stopped by an officer.

2004: A male threw whipped cream at the governor's forehead while he was giving a congratulatory speech at the Seijin-shiki in Osaka.

2004: Before the opening of the Seijin-shiki in the Shizuoka prefecture, more than 10 drunken Seijin took their clothes off on stage, ate the decoration flowers, and ripped the citizen's charter banner.

These events are only a couple of examples of disruptions that occur at the Seijin-shiki all throughout Japan. Most disruptions can be considered as pranks by youth that are carried away. However, as explained previously, some disruptions are much more serious and result in injuries and arrests. As the number of youth that display rude behavior increases, the number of these serious disruptions will increase as well.

It is widely regarded that these "ruined ceremonies", as the media calls it, started to draw the public's attention in 1999, when a college professor who frequently appears in the media held a memorial lecture at a ceremony. During his lecture, many of the youth were talking to each other and using their cellphones while ignoring the professor's lecture. The somewhat appalled professor proceeded to point out the bad manners, which led to the host city's mayor giving him a public letter of apology (1/20/1999 Asahi Newspaper).

2.5.3: The "Empty" Ceremony

Through the media, the idea of repealing the Seijin-shiki can be seen in many places. However, contrary to this idea that is floating around in society, interviews conducted by Nakaruma Shingo show that the public, divided into various age groups ranging from 20 to over 70, actually thinks the ceremony should continue. The overall public seems to agree that they do not want to see the ceremony disappear. Shingo's interview data shows that a very high percentage of the upcoming Seijin that want the ceremony to continue. It is important to note that just because the youth want the ceremony to continue does not mean that they will actually participate. It also shows that as the age group gets younger, a higher amount of interviewee's answered "If I had to choose, I believe it is necessary" to the question "Is the Seijin-shiki necessary". This data shows the degree to which the youth think the ceremony is needed today (Nakamura, 2003, pg.53).

Nakamura Shingo explains this phenomenon by comparing today's Japanese (as well as other countries) society to that of Japan's in the Meiji and beyond. As explained earlier, lineage and family

were very important to every household in pre-Meiji Japan. Because of this, the youth were bound by this descent in various ways and did not have many options, including participation of the initiation ceremony.

Unlike the youth in the Meiji era, present day Japan's youth have many different options. For example, with the Seijin-shiki the youth receive a letter of invitation, know the requirements to participate and the events that will take place, then decide whether to participate or not. Having options, in this case the option to participate or not, gives peace of mind. Therefore, there is no reason for the youth to lessen their options by having the ceremony cease to exist. Since they are not required to participate and can choose whether to go or not, it is safe to assume that much of the Japanese youth population will likely answer "If I had to choose, I believe it is necessary" in order to increase their freedom of options and not be restricted (Nakamura, 2003, pg.51-54).

Another reason Shingo brings up is that society is using the Seijin-shiki as a placeholder of the previous initiation ceremonies. The initiation ceremonies the pre-Meiji youth went through took place to have the youth go through a "transition" to adulthood. As time progressed and the Seijin-shiki was created, this traditional "transition" that the youth go through became the responsibility of adults and society. However, with the increase in "youth that have not acknowledged themselves as adults" in today's society, it is obvious that society is dumping their responsibilities onto the Seijin-shiki by ignoring their role to help the youth in their transition to adulthood. The Seijin-shiki was chosen as the placeholder because it just happened to remain as the initiation ceremony that the youth go through at the age of 20. They have made it revert to its previous form where the ceremony was fully responsible for the "transition" into an adult. The Seijin-shiki is currently an empty ceremony that is used as an excuse by society (particularly the elders and middle aged) for the increase in misbehaving youth, when in actuality these problems are occurring due to society's inability to accept modernization, educate the youth, and put meaning back into the ceremony (Nakamura, 2003, pg.59).

26

2.5.4: Questioning the continuation of the ceremony

Due to the disruptions, rude behavior, and arrests made at the Seijin-shiki, the mass media and many Japanese citizens have questioned the current state of the ceremony. *Asahi* newspaper conducted a survey on whether cities and towns should continue the ceremony (Table 2). As you can see, the number of people who answered "It should continue" and "It should not continue" are almost the same. What is surprising is the reasons given for those that oppose the continuation. The total percentage of people that answered "the ceremony is conventional", "there is no meaning in the ceremony", and "it's not something the government should do" is greater than that of those that answered "the manners of the youth are bad". This shows that the public sees a decline in the ceremony itself, therefor question the continuation of the ceremony (Kobari, 2005, pg.119-120).

Table 2: Public Opinion on the continuation of the ceremony

Should the town and city sponsered "Seijin-shiki" continue or not (Asahi Newspaper Company research, January 2001) n=1192					
Opinion	**Percentage**	**Reason**			
It should continue	43%	It's an event that marks reaching the age of 20: 30% Interchange with the same generation: 7% It's an annual event: 4% Other, no answer: 2%			
It should not continue	47%	The content is too conventional: 21% There are participants with bad manners: 14% There is no meaning in continueing: 6% It is not something that the government should do: 5% Other, no answer: 1%			
Other, no answer	10%				
				(Kobari, 2005, pg.120)	

2.5.5: Efforts to Combat the Decline

A typical Seijin-shiki consists of the girls dressing up in a Furisode and boys in a suit or Hakama. The ceremony usually takes place in a ceremonial hall, where the youth are given a ceremonial gift which consists of simple goods (pens, file folders, clocks, etc.) at the entrance way. A series of ceremonial speeches are given by a variety of elders such as the mayor, head of the executive committee, and anyone who has significant importance to the city or town. After these speeches, the youth exit the hall and often break up into separate groups to hang out elsewhere at a bar, game center, or karaoke with their friends.

The Seijin-shiki I participated in would likely be categorized as a typical Seijin-shiki. The ceremony took place in Kinshi-chou (part of the Sumida prefecture) on January 14th, 2013. My friends and I went to the ceremonial hall which was 15 minutes away by car. We were given ceremonial gifts at the reception desk in exchange for a ticket that was received through mail in the prior week. Once the actual ceremony began, there were ceremonial speeches by the head chief of the Sumida ward, a principle of a local public high school, and a youth representative of that year. These speeches consisted of how we (the youth) have matured throughout our lives, reached adulthood, and should walk with confidence towards a bright future. A slight difference from the typical ceremony would be the fact that there was a presentation by the student executive committee and a short concert by an orchestra. The presentation consisted of a slide show that went through significant events that occurred in the Sumida ward and events that everyone can sympathize to (such as the start of popular TV cartoons, toys, and games) from 1992 to 2013. After the ceremony, all of my classmates gathered at a bar that one of my friends had reserved, partied and talked for a couple of hours, then said our farewells and left for home.

Recent Seijin-shiki ceremonies have begun to implement more events that appeal to the youth in order to counter the participation decline and rude behavior seen during the ceremony. Now, it is actually rare to see a Seijin-shiki that is only compromised of the ceremony. Many different attractions including trips to theme parks, live performance concerts, and short video films, are being implemented

in the Seijin-shiki in order to interest the youth and have them participate in the ceremony (as seen in

Table 3). The cities that have implemented this tactic have seen a noticeable increase in the

participation of the youth (Nakamura, 2003, pg.43-44).

Table 3: The contents of the Seijin-shiki's that took place in 2000

General contents of events of the Seijin-shiki's in 2000			
Content of the event	Number of cities and towns	Percentage	
Ceremony	3081	95%	
Commemorative Photo	2074	64%	
Attractions	1344	41%	
Meet with former teachers	474	15%	
Commemorative lecture meeting	385	12%	
Plant a commemorative tree	173	5%	
	(Nakamura, 2003, pg.43)		
Retrieved from: 新成人式研究会「新しい成人式の創造」（参考文献１）			

Another major change is that now, the youth are much more involved in running the ceremony

(Table 4). Every year, a number of the new Seijin are chosen to manage what events will be included in

the ceremony, where it will take place, and how the ceremony will run in general. The purpose behind

this change was to make the ceremony appeal more to the youth by having their classmates, who are

the same generation, give their opinion on how the ceremony should take place. This would result in a

ceremony that would have events that interest the current generation and give them incentive to

participate in the ceremony (Nakamura, 2003, pg.44).

Table 4: The ratio of sponsors of the Seijin-shikis in 2000

On the Sponsors of the national Seijin-shikis in 2000			
Sponsers	**Number of towns/cities**	**Percentage**	**Remarks**
Independently by the Board of Education	1015	31%	
Independently by the Head of Departments	496	15%	
Cosponsered by both the above	1205	37%	
Cosponsered by administrations and non-administrations	467	15%	Executive committee including new Seijin, young men's association, women's association, neighborhood association, committee of the healthy development of young people, association of the public hall, resident's association
Other (non-administrations)	64	2%	Executive committee including new Seijin, young men's association, resident's promotion group
Total	3247	100%	
			(Nakamura, 2003, pg.44)
			Retrieved from: http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/13/04/010420.htm

The Seijin-shiki in Urayasu in 2002 clearly showed that attractions that appeal to the youth directly affect the participation rate. Previous Seijin-shikis in the city included events such as performances by comedians and Chinese acrobat teams, but the participation rate was in the high 50%s. In 2002, the city decided to include a number of new Seijin in the executive committee. The goal of this was to plan a ceremony that appealed to the youth, which in turn would increase the participation rate. The idea of having the ceremony take place at Tokyo Disney Land was brought up and executed during the next Seijin-shiki. This Seijin-shiki was a huge success, and the participation rate was greater than 70%. This can be seen as a direct result of incorporating the youth in the executive committee and creating a "new" Seijin-shiki because all other factors were controlled and unchanged (Nakamura, 2003, pg.46).

2.6: Conclusion

The initiation rites in Japan have transformed quite a lot since the pre-Meiji era. The once very formal and traditional ceremony is now a more modern and entertaining "event", somewhat similar to a reunion. Although this may be exciting for the youth, the older citizens in Japan think the opposite, and threaten the continuation of the ceremony. Not only have the contents changed, but the youth that participate in the ceremony have also undergone a drastic transformation, particularly starting in the 1990s when the term "monster children" was born. I believe that it is critical to analyze the connection between these two phenomena in order to extract a solution to the deterioration of the Seijin-shiki.

3. Methodology

The process of connecting the Seijin-shiki to larger societal issues was broken down into three major parts. The first phase consisted of gathering information on the past and present initiation ceremonies. The second phase pertained to research on the "monster" children and the Japanese society in the 1990s. The final phase connected the two previous phases in that the problems seen in today's Seijin-shiki were applied to the larger societal issues seen in 1990s Japan.

To gain an understanding of the current state of the initiation rite in Japan, a preliminary assessment of the Seijin-shiki was conducted. This was followed by a problem assessment that extracted the main problems seen in the ceremony. After the problem assessment, a justification of research methods was presented to explain why I chose the methods of research used. Finally, implementations of the interviews were further explained as they are a distinct method of research.

3.1: Preliminary Assessment

This preliminary assessment was used to gain background information on the history of the coming-of-age ceremony in Japan and specifically, analyze the current state of the ceremony. This allowed for a comparison of past similar ceremonies and the current Seijin-shiki, which would help answer why recent ceremonies are "ruined". To do this, an analysis of what an ideal ceremony would be like, the specific problems seen in past and recent ceremonies, and how/if these problems are linked to larger societal issues were researched.

To determine what an ideal ceremony would be, the beginning of the Seijin-shiki in the Meiji era was first researched. This was done to understand the initial meaning and role the ceremony had before it was "ruined". Most information came from scholarly sources, as well as books related to the Seijin-shiki and Meiji era. The greetings and flow of the Seijin-shiki I participated in were also paid attention to see whether any of the traditional goals of the ceremony were mentioned.

Past cases of ruined ceremonies were researched through newspapers and online articles to obtain a better understanding of how and why these disruptions are occurring. This also allowed me to pin-point the time period where these ruined ceremonies started appearing. Friends and family were interviewed to see whether any specific problems occurred during the Seijin-shiki they participated in. The responses were also used to compare the opinions on the ceremony of the current youth and elders who participated in the ceremony at the age of 20. Any problems observed in the ceremony I participated in were noted and analyzed along with the disruptions in other ceremonies found through research.

The history of Japan, mainly in the 1980s to 1990s, was researched to see whether any key societal changes occurred. This was done because the people that participated in the Seijin-shiki in 2000 (when the disruptions started to occur) were born during that time, and may have been affected by the societal changes. Pin-pointing these key events helped me connect the Seijin-shiki to larger societal issues, which may be one of the major reasons why the ceremony has become "empty" and is in the process of deteriorating.

3.2: Problem Assessment

After the preliminary assessment, the problems that came up through research and any problems that surfaced during my own Seijin-shiki were analyzed. I searched for reasons of why recent ceremonies are disrupted through scholarly articles on the analysis of ruined Seijin-shikis. I also searched for the main societal issues that Japan experienced in the 1990s to apply them to the youth of today's society. This allowed me to analyze any common problems and determine whether they are linked to societal issues.

Information on Seijin-shiki's throughout Japan was researched to see whether there are any common reasons in the ceremony as to why they are recently disrupted. Problems seen during the

Seijin-shiki I participated in were noted for analysis and comparison. Interviews found online with

disruptors were also analyzed to find any common points, which would help to pin-point any

characteristics that are "more likely" to disrupt the ceremony. Any information on why they disrupt the

ceremony was evaluated to see whether they were related to societal issues in Japan. I focused on data

on ceremonies that took place after the year 2000 because the ruined ceremonies are said to have

started in the past 10 years.

3.3: Justification for Research Methods

Structured interviews were conducted to gain first-hand, qualitative information from various

ceremony participants in the limited amount of time I had to stay in Japan. They also allowed me to gain

answers to specific questions I had that would be difficult to find through other sources. Interviewing

various generations gave me opinions from different perspectives, giving me a broader view of the

ceremony. I decided to interview three different generations: my grandparent's generation, my parent's

generation, and my own generation. I chose three generations because I believe that the age gap

between these generations is sufficient enough to see changes in each Seijin-shiki. Another reason why I

chose interviewing as a research method is because interviews would help broaden my scope and

understanding through the experiences of those who have participated in the ceremony dealing with

qualitative data (Gill, 2008). The questions asked in each interview may be found in the appendix.

During my visit in Japan, I participated in the Seijin-shiki ceremony that took place on January 14,

2013. Participating in the ceremony gave me first-hand experience of going through an initiation

ceremony, which would help when connecting the problems to larder societal issues. Having knowledge

on the Seijin-shiki beforehand helped because I knew what to focus my attention on during the

ceremony. It would also allow me to see and take note on how the ceremony is run, whether any

disruptions occur, key traditional and new events that take place, and what the goal/role of the

ceremony is (observe the ceremony as an insider). Additionally, going to Japan to participate gave me the opportunity to interview the participants and other interview subjects.

Online scholarly articles and books were mainly used because they were easy to access and usually gave relevant data. These sources gave information on the recent Seijin-shikis, as well information on the Genpuku and draft. This data was used to broaden my knowledge on Japanese initiation ceremonies so that I can conduct my research on its connection to larger societal issues. Most articles on the recent ceremonies were written within the past 10 years, but some sources on the older initiation ceremonies were published in the 1900s.

3.4: Implementation

My interview with my grandmother gave me the opinion of someone who experienced the Seijin-shiki in in the 1950s. During this time, the Seijin-shiki was still relatively new and the youth did not know what to expect in the ceremony. The Seijin-shiki she participated in took place in the Gunma prefecture, which was very rural at the time. However, because the ceremony was still new, the contents of the ceremony were almost exactly the same as that of one held in a more urban area (Nakamura, 42, 2003). I used my grandmother as a representative that reflects her generation of youth that participated in the Seijin-shiki in the 1950s because she seemed to fit the characteristics of an average Japanese citizen at the time, i.e. her family was neither poor nor rich, she went to high school (which was common at the time), and there were no other abnormal circumstances that could disqualify her. Although she may not totally represent the Japanese population at the time, many other youth in the 1950s had similar opinions towards the ceremony, mainly confusion and lack of knowledge, towards the ceremony because it was still in the process of implementation.

My uncle participated in the Seijin-shiki in the early 1980s. The ceremony took place in urban Tokyo and he went without any particular goal with various friends. By this time, the Seijin-shiki was

36

much more well-known and common throughout Japan. Although it was much more common, my uncle's ceremony did not have any differences from that of my grandmother's ceremony. It consisted solely of the ceremonial speeches, with no events during the ceremony or party with former classmates after the speeches. My uncle represents the generation of youth that participated in the ceremony when it was transitioning into one of Japan's traditional yearly ceremonies that most cities hosted. He also represents the youth of this generation that completed high school and had a stable household. Although these factors do not represent the conditions of all Japanese youth, they are common to the majority of them.

Three of my friends that I interviewed currently go to college in Japan while one went to a two-year college and is currently fully employed. Two of them were enrolled in the same junior high school as me while the other two went to a different junior high school. All four interviewees reached the age of 20 before the Seijin-shiki. None of them had any major problems in high school or their current college/work place. Thus, although they represent the current youth that went through high school and continued onto college or work, they do not represent those that dropped out of high school or are currently unemployed. This means that they also represent the well-behaved youth that do not cause trouble at the ceremony because the drop outs and unemployed are more likely to cause disruptions. Their opinions were used to get a general understanding of the view the current youth have on the Seijin-shiki and how it compared to those of my uncle, grandmother, and related sources found online.

4. Discussion

On May 1st, 2000, a 17 year old high school student murdered and wounded two people in the city of Toyokawa (Yabusuka, 2004). On June 8th, 2008, a 25 year old male ran a 2 ton truck into an intersection in Akihabara, killing 3 people and wounding 2 others. He then got out of the vehicle and proceeded to stab 12 others, killing 4 more people (Asahi Digital Newspaper, 2008). Both incidents show similar motives to the Kobe incident with Shonen A, that is, a dissatisfaction with society or an identity crisis. An important fact to note is that according to Global Peace Index rankings, Japan has been rated in the top five peaceful countries in the world for the past five years (Vision of Humanity, 2007). Coupled with the fact that Japanese parents are often overprotective of their youth, these attacks by the youth are very unusual and horrific. These two cases demonstrate that the problem with "monster youth" in the Japanese society is still continuing on from the 1990s.

The Seijin-shiki is a key event that may help to eliminate the possibility of these "monster youth" to appear in society. However, today's Seijin-shikis are not exactly the "traditional" ceremony they used to be, which is causing the Japanese society (mainly the citizens of age 40 and above) to have a negative opinion on the continuation of the ceremony. The initial purpose of the initiation rite in Japan was to mark the transition of the youth into adulthood and have the youth acknowledge that they are now adults with greater responsibilities. Now, it seems as if the Seijin-shiki exists solely as a placeholder and empty replacement of the traditional initiation ceremonies. The Seijin-shiki has a much bigger potential than being an empty ceremony and can benefit the Japanese society by using it as a means to communicate with the youth.

4.1: Reasons for Continuation

Everyone I interviewed answered that they believe the ceremony should continue. One of the more popular reasons among my friends was "so that we can meet with former classmates and hang out". While this is a valid personal reason, it should not be one of the main reasons why the Seijin-shiki should continue. If the sole purpose of the traditional ceremony was so that the youth have a reason to come back to/from the city to meet former classmates, the ceremony would no longer be a rite of passage, but more of an excuse to take the day off and party. Therefore, this is not a valid societal reason for the Seijin-shiki to continue and today's society (personal communication, January 16, 2013).

My uncle (Kazuyuki Watanabe) had a completely different opinion than my friends when asked if he believes the ceremony should continue and why. He answered "It brings an opportunity to think something over. It brings an opportunity to find something new". Although he does not specify what the youth may gain through the ceremony, it is clear that he believes the ceremony is more than just a get together for the youth. My uncle also mentioned that whether or not the youth gain something from the ceremony is dependent on the youth's ability to take action and society's abilities to provide an "ibasho"[15] for the youth. It is clear that my uncle believes the ceremony should continue because the youth have the *opportunity* to benefit from the participating in the ceremony (personal communication, January 18, 2013).

My grandmother (Wasa Watanabe) also approached the question from different angle than my friends. When asked "Do you think the ceremony should continue?" she replied:

> Yes, but there's no need to do anything showy or flashy. The ceremony is necessary to create or see a breakpoint in life. For the youth to gain self-acknowledgment that they are now 20 years old and need to live life the right way from now on.

It seems that my grandmother has the same opinion as my uncle in the sense that they both believe the ceremony is an opportunity for the youth to change. She also mentions the traditional purpose of the

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[15] 居場所 (ibasho) means place. In this case, my uncle means "place in society".

ceremony (to encourage and commemorate the youth), which is not surprising because she participated in the ceremony back when it was still in its relatively traditional state. It is clear that my grandmother also thinks that the Seijin-shiki should continue for the benefit of the youth (personal communication, January 20, 2013).

After participating in the Seijin-shiki myself, I have also come to believe that the ceremony should continue in today's Japanese society even if it is does not completely resemble a traditional initiation rite. Today's ceremony does not have to be as formal and traditional as the previous ceremonies. Although this somewhat goes against my grandmother's opinion, the ceremony should contain events that give the youth incentive to participate. Japanese trends have changed drastically since the first Seijin-shiki, and the ceremony must adapt for it to continue on in society. The ceremony can act as a breakpoint or even an "excuse" in life to for the youth to stop and think about whether they want to live through life without changing their behavior. As long as the youth can go through this process, the ceremony should continue to take place for the youths of Japan.

4.2: Recommendations to Alleviate Problems

The main problem in the ceremony is the youth disrupting and not attending the Seijin-shiki, which is having a negative impact on society's opinion about the ceremony. The youth act this way towards the ceremony for two reasons. One reason is because the ceremony does not appeal to them. If the ceremony does not seem interesting, the youth will have no incentive to participate or listen to the speaker. Another reason is because some of the youth feel as though they are the "odd ones out" compared to those that succeeded in high school. These youth try to get on par with their classmates by disrupting the ceremony to show that they have guts and can do something that the good students wouldn't be able to do.

To combat the first problem, implementing the "new" Seijin-shiki into other parts of Japan will likely succeed as it did in Urayasu. Most youth will look forward to the events that they will participate in with their former classmates, which will be enough incentive to go to the Seijin-shiki. Including more youth in the executive committee of the ceremony will help make the Seijin-shiki fit in with youth trends to make it more appealing. These changes should not be that hard to implement into cities that have not already done so. Youth who took part in the student council during high school will likely volunteer to take part in an organizational committee like the executive committee. They then would discuss what type of events would give the youth incentive to participate and not ignore it to hang out with friends. I recommend a remake of the Seijin-shiki in order for it to fit the modernized Japan, give incentive for the youth to participate, and make the ceremony enjoyable so that they do not try to disturb it out of dissatisfaction.

Shinji Miyadai addresses the second issue in Tomiko Yoda's "A Roadmap to Millennial Japan". Japan is currently clinging on to an old system of a lost community and collective morality. This system is essentially denying the current youth's pursuit of individuality. Miyadai's solution is a system that praises the diversity within the Japanese society. This new system would control and regulate the problematic youth by ensuring respect for individual freedom. On the other hand, he attacks the Japanese adult generation for holding on to the principles of modernization and forcing their values upon the postmodern youth. He believes that the Japanese must gain the ability to make individual decisions and navigate the world by sharpening their communication skills. Miyadai encourages the diversity and spread of individuality within the Japanese youth and also states that society is in need of a new system to accommodate these changes.

Yoda also includes Murakami Ryu's appeal, which is similar to that of Miyadai's. Murakami claims that Japan must leave behind "…the collectivism underwritten by the national community and must turn into a truly modern, liberal, and individualistic society" (Yoda, 2000, pg.39).He also argues

that Japanese society is still living in the era of national unity and purpose. This society is teaching the

youth to compete for a good diploma, a good job, and a good marriage, all of which were the goals of

postwar Japanese middle-class. However, the youth cannot help but question these force fed goals due

to images in the media and everyday experiences. This contradiction of what the youth actually see and

what they are told causes confusion, which Murakami claims to be the main reason why the youth

experience a moral paralysis and act violently. Murakami seems to suggest that the adult Japanese must

let go of the corporate collective of pre-modernization and let the youth strive in a post-modernization

Japanese society.

4.3: Conclusion

The efforts seen in Urayasu and other areas of Japan to try and make the Seijin-shiki more appealing to the youth are a good step towards restoring meaning into the ceremony. It shows that the Japanese society has started to implement new traditions and values into the Seijin-shiki and is in the process of letting go of pre-modern standards, such as strictly holding onto the "traditional" format of the ceremony. The continuation of the ceremony will help the youth find something important to them and reflect on how they want to live their life from that point forward, effectively mitigating the appearance of the "monster youth" from Japanese society.

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Appendix

Friends that participated:

Questions about the actual ceremony they participated in
- What did you like about the ceremony? Dislike?
- Do you think that the spotlight was on the new Seijin or others? (i.e. politicians)
- Did you think the ceremony was more of a ritual or a party/alumni association?
- What would you have liked to see more of?
- What is your opinion on the youth that were disruptive during the ceremony? (if any)
  - What do you think is causing these disruptions?
  - How would you change the ceremony to alleviate these disruptions?
- Why did you decide to participate in the ceremony?
  - Did you achieve your goal?

Questions about the ceremony as a whole
- What do you think the true meaning/role of the ceremony is?
  - Did you feel that the ceremony you participated in reflected this true meaning? How?
- What do you think are the factors that constitute whether you are an adult in today's society?
  - Do you think that the ceremony contributed to the maturation of participants? How?
  - Do you feel as if you have become an adult through this ceremony? If not, when did you consider yourself as an adult?
  - Do you feel that the ceremony helped you figure out your obligations as an adult?
- Do you think there is any connection between the ceremony and identity?
  - Did you get a sense of who you are as an individual through this ceremony?
  - After seeing your former classmates, do you think the ceremony helped them grasp a sense of identity?
- Do you think that the ceremony is still needed today? Why or why not?

Grandmother and Uncle:

Questions about the actual ceremony they participated in
- How did your Seijin-shiki take place? Was it just a ceremony with greetings and speeches?
- Was the ceremony more of a ritual or party/alumni association?
- Was there any disruptive behavior seen at the ceremony? If not, what is your opinion on the current disruptive ceremonies?
- How important was "community" when your Seijin-shiki took place?
- Why did you participate in the Seijin-shiki? Was it required to participate?
  - Did you achieve your goal?

Questions about the ceremony as a whole
- What do you think the true meaning/role of the ceremony is?

- - Do you think that the current true meaning/role of the ceremony is different than what it was back when you had your ceremony?
  - Do you feel that the current Seijin-shikis that include entertainment events has lost it's meaning?
- What were the factors that constituted whether you are an adult when your Seijin-shiki took place?
  - Do you think that the ceremony contributed to the maturation of participants? How?
  - Do you feel as if you had become an adult through the ceremony? If not, when did you consider yourself as an adult?
  - Do you feel that the ceremony helped you figure out your obligations as an adult?
- What do you think are the factors that constitute whether you are an adult in today's society?
- Do you think there is any connection between the ceremony and identity?
  - Did you get a sense of who you are as an individual through the ceremony?
  - After seeing your former classmates, do you think the ceremony helped them grasp a sense of identity?
- Do you think that the ceremony is still needed today? Why or why not?