

Response to Ellen Schattschneider, “Adopting the Fetish: War Memory and Uncanny Kinship in Modern Japan”

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Japanese ritual dolls are a fascinating topic, as doubles and as gifts. Ellen Schattschneider suggests they are even more fascinating by making their appearance in different ritual practices link those practices with each other and the rituals with some harrowing case studies.

The case studies, which are of trauma and of personally unique attachments to dolls, seem to clinch the case for a psychoanalytic interpretation of the ritual practices. But the differences between the practices and the case studies need much more exploration theoretically to convince me that the links are valid, despite my being personally close to clinical psychoanalysis and sympathetic to the anthropological use of some meta-psychoanalysis. As an anthropologist I also see in her article elisions between different ritual practices that are not empirically justified by the material she presents.

I will start with these empirical and theoretical elisions and will go on to a comparison with relevant Chinese practices that suggest further empirical questions, as well as contrasts.

Gifts of dolls to girls by their mothers and maternal grandmothers and later, after marriage, by their mothers-in-law on Dolls’ Day is the most general Japanese ritual brought into this article. The dolls are stacked by the receiver in a shrine with the imperial couple at the top. Because the mythical founders of the imperial line are a couple who are brother and sister, just as the procreators of the world are also an incestuous sibling couple, this practice does seem to allude to the desire for endogamy. But on the face of it, all the gifts of dolls do is mark the matrilateral side of bilateral kinship links before and after marriage. By using the figure ‘energizing’ to relate the remote imperial couple to the other dolls, Schattschneider reads into the display a disavowal of desire for sibling coupling that makes Freudian fetishes of the dolls. She reads the myth of the imperial couple into the gift dolls and the girls’ minds as they anticipate and then experience marriage through the fact that they are advised to dismantle the dolls’ shrine on the night of Dolls’ Day, otherwise they would not get properly married. This certainly shows that the dolls contain a hidden threat. But the link to the imperial couple is made out to resolve this threat. And then she interprets all this through Freud’s essay on the fetish.

Rituals and marital practices in case studies can be seen to be materials for fantasy and dream, but to assume that all girls have such fantasies or dreams and have fetishistic attachments to their dolls is simply to reverse this link from cultural environment to case. In reference to one of the case studies, a doll is ascribed the characteristic of a child’s transitional object, using Winnicott’s concept. A transitional object benignly affords the space of illusion in which the distinction between I and not-I is literally at play. Then Schattschneider adds fetish, in which the child can manifest and at the same time disguise a fantasy that his or her mother has been

castrated, a secret play of threat and pleasure. Her authority for this elision is an article by Phyllis Greenacre in a clinical psychoanalytic journal of cases of treatment of children presenting various pathologies. Children normally become detached from transitional objects and fetishes. Yet here, in Schattschneider's case study, the dolls have become a secret and reclusive pleasure of a bereaved father, a substitute for a daughter incinerated in the Nagasaki bomb. And the case study is meant then to illuminate what the dolls are for the girls given them on Dolls' Day, without asking whether it is normal for the dolls' shrines to be stored away and forgotten, as transitional objects and fetishes, as certainly one daughter in the case studies did, and without arguing how you move from a single case to the general of those who perform the Dolls' Day rituals.

Schattschneider is distorting the clinical evidence for Winnicott's and Freud's theories and eliding a case study of a father that is without doubt pathological with normal ritual practice and she does this with no empirical justification or argumentation.

It is plainly appropriate to give an extended exposition to another of Freud's papers, on the Uncanny, since it considers the lifelike and lifesize female doll Olympia from Hoffman's "The Sandman." As Schattschneider makes clear, the story in Freud's reading is more about the threatening magician figures who construct Olympia. All, the doll and the magicians are doubles, substituting for life, and they prompt violent defensive aggression against them by the living boy Nathaniel. So now we have the dolls all at once as benign transitional objects, and as threatening uncanny doubles of life, and as fetishes. Is this not overburdening the advice to put the dolls away on Dolls' Day night?

To cap this, I note the omission from this article's psychoanalysis of rituals and case studies of doll obsession of Freud's essay on mourning and melancholia. It should have been here because on the first page Schattschneider writes that dolls 'aid in transitions from melancholia to mourning'. But nothing more is said about melancholia, though it is obviously appropriate. Transition from melancholia to mourning is from the projection outward, in melancholia, of an I-destroying ideal, to an internalization of the lost object. Reflection on this transition could have begun a theorization of transitions from benign to malign and from malign to benign objects of projection, for discussion of the three case studies – though probably not for the Dolls' Day gifts and shrines.

In another kind of elision, less theoretically loaded, husband adoption (uxorilocal marriage) is linked to the myth of generative sibling marriage. But husband adoption carries a stigma of shame. The stigma does the opposite of disavowal, it is an open shame. But is it shame about being both a sibling and a husband, as we are asked to accept, or just the shame of being a male daughter-in-law? I would like some elaboration of the Japanese term for uxorilocal marriage, *mukoyōshi*, in particular of what is translated as 'adoption', and to be told how people use it and refer to it. Does it carry the implication of the English word 'adoption' that the husband is also a child of his parents-in-law? The empirical justification for this analysis is missing.

I come now to comparisons from a field of study with which I am far more familiar, Chinese rituals. In China there are two alternative forms of marriage for the poor. With a daughter and no son, as in Japan, instead of adopting a boy or because for some reason they cannot adopt one, parents arrange for a husband to marry in. He bears the shame of having through poverty to do so and to beget at least a first son bearing the family name of his wife. Another reason for uxori-local marriage is to add labour to the household, even when there is already a son. The other economic resort of the poor is for parents of a young son to adopt a girl as a child eventually to be married to him with no expense and in the meantime to have the girl already available for domestic labour. This is close to the marriage of siblings, since the children have grown up together. Arthur Wolf in a number of publications has discussed Chinese little bride marriages at length showing statistically that they break down or are childless more frequently than other forms of Chinese marriage, a fact that he attributes to a natural inclination not to commit sibling incest, referring to Westermarck and arguing against Freud. The statistical evidence on its own does not deny the tensions a Freudian would note between sibling incest desire and the resistance to that desire. Is there a Japanese equivalent? If so, it surely would for this article have been of great relevance to the main topic of the shadow of sibling marriage in Japan.

More pertinent to dolls is the ritual of ghost marriage in China. Here I simply want to bring out some contrasts between Japanese spirit marriage and Chinese ghost marriage and the dolls or effigies involved. The spirit marriages that Schattschneider describes are of direct relevance to one of her case studies. They occur in anticipation of and after the event of martyrdom of combatants in war. She does not say whether before the twentieth century or outside war there was marriage of dolls and by implication their girl doll-makers to spirits of the dead that might otherwise be troublesome wandering ghosts. In China there certainly was and is. And in many cases they involve what might be described as dolls, in fact cane and paper effigies of the ghost bride or groom. In some parts of China an ancestral tablet for the deceased is placed inside these effigies. That is one major difference to the Japanese practice. They may be accompanied by similarly made household goods. Effigies and goods are both burned at the close of the ceremony in exactly the same way that merit-making rituals for the dead in China conclude with the burning of effigies of the deceased and their household goods, provisions for their residence in the Western Paradise. The purpose of both ghost marriage and merit-making rituals in China is the transformation of a ghost into a saved soul and an ancestor. The burning is another contrast with the retention of ghost dolls in Japan. But both seek to save and transform a restless soul or ghost into one that is fixed, named and formally remembered. This is marriage as mourning, quite unlike Dolls' Day gifts that are for marriage, except on the night of the Day itself. Finally, the Japanese dolls in spirit marriage represent the living sister-bride, not the dead soldier as they would in China. They are doubles of the living, and that is the most fascinating and substantial point I take from this article.