Establishment of Community Cinerary Monument and Ancestor Worship
—Example of “Hyakureibō” (One Hundred Spirits Grave) at Oshiage, Itoigawa City, Niigata Prefecture—

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Ancestor worship as it is actually performed, shows many variations. These are due to various factors, such as religious policies by political powers, the posture of religious groups, the social structure of local communities, and the existence and structure of the “Ie” (family), which are intricately interwoven; they cannot be explained by a single causal relation. In this paper, the author looks at community cinerary monuments which are scattered mainly in the Hokuriku District, and attempts to clarify the social structural factors leading to their establishment. Conventionally, graveyards and graves, as well as Buddhist altars, have been regarded as a physical installation, representing the borders and the unity of the “Ie” and the family group, and worship of them has been analyzed. However, in several areas which the author investigated in the Hokuriku District, there was no family grave in one example; or community cinerary monuments were constructed by ordering and unifying conventional family graves. These were constructed from the final period of the Modern Age to the mid 1980’s. Primary factors in the construction of community graves can be considered to be: the spreading of the concept of respect for human remains; fear of one's grave being untended due to social migration; and as a measure aiming to unify the village. It can be said that the acceptance of such community graves was made possible because the social borders of the “Ie” (families) and family groups were weak, or became weakened. However, as an “Ie” establishes various social relationships in order to continue to exist, its independence is by no means strong. The construction of these communal monuments can be said to be a local response to the problem of untended graves, and also a way to continue ancestor worship permanently.