The “No-Grave System”, and
the Grave System of the Shin-Buddhism

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Conventional folklore study on the grave system has progressed centered on the “double grave system”. The “double grave system” is a term used in opposition to the “single grave system”. Recently, in addition to the above, the “no-grave system” has come under discussion. The author wishes to point out the questions posed by the latter grave system, since there is no common understanding nor a conceptual standard among researchers, and this leads to confusion. Furthermore, since the “no-grave system” is frequently seen among believers of the Shin-Buddhism, the author wishes to consider the questions of “tombstones” and the “laying of ashes to rest” through the accepted idea of “graves” in the Shin-Buddhism.

Putting in order examples from all over the country, the author finds that previous reports did not distinguish between cremation and inhumation, and that reports that “there were no graves”, gave no clear definition of what was meant by a “grave”. He also shows that the definition of a “visiting grave” (tombstone) in the double grave system was ambiguous. What really happens in the “no-grave system” is that the ashes are left as they are after cremation, without erecting a tombstone. This grave system tells us that we must reexamine not only the problem of where the body was buried, the question of the tombstone, and the problem of inhumation, but also the question of cremation.

As to the reason why the “no-grave system” was prevalent among Shin-Buddhism believers, the author examines, from the historical viewpoint, how the Shin-Buddhism faith regarded the grave. Looking at the form of tombstones seen in present Shin-Buddhism cemeteries, and the process of the establishment of the custom of the placement of ashes in the head temple, the author discusses the concept of the grave system in the Shin-Buddhism, and its relationship with the restrictions by the religious order. It was a problem from the doctrinal point of view, to hold religious services for bodies or ashes. In the Middle Ages, the Shin-Buddhism took a negative attitude towards stupas and tombstones. This contemptuous view of graves and tombstones continued throughout the modern period until the present day, so that the custom remained of leaving ashes after cremation, without erecting a tombstone. Also, the Shin-Buddhism gainsaid the tombstone as a grave, but accepted the ceremony of laying ashes to rest, and inherited the medieval ceremony of laying ashes to rest in modern form, at the establishment of the modern religious order.