Hana yori Dango

Flower viewing in Japan as a secularized ritual of lived religion

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Tiivistelmä – Referat

Japanilainen kukkien katselu saa ihmiset sekä Japanissa, että ulkomailla liikkeelle keväisin. Etenkin ulkomailla japanilainen kukkien katselu on synonyymi kirsikankukkien kanssa. Kirsikankukat ovat kukkien katselun suosituin kohde, mutteivat suinkaan ainoa. Tämä tutkimus selvittää mistä japanilaisessa kukkien katselussa on kysymys ja millainen rituaali on kyseessä.

Tutkimuksen teoria ja näkökulmat ovat eletty uskonto, rituaali sekä sekularisaatio. Tutkimuksen hypoteesi on, että japanilainen kukkien katselu on eletyn uskonnon rituaali. Ensimmäisellä tutkimuskysymyksellä haetaan vahvistusta tälle hypoteesille. Toinen tutkimuskysymys on: edustaako kukkien katselu japanilaista kulttuuria sekularisoituneena rituaalina?

Aineistona työssä on vuonna 2017 keväällä Japanissa (Kiotossa ja Tokiossa) suoritettu kenttätyö. Kenttätyö koostuu tarkkailu- ja osallistuvasta havainnoinnista sekä kymmenen japanilaisen haastatteluista. Haastattelut on suoritettu japaniksi ja käännetty englanniksi. Aineisto analysoidaan grounded theory-metodia käyttäen. Metodina grounded theory on lähellä aineistolähtöistä sisällön analyysiä, mutta siihen sisältyy oman teorian muodostaminen aineiston pohjalta. Kyseinen teoria esitetään ennen johtopäätöksiä.

Tutkielman aineisto puoltaa alkuperäistä hypoteesia kukkien katselusta eletyn uskonnon rituaalina. Aineistosta nostetaan seitsemän teemaa, jotka muodostavat Japanissa kukkien katseluun liitettäviä merkityksiä. Nämä seitsemän teemaa ovat: seurustelu, kommunikaatio, ruoka ja juoma, kauneuden arvostus, kevään rituaali, henkinen kokemus sekä kukkien katselu japanilaisen kulttuurin symbolina.

Aineiston pohjalta löytyneet teemat muodostavat kuvan japanilaisesta kukkien katselusta tärkeänä kansanjuhlana, jossa on sekä käytännöllisiä, että symbolisia merkityksiä. Kukkien katselussa yhdistyy monta japanilaisten rakastamaa asiaa. Osa näistä on japanilaisille tyypillisiä, jonka takia ne yhdistämällä saadaan rituaali, joka edustaa japanilaisuutta. Rituaali on uniikki japanilaisille, vaikka kirsikankukkien katselua harrastetaan muuallakin maailmassa.

Avainsanat – Nyckelord

Hanami, Sakura, Flower viewing, Secularisation, Cherry blossoms.

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Muita tietoja

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1. Introduction

In Japan the school and work year resumes after vacation around the beginning of April. Around the same time, in many places in Japan, the sakura[1] or cherry blossom trees are in full bloom and the gardens, parks, temple grounds and other public spaces are covered in pastel coloured clouds of sakura trees. Because the timing of sakuras' full bloom coincides with the start of the academic year, many schools and workplaces hold their welcoming parties under the sakura trees and view the flowers while socializing, drinking and eating. This flower viewing is called hanami[2] in Japanese.

> Hanami is..the enjoyment of spring. With everyone, under the flowers you eat food and talk, that kind of thing. It's a thing that only blooms for short while in the spring, since you can only see it for a while everyone wants to see it. Especially Japanese people are like that. (Sunny)

Hanami, or flower viewing, is one of the most prominent social events for Japanese people. This is not only due to the fact that the sakura are all in full bloom at the same time in the middle of the spring, soon after the dreaded winter, but also because in sakura, the glory of nature is displayed and enshrined.[3] Since sakura's blooming time is an opportune time to have a picnic or an excursion, it is no wonder that sakura became such a beloved object of admiration for the Japanese people. This admiration goes even as far as having sakura as the national flower of Japan.[4]

For this research I will be using the Japanese romanized terms for the central concepts and ideas which are originally Japanese. I will also be using romanized forms closest to the original reading in hiragana, e.g. I will write long vowels as they are written in hiragana (such as Shintou instead of shintō). I would like to note however, that I will be writing all authors' names as they are printed in their works (when applicable) and the names of Japanese cities (Toukyou – Tokyo) as they are officially established in English in order to avoid any confusion. I will write Japanese names in the Japanese order (last name, given name). Some of the key terms, such as hanami and sakura can be translated into English, but I felt that with terms such as flower viewing or cherry blossom something might be lost in the translation. Even though these terms can be translated and understood easily, I still feel that the original Japanese context might not translate through. For example, hanami, does not mean simply looking at flowers, as

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[1] 桜
[2] 花見 – the symbols are for 'flower' and 'to look'.
[3] Miyoshi 1934, 23.
[4] Miyoshi 1934, 11.

the English translation might indicate. It is much more than that and the purpose of this research is to explain that in detail. For this reason, I will explain all the different Japanese terms I will be using whenever I first use them in this research.

2. Previous Research on Hanami

There is hardly any previous research on this exact topic, however there is some research done on sakura and Japanese culture that take a brief look at hanami. Most of the research is either botanical research on the sakura and its qualities as a plant or cultural research that takes a look at sakura as a symbol of Japanese culture. I should note that while many Japanese cultural guides or works concentrating on Japanese culture, especially the social culture, often mention sakura and hanami, they rarely delve very deep into hanami, its history and cultural relevance. However the fact that so many works mention it should give a rough idea of how central it is in Japanese culture. That being said, most of the literature that actually concentrates on hanami is meant for large audiences as tourist or cultural guides. Photobooks of hanami seemed plentiful too. The research available in English was very limited and the research in Japanese was somewhat lacking. Though the limited amount of Japanese research might be explained by the fact that I only had access to a very few Japanese online databases and bookstores.

Since for most people hanami is synonymous with sakura, I concentrated my research on sakura, rather than the other hanami flowers. I found two books on sakura that were mostly botanic in nature, both originally in Japanese. One other book in English that was close to my topic concentrated on the Japanese floral calendar, which included many of the objects of hanami, including sakura. It should be noted however, that both of the English books were very old, from early 20th century. It seems that there has not been a lot of interest in hanami or sakura as a topic of research after that era.

Sakura, Japanese Cherry by Manabu Miyoshi (1934) was the closest thing I could find to my own research. Even though this booklet was written by a doctor, it was commissioned by the Board of Tourist Industry, Japanese Government Railways. Even if it is essentially a tourist guide from the 1930's it has a short introduction on history of hanami, which I found very useful, since the information was not easy to find elsewhere. The book concentrates on the different types of sakura and how their different characteristics can be best enjoyed. It also features a large collection of recommended hanami spots and famous or noted sakura trees

around the country. Unfortunately, many of these noted or famous sakura trees are most likely already gone today.

"Shun" no Nihon Bunka is a book in Japanese[5] by Noritake Kanzaki (2009). Translated the name reads 'Japanese culture of seasons'. It explains the different seasonal traditions and customs of Japan. Even though short, it has an explanation on hanami as well, in the spring section, since hanami (specifically sakura) is an important part of the spring in Japan.

Floral Calendar by Ernest W. Clement (1911). I found this book a useful tool for this research, mostly because it introduced a few other flowers in Japan that are also part of the hanami tradition. Hanami was not the main topic of this book, but rather the different beliefs, spiritual connections and traditions associated with different flowers in Japanese culture. The book points out how Japanese people respect their greenery and consider just viewing them something worthwhile. Many of the traditions and flowers depicted might have changed in modern times however, seeing as the original version of the book was written by a Westerner in 1904.

Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History by Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney (2002) takes a look at sakura as a symbol of Japan. Though this book focuses on war and its symbolism, it still has some ideas about sakura as an important national symbol in Japan. Another book by Ohnuki-Tierney *Flowers That Kill: Communicative Opacity in Political Spaces* (2015) also takes a look at sakura as an important symbol of Japan. This book focuses on the symbolism around flowers, but this time the focus is more on politics.

I found a single book fully devoted to hanami and sakura in Japanese. *Hanami to Sakura* by Youzaburou Shirahata (2015) is an introduction to hanami and sakura. The book explains what hanami and sakura are in Japan and abroad and what cultural significance hanami has. This book was the closest to my research topic since it focuses on both hanami and culture.

3. Tools for This Research

I felt it clear to gather all of my theoretical and methodological topics in the same chapter, starting with the most important part, my research question, followed by my chosen method, data and theories. I had a lot of data from my observations in Japan, but I did not find a suitable place to fit them anywhere on my analysis part. Therefore, I actually left some thoughts and observations for the data part of this chapter and the next chapter discussing the background of hanami.

3.1 The Research Question

When starting this research, I had the hypothesis that hanami is a ritual of lived religion in Japan. I based my hypothesis on my previous knowledge on Japanese culture and the observations I made during my stays there. I had not done hanami before in Japan, but it is such a relevant part of Japanese culture, that the concept was very familiar to me. I felt that hanami had some characteristics of a ritual that was not specifically religious, but rather spiritual in nature. This is why I thought it could be a ritual of lived religion. So, my first research question in: *Can hanami be seen as a ritual of lived religion?*

My second research question formed to be: *Does hanami represent the Japanese culture as a secularised ritual?* I felt that the ritual aspect of hanami was quite strong, so I formed both of my research questions around it. Hanami being a part of Japanese culture came up in my data both directly and indirectly. Secularisation also came up in both my data and previous research. Secularisation in Japan was not a new concept to me, so I wanted to know if it applied to hanami. I wanted to know more about the relationship between Japanese culture and hanami as well. This is why I formed my own theory around this train of though and based my second research question on it.

3.2 The Method

I chose a different method for this research than I had planned in the beginning. At first I was going to use conventional content analysis, but after realising my topic was rather challenging and it had very little previous research, I thought it would be interesting to try a different approach to it. That is why I ended up choosing grounded theory, which admittedly is not usually used for research done in the faculty of Study of Religion. It is used more for social

studies, yet it has been applied to work with other research fields as well, especially qualitative research. I chose this method, because I personally prefer to do research that is focused on the data, rather than some previous theory. Having knowledge about previous theories but putting them aside for the analysis and theory development is a crucial part of grounded theory.[6]

Grounded theory dates back to the 1967 when Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss collaborated in their studies of dying in hospitals in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Their idea was that qualitative analysis could generate theory while having its own logic. Their specific intent was to construct abstract theoretical explanations of social processes. In other words, their original work was used for developing or discovering theories from research data as opposed to deducing testable hypotheses from existing theories.[7]

After its emergence in the 1960's grounded theory has first been split into two schools, since the initial developers of the theory could not agree on its application.[8] The two schools were the Glaserian and Straussian paradigms. Later other researchers have developed the method further. One of these researchers is Kathy Charmaz and I am inclined to agree with them on the idea that grounded theory can be viewed as more of a set of principles and practices. In other words, grounded theory can be very flexible guideline to doing research and not just a strict set of methodological rules, recipes and requirements. This is the reason I was relying on their work and concept of grounded theory the most.[9]

As a method grounded theory has several steps to it. After taking a look at a few of the guidebooks for this method I drafted rough steps that are included and explained in all of them in almost identical ways. I would however, note that as I mentioned in the previous paragraph, I used this method (and the steps) quite flexibly, according to my needs. The first thing to remember when using grounded theory is that analysing begins right away after collecting the first bits of data. Analysing and constantly comparing data are a part of every step of the process. This meant that I returned to my some of my interviewees and interviewed them again about other topics of interest I discovered from my other interviews or observations. The following steps include the basics of grounded theory:

1. Gathering data
2. Coding

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[6] Dey 1999, 1.
[7] Glaser & Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2006, 4-5; Dey 1999, 3.
[8] Dey 1999, 18, 22-23.
[9] Charmaz 2005, 9.

3. Memoing
4. Categorising
5. Theoretical sampling
6. Developing or discovering theory

Obviously the very first thing to do is to choose a topic of research. In grounded theory choosing a specific research "problem" or question is not necessary in the very beginning. Choosing a general topic and a suitable site for study are enough. This means avoiding relying on previous research and theoretical preconceptions on the topic in the very beginning.[10] Seeing as I had previously thought about using conventional content analysis I had already gathered and read some previous research on this topic. I will go back to these researches and other research in later parts of this process. After picking a topic, gathering data is the "first" step in this method. For grounded theory, data often consist of field observations and interviews.[11] This will hold true for my research too. The data from my observations and participant observations are all the field notes and diaries I write and the photos I took. Similarly, with the interviews, the written results, in other words the transcriptions, are my actual data. I will explain the details for my data gathering in the next part of this chapter.

Coding means categorising and labelling segments of data with short names. The labels also work as summaries of the data pieces. This basically means defining what the data is about. Coding is important in grounded theory, because it shows how the researcher selects, separates and sorts their data. During the coding and analysis, it is important to ponder which theoretical categories the data being coded might indicate.[12]

Memoing or memo-writing is exactly what it sounds like. Practically memoing means taking notes while thinking about the codes made during the previous step. This includes analysing the data early in the research process. This is meant to increase the researcher's commitment to the analysis and the level of abstraction in their ideas. This step will also reveal the most important codes which stand out and will eventually form into categories. It helps in making comparisons between the data, codes and categories and so on.[13]

In the original guidebook for grounded theory Glaser and Strauss define a category as a 'conceptual element in a theory'.[14] Developing the codes from the previous step will

[10] Dey 1999, 4-5.
[11] Charmaz 2006, 14.
[12] Charmaz 2006, 43-45.
[13] Charmaz 2006, 72.
[14] Glaser & Strauss 1967, 37.

eventually lead to the development of categories. The important thing in this step is to specify what the categories are, what they consist of and what the relationships between them are.[15]

After arriving on conclusion about at least some categories the next step is to start gathering more data on them. This is called theoretical sampling and it includes seeking and gathering relevant data to elaborate and refine the categories previously formed. This will continue until saturation, or when new properties for the categories will no longer emerge. This can for example mean going back to do more interviews. This step seems to be the most misunderstood and misused within researchers using grounded theory. This is because many researchers seem to be unclear on how to do theoretical sampling and when the saturation actually happens.[16] I will be referring to previous research in the formed categories instead of doing a lengthy background chapter.

The last step of grounded theory will vary with different researchers and researches. All of the research I did on grounded theory had different ideas of what is a 'theory' developed through grounded theory. All of the researchers tried to define what a theory is, but since there is no generally agreed upon definition I decided to go with my own interpretation and form a reflection based on my data and previous research, that works in the context of my topic.

That being said, I used grounded theory as a sort of a guideline or basis for my research. There are some things that I do not completely agree with this research method, such as the idea of not researching any previous theory on my topic beforehand. Doing previous research in general is reserved for the later parts of the process, which I found to be in conflict with the nature of this research. So rather than not doing any research on the theories or previous research, I tried to put emphasis on my data, whilst still being mindful of the previous research when I was developing my theory.

3.3 The Data

As is common with my chosen method, I gathered my data by observation and interviews. I started with a single interview over the Internet to get some idea of what to look for in the next phase of my data gathering, which was field observation. In practice, this meant going to Japan and observing hanami in Kyoto and Tokyo. According to researchers like Harvey, sometimes

[15] Charmaz 2006, 91-92.
[16] Charmaz 2006, 96-97.

participant observation can demand good relationships with those being observed, but in my case, it was not necessary, seeing as hanami is often a public phenomenon.[17] However I found that the people I knew beforehand and had good relationships with were more likely to really think about what I asked and reflect on it. I had the intention of participating and observing with and without my Japanese friends, since I had two weeks' time to observe, but in 2017 Kyoto's hanami season was about one week later than normal and I arrived too early. In Tokyo I was there during the prime season so I was able to gather my data without any issues, even if my time was cut shorter than I intended.

3.3.1 Observation

I chose both popular and less known locations for my observations. I thought it best to try both since the way hanami is done might differ a little depending on the hanami spot. I found this to be true, since very popular places such as Ueno park seemed to have their own rules and etiquette for hanami, when compared with other hanami spots. In the end, the places that I have visited included the Kyoto Imperial Palace[18], Kiyomizudera[19], Arashiyama[20] and Kita no Tenmangu[21] in Kyoto and Ueno park[22], Yoyogi park[23], Shinjuku Imperial Garden[24], Yasukuni shrine[25], Chidori ga fuchi[26] and National Hansen's Disease Museum park[27] in Tokyo. I visited a few smaller places too, but since there were hardly any people doing hanami I feel that they are not worth mentioning. While I was in Kyoto, since the hanami season had not yet started, there were only a few odd blooming trees here and there. I suspect most of those trees were actually ume and not sakura.

Kyoto Imperial is the former palace and seat of power of the Emperor of Japan. After Meiji Restoration in 1869 the seat of power moved to Tokyo. Nowadays the palace grounds are open

[17] Harvey 2001, 218-219.
[18] 京都御所 - Kyoto gosho.
[19] 清水寺
[20] 嵐山
[21] 北の天満具
[22] 上野公園 - Ueno kouen.
[23] 代々木公園 - Yoyogi kouen.
[24] 新宿御苑- Shinjuku gyoen.
[25] 靖国神社 - Yasukuni Jinja.
[26] 千鳥ヶ淵
[27] 国立ハンセン病資料館 - Kokuritsu Hansenbyou shiryoukan

for visitors, but access to the palace is limited. The grounds hold several sakura trees. Some of the trees are special or noted trees.

Kiyomizudera is a famous Buddhist temple in Kyoto, known for its pure water. The sakura there are very famous. It was founded in 780 at the sight of Otawa waterfall. The temple is also famous for the water from the waterfall that is divided into three streams. Each stream has its special characteristics that bring different benefits, namely longevity, success in school or love life. Drinking from all three is a sign of greed. Even though it is a Buddhist temple, there is a Shintou shrine attached to it as well.

Arashiyama is an old area in Kyoto, very popular and famous among both locals and tourists. The sakura in Arashiyama are said to be the best in Kyoto. It has been a popular tourist destination since the Heian period. Rather than just sakura hanami, arashiyama is also famous for its autumn leaves and bamboo forest.

Kita no Tenmangu is a Shintou shrine dedicated to Sugawara no Michizane, who was a 10th century bureaucrat, scholar and a poet exiled from court by his enemies. Later he became the patron kami[28] of students. Kita no Tenmangu is famous for its ume gardens. I mostly chose this place, because while living in Kyoto I would often visit this shrine since it was relatively close to my dorm and school. Also, I simply found the ume to be beautiful.

Ueno park is the most popular and famous hanami spot in Tokyo. The fight for the best spots in Ueno park can be exhausting, since the best spots are taken very early in the morning. Ueno park is said to be the most beautiful place for hanami in Tokyo. The flowers bloom there a few days before the rest of Tokyo.[29]

Yoyogi park is a very famous tourist spot in Tokyo, which attracts a lot of tourists during the hanami season, even if it has relatively few sakuras. Since it is close to Harajuku it is a gathering place (on Sundays) for different youth cultures, such as cosplayers, musicians and other subcultures. In my experience it attracts a lot more foreigners than most other tourist spots I have visited in Japan.

Shinjuku Imperial Garden differs from the other places on my list in that it is not free to enter. It is both a park and a garden. It is nowadays a national park under the jurisdiction of Ministry

[28] 神 – Can be translated as spirit or god in the context of Shintou. Can be used in other contexts as well, for example in Christianity, kamisama means God.
[29] See Attachment 1.

of the Environment. It is a popular hanami spot, though it is not as nearly as crowded as Ueno park. There is no need for place holders.[30]

Yasukuni shrine is a Shintou shrine commemorating those who died in the service of the Emperor of Japan from 1869 to 1947. The shrine is famous for its many sakura that host the spirits of those who died in the war. During my visit, some of the trees were behind a tarp, because of construction or maintanence.[31]

Chidori ga fuchi is the moat located near the Imperial Palace. It is lined with sakura and during the hanami season the sakura will create a sakura tunnel into the moat. This sakura tunnel is very famous and popular in Japan. Boats can be rented too, but during hanami season the wait for a boat can be a few hours, since it is so popular.[32]

Hansen Hospital Museum's park is a small local park in the outskirts of Tokyo. The museum is dedicated to promote awareness of leprosy, lepers and their history in Japan. It is a small, quite spot for the locals to enjoy hanami. The old Hansen hospital's inhabitants were forbidden from having children so instead they planted several sakura in the area and looked after them. The old walls and the lepers became an inspiration for parts of the film Momonoke hime by Ghibli film director Hayao Miyazaki.[33]

I actually learned a lot while just observing people doing hanami. One of the things I most paid attention to was the fact that not everyone wanted to do hanami by having a picnic. I talked to a lot more people than I actually interviewed and some of them only expressed a desire to walk around under the sakura trees in order to enjoy the view. Later I thought if this form of hanami might be closer to the 'real' purpose of hanami than the picnic one. With this I mean the fact that most people will do hanami for the food and drinks, rather than the flowers. I thought that if people just walk around looking at flowers and not stopping to eat and drink, maybe they get a different experience from it. Unfortunately I was unable to find a willing interviewee among the walkers. One of my Japanese friends, Suisui, however said that they always just walk around rather than setting up a picnic spot:

> I usually walk and do hanami. I don't really do the picnic thing. We don't really go with my current co-workers so with friends we just walk. With picnic in Japan, it's like… it's the image of doing it with many people, so if it's just with three friends, laying out a sheet, making food, we don't really do such a thing.

[30] See Attachment 2.
[31] See Attachment 3.
[32] See Attachment 4.
[33] See Attachment 5.

> But it might be different for different people. Some people like picnics, so they're more likely to do it, but I'm the type of person to not go unless there's enough people. But there are different people. (T: So then if you're walking will you still drink and eat?) No, we don't do that. But the feeling is the same. (Suisui)

Since Suisui was the only one I was able to interview about this type of walking hanami, I will not be including it in the actual analysis part, because I feel I do not have enough data on it. But since I observed it and found it interesting, I thought it worth mentioning. If I ever continue hanami research, I think it would be interesting to interview people who prefer to do hanami by walking rather than picnic to see if their motives to do hanami and feelings about hanami are any different to those that I interviewed.

I noticed some contradictions with some of the hanami rules or etiquette I had learned beforehand during my observations. I will take a closer look at these in the Hanami Etiquette chapter. A lot of my observations coincided with the previous knowledge I had of hanami. For this reason, the chapter Hanami Etiquette is mostly based on my own observations rather than literature. The hanami rules and etiquette are often unofficial or unwritten rules, which is why they can vary from place to place and there are is no academic literature to back them up.

3.3.2 Interviews

Intensive interviews and grounded theory work well together according to Charmaz. I had first thought to solely use semi-structured interviews for interviewing, but I felt more structured interviews might be better with certain people or at least in some parts of the interview. Intensive interviewing is quite flexible and open in its nature, like semi-structured interviewing. Therefore, I thought it might be good to use both, since intensive interviewing can be more directed than semi-structured interviewing.[34]

Intensive interviewing is used for in-depth exploration of a particular topic. The interviewee needs to have the relevant experiences relating to the topic. In my case the relevant experience is participating in hanami or Japanese religions in a few of the cases. The interviewee is often asked to describe and reflect on the topic in ways that rarely occur in normal day-to-day life. Semi-structured interviewing can be used to research experience-based phenomena. Intensive interviewing includes observing the situation while listening. Like semi-structured interviewing, intensive interviewing usually starts with a few broad or open-ended questions,

[34] Charmaz 2006, 28.

which can be focused and specified according to the researcher's interests. In both interviewing methods the actual interviewing situation and the interviewee will determine the direction of the interview. All in all, I felt that intensive interviewing and semi-structured interviewing were practically the same as interviewing methods.[35]

In the end I ended up using more structured interviews with more specific questions with the place holders I interviewed, since I did not know them beforehand and they all admitted to not ever really reflecting on my topic. For this reason, they did not have a lot to say with just broad questions. My Japanese friends, the religious experts and the elders I interviewed had a lot more to say with just a few broad questions related to my topic. So, I switched between interviewing methods as I felt necessary.

I contacted some of the temples and shrines to see if they were willing to give an expert interview. After a few misses, with some aid from Suisui and Sunny, I was able to get permission to interview the people at St. Agnes' Episcopal Church in Kyoto and Hongyouji temple and Suwa shrine in Tokyo. At first, I thought it would be interesting to interview someone from a famous temple or shrine, but as we called some of the bigger places we got answers like; 'There is no connection between religion and hanami'. After that I decided to search for smaller places. I thought bigger temples and shrines might be too busy to give interviews and according to Sunny bigger places might be closer to businesses rather than religious or spiritual places. Although Yasukuni shrine's kannushi[36] said there was absolute no connection between sakura or hanami and religion, he said the sakura in yasukuni shrine were planted for those passed in war, so that they could return home to Japan. Their souls could return home when the sakura trees held their souls. In the end I was able to talk to an Anglican priest, a souryo and man who worked at a shrine, who did not have a specific title.

I wanted to talk to people with religious connections since my topic is revolving around hanami and its spiritual or religious connections. Though most Japanese people will at first say that there are no connections between hanami and religion, I felt that the religious people in Japan might see it differently. In part this was true. I wanted to talk to these people about the Japanese concepts of religion and spirituality in general. So the interviewee Priest-san is an Anglican

[35] Charmaz 2006, 25-26; Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 47-48; Eskola & Suoranta 2000, 86-87.
[36] 神主 The person responsible for a shrine in Shintou.

priest in Kyoto, Souryo-san or a souryo[37] in a temple and Suwa-san is a man without a title[38] who worked at a shrine. Even though I approached them all in the hopes of expert interviews they all wished to remain anonymous.

As is normal with almost any kind of research, protecting the privacy of the interviewees is an important part of research ethics. So, I will be using aliases for my interviewees. This will hold true for the people I just introduced. Although they said it was okay to use their titles and names of the places where they worked, none of them wanted their names to be used. They felt it easier to talk about this topic if they could do it anonymously, without fear of repercussions. For this reason, rather than using them as expert interviews, I will just be using them as normal data of people who have connections with religion.[39]

During my observations, I did find a few interviewees, who were mostly so-called place holders[40] for their co-workers. People in groups were not that interested in being interviewed, since they wanted to enjoy the hanami and talk to their friends, families or co-workers. All of the place holders I talked to were willing to accommodate my request for interviewing, but only for a while. I noticed quite quickly that these interviews would not work as intensive interviews, because of the situation and the social situation. With the situation, I mean the fact that we were in a crowded park with a lot of people all around. Even if I asked, all of my interviewees preferred to be interviewed then and there, rather than meeting me later for in-depth interviews. I found it easier to interview the people I was already familiar with, rather than the strangers I had just approached and met at the park. For this reason, the interviews with the place holders were a lot shorter and closer to structured interviews, rather than intensive or semi-structured interviews. With the situation being what it was I took what I could get.

In Kyoto I only interviewed my friend Suisui and Priest-san, since the hanami season had not started yet and there were no people doing sakura hanami. In Tokyo I found a lot of people who were doing hanami, but only a few were willing to be interviewed. During my first observation day in Ueno park as I had just finished my first walk around the park and was taking some notes I was approached three times by separate elder men within 30 minutes. At

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[37] 僧侶 This is often translated as monk, but it is actually closer to a buddhist priest, since I would concider monks to be ascetic and living in monasteries, but Japanese buddhist ”monks” can marry and so on.

[38] I got the impression that he was a member of the family who runs the shrine.

[39] Vakimo 2010, 84-85.

[40] 場所取り – basho tori in Japanese.

first, I thought they might be good candidates for interviewees, but as all three of them were offering me either dinner, a place to stay or just straight out asking for sex, I decided not to approach elderly men anymore. I did want to get some elderly people to interview, but sexual harassment of young lone women is unfortunately quite common in Japan, so I thought it best not to approach lone elder men or groups of drunken older men. I was able to interview one elderly man who had come to Ueno park with his elderly lady friend. Their interview was interesting, however unfortunately my recorded ran out of batteries after six minutes. I did not notice this until it was too late. The first six minutes did include some interesting points so I decided to keep as data. The elders in question are Rouba-san and Roujin-san, with Rouba-san being and elderly woman and Roujin-san an elderly man.

Other than my friend Sunny, the other people I interviewed were all found in Ueno park. They were all relatively new employees at their workplaces, which is why they were given the "honour" of being a place holder. They were all in their early twenties. I named them Kou-san, Tarou-kun and Hiro-kun. Kou-san was the only female place holder I talked to and Tarou-kun and Hiro-kun were both male[41]. I interviewed my friend Sunny twice, once over the Internet after I had only decided on a broad topic of hanami for my research and then later in Japan I interviewed her for more focused data.

3.3.3 Language and Translation

I conducted all the interviews in Japanese so I wondered the question of translation for this research. Japanese and English are fundamentally very different languages and literal translations seemed difficult to achieve without losing the original meaning and intent. I decided to translate the transcriptions by myself and relatively loosely so that I could ensure that the quotations from the interviews could be easily understood by someone who is not familiar with Japanese language. Even so, whenever possible, I tried to make the transcriptions as close to the original Japanese as possible. I decided to use the Japanese words for the key terms of this research, especially for the transcriptions. Though my previously stated desire to keep the meaning and images as close to the original as possible holds true to this whole

[41] In Japanese it is common to use suffixes such as san and kun. San is a general term that can be used on nearly any situation, it is equivalent to mister or ma'am. It is polite to use it when talking to strangers or people older than you. Kun is a suffix used mostly for younger males. I chose to use kun with Tarou-kun and Hiro-kun to make it easier to distinct them as young males (younger than me). I also omitted suffixes from Sunny and Suisui to signify the fact that I know both well and would normally use neither formal language nor suffixes with them.

research, I felt that this is especially true for the transcriptions. This is why I might use even more Japanese terms when including quotations in the analysis. I will of course explain the terms when I use them for the first time.

Some things are very difficult to translate into English, such as the difference between formal and informal language. In Japan, formal language is used when speaking with someone you are not very close to or you have different positions in the Japanese social hierarchy. Informal language on the other hand is reserved for family members or close friends. The difference between formal and informal language is a lot clearer in Japanese than it is in English, so it will not be very visible in my translations. This can however be used to specify what kind of situation the interview is intended to be. I could use formal language when talking to my friends to try and make some distance between us (in order to remain as neutral as possible) or I could try to use informal language with strangers if they are around the same age to try and make them feel more comfortable. In Japan, there are a lot of unspoken rules about this and as a foreigner I am not expected to follow them completely. I can speak Japanese without any real hard effort and be understood easily, but I do tend to forget to use the formal language, because I usually only talk to my close Japanese friends, using the informal language. I have found that just being able to change between the formal and informal style and uttering a few words of the very formal language[42] will win the respect of any average Japanese person. Therefore, even if I slipped and started using informal language when I probably should not have, I noticed that it did not affect my interviews. Just being a foreigner will get you off the hook in almost any situation in Japan.

The thing I was worried about, when interviewing people I was friends with, was whether or not I could remain neutral in the interview situation.[43] This fact brought up the question about how close to the group I am studying is it preferable to be. For this research I felt it was not a problem that I knew some of the people beforehand, because the size of this research is quite small and the data I am gathering is not too personal. I actually felt that my previous relationship with the interviewees helped me during the interviews, since I did not need to 'break the ice' or if my Japanese was not perfect the interviewees still understood what I was

[42] 敬語 - Keigo is formal language in Japanese and there are many levels to it. The most common being the "normal" formal style (so called desu-masu style) most people use with strangers and then the more formal styles which are used when talking to people in higher social positions.
[43] Ruusuvuori & Tiittula 2010, 45.

trying to say. I noticed that the people I did not know beforehand were more challenging to get to properly reflect on the things I was asking them about.[44]

3.4 The Theory

Although my chosen method, grounded theory advises researches not to use any previous theories before starting their analysis, I had already chosen some theories and point of views beforehand. This was before I chose to use grounded theory instead of conventional content analysis. Grounded theory prefers not to rely on previous research in the beginning of the research, so if the researcher is aware of it, it expects the researchers to be able to put the previous research aside until it is needed again. But as I mentioned earlier, I felt it was kind of weird to except a researcher not to use previous research in the early stages of research so I ended up using my chosen theories to reflect on my topic in most stages of my research. I think their effect can be most seen when I was first going through my data during coding and memoing and then later forming them into categories. I chose my important codes and formed my categories based on my viewpoint of my topic, which in turn was based on my chosen theories. These three theories I chose to use as a basis for this research were: lived religion, ritual studies and secularisation.

In the beginning I was taking a look at hanami as a ritual of lived religion. Rather than trying to prove that hanami is a ritual of lived religion, I thought to just look at it as such and concentrate on the secularised aspect of it. I came to this conclusion after reflecting on the general characteristics of Japanese religious behaviour and much of my data supported this idea. I will cover the relationship between Japan, religion and secularisation in a later chapter.

3.4.1 Lived Religion

I feel that lived religion describes most Japanese people's spiritual or religious life the best. This theory will however be more of a guideline that I will use to explain the spiritual nature of this topic. I will be concentrating on Meredith McGuire's theory on lived religion (McGuire, 2008). Lived religion takes a look at people or activities that can be described as religious or spiritual. True to its name, lived religion focuses on ordinary religious people and activities,

[44] Vakimo 2010, 99.

through the people who live them, not the institutionalised religion or the normal assumptions of how a 'Christian' or a 'Buddhist' is supposed to act, behave and be like. In other words, lived religion takes a look at people as individuals with their own experiences and expressions on religion. For this reason, field work, such as interviews and participant observation are common when doing research on lived religion.[45]

An important thing in lived religion is practicality. This is because the theory about lived religion is based on the religious practices of people, rather than the theoretical ideas or beliefs about religion. For this reason, lived religion does not always need to be logically coherent. Rather than logic, the experiences that arise from religion or spiritual activities need to make sense on a practical level. For example, some spiritual practice will be worth doing if it has some desired effect, such as healing, even if it doesn't make any sense if thought about rationally. A good example of this is spiritual healing. It might not seem reliable to a doctor, but if it works for the one being healed, it makes it practical for them.[46]

Lived religion uses the terms religious and spiritual interchangeably. This works very well for my research, since most Japanese people would not describe themselves as religious, but rather spiritual. In Japan most people would understand religion or religious[47] as someone who is deeply involved in religion or a devout believer and participates in organized and institutionalized religion. Many Japanese people I've talked to about religion have had a strong reaction to it, saying "I'm not religious" or "This is a secular country" or something similar. This is why I prefer to use the word spiritual when doing the research in Japan. Sometimes I use the term 'thing of the heart'[48] in Japanese, if the Japanese people do not understand the English word spiritual.[49]

Of course, since lived religion is heavily based on the experiences of an individual, it would be nearly impossible to draw consistent conclusions on a specific topic if there were too many interviewees. This is because the concept of religion is changing all the time and religiosity and spirituality have become so individualized. So while doing a large scale research on lived religion might not work, I feel that it will be perfect for a research of this size, with only a handful of interviewees.

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[45] McGuire 2008, 3-4, 12.
[46] McGuire 2008, 15.
[47] 宗教 – shuukyou.
[48] 心のこと – kokoro no koto.
[49] McGuire 2008, 6.

3.4.2 Ritual

Since I am taking a look at hanami as a ritual of lived religion, I feel it necessary to explain how I define a ritual. I read about rituals by Catherine Bell (Bell, 2009) and Ronald Grimes (Grimes, 2010 & 2013). In her book Bell takes a close look at the problematic nature of ritual studies, where as in both of his books Grimes is focused more on how to study a ritual. I felt that the field of ritual studies was fragmented and it couldn't fully explain what a ritual is and how it is defined, since a ritual can be defined in so many ways and so broadly. But according to Talal Asad, an ethnographer will recognise a ritual when they see one, because it is a symbolic activity as opposed to the instrumental behaviour of everyday life.[50]

For this research, I would define a ritual as a religious or spiritual action that is repeated an unspecified amount of times on a regular basis. But rather than just repeating an action over and over again, a meaning is required. Bell defined ritual as an action that has some meaning besides its practical meaning, such as planting potatoes vs. shaking hands. This means that the action repeated needs to have some specific meaning for the person doing the ritual.[51] In this research the ritual is hanami, and the meanings it has for the people interviewed is what makes it a ritual worth studying. I think in this case the ritual of hanami can be seen as Kalland and Asquith put it: transitioning from winter to spring and coming to terms with nature without necessarily idealising it.[52]

4. Japan and Religion

Traditionally Japan has been seen as a religious or spiritual country. It is common for Japanese people to treat sacred things very secularly. At the same it can be said that Japan has a special sense of superstitious behaviour with common everyday things.[53] My interviewees who were affiliated with religions (Priest-san, Suwa-san and Souryo-san) also pointed this out:

> Hmm, hmmm, umm, well as one point of view, there are of course people who do not believe in gods and then there are those who earnestly believe in gods. I think people who are in the middle of that are the largest group. People who always think about gods and think of their teachings and try to live

[50] Asad 1993, 55.
[51] Bell 2009a, 46-47.
[52] Kalland and Asquith 1997, 19.
[53] Vesterinen 1982, 92.

> by them are very few, but there are a lot of people who just want to buy an omamori or something. (Suwa-san)

Even if most Japanese people will proclaim to be non-religious or atheist, they might still admit to believing in kami. Even so, many people in Japan feel that a religious attitude is important. About seventy-five percent of Japanese people claim to be non-religious. When Japanese people say this, it usually means they are not affiliated with any specific religion, rather than being atheists as we understand it in the Western context. In Japan, even some people with clear religious connections, such as Shintou or Buddhist priests, might proclaim themselves as secular people with no religious beliefs.[54] About two thirds of the thirty-five percent of people who claim to be religious in Japan indicate their religiousness being due to customary affiliations between their household and a Buddhist temple.[55] Most Japanese people I know and have talked to about this topic, see Japanese religions as more of a cultural aspect than religious or spiritual:

> Japanese religion is very varied in expression so it is quite difficult to explain simply. – It is a typical part of Japanese culture. The ceremonial events might seem religious to Europeans, but Japanese people do not think of them as religious. So it might be incompatible[56], I think. Even in a Christian church in Japan, the faith that one has might be less, even I personally think so. (Priest-san)

> It is obvious in Japan, it is part of the culture. (Souryo-san)

The word religion, religious and spiritual have slightly different meanings in Japanese culture as they do in the Western context. I talked about these differences especially with Priest-san, Souryo-san and Suwa-san, since they had clear connections with Japanese religions. Ama Toshimaro notes that if religion is understood in the context of Christianity or something similar, then Japanese Shintou traditions such as matsuris[57] cannot be seen as religious events. He also points out that Japanese people rarely have a similar religious mind-set or religious understanding as most Westerners.[58] Priest-san talked about this too:

> Even so, in Japan, unlike some other countries, where there is a national religion, those places are more involved in their people's religion. In Japan there was national Shintou about a hundred years ago, so now it is confusing. It is a religious expression that is not a religion, and it has not been organized yet, I think.
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> They are just not aware. The religion itself is avoided, but if they do not do the seasonal religious things, they will feel bad. I think Japanese people are the kind of people that have these religious feelings but

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[54] Ama 1996, 1-2.
[55] Nelson & Prohl, 2012, 11.
[56] He means it is incompatible with the European view of what religion is.
[57] 祭 a Japanese indigenous festival associated with Shintou.
[58] Ama 1996, 2-3.

> are not just aware of them. I am involved with the church so I really get thing kind of feeling. But this is an Anglican Church so the values and calendar are different from those of other religions so you can really feel it here. In Japanese society, there are a lot of people who are not interested in expressing their faith. (Priest-san)

Ama approaches Japanese religions from the point of view of natural and revealed religions. Revealed religion is what most Westerners will think of when thinking about religion. Examples of revealed religion are Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. Revealed religions are revealed to people through texts, preaching and they are managed by profitable organisations.[59] I would like to point out that I think profitable organisations managing religions does hold true even in Japan, at least to some extent. Many temples and shrines in Japan, especially in bigger cities, work like businesses. According to my friend, when going to a shrine to get a blessing for their child, they were treated quite coldly due to the fact that they chose the cheapest option. It is normal for people who choose more expensive options get better treatment. Things like buying an omamori[60] are usually seen as donations for the temples or shrines.

Natural religion is more difficult to define that revealed religion. With natural religions it is difficult to point out certain people who found the religion or periods when the religion first appeared. It is difficult to know how exactly it spread and how it was implemented into people's lives.[61] I will explain the major Japanese religions in theory before explaining what I feel is the general (secularised) nature of Japanese religiosity.

Most Japanese people will mix different religions together. It is commonly said that Japanese people will hold their happy live events in Shintou traditions, but maybe get married in a church and then be buried at a Buddhist cemetery in Buddhist traditions. Japanese people do not see any contradiction in this, because they do not separate different faiths and beliefs. Rather Japanese people see them as a mass where all parts are equally important, each with their own specific purpose.[62] The only Japanese people I know that only specifically avoid this are the Christians. I would say that their view on religion and spirituality is closer to the Western mindset. Priest-san mentioned this too:

> If there is someone who wants to practice their religion here from other religions, this is a Christian church with Christian services, so for those following other religions, I'd rather not have them do as

[59] Ama 1996, 3.
[60] お守り Japanese amulets sold in practically all temples and shrines. They all have different 'blessings' such as good luck, good health, traffic safety etc. Most common and popular types will be sold anywhere, but each shrine and temple have their own specialties.
[61] Ama 1996, 3.
[62] Vesterinen 1987, 156.

> they selfishly wanted by themselves when in this church. There might be people who want to have a dialogue and I might pray together with them, but while I have worked here I have not had such a thing happen yet. Hmm, oh and also, there are a lot of people who want to get married in this church, but if they only tell me to "lend the place and we do not need the priest's prayer", it is not connected to worship so I tell them to find some other place. I have had a lot of those people who just want the place. (Priest-san)

In general, it can be said that most Japanese people appreciate the functional specialisations of religions but have little interest in their doctrines. Japanese people compartmentalise their religions and traditions and therefore do not necessarily see contradictions between different religions or traditions. This sort of compartmentalising is typical in Japanese culture. This is what has allowed the harmonious coexistence of diverse religious traditions in Japan. Jan Swyngedouw called this 'unity in diversity and diversity in unity.'[63] Suwa-san mentioned this as well:

> Umm, I think the 'religion' that Japanese people have is different from Christian and Islamic people's 'religion'. First of all, I think the difference is that in Japanese religions there is no confession, like in Christianity or Islam. You do not need to declare that 'I am a Christian.' There is no system where you need to proclaim in a specific place that you are a Muslim. -- Religion is not really tied up to everyday life, perhaps. I think that maybe Japanese people are not that philosophical. I think that might be the difference.

4.1 Shintou

Shintou can be seen as deriving from natural religion, while not necessarily being one. It has no clear founder and no one can say when and where exactly Shintou was born. It is an animistic religion centred around worshipping nature. All different aspects of nature contain the divine, or kami, and kami are of nature, not separate from it in any way. The word Shintou[64] was not used until Chinese culture and religions started spreading to Japan. Before that there was no need for such a word. The word itself means way of the kami or god. The name was chosen to separate Shintou from Buddhism, or butsudou[65], which meant the way of Buddha.[66]

Kami worshipping is an integral part of Shintou. Kami are worshipped for their virtue and authority. There is no one creator deity who is an absolute ruler. Rather, all kami work in

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[63] Swyngedouw 1976, 294, 300.
[64] 神道
[65] 仏道
[66] Vesterinen 1982, 95.

harmony fulfilling their specific missions. All beings have kami spirit, so in a sense all things can be called kami or be regarded as potential kami. As a term, kami, is an honorific, which is why it is not applied to ordinary beings. Other than natural phenomena mentioned before, different guardian spirits, some animals and ancestral spirits can be referred to as kami. Ancestral spirits include all ancestral spirits from Imperial and noble ones to families' own ancestors. Other than individuals of notable qualities, even pitiable dead are considered kami as spirits after death. Guardian spirits can be the guardians of different lands or places, occupations, groups etc. The modern concept of kami is very broad, but it includes distinctive sense of justice, order and divide favor. This all implies to harmony and cooperation among the kami and between this world.[67]

There are no sacred writings in Shintou. It lacks any canonised creeds. Writings such as Kojiki[68] and Nihonshoki[69]/Nihongi[70] are sometimes considered authoritarian in Shintou, but they are never considered sacred like the Bible of Quran.[71] Kojiki, also known as Records of Ancient Matters. Kojiki was written by Ou no Yasumaro around year 711 by emperor Gemmei's order. It is a collection of poems and songs that is the oldest extant chronicles of Japan. Kojiki consists of the creation myth of Japan and its four islands and the tales of kami.[72]

Nihongi or Nihonshoki, or Chronicles of Japan, has is the first known piece of writing using the term Shintou. The word Shintou did not come to general use until the 13th century. Nihongi was written around the early 8th century. It was written as a means to differentiate the traditional Japanese faith from faiths introduced by foreigners, such as Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. It offers a more detailed account of Japanese history and mythology than its predecessor Kojiki.[73]

In Kojiki the kamis Izanagi no Mikoto and Izanami no Mikoto were husband and wife. They were the ones who descended from heaven and created the earth and other kamis. Izanami died during childbirth and her husband Izanagi went to underworld to meet and bring back his wife. Izanami's body had already rotted and Izanagi had to flee the underworld. He did not escape without trouble but did manage it in the end. However, he felt tainted and filthy after returning

[67] Ono 1992, 7-8.
[68] 古事記
[69] 日本書紀
[70] 日本紀
[71] Vesterinen 1982, 96.
[72] Irimoto 2000, 66.
[73] Ono 1992, 2-3.

from the underworld and went to do a misogi[74], a purification ceremony in water. While he was purifying himself in a river, new kami were brought forth from his everybody body part that were purified. In addition to being a story about creation of the world, it is also a story about how to purify oneself from the taint of death.[75] Ritual cleansing is of utmost importance in Japan and Shintou. Rather than having a concept of sin, Japanese people place importance on ritual purity and impurity.[76]

The three kami that were born from Izanagi during his purification ceremony were Amaterasu Ou Mikami, the Sun goddess, and hid two brothers Susano'o no Mikoto, the god of stroms and tsukiyomi no Mikoto the god of the moon. Depending on the source, one of the brothers misbehaves and angers Amaterasu, who is the ruler of heaven, who decided to hide in a cave. This causes the sun to disappear for a prolonged period. In the end the other kami manage to lure her out of the cave by dancing, celebrating and ultimately stripping just outside the cave, which peeks her curiosity. The misbehaving brother is then banished to the lower world of humans. Eventually Amaterasu sends her grandson Ninigi no Mikoto to earth to rule Japan. For this reason, all Japanese emperors' lineage can be traced back to Amaterasu.[77]

Shintou is not a united religion. It has different forms, such as popular Shintou, sectarian Shintou, shrine Shintou, Imperial Household Shintou, domestic Shintou and state Shintou, which I will take a closer look at in chapter 4.4. Popular Shintou is simply the everyday Shintou of Japanese people that includes kami-worship. These are the beliefs that have survived in an unorganized way from ancient times. Popular Shintou is also called folk Shintou or popular faith.[78]

Sectarian Shintou[79] consist of different heterogenous groups that the Meiji government branded as one in 1882. This was done to make shrine worship the state cult in the wake of nationalization of Shintou. In 1882 every religion that was not Buddhist or Christian in nature were lumped together under the name Shintou. Shintou was then divided into two: shrine Shintou and sect Shintou. Sect Shintous were places under the supervision of a specific government office. Afterwards several of these sects became independent religious bodies and nowadays there are dozens of different sects in Shintou that are labeled as belonging to

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[74] 禊
[75] Irimoto 2000, 66-67.
[76] Vesterinen 1987, 157.
[77] Ono 1992, 4-5.
[78] Ono 1992, 12.
[79] 教派神道 – Kyouha Shintou

sectarian Shintou. Even though these sects are independent from each other, many of their aspects are very similar and overlap often.[80]

Shrine Shintou[81] is the closest in nature to the original ancient Shintou centering around kami-worshipping. There have been shrines before the dawn of Japanese history. At the beginning of the 20th century there were almost two hundred thousand Shintou shrines in Japan. After the Meiji Restoration shrines were nationalized and organized. Their number decreased greatly and nowadays there are about eighty thousand Shintou shrines in Japan. After World War II the shrines became private institutions.[82]

Imperial Household Shintou[83] consists of the rituals conducted at the three shrines located within the palace grounds. These shrines are exclusively for the use of the Imperial family or some specific related matters. The Shintou ceremonies conducted at the court were once in the hands of two families: Imbes and Nakatomis. These traditions were passed down to each generation, but nowadays such hereditary system is no longer used. The ceremonies conducted are still almost the same as in the past. The Emperor himself leads and conducts the most important ceremonies and other are conducted by Imperial Household ritualist officers.[84]

Domestic Shintou refers to religious practices in the home with a Shintou home altar. Some houses in Japan will have a private garden shrine, but in most homes, there is only a small miniature shrine sitting somewhere on a clean, quite high shelf. These shrines vary greatly in size and quality and they are often dependent on the financial situation of the family and the faith of the head of the household. The shrines are usually kept clean and small offerings of rice, fruit or other edibles are made. On special days, certain items pertaining to the occasion might be placed before the kami inhabiting the shrine as tokens of thanksgiving.[85]

4.2 Buddhism

Buddhism came to Japan from Korea in 538 or 552 C.E. These dates do not actually necessarily imply when the religion was first introduced to Japan, but rather when it became politically

[80] Ono 1992, 13; Vesterinen 1987, 165.
[81] 神社神道 – Jinja Shintou
[82] Ono 1992, 14; Vesterinen 1987, 171.
[83] 皇室神道 Koushitsu Shintou
[84] Ono 1992, 13-14.
[85] Ono 1992, 58-59.

significant. Buddhism was not the only thing to come to Japan from Korea during the 6th century. Korean craftsmen with knowledge of more advanced technologies arrived as immigrants. The arrival and adaptation of Buddhism were not welcomed by all and a civil war ensued with the side supporting Buddhist adaptation winning.[86]

The Buddhism of Japan is unique compared to Buddhism elsewhere in the world. It adapted and was integrated well into the Japanese culture, making it one of the most developed forms of Buddhism in the world. It was the elite of Japan who were first attracted to Buddhism and it was able to become a nationalistic religion. Japanese Buddhism has several different schools and branches that have developed over time.[87]

In Japan all the different schools have their own unique religious rituals and ceremonies, in contrast to the Buddhism of other countries where different schools of Buddhism have the same rituals despite belonging to different schools. Japanese Buddhism is very strict about their members only belonging and practicing within their own schools.[88]

In Japanese Buddhism priests and monks are allowed to marry, unlike in many places around the world. This lead to the post of priest being hereditary. The title would pass from father to eldest son and in some cases even to daughters, if there were no sons to inherit the title. Temples and monasteries' ownership was passed down in certain families in a similar fashion. Because Buddhist priests and monks abandoned celibacy, they came more into contact with ancestors, their worship and ultimately death. Buddhism was the first religion or institution to offer funerary services in Japan. Even nowadays Buddhist temples are mostly in charge of cemeteries and funerals, having a complete monopoly over these matters.[89]

Buddhism and Shintou have a close relationship in Japan. Most Japanese people see themselves as both Buddhist and Shintou followers. This can be seen in census numbers, where the numbers of practitioners exceed the total number of people in Japan. Buddhism has about 96 million followers and Shintou has about 106 million followers. Japan has a population of about 127 million people.[90] Both have influenced each other's traditions and nowadays they can

[86] Ellwood 1992, 23.
[87] Vesterinen 1987, 177.
[88] Vesterinen 1987, 177.
[89] Vesterinen 1987, 177.
[90] Nelson & Prohl, 2012, 11.

even live side by side, literally. Temples might have shrines built close-by or the other way around. Sometimes one religion's divine will even have a residence in the other's grounds.[91]

4.3 Other Religions

Nowadays Japan is open to new religions and religious movements. Some of the bigger other religions include Christianity, different cults with roots in either Shintou or Buddhism and other new religions. The flourishing of new religions was made possible by true religious freedom and disestablishment of the imperial way. This happened mostly after World War II. Even though several minor religions were established long ago, most were revived or started to truly flourish only after the war in 1945.[92] I will only very briefly cover Christianity, as it is perhaps the most influential religion outside Shintou and Buddhism. Most other big minor religions in Japan are offshoots of either Shintou or Buddhism.

Christianity came to Japan after 1543. Francis Xavier landed in Kagoshima and started preaching, with permission, about Christianity. Japanese people and Buddhist priests listened and were even encouraged by their leaders to turn to Christianity. Even so, most Japanese people were more interested in the foreign merchandise being brought after the preachers. The missionaries took advantage of this and the merchandise was only sold to those willing to listen to their Christian message. One of the reasons why Christianity was so willingly accepted was the fact that it was often mistaken as a school of Buddhism.[93]

During Toyotomi Hideyoshi's rule, Christians were persecuted, because of political conflicts and Christian's rise in power was seen as a threat to Japan. Christian preachers were told to leave the country and even though not all listened in 1639, all of Japan was closed to foreigners for over two hundred years. Dutchmen were the only ones allowed to do any kind of trade with Japan. Persecutions of Christians continued till the 19th century and many gave up their beliefs. In 1873 laws forbidding Christianity and its practice were abolished. Nowadays about one percent of Japanese people are Christian.[94]

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[91] Vestrinen 1982, 108.
[92] Ellwood 1992, 49.
[93] Vesterinen 1982, 123.
[94] Vesterinen 1982, 125-126.

4.4 Secularisation

As a term, secular means something relating to or of something worldly, as opposed to something religious or spiritual. Therefore, secularisation as a term means the process of something religious or spiritual in nature becoming worldly or non-religious. Most research on secular and secularisation is in the context of the Western culture, but there is some research on the secularisation of other cultural contexts and even the context of Japan. I did not originally intend to include secularisation as a point of view for this research, but the concept kept coming up in one way or another from my data, previous research, my previous knowledge on Japanese culture and religion and my reflections on all of them. The further I got in my research the more prominent this concept became, which is why I chose to not just include it, but also base my research more around it.

The modern concept of secularisation began in the 17th century during the scientific revolution with philosophers and legal theorists in Europe.[95] According to Beckford, secularisation is a concept that is at the same time central to academic discussion and inherently problematic.[96] So like the concept of religion, it can be very difficult to explain. One simple conceptualisation is people not going to church anymore. According to Vernon Pratt this is the common basic idea that people have about secularisation. This basic idea does however include a distinctive idea of a certain way of life that comes with being 'secular'.[97]

Another way to look at the relationship between religious and secular is to look at what they stand for in relation to each other. Secular can be seen as a neutral public sphere that is available to us all. This sphere is governed by institutions and forms of reasoning that are reputedly non-controversial. Secular is identified with terms such as 'real' 'natural' and 'rational'. Religion is the exact opposite of these. Religion is a private sphere based on revelations and authorities of scriptures or traditions that are beyond the scope of public reason. The terms used for religion are 'unreal', 'supernatural' or 'irrational'. These terms and concept are of course filled with assumptions that might be heavily biased.[98]

Originally the Japanese people had no concept of religion, which meant that they had no concept for secular either. As I mentioned before, the Western concept of secularisation cannot

[95] Pratt 1970, 11; Beckford 2003, 34.
[96] Beckford 2003, 32.
[97] Pratt 1970, 1.
[98] Tregenza 2014, 173.

be fitted into the Japanese context as it is. Therefore, I will introduce some of the ideas (Western) researchers have theorised and introduced about Japanese secularisation.

Modern Japanese secularisation can be traced to the Meiji era. During the Meiji era, Japanese leaders and policymakers promoted, influenced by Western thinking, religious freedom by separating religion from the public sphere. In other words, Shintou was removed from the political sphere and ecclesial authority. The Shintou the policymakers were referring to was state Shintou, which has since then been disestablished. It composed of national ceremonies, national teachings and political teachings or patriotic duty. They contrasted this state Shintou to a religion characterised by beliefs. Nowadays this distinction could be described as the difference between personal religion and the Shintou secular state.[99]

Even if the term Shintou secular, which can be used to describe state Shintou, sounds contradictory it is not necessarily so. State Shintou was neither a theocracy nor a state religion. Japanese people were not expected to convert to Shintou, rather they were subjects, not converts. Shintou was rather seen as the traditional way of life for the Japanese people. The purpose of state Shintou was not to create a powerful majority church nor a confessional unity across the country. It was argued that participating in state Shintou was compatible to religious freedom.[100]

Shintou was not the only religion in Japan to go through secularisation. Japanese Buddhism went through it too, sort of. Buddhism in Japan has never been in a dominant position over the people's thoughts and behaviour in Japan, but it has had some political influence and military power, but even so it has never claimed universal authority in Japan. In other words, Buddhism has never really gone through secularisation as a loss of ideological control. Rather Japan's Buddhism went through different political phases, which Max Eger compares to phases of secularisation. Japanese Buddhism had been closely controlled by political authorities since its introduction to Japan and even though it eventually gained more and more influence and power, it ultimately came under the control of the state once more. In the beginning of the Meiji era, Buddhist land-holdings were confiscated by the state, which is a reminiscent of the classical use of the word secularisation, with Emperor Joseph II of the Holy Roman Empire confiscating church possessions.[101]

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[99] Josephson 2012, 133.
[100] Josephson 2012, 133; Eger 1980, 13.
[101] Eger 1980, 14-15.

According to Eger, the secularisation of Japan was tied to the modernisation of Japan. After Japan opened its borders to foreigners once again after over two hundred years of isolation, Japan wanted to catch up with the Westerns in order not to be colonised. So, Japan started to emulate the Western culture in order to modernise their country, especially in terms of science and technology. Japan however, took great care to retain their traditional social structures and values, which they still hold onto even today. Rather than modernisation in a Western sense, this could also be called the Westernisation of Japan. This is because, rather than the aim of Japan's modernisation was to gain parity with the West. Even in the present day, Japan has been Westernised only to a limited extent. It was during this period of modernisation that the Japanese term for religion, shuukyou, was developed. It had been used before in Buddhist technical writings, but not in everyday use.[102]

Fukuzawa Yukichi (1834-1901) was perhaps the most influential figure in Japanese thinking in the second half of the nineteenth century. He started out in the elite samurai class at the end of the Tokugawa period and so he was educated in Confucian classics while remaining distant from superstition. As a young member of Meiji era intellectual elite, Fukuzawa was educated in Western languages, philosophy, culture and history. He was especially well read in Scottish Enlightenment thinkers. He was a supporter of the modernisation and Westernisation of Japan, because he felt that Japan could become a civilised nation that was well equipped in both war and peace, just like the Western nations. Fukuzawa believed that religion was not necessary to attain civilisation, rather rationality and ethics based on science were more important. Even so he wrote about eighty essays on religion. In his essays he had a tendency to disparage Japanese popular religious life as based on ignorance.[103]

Loyalty to the nation was of more importance to Fukuzawa and other Meiji elitists. This meant committing to Japan becoming a rich country with a strong military. This was called fukoku kyouhei[104], that could be said to the slogan of the Meiji era. Even so, inspiring and keeping the loyalty of the masses seemed difficult with religion to maintain morality. Fukuzawa notes that this dilemma was true in both Japan and the West, but that in Japan the samurai were able to maintain a high personal morality without religion in part thanks to Confucianism. Fukuzawa did not support implementing Confucianism to the masses, because he saw it as unfit and outdated for the modern Japan. So, his recommendation was for the government to nurture

[102] Eger 1980, 13; Hardacre 2011, 2.
[103] Hardacre 2011, 3-4.
[104] 富国強兵 - Enrich the state, strengthen the military.

indigenous piety. He believed that the masses would be able to cultivate the same kind of morality and loyalty as the elite, once the masses grew more rational and discarded religion and superstition. In his vision for Japan, religion would be supplanted by philosophy. The problem of secular morality and its source still remained unsolved.[105]

Helen Hardacre calls the secularisation in Japan's case a project of the elite. Japan's elite who supported the modernisation and secularisation of Japan in turned influenced the policy makers and leaders to debate the social roles of religion and create bureaucratic mechanisms for the production of a secular populace. In other words, Japan's secularisation was not a passive natural by-product of modernisation, but rather a conscious effort of the secular-minded elite.[106]

As with previous examples, the Japanese religions have become quite secularised. The way I see it, Japan cannot be considered a fully 'secular' or 'religious' country by Western standards. I tried to understand the religious and secular concepts in Japan's context as something distinctly Japanese, that do not necessarily need to be fitted into Western ideas and concepts. Traditions are important in Japan, which I think can be seen not only in my data, but in the general attitude towards religion and secular in Japan. As long as religions serve a purpose they are important to Japanese people, whether or not they believe in their teachings. I think this train of thought is what defines Japanese religiosity and secularity. Religions and their traditions have value to the Japanese people, because they serve a specific practical purpose in their lives, such as blessing babies or burying loved ones. In other words, some traditions like hanami, might have started off with religious traditions and beliefs attached to them, but what has survived to this date, after secularisation, is the practical purpose they offer.

5. Hanami in Japanese Culture

Hanami in Japanese culture has long traditions that are nearly forgotten nowadays. The way hanami is celebrated or done differs from person to person and location greatly, so I felt it necessary to explain in detail what the word 'hanami' actually means in Japanese language and all of the cultural implications it includes. Even if things like hanami rules or etiquette might seem obvious to many people, I felt it would offer a deeper understanding of the basics of

[105] Hardacre 2011, 5.
[106] Hardacre 2011, 13.

hanami for most people, especially those not familiar with Japanese culture and traditions. I wanted to avoid any common foreigner mistakes when thinking about hanami, seeing as most foreigners only know of a single type of sakura hanami, when real the hanami is a lot broader concept.

When most people think about hanami, they solely think of sakura and the cherry blossom viewing in early April. Many people, especially outside of Japan, might not be aware that even though sakura is the most common, beloved and famous of flowers to be viewed by the Japanese people, it is however not the only one. There are and have been at least a few other flowers that have attracted people's attention enough to have people celebrate their full bloom. So, the concept of hanami can be quite broad, if not narrowed down.[107] I will mostly concentrate on the most well-known form of hanami, the picnic, but I would still consider other forms of using flowers as objects of admiration as hanami as well. For this reason, I will shortly explain a few of the other flowers used in Japan with the purpose of admiring them. This is so that the real idea of admiring and respecting flowers in Japan can be better understood by the readers who are not familiar with this aspect of Japanese culture. Japanese people have a strong relationship with nature, which I will explain briefly as well. I think it could give people some insight into the connection that Japanese people have with nature and the greenery around them, including the different objects of hanami.

5.1 Japan and Nature

The first thing to understand about the relationship between Japanese culture and hanami is the importance of nature in Japanese culture in general. This relationship can be seen in both material and immaterial culture, such as art, material products and attitudes towards nature. The Japanese people can be said to live in harmony with nature, unlike the Westerners who allegedly try to conquer nature. Whether or not this is true however, is debatable. This need for harmony with nature can be seen as rising from Japanese sense of aesthetics that greatly values all things beautiful. Rather than just an appreciation for beauty, this sense of aesthetics also includes religious appreciation. For Japanese people, beauty can only be truly appreciated by

[107] Clement 1911, 1.

religion, for without religion one cannot detect and enjoy genuine beauty. This kind of thinking can be observed for example in Shintou.[108]

In ancient Japanese religions, such as Shintou, there is an intimate relationship between man, kami and nature. In Japanese mythology natural phenomena are the offspring of deities. Thus, nature itself can be seen as divine. The inspiration or feeling of awe and spirituality that people can experience from nature springs from kami aboding in natural features, such as the moon, flowers and rocks. In Shintou nature and spiritual world are inseparable. Later this relationship with nature influenced Japanese Buddhism.[109]

Japanese people have a strong identification with nature. There are two ways of identification with nature: emotional identification and transiency of man and nature. Emotional identification means the way humans find expression of emotion in natural objects and phenomena, such as rain, mountains and flowers. Human transiency is associated with the transiency of nature. They are both seen as essentially the same thing, because they are both subject to the same principle of existence. This identification with nature can be seen as an artificial barrier or a mediator between man and nature. When this barrier is removed, only then can one see into the living heart of nature and live with it. This is the true meaning of love.[110]

Even if Japanese people consider themselves as living in harmony with nature, there are several cases of Japanese people trying to control and dominate nature ever since the medieval age. These cases are over-exploitation of natural resources for various reasons. For example, during the Edo period, neo-Confucian ethics saw exploiting natural resources for the benefit of mankind as a duty. Overpopulation during this period made the exploitation more prominent. Even though there were some regulations imposed, they were mostly due to political reasons, rather than conserving the nature. In modern times factories and their pollution have caused several incidents and environmental disasters that have caused the harm to people in the thousands.[111]

This kind of behaviour might seem contradictory from allegedly nature loving Japanese people. This can be explained in how Japanese people view nature in a conventionalised rather than

[108] Kalland & Asquith 1997, 1-2.
[109] Kalland & Asquith 1997, 2.
[110] Kalland & Asquith 1997, 3-4.
[111] Kalland & Asquith 1997, 5-6.

empirical way. So rather than experiencing nature, Japanese people are traditionally used to perceiving nature as an aesthetic fusion of nature, religion and art. Industrialisation and rapid population growth caused the loss of natural areas, which caused the Japanese people to adapt and experience nature through and in art.[112]

Some might even argue that the Japanese people's appreciation for nature is somewhat idealised and limited. According to a study by Stephen R. Keller (1991, 1993) on people's attitudes to wildlife in Japan, United States and Germany, Japanese people's appreciation of nature was limited to very specific and controlled situations, such as isolated landscapes or specific species considered unusually aesthetic. Any features outside of these boundaries tended to be ignored, considered irrelevant or judged unappealing. A UNEP study found that Japanese people valued control and mastery over nature rather than harmony with it.[113]

Whether or not the Japanese people truly appreciate nature or not, most Japanese people will still proclaim a special relationship to it. Most will say that they love nature and go to specifically admire it from time to time, as in the case of hanami. So whatever Japanese people's true relationship with nature is, it is probably quite complicated. The relationship with nature does come up with a few of my categories in the analysis chapter since it also came up in my data, but it is not the main interest of my research, so I chose to do just a short explanation of it and reflect a bit on it in my analysis. Even if secularisation can be seen in the relationship with nature (from religious appreciation to conventional usage), I chose to keep this section short so that it would not take over my whole research.

5.2 Seasonal Japan and the Different Objects of Hanami

Japanese people often like to point out and take pride in their nature and four seasons[114] (or five if you include the rainy season as its own season). Like Kalland and Asquith, I feel that for Westerners this obsession with seasons might come as a surprise.[115] At least that was the case for me, when I first started getting familiar with Japanese culture. Ackermann even says it expresses something of 'fundamental importance'. Each season has their own colour schemes, flowers, fruits etc. used in many contexts, such as clothing patterns, restaurant menus and even

[112] Kalland & Asquith 1997, 6.
[113] Kalland & Asquith 1997, 6-7.
[114] 四季 – shiki.
[115] Kalland & Asquith 1997, 10.

tableware. Seasonal products are common in Japan and some things are strongly associated with certain seasons.[116] Other than hanami, there are other seasonal viewings as well. The autumn leaf viewing is called momijigari[117], which means watching Momiji. Momijigari can also be referred to as kouoyu[118]. Tsukimi[119] means watching the moon and it is done during early autumn, when the moon is at its most beautiful, according to Japanese people.

> It's an event that allows you to feel the seasons. For example, in the summer you go to the ocean, fall is Kyoto's kouyou. You understand kouyou? (T: Yes.) kouyou-style, nn, watching.. since it's an event to feel the seasons it's not necessarily definitely important, but … umm, enjoying the four seasons. It's the feeling of the coming of spring. Long time ago, I do not the reasons of the people from long time ago, but I think the current Japanese people mostly think that. (Sunny)

Sakura is one of those things. Sakura is the representative of spring and it could easily be seen in the interviews I conducted. For that reason, I chose to include the floral calendar of Japan and a little explanation of the pride the Japanese people find in their four seasons. Like Ackermann, I would like to point out that to Japanese people, this talk of four seasons is completely obvious, which makes it a difficult topic to discuss.[120] I found this out while I was doing my interviews. Most Japanese people found the talk of hanami so profoundly obvious or natural that they had hardly anything to say about it and found it difficult to say any more than a few words.

Ernest W. Clement's research on the Japanese Floral Calendar (1911) had some examples of the different types of flowers admired in Japan during each month. In Japanese the word hana does not only include the flowers or blossoms, but also the twigs, leaves, grasses and so on. So, their concept of flower is different from its Western counterpart, since the floral calendar includes some hana that are trees that do not actually have any flowers or blossoms.[121] All of my interviewees contrasted hanami (as in sakura viewing) with the coming of spring. Sunny even mentioned that sakura was an important part of the Japanese calendar and it represented the 4th month and spring:

> It's a thing of the Japanese calendar. January 1st is New Year. March 3rd is hinamatsuri, the flower season in April is hanami, May 5th is Children's Day, Obon is in August. It's one of the things in the

[116] Ackermann 1997, 36.
[117] 紅葉狩 – Literally autumn leaf hunting.
[118] 紅葉
[119] 月見
[120] Ackermann 1997, 36-37.
[121] Clement 1911, 1.

> Japanese calendar, like those other things. Rather than something of the heart, it's something obvious, the coming of a season. (Sunny)

According to Clement the "old style" lunar calendar of Japan had the following program (left) and since Japan adopted the Gregorian calendar, it now looks like this (right):

First month - Pine (around February)	January - Pine
Second month - Plum (around March)	February - Plum
Third month - Cherry (around April)	March - Peach
Fourth month – Wistiria (and so on)	April - Cherry
Fifth month – Iris	May - Wistiria
Sixth month - Tree peony	June - Iris
Seventh month – Lespedeza	July - Morning-glory
Eighth month – Eularia	August - Lotus
Ninth month – Chrysanthemum	September - "Seven grasses"
Tenth month – Maple	October - Maple
Eleventh month – Willow	November - Chrysanthemum
Twelfth month – Paulownia	December – Camellia[122]

So even though most remain the same as in the lunar calendar, some of the seasons for the flowers were not applicable to the Gregorian calendar and were thus changed.[123] All of these different flowers have their own months, symbolic meanings and traditions. Rather than explaining all of these hana, I will take a closer look at sakura and the other 'seasonal flowers' to clarify the importance and meaning of the Japanese seasonal calendar and its flowers. The importance of the seasonal flowers in Japan cannot be underestimated, since during each season the corresponding flower can be seen everywhere and Japanese people even expect it and take great pride in it. Personally, I found this a little on the obsessive side, the first few times I visited Japan, but have gotten used to it since.

Though not technically flower viewing, I chose to include a small explanation of one of the other trees, since it shows that Japanese people have a fondness of putting flowers on display, thus being able to view them at specific times. As I mentioned before, hanami literally means viewing flowers. Like in the case of the pine, it does not always have to be in public spaces or outside one's own home. This emphasises the importance Japanese people place on flowers, especially the seasonal ones.

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[122] Clement 1911 1-2.
[123] Clement 1911, 2.

5.2.1 Sakura of Spring

Sakura is a special thing to Japanese people. According to Katsuki Toshio this can be realized every spring as the media and shops are filled with hanami and sakura related content. It feels like the whole country of Japan is partaking in the festivities surrounding sakura. Even different arts and sciences partake in this celebration.[124]

> Hana wa sakura
> Hito wa bushi.

The flower is sakura, the man is the warrior. This is an old Japanese proverb that originated back in the medieval period. It can be analysed to mean that just as warriors were considered the foremost among humans, the sakura is the foremost among flowers. The traditional spirit of admiring the ethereal sakura flowers' beauty and virtue is an inseparable part of the characteristics of the Japanese people. This love can be seen in the huge popularity of the sakura and all the works of art, literature and crafts it has inspired. Therefore, sakura can be said to be the flower of flowers or the queen of flowers in Japan.[125] According to Clement, sakura symbolises loyalty and patriotism.[126]

Sakura trees are part of the prunus family, which include several fruit bearing trees. Most sakura species, especially the ones used for hanami, do not however produce any fruit. The English term cherry blossom can therefore be misleading. This same logic applies to the next flower ume, which is translated as plum blossom.

Sakura trees have several different species, but most people are not very aware of this fact.[127] Japan has the most variety in species when it comes to sakura trees and cherries. This is largely due to the love the nation has for sakura according to Miyoshi.[128] Many sakura petals range from white to light pink in color, but there are some darker pink, yellow and even green species of sakura. According to Clement, amongst the sakura, the best colour is the pale pink. The absence of green leaves when sakura are in full bloom is a factor in their sublime beauty. The green leaves appear at a later time. The fallen petals in the ground are often thought of as pink or white snow.[129] The fluttering of petals, that forms the 'snow' in the ground is called hana

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[124] Katsuki 2015, 'For starters'. (I only had access to the kindle version of this book and it lacked page numbers completely. I will therefore be using the chapter numbers and/or names to identify the location where I referring to.)
[125] Miyoshi 1934, 25.
[126] Clement 1911, 22.
[127] Miyoshi 1934, 7.
[128] Miyoshi 1934, 11.
[129] Clement 1911, 21.

fubuki, or flower petal shower.[130] The number of petals in a single flower can be anywhere from five to over a hundred. The blooming times differ between species. Different forms and shapes for the trees are also common.

The most common species of sakura is yamazakura or the mountain sakura. Yamazakura can be found virtually everywhere in Japan. Japanese people have purposely cultivated this sakura for several uses by planting them in different places such as gardens, road sides or at shrine and temple grounds, so that people could admire their beauty.[131] This was the first purposely cultivated species of sakura. Sakura have been purposely planted by nobles around Kyoto area since late 8th century. Especially Arashiyama has been attracting visitors during the flower season. Later this tradition of planting sakura spread to other areas as well.[132] Yamazakura, being the most numerous and far spread of the sakura species, has been the subject of all the love from people and the inspiration for the songs, poems and pieces of art since the Heian period. According to Miyoshi, this simple and dignified beauty of their flowers and their elegance is the reason (yamazakura) has earned the name "national flower".[133]

Another variety of sakura is the satozakura, or the domestic sakura. During Tokugawa period when Edo (modern Tokyo) became the center of civilisation and culture this species of sakura appeared as the result of the progress and advancements in botanical studies and horticulture. Satozakura are actually a group of garden variety sakura. They have several different subspecies and names, but their distinctive characteristics are the comparatively large flowers, beautiful colors and the fragrance they possess. Since these sakura pleased people, efforts were made to enhance and multiply them by means of crafting and other similar devices.[134]

The earliest subspecies or variety of satozakura has been recorded around the year 1555. This variety is known as fugenzou. They were already greatly admired by the people of the Muromachi period, but other varieties of satozakura emerged around the year 1750 and later. During this period, many daimyous (feudal lords) were lovers or students of horticulture and sakura, thus getting rare saplings and planting them in their gardens. Their love for the trees was so great that they even had artists sketch and prepare illustrated albums of sakura. These albums remain even today and they are valued by botanists and other enthusiasts.[135] Many

[130] Shikitari 1996, 59.
[131] Miyoshi 1934, 11.
[132] Miyoshi 1934, 14-15.
[133] Miyoshi 1934, 21-22.
[134] Miyoshi 1934, 16.
[135] Miyoshi 1934, 16.

sakura were planted and immortalised in sketches during the Tokugawa period, but many of them were lost as the feudal regime fell and great changed came about during the following period. There were several sakura lovers among the gardeners and professional horticulturists of the time and so after the Meiji Restoration (1868) they were able to transplant all of the rare saplings they had previously collected and kept safe. This is what saved the satozakura from being extinct.[136]

The average Japanese person is not likely to be very informed about the different kinds of sakura species. Sometimes the intentional cultivation of sakura can lead to potential problems with the different subspecies. Suwa-san felt that this creation of new species might not always be intentional:

> I think Japanese people do not really care about that either. But you know, this[137] sakura as a tree, as a plant is a little unnatural. It does not spread via seeds nor cuttings. It is done by grafting. So all the trees around the world originate from the same tree. It can only be spread via human hands. That is why when the season comes they all bloom and fall at the same time. They have no individuality, so if a disease appears, they will all die and disappear. Even so, the lifespan of one is about 60 to 70 years. It is really short for such a big tree. A normal shidarezakura can live for hundreds of years, so less than a hundred years is not that long. So it is really strange. Rather than being extremely artificial I'd say that it was accidentally created. (Suwa-san)

In 1919 a Law for the Preservation of Places of Scenic Beauty and the Protection of Historic and Natural Monuments was enacted so many famous flower resorts or special sakura have come to receive special care and attention as protected.[138] Although the most notable merit of sakura trees is their beauty, and therefore they are mostly valued as a decorative plant, they have other merits as well. The tree produces very fine wood that can be used to make a variety of things ranging from furniture to other useful objects. The bark is used in decorative purposes and the flowers can be pickled in salt and soaked in a cupful of hot water to make a (horrible) substitute for tea. The leaves are preserved and used to wrap sakuramochi, a common Japanese dessert.[139]

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[136] Miyoshi 1934, 18.

[137] He was talking about the big sakura tree in the shrine where he worked and where I interviewed him. As I understood it, it was a subspecies of shidarezakura.

[138] Miyoshi 1934, 21.

[139] Miyoshi 1934, 68.

5.2.2 Ume

Easily mistaken as sakura by foreigners, ume is a relatively popular object of hanami in Japan. It blooms a little before sakura. Ume symbolises feminine virtue and sweetness. In the past it was even a popular name for girls. Ume season is a bit earlier than sakura season, so it is a good pick for those not wanting to wait till April for the sakura season. Sometimes it is even considered the hanami of the elders. Another possible reason for the popularity of ume is the fact that it blooms just after the coldest season in Japan, the kan, and therefore can be seen as a harbinger of spring.[140] Though nowadays it seems that, at least according to my interviews, sakura is seen as more of the bringer of spring. Like sakura, ume has several different species and the colors range from white to pink and hot pink. Historically hanami was often an ume viewing party, but later sakura became the most popular one. Like sakura hanami, it is mentioned in historical records and ume has been and is still a great source of inspiration for many artists.[141] According to my Suwa-san there are a few possible reasons as to why ume hanami became sakura hanami:

> Umm, I think that was created, it is a mood created by wise men. There is a famous song by Motoori Norinaga that says that the real Japanese heart is the refreshing feeling and atmosphere of yamazakura that shines in the morning. Later wise men then messed it up a bit. – A really long time ago the flower was ume. I am not sure when or why it changed to sakura, so it is very difficult to say why sakura has such a mental influence on Japanese people.
>
> The thing with ume and sakura is that with sakura you can just leave it alone and it will be fine, but with ume you have to do your very best to take care of it, cut it into the right shape and so on. So sakura is easier. (Suwa-san)

Suisui felt that the ume season, which was when we were doing our hanami and interview in Kyoto Gosho, was still too cold for hanami and that ume itself had an image of being a flower of cold season:

> There's ume hanami too, but it's not as popular as sakura hanami. Indeed, it's the favourite of old ladies and such. Ume has the kind of feeling that it blooms even in the midst of coldness. (Suisui)

When I asked Sunny about the change from ume to sakura she felt it possible that the was change to sakura was due to the fact that the Japanese people wanted to make hanami into a 'Japanese thing'. Since according to her, Japanese people often take foreign ideas and concept and try to fit them into their own culture and then claim them as more or less Japanese concepts:

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[140] Clement 1911, 12.
[141] Clement 1911, 13.

> After all, sakura only bloom in the spring. Spring is the best time for picnic like this. Summer is too hot and winter is too cold. And the most beautiful flowers bloom. You wouldn't do hanami under summer flowers. It's too hot and sakura is especially beautiful, probably. There aren't really any flowers that bloom in the winter. Even ume… They won't bloom like this. With sakura, the number of trees is great. So sakura hanami is special. -- I think it's very Japanese-like. Japanese will take what they find comfortable and adopt it into their own culture. That's a Japanese characteristic. If they find things from other cultures interesting, they will take those too. Like that. So this might be a country that specializes in taking in comfortable things for itself. (Sunny)

5.2.3 Himawari of Summer

Sunflower is the seasonal flower of summer in Japan. Though not similarly celebrated as sakura, ume and momiji, the sunflowers still represent summer for Japanese people. Sunflower fields are especially famous in Hokkaido and there is even an annual sunflower festival held nationwide around July and August. Like with sakura hanami, people will go to see these large fields of sunflowers with millions of flowers to enjoy the view. Sunflower prints and art are common during the summer season.

Since the sunflower is not originally native to Japan it was brought to Japan by foreigners. It was brought to Japan by the Chinese in the 17th century. Chinese in turned were introduced to the flower by the Russians.

There is a day called Himawari no hi[142] or Sunflower day in Japan. This is in commemoration of Sunflower number 1, a satellite launched by JAXA[143] on July 14th 1977. Sunflower number 1 was the first of 8 similarly names satellites. These satellites are meteorological satellites and they are used for purposes like predicting the impact of typhoons. Like with sakura hanami, himawari no hi is about appreciating the sunflowers, though it is not nearly as popular or widespread as hanami, it represents the summer for Japanese people.

5.2.4 Momiji of Autumn

The modern maple in October can be thought of as the autumn equivalent of sakura hanami. In Japanese it is called kouyou or momijigari. Kouyou is similar to the Finnish ruska. It is when the autumn leaves start turning yellow and red. Like with sakura hanami, Japanese people will purposely go and see these trees and admire the colours and scenery, often even doing domestic

[142] ひまわりの日
[143] Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency.

traveling to see the best and most famous places or meisho. Momiji or maple leaves will turn bright red before falling off for the winter.[144]

Traditionally in Japan, the change of the momiji leaves symbolises change in feelings, like love. For example, a woman can send their lover a momiji leave or branch to signify their desire to break up. Comparing momiji leaves to baby hands or delicate hands is common. This is a compliment and it is due to the fact that the leaf shape is similar to a small hand. Like sakura or ume, momiji is a favourite of the artists. Momiji prints and red colours are very common in the autumn time. Japanese people will often do domestic traveling just to see the momiji or kouyou in famous and popular places.[145]

5.2.5 Matsu of Winter

Pine is the only choice for the first month, since it is the winter season. For New Year's the Japanese people decorate their houses with kadomatsu (gate pines) or matsukazari (pine decorations) and the first seven days of the year are called matsu no uchi or pine week. Even though the pine has no blossom, it still considered a flower in Japan. The pine always keeps its green colour, even in the winter so for Japanese people it symbolises constancy, endurance, health and longevity.[146] The kadomatsu are placed in pairs in front of one's gate. The left one or the one on the side representing honor is a prickly rough pine representing men. The softer and graceful one on the right side represents women.[147] New Year is the most important and biggest of Japanese holidays. It is the time when people will have a few rare days off work and school and they will spend it with their families.

5.3 The History of Hanami

The first time the term hanami was used to describe viewing sakura flowers was during the Heian period (794-1185) in the famous novel Genjimonogatari or The Tale of Genji. According to Miyoshi an important thing about sakura are its nearly forgotten origins, going back over a thousand years.[148] What has not been forgotten is the fact that hanami began as an ancient

[144] Shirane 2012, 23.
[145] Clement 1911, 47-48.
[146] Clement 1911, 3.
[147] Clement 1911, 4.
[148] Miyoshi 1934, 7.

ritual seeking to renew life through contact with nature and the seasonal cycle. This ritual later secularised and turned into entertainment for everyone, not just the nobles.[149] I have only found a few bits and pieces of information on the history of hanami, so it seems that the history indeed is nearly forgotten, even by my interviewees, seeing as no one knew anything about the history of the ritual they were practicing.

However, most of my interviews simply said that they did not really know anything about the history of hanami. Most of them admitted to never even thinking about it, it is just something that they do.

> I really don't know. After being born it's like… this thing called hanami has just been there. I don't really know anything about it. Japanese people don't really think about this. It's just about the culture and people just kind of do it. (Tarou-kun)
>
> Hanami is Japan's traditional culture. Everyone, grandparents, parents, since long ago have done it and I too have done it since I was a child. I think that's Japan's culture. (Suisui)
>
> I must admit I do not know much about it. I think the Japanese people have mostly forgotten about it. (Rouba-san)

It is believed that the hanami given by the Imperial Court during periods after the Heian period has its roots in the year 812 when Emperor Saga visited a noted garden of Shinsenen to view the flowers there. In the present this court function is held at the Imperial gardens to Shinjuku, Tokyo[150]

A common species of sakura, yaezakura, or the double flowered or manifold petal sakura appeared after yamazakura. This species of sakura dates back to the Nara period. According to a historic record, in 1195 at Nara's Toudaiji temple, a religious memorial ceremony was held during the full bloom of yaezakura.[151]

From Heian to Kamakura period hanami was the pastime of nobles and the elite. Around the Warring States period it became a pastime among the common people. Some famous painting from the Momoyama period (1568-1615) depicted common people in a variety of dresses playing drums or the flute while others hold sakura branches and dance around. There was a famous play where the protagonist travels in Kyoto from one famous hanami spot to another while contemplating the hanami craze among the common people.[152]

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[149] Shirane 2012, 23.
[150] Miyoshi 1934, 24-25.
[151] Miyoshi 1934, 13-14.
[152] Shirane 2012, 169.

In 1594 Toyotomi Hideyoshi aka Taikou Hideyoshi, had a hanami at Yoshinoyama. He invited many key members of the military among other elite. The hanami lasted for a few days.[153]

During the Genroku period (1688-1703) when it is said the habits of luxury gaiety were at their peak, the practice of hanami was indulged to its full potential. A floral calendar, a sort of a guide book for sakura, was invented and published annually. The floral calendar held information on the best places and times to enjoy hanami. Some of these calendars still remain, but many of the noted sakura groves or trees are long gone by now.[154]

Cultivation of flowers has been a part of the life of the elite of Japan for a long time. Ever since the Heian period, sakura and ume have been the most beloved of flowers. Since many sakura and ume grew on shrine or temple grounds, some of them even had religious significance. At some point during the 18th century, gardening in Japan took a gradual turn to the grass type flowers thus allowing easier gardening to be done in private gardens. This led to the urban common people being more aware and gaining interest in public "nature" activities, such as hanami.[155]

When Tokyo was still called Edo during the Shogunate government, the townspeople of all ages and both genders used to dress up and head to Ueno or Mukoujima intending to enjoy the sakura flowers' beauty to the fullest. This practice was not however limited to the people of Edo, since it became commonplace even in the countryside and thus it developed into a national tradition.[156]

As can be seen in the information I managed to gather, most of the historical data are records of people of high status attending or hosting hanami parties or quite simple records of public hanami. Even though I was not able to obtain any more detailed information, the earliest records are dated as far back as the 9th century. The information I managed to gather does reveal how the nature of hanami had changed over the centuries. It may have started as a special or spiritual ritual or pastime for the nobles, but when the social change allowed it, even the commoners joined in on the tradition. Even if the tradition of hanami changed from its original, the most important part, which is the flower viewing, has remained the same, even if the flower has changed from ume to sakura. Another explanation for the formation of the custom of

[153] Miyoshi 1934, 15.
[154] Miyoshi 1934, 24-24.
[155] Shirane 2012, 111-112.
[156] Miyoshi 1934, 23.

hanami is the preparation of rice growing of ancient people. The preparations started around the same time as the sakura were in full bloom. The people went to the mountains, where the sakura were and prayed to the kami for a good harvest. The people were so taken in by the beauty of the sakura that this custom eventually formed to hanami.[157]

5.4 Hanami Etiquette

Although I knew quite a lot about hanami etiquette beforehand, I had never actually been to Japan during sakura peak season before. I learned and realised a lot of new things, but I also noticed that not all the rules or etiquette I had learned beforehand actually held true. First of all, the hanami etiquette can vary depending on the place. For example, there seemed to be different etiquette for popular crowded places like Ueno and smaller local places like the one I visited with a friend.

Hanami can be viewing a single tree or several. In Japan it is common to do domestic traveling just to see famous hanami spots called meisho[158]. This term became popular during the Edo period and it can refer to four types of places:

1. Poetic places where noted poems have been written about.
2. Historic sites, such as a former barrier or battlegrounds-
3. Famous temples or shrines.
4. Locales noted for their seasonal landscapes.[159]

Some of my interviewees mentioned meishos:

> It's called a hanami meisho. Ueno is like a famous spot or something. (Tarou-kun)

> Kyoto has a lot of sakura meisho, so every year we think; let's go here and let's go there, change places a bit and go see them once a year with friends. Or twice. Usually it is places like Arashiyama park or Kyoto's maruyama park, toufukuji temple or Kyoto Imperial Palace and so on. I like Arashiyama the best, because it has elegance. (Suisui)

Single trees can be special or noted trees that might even have some legends attached to them. Most often people will still head to the many parks and shrine or temple grounds to enjoy the flowers under a grove of trees. Most popular viewing places can be very packed and busy during the full bloom peak. It is customary to spread a picnic sheet for all the people in the

[157] Shikitari 1996, 59.
[158] 名所
[159] Shirane 2012, 166.

party to sit together and enjoy the flowers. However, in popular places the fight for best places can sometimes be very intense. It is not uncommon to have someone from a group of friends of co-workers go and reserve a spot early on in the morning or even during the previous day. Sometimes a single person might even reserve the spot by waiting the entire day for the others to arrive. I interviewed three place holders, who were just sitting and holding their chosen picnic spot either alone or with a co-worker. Hiro-kun in particular was not very happy about this arrangement:

> I want to go back. I have been here since 6AM[160]. Everyone will get here around 1PM or 2PM. (Hiro-kun)

Hanami forecasts are broadcasted in Japan around the time of sakura season. The fact that even national television stations will keep people informed shows just how important hanami is in Japan. As mentioned before, sakura is not the only object of hanami, but rather the most popular one. Therefore, most Japanese people will participate in hanami during the sakura season, which is why it is the one with the national forecasts. Even though it is not a national holiday, it is still a national event. Hanami is enjoyed by all the people of Japan. All ages and social classes participate.

According to Miyoshi, the best time to go view the sakura flowers is during the early morning hours. The sunny side is the best side to view from, with the morning sun shining behind the viewer, so that flowers are basking in the mild warm rays.[161] Even though sakura flowers in the moonlight, rain or wind are the inspirations for many a poem or painting and may sound poetical and even be lovely, according to Miyoshi they still do not compare to the sight of sakura flowers bathing in the morning sun. He even calls this sight sublime.[162] Even if morning is the best time to view sakura according to Miyoshi, most Japanese people will still head to the parks around noon, afternoon or evening. I think this might be due to the busy schedules Japanese people have. As one might expect, in the earlier hours of the day, the people doing hanami are mostly elders or families with small children, who do not need to be at work or school. In the evening hanami parties will mostly include friends or co-workers, rather than families. For my trip to Japan, I unfortunately only had one Saturday when the sakura were in full bloom and it was raining. But even if the weather was not ideal, Ueno park was still full of people and even a few place holders, though not as many as during the week. Ueno park is said

[160] It was around 12PM when I interviewed him.
[161] Miyoshi 1934, 46.
[162] Miyoshi 1934, 48.

to be the best place in Tokyo to do hanami, so it is always full of people ranging from families, friends and co-workers to tourists.

The sakura are not at the most beautiful when they are in full bloom, but rather when about a third of the flowers are still in the bud. This holds especially true for the common yamazakura. At least according to Miyoshi. He criticises the usage of a single flower branch in a vase as a decoration or replacement of the real thing, since the simple branch does no credit to the real thing, because its full potential is not being realised with just a mere branch.[163] Since taking the branches off the trees is considered harming the trees and therefore a definite no-no, nowadays many shops will sell fake single sakura branches that can be seen decorating anywhere from private homes to shops and restaurants during spring.

When talking about hanami and the picnic it includes, most people think about hanging out in the park during the day, but some public places offer great chances for yozakura[164], or night sakura. Lanterns are lit around parks and temples at night, so that people can enjoy and get a different experience from hanami compared to the common hanami happening during the day. The lanterns light the area just enough so that the flowers can barely be seen or so that they seem like they glow in the dark. Popular places like Ueno park do this. This often means offering extended opening hours, as many most temples, shrines and tourist sites might normally close around 5pm.

Hana yori dango. Food rather than flowers. This is a Japanese proverb often used during hanami. Food is a crucial part of hanami and the proverb hints that many people might enjoy hanami more because of the food rather than the flowers. Or that people do hanami in the first place, because of the food involved and the flower viewing holds little value to them. Making or buying bentou[165], or boxed lunch, is a common part of hanami. During the hanami season many supermarkets and stalls will sell special hanami bentou. These bentou will include common Japanese dishes such as sushi and tamagoyaki (egg rolls), but they might be decorated with hanami flower colored items or they might have vegetables such as carrots cut in sakura shapes. According to my interviews, it would seem that many people might actually prefer the sake involved over the food or flowers:

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163 Miyoshi 1934, 48-49.
164 夜桜
165 弁当

> The flowers, if they are buds it's no good. When the flowers are beautiful and blooming is the best time. But there are people who will drink beer under the flowers even if there are no flowers. Those are the dango people. (Sunny)

There are distinctive wagashi or desserts for hanami season, the before mentioned dango being one of them. Dango is a traditional Japanese dumpling dessert maid of rice flour. The difference between a hanami dango and a regular dango is that the hanami one is white, green and pink in color.[166] Sakuramochi are also common. They are mochi colored pink and wrapped in salted sakura leaves. Mochi is a traditional rice cake filled with red bean paste. Like the sakura shaped carrots, the wagashi for hanami is often made especially for the hanami with specific characteristics. This is a way of showing special attention and affection for hanami and its accompaniments. Although during my trip I saw very few dango or sakuramochi. Most people had other snacks like potato chips and chocolate with them.

Sake is a crucial part of hanami. According to an old story this association goes all the way back to Emperor Richiu, who was on a pleasure cruise on his boat, when a sakura petal from a nearby hill floated into his sake cup. According to the story this instance drew the Emperor's attention to the neglected sakura and thus drinking sake became an inseparable part of hanami.[167] Just like bentous, sake is a crucial part of hanami. Sake during hanami is called hanamizake. Sake does not always refer to the Japanese rice wine. It can mean any alcoholic beverage. It is common in Japan to drink till drunk with your friends or even co-workers and it is not illegal to drink in public in Japan. For many of my interviewees sake was actually the main motivation to do hanami.

Playing or listening to music and singing are traditionally a part of hanami. However, since hanami is so popular nowadays and the most popular places will be extremely crowded activities such as dancing can be difficult. In Japan there is a strong culture of not causing any trouble for other people. Singing or listening to music in public (without headphones) can be seen as disturbing others and therefore causing them trouble. So nowadays these parts of hanami are mostly forgotten, unless special concerts or musical performances are part of the pre-planned hanami celebrations organised by the locale staff. I only saw one group of young people playing guitar in Ueno park during my stay. Other than that, I saw no groups or people playing music in crowded places. Otherwise the groups, especially the intoxicated ones, were making quite a lot of noise, yet no one seemed to mind, or at least no one was complaining,

[166] See attachement 6.
[167] Clement 1911, 25.

which I might add, would not be uncommon at all in Japan. In the National Hansen's Disease Museum park where I went with my friend, I actually saw two separate groups of people singing and playing music. Both of the groups were from elderly homes where the nurses had brought the patients or residents to do hanami in the park. The nurses were the ones who lead the old traditional songs they were singing with the elders. Other than the elder groups, all the other groups were relatively quiet, with the exception of the children. Though normally Japanese parents might try to make sure that their offspring are quiet and behave, during this hanami they were playing and running around freely and no one seemed to mind like they normally would. This was also true for the songs of the elder groups.

Not all public places with sakura or other hanami trees will allow hanami parties to be held. Therefore, it is important to check beforehand if the hanami is even allowed. No matter where you decide to hold a hanami, it is commonplace to make sure you leave absolutely nothing behind when you leave. This means that collecting one's own trash during and after hanami is very important as there are few places to leave your trash in the public places where hanami can be held. According to my friend, the lack of trashcans in Japan can be traced back about twenty years ago when terrorists used trashcans as hiding places for bombs and therefore Japan heavily reduced the number of public trashcans. During hanami some special exceptions are made however. Once again, Ueno park is a special example in this. During hanami season several trash collection points will be added to the park. In these trash collection points there are several trashcans for different kinds of wastes. These special trashcans will be removed after the hanami season. I saw these specifically for hanami trashcans only in Ueno park. Shirahata notes these trash collection points in Ueno park too. According to him, they tell of a new period in Japan, that gives rise to new rules to hanami etiquette. He felt that Hanami keeps on taking on new features and thus continuing on into the future.[168]

It is important to respect the trees during hanami. This means that one should not harm the trees in any way, such as breaking off branches or twigs or climbing the trees. Picking the flowers from thee trees is frowned upon. This is a sort of an unspoken rule in Japan. My friends told me that Japanese people understand this, but it is often foreigners who break this rule by picking the flowers or twisting the braches for photos. I observed this behaviour only once, when a child was climbing a tree. Most places I visited had signs in Japanese and English saying that the trees were to be left alone or that they were not to be touched. I had heard beforehand that

[168] Shirahata 2015, 14.

the Japanese people would speak out if one was to harm the trees but would just uncomfortably frown if the fallen petals were to be touched or collected. This was supposed to be due to the fact that the spirits of the dead might reside in the sakura trees or the petals represent the shortness of life and so on. However, I saw several Japanese people collecting the fallen petals and flowers and either looking at them or using them as decorations in their hair etc. When I asked Sunny about this she told me it was acceptable to pick the petals and flowers if they had already fallen.

Another thing I noticed about people's behaviour during hanami, was the endless photography. Everyone wanted their share of hanami memories captured so in some places like Chidori-ga-fuchi the hanami trails had specific lanes of clockwise and counter clockwise walkers. The best photography spot was separated and a specific entrance and exit were built around it to manage the flow of people. Like so often in Japan, this meant that people had to line up to get to the best photo spots. This held true in other places as well, since Japanese people will patiently wait for their turn to pose and take the best photos.

6. Analysis

After coding my data, I ended up with seven categories: socialising, communication, food and drink, appreciating beauty, ritual of the spring, spiritual revival and symbol of Japanese culture. I chose to separate socialising and communication as their own categories, even though they are very close, because I felt the motivations for using those terms was different in both cases. Socialising was for friends and family whereas communication was more for co-workers. The other categories might overlap in some places too, since many of the categories are connected in some ways. For example, socialising and food are closely connected in Japan. Appreciating beauty and spiritual revival are also connected.

6.1 Socialising

None of my interviewees were doing hanami by themselves. All felt that doing hanami with friends, family or co-workers was the right way to do hanami. They felt that with different social groups the motivation and focus of hanami shifted depending on who they were doing it with.

> You drink sake and talk. With co-workers or friends. With co-workers, you need to be mindful, but with friends it's different. (Hiro-kun)

Although Hiro-kun had not done hanami before, he did mention it was necessary to be more mindful when with co-workers. I felt that in his case however, he was more wary than normal since he was very young (21) and most likely just started working at the company. He was not the easiest person to talk to and seemed to be wary even when talking to me. But I do feel that his thoughts of being wary when drinking with co-workers, is understandable. I have often seen very drunken Japanese salarymen who definitely do not hold back or watch out when interacting with their co-workers or others.

Other than that, practically all of my interviewees mentioned having fun with friends, co-workers or family was one of the most important things about hanami.

> I don't think hanami really changes with different generations, but it changes depending on who you watch (the flowers) with. With family I usually walk around and it's fun. With my company and co-workers you buy alcohol and get into a festive commotion. It becomes like an event for the company. You enjoy the flowers plus get familiar with new people in company. It is such an event. (Suisui)

> It's about having fun together with everyone. -- The most important thing is … I wonder what it is. Temperature? it's warm. And people. You can't do it alone. (Kou-san)

None of my interviewees mentioned doing hanami alone. Some mentioned sometimes stopping to enjoy the flowers when walking from one place to another. But they were not specifically doing hanami, rather they were just stopping to look at the flowers on their way. During my observations, the only people I saw alone were either clearly place holder or elderly. The elders who were alone were always walking around and looking at the flowers and not sitting down for a picnic. Shirahata mentions crowds as one of the elements of hanami. People do not come to enjoy the flowers alone or with just one other person, they come in groups and form massive crowds.[169]

6.2 Communication

The place holders I talked to were quick to point out this part of hanami. To them, it was perhaps the most important motivation behind doing hanami with co-workers.

[169] Shirahata 2015, 15.

> I usually do hanami only once. Around March, just once. With my co-workers. Ah but indeed I do this once with my company and then in private with friends. With co-workers it's noisy and it's an event to deepen the bonds between co-workers. With friends you hang together. (Kou-san)

> What is hanami you ask? Hanami is Japanese culture. Japanese culture and communication I think. With co-workers or friends or something like that. (Tarou-kun)

Two of the place holders I talked to, Kou-san and Tarou-kun, found hanami a good way to build up the communication between co-workers, but as I mentioned before in the Hanami Etiquette chapter, Hiro-kun was not very happy about this arrangement. This was due to the cold and early morning of boredom he had had to suffer. He also mentioned never doing hanami before:

> This year is my first time. This is not really my thing. I never did this with my family either. I don't think they like this very much either. It would be better just to go to a izakaya[170]. Because it's warm. (T: I do not think it is that cold now…) It's cold, it's cold. In Japan this is too cold.[171] (Hiro-kun)

Whether or not the Japanese salarymen are interested in doing hanami to improve communication, most Japanese work places will still make arrangements to hold a hanami party for their workers. Japanese people believe that drinking together improves communication and human relationships in everyday life. They think that when you drink, you become frank and that is when you say what you actually think. This situation is called 'drunkards' paradise'. Even though this was not viewed as a bad thing in the past, nowadays there is some change happening. Being drunk in public is considered as a sign of lack of self-control and a problem.[172] Sunny mentioned this too:

> Izakaya is also one place for communication. Even people who hate alcohol got there and they can talk with the people from the company in a bit more relaxed way. You can go to an izakaya anytime, but doing hanami has the same style and feeling, but you can do it outside, so it's another precious thing. (T: Special?) Yes, special kind of feeling. And you can only drink alcohol under the sky only around hanami. (Sunny)

In Japan, there is a word for equality, but true equality is rarely used outside of physics. In Japan, there are superiors and inferiors in all aspects of life. I talked a bit about this earlier when I was talking about translation and language. Even the language reflects this way of thinking with its different levels of politeness. This way of thinking is reflected in business

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[170] 居酒屋 A sort of a bar/restaurant that is very popular in Japan. This is where Japanese workers usually go after work with their co-workers to socialise, improve communication and simply to unwind by eating and drinking, often even until drunk.

[171] I do not know for certain, as I had nothing to measure the temperature with, but I think it was around 15C that day.

[172] Shikitari 1996, 107.

relationships too. Especially in the past few decades, it was only acceptable to criticise or complain to their boss or immediate superior when outside of working environment. This usually meant that most actual work might happen in izakayas or similar places. All in all, I do feel that even if younger Japanese people will feel that they need to watch out when drinking with their co-workers more than when they are drinking with their family or friends, not all Japanese people will feel this pressure.[173]

6.3 Food and Drink

All of my interviewees mentioned eating and drinking as an important part of hanami. Some had a clear preference over the other however. Especially the place holders in Ueno park mentioned the sake involved as important whereas the other interviewees varied between sake and the bentou.

> When you do hanami you drink sake. You drink while thinking that the flowers are beautiful. But I like the sake part. Because it is hanami, I drink sake. (Tarou-kun)

Shirahata mentions food and drink as one of the elements of hanami. According to an inquiry made by Santory Research Institute on Continuity and Change in Life, 87% of Japanese households will bring food and drink with them when doing hanami. About half of these households make a bentou by hand.[174] Unlike in the West, in Japan social entertaining revolves around food and not around conversation.[175] The idea that eating and drinking together can make people like-minded has been around since ancient times. Therefore, it is understandable that food and drinks would play an important part in a Japanese social event such as hanami.[176]

Hana yori dango is a part of an old poem that has turned into an expression. Even though dango is not eaten regularly during hanami anymore, the expression is still used today. In the past manjuus[177] were actually more common than dango as a hanami snack. The expression itself came about, because people were 'turning their backs' on the flowers and just eating the dango. So rather than and actually looking at the flowers and enjoying them, people were satisfied with just eating the food they had brought with them.[178]

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[173] De Mente 2005, 55.
[174] Shirahata 2015, 195.
[175] Shikitari 1996, 11.
[176] Shirahata 2015, 212.
[177] 饅頭 – a steamed bun with different fillings.
[178] Shirahata 2015, 181.

When asked about the expression hana yori dango some of my interviewees were quick to point out that rather than dango, nowadays most Japanese people seem to prefer alcohol over the flowers:

> Haha, I think it's true for me. I do think it might be the same for most Japanese people. I wonder why … I can't really think of a reason why. … couldn't it be… Flower (Laughing) Charm..flower charm. But hana yori dango is an expression, but now sake is more likely. (Kou-san)

> Hmm, the people nowadays always bring sake, right? Sake and bentou, nigiri or… I wonder if there are… people who bring pizza or something? But, traditionally, normally it's onigiri or bentou, tamagoyaki[179] or something like that. Mom makes the bentou and you eat it with everyone. But nowadays people just bring sake. I don't really think there are a lot of people who bring dango. Earlier it was common to bring dango, but now I don't think there are many people who bring dango, if at all. The Japanese people now are different from the ones before so they try out new things and the traditional things don't really matter anymore. When I was young, my mother made a bentou, but there might have been or there might not have been dango in it. It was a little closer to the traditional hanami, that I did. Now it's okay to just eat anything. Everyone just wants to party. That's Japan's hanami. (Sunny)

While food is important both traditionally and with my interviewees, nowadays the trend seems to be in enjoying alcohol under the trees. So perhaps hana yori sake, or alcohol over flowers, would be a more accurate expression nowadays. It can also be interpreted to mean that people prefer the practical aspects of hanami, such as eating, over the symbolic aspects.

6.4 Appreciating Beauty

Although all of my interviewees mentioned viewing the flowers as a part of hanami, not all of them felt it was actually the main point or even an important part of hanami. This in itself did not come as a surprise to me, since my original hypothesis was that viewing the flowers might be of a lesser value to modern Japanese people when compared to the social factors and the food and drinks, as in hana yori dango. The one exception to appreciating the flowers was Hiro-kun, who was doing hanami for the first time in his life, because of his company outing. He mentioned not being interested in hanami in general and not really appreciating the flowers either:

> Personally, I do not really feel anything when I look at flowers. Japanese people say that they do, but I do not. (Hiro-kun)

Still some of my interviewees did mention actually viewing the flowers and appreciating the beauty as important. Hume mentions four characteristics to Japanese sense of beauty;

[179] 卵焼き – fried eggrolls, a very popular dish in Japan.

suggestion, irregularity, simplicity and perishability. Suggestion refers to climatic moments, which hanami in full bloom is an example of. The distinctively Japanese part of appreciating the beauty of hanami is in being able to appreciate not just hanami during full bloom, but the barely opened buds and fallen petals too.[180]

Appreciating irregularity can be seen in many forms of art in Japan, such as flower arrangement, calligraphy and ceramics.[181] Appreciating the flowers' (or trees) beauty, even when they are in inconvenient places or wild in nature, is part of the Japanese sense of appreciating irregularity. Rouba-san was the only one who specifically mentioned this kind of appreciation:

> I feel touched when I do hanami. I mean big trees have been there for who knows how many years, right? Even though they are old they can make these kinds of gorgeous flowers bloom. That is why I think the flowers are so great. It gets better with more years. No matter where you place them, in that place it will bloom beautiful flowers. Even if humans are selfish and say that this is not a good place and do things like this[182], these trees, no matter where they are placed they will still make beautiful flowers. No matter what happens, they will still bloom beautiful. (Rouba-san)

Simplicity is especially appreciated in housing and furnishing. Sometimes in Japan simplicity can be more expensive than building something decorative. Appreciating perishability is perhaps the most unthinkable to Westerners. Westerners build monuments with a desire to last as long as possible, but Japanese people feel different about this. Japanese people prefer art and objects that have passed through several hands and even generations and show wear and aging. Perishability shows humans the uncertainty of life, which Japanese people find beautiful, because if humans were to live forever they would lose appreciation and wonder for all things eventually. In this sense, sakura is beautiful too. Sakura flowers will only bloom for a very short time and then fall. Being such a short event makes it even more beautiful and worthy of appreciation in Japanese people's minds.[183] Some of my interviewees felt this as well, but Sunny talked about it the most:

> It's precious. It's something you can only see for about one week within 365 days, so it's important. - Probably.. Because sakura falls.. Japanese people.. think that falling petals is what is beautiful. If it was a flower that bloomed always, it probably wouldn't have become the national flower you know?
>
> In Japanese people's minds, blooming in a flash and then falling in a flash, that kind of way of life is thought to be cool by some people. There's also the saying of 'make a name in the world'[184], it means

[180] Hume 1995, 30-31.
[181] Hume 1995, 33.
[182] She is referring to the tree stump she was sitting on during the interview it. She meant that people sometimes selfishly cut down trees, even though they are beautiful.
[183] Hume 1995, 36, 38-39.
[184] 一花咲かせる – Hitohana sakaseru. Literally translated it means one flower blooms.

> let's succeed like the blooming flowers. Nnn.. It might not have anything to do with this.. It blooms and then it falls and then it's goodbye. You don't just sit around, you fall. That is kind of cool in a way. (T: Does that have something to do with samurai?) Yes, I think it's similar with samurai. In the end they have to cut their own bellies. Even though they don't really want to die, dying like that is cool so. So Japanese people might think that the way that the sakura flowers bloom applies to this kind of thinking. Right now the thinking is similar..it's close. So maybe they that's why they think sakura is so good? It's short lived, short lived like snow, so it will just disappear as soon as it turns up. Japanese people have the kind of thinking that they find this beautiful. I think if the flowers bloomed all year around we wouldn't do this kind of thing. (Sunny)

The blooming of sakura have been compared to the life of samurai warriors. The life of a samurai warrior was brief and shining. The highest goal in a samurai's life was to die with honor preferably in the service of their overlords. A brief well-lived life was seen as similar to blooming of sakura flowers, with a short time to bloom and a quick end in one's prime. This desire for an honorable death in the service of one's country or overlord was later seen in Japanese kamikaze pilots during World War II.[185]

I have never seen as many selfie sticks in my life as I did in Japan this time. As I mentioned in the Hanami Etiquette chapter, taking photos of hanami is very popular in Japan. This was true for both the Japanese people and tourists. I even saw several video camera crews in Ueno park, who were most likely from local TV networks to report on the starting hanami season in Tokyo. When I asked about this photomania a few of my interviewees said that everyone wanted to be able to remember the sakura later on. No one commented on their own photographs or if they shared them on social media. I would have found it interesting to hear if sharing hanami pictures on social media meant anything special to anyone. I asked about this because I wanted to know if there was any conflict with taking pictures and appreciating sakura for its perishable beauty. The conflict never came up in any of my interviews, but some interviewees just mentioned enjoying taking the photos:

> The feeling is there. The sakura of today and the sakura of tomorrow. (Kou-san)

> In times when sakura are blooming, I want to take pictures, that is the kind of spiritual thing that happens in my heart. (Priest-san)

6.5 Ritual of the Spring

As I mentioned before, the four seasons are very important, even obvious to Japanese people. Spring especially seemed to be very important to the people I was interviewing. Though some

[185] McClellan 2012, 10.

authors like Clement[186] and Ackermann[187] and old poetry will mention ume as the symbol for spring my interviewees all felt it was sakura that meant the coming of spring. Both Clement and Ackermann mentioned that the important thing about ume and spring was the fact that they come after kan, or the harsh coldness of winter. Ume is known for its durability and ability to withstand the cold.[188] My interviewees felt that the ume season was too cold and even if it has been common to do ume hanami in the past nowadays sakura hanami was the way to welcome or start spring:

> Hanami is … the visit of spring. It's the event when everyone realises it's spring. (Kou-san)
>
> When I do hanami, I feel like I can feel Japan's seasons even more. Spring, summer, autumn, winter. Since it's a country with clear seasons, sakura represents spring and that is hanami. It's only for one week, but when you do it, it feels like: AHH, Spring has come!, for everyone, or so I think. Japanese people love the spring. Sakura too. Winter is harsh so when it ends we feel happy. Isn't Finland the same? (Suisui)
>
> Well in Japan it is the coming of spring, that kind of feeling. Warmth has come finally. Winter is harsh and cold. (Roujin-san)

Most Japanese people do not regard rituals as religious, but rather as traditions or customs to uphold. Christmas might be a holy day for Christians and in Buddhist funeral chanting sutras is important, but these practices have become merely customs for many people. Many people will celebrate or enjoy Christmas and attend Buddhist or Shintou ceremonies, even if they are followers of revealed religions. In such cases, people will just not regard the ceremonies as very religious. So, whether or not hanami is a religious or spiritual ritual is up to interpretation.[189]

Japan has traditionally placed great importance on different rituals. Rather than just defining the context for different interactions, rituals in Japan play an important role in transitions from one context to another. Such as from winter to spring. Rituals in Japan can help to come to terms with nature without necessarily idealising it. These rituals can be used to manipulate nature, because nature is understood in a religious or spiritual way. As I have mentioned before, in Japan nature is inhabited by kami. By doing rituals Japanese people can form working relationships with the kami or spirits. Though not an official organised religious ritual, hanami

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[186] Clement 1911, 12.
[187] Ackermann 1997, 45.
[188] Ackermann 1997, 45; Clement 1991, 12.
[189] Ama 1996, 5.

can be seen as a ritual to commemorate the transition from winter to spring by appreciating the beauty of nature and sakura.[190]

Out of all the themes, I felt that hanami being a crucial part of spring was the most common theme in all of my interviews. Almost all of my interviewees mentioned sakura and spring or hanami and spring being connected. A few even went as far as to say that hanami was a ritual of spring. Nobody took it as a religious ritual however, but rather as a secular ritual to transition from winter to spring. For some it also meant the beginning or end of the school year:

> The image of sakura is also about school admissions. When my son starts school, we'll go and take the photos under the sakura tree. So there's a connection to the start of academic year as well. But lately due to global warming, the blooming time of sakura is changing so I've heard that it might not be possible to take the pictures at the admission ceremony anymore. So for that reason the image of sakura might change again in Japan. (Sunny)

> About sakura, it means starting school or graduating school, it's that kind of connection. So when it's April it means that when the sakura bloom kids will graduate or enter school. (Rouga-san)

The academic year starts in April in Japan. Therefore, sakura in full bloom, which coincide with this event, are the harbingers of spring. Children will start school or transition from one school to another, all the way to university. Graduation happens around the same time too. Students graduating will enter the workforce as full members of the society. In other words, in Japanese society, several important transitions are happening around the same time as sakura hanami. Which is why things like taking school admission or graduation photos with sakura trees is popular. Hanami is a good way to celebrate these transitions.[191]

Since I thought that doing hanami at least once every year was normal for most Japanese people, I asked them how it felt it they missed it some year. No one said that they would be distraught or too upset if it happened, but everyone felt that it would be a shame. No one also said that it would not matter at all.

> Aaa, it feels like I couldn't experience spring. (Tarou-kun)

> If I can't see the sakura for some reason I feel like Aa, I missed them. You understand minogasu? (T: Mi..?) mis-su. (T: To miss?) Un, right, right. So it's like I can't see sakura until the next spring, so I have to wait another whole year, that kind of feeling. It's a bit of a shame. (Sunny)

[190] Kalland & Asquith 1997, 19.
[191] Moeran & Skov 1997, 196-197.

6.6 Spiritual Revival

Many of my interviewees expressed a sort of spiritual connection when viewing sakura, even though most were sceptical about this connection at first. When I did my first and second interviews I just asked about this connection at some point and got a simple 'no' as an answer. After talking a little more about the topic most people still changed their mind about their initial thoughts, because I started asking about spirituality and religion in general and asking them to define what they were. After the first few interviews I actually started asking people about spirituality before asking about the connection, at which point more people started feeling like there might be some connection when I first brought it up. However, when asked about the connection between religion and hanami, most people felt that there was none. Some mentioned that there might have been some connection in the past, but they felt that there was none nowadays, even if some sakura trees were in temple or shrine grounds.

> The people right now… I think it not. -- Right now, I don't think there is. But it's a good feeling so … there might some little connection. But you might be right[192], they just don't realise it. If you talk to them, it might be that they would feel the same (that there is a connection). And then it becomes obvious. It's so obvious because they've been doing it for a long time. They've been taken to do hanami as kids, and they do it every year and it just becomes so obvious. (T: Like a ritual?) Yes, yes, yes. Like a ritual. (Sunny)

Although I named this category 'spiritual revival' not all of the interviewees were this specific when talking about the connection between spirituality and hanami. Most used terms like feeling warm (on the inside), feeling touched or calming down. I would still interpret those as something spiritual, rather than secular or mundane. Some did however feel the spiritual connection in some way:

> I become happy when I do hanami, because it's beautiful. When I look at beautiful things, I get a little happy. I think that's Japanese sensitivity[193]. Spiritual or …. Ummm… Japanese people's… (T: Japanese heart[194](spirit)?) Yes yes yes, that, spirit. I feel touched. (Suisui)

> What kind of feeling[195]? You mean feeling[196]? About feelings…Well it's fun. Happii, Happy[197]. But you know, after all the sakura are beautiful. I feel touched. -- Spiritual…It feels mysterious. Sixth sense or

[192] I had previously stated (several times over the years) that I see many spiritual things that Japanese people do without even realizing them.

[193] I was unsure how to translate the original word かんせい, since it could mean several things, but in this context, it seemed to refer to Japanese spirituality, but not religion per se. Depending on the kanji it can be translated as religion or sensitivity. It is opened a bit on the next sentence so I just translated it as sensitivity.

[194] 日本人の心 – Nihonjin no kokoro.

[195] 気 – ki, feeling/mood/spirit/etc

[196] 気持ち – kimochi, feeling. More specific than just 気.

[197] This was in English.

> something? It's really difficult. But…are they connected? I think they are connected. Like your heart feels warm when you look at flowers. Because they're beautiful. And you feel Happy. It's just awesome. Right, there are a lot of things. There's a connection. (Tarou-kun)
>
> Rouba-san: I calm down when I look at sakura. Roujin-san: Religion, eh. I don't know… probably no connection. Right? Rouba-san: Right. But spiritual is probably like: Yes, it's finally spring so let's live and have this year, kind of feeling, probably. I feel touched when I do hanami. (Roujin-san and Rouba-san)

Appreciating beauty can be soothing and thus revive the spirit, especially when appreciating natural beauty as opposed to artistic beauty. Traditionally appreciating natural beauty has been seen as a sign of a good spirit.[198] So even though traditionally religion has no connection to hanami, at least in modern day Japan, it definitely has spiritual connections for the individual. I think the reason for appreciating beauty, especially natural beauty in Japan, is that is offers people spiritual revival.

As I mentioned in a previous chapter, Japanese people have a special relationship with nature. Hanami is about celebrating and appreciating nature and its beauty. If what Kalland and Asquith said about humans only being able to appreciate beauty only through religion, then the appreciation of hanami beauty stems from spiritual or religious feelings. They also talked about the spiritual connection that Japanese people have with nature.[199] I felt that perhaps this connection is what gives Japanese people the sense of spiritual revival when doing hanami. I feel like I covered this topic in more detail earlier in chapter 5.1 so I will not go over the research done on it again.

6.7 Symbol of Japanese culture

A few of the interviewees mentioned hanami as 'Japanese culture' when asked to describe what hanami is.

> It only blooms for a little while, admiring that moment's beauty is Japanese culture. Japanese people like those sorts of things that are bright only for a while, fireworks are like that too. They only shine for a moment, admiring such things is … part of our ancestry. (Suisui)

Tarou-kun mentioned something that made me rethink the meaning of hanami in Japanese culture:

> The meaning of hanami? Isn't hanami culture? I think it is the culture of Japanese people. Well I think Japanese people get easily swept away by the flow. When you see everyone doing something you want

[198] Diessner et al 2008, 4.
[199] Kalland & Asquith 1997, 1-2.

> to do it yourself as well. I think it is that kind of custom. Well when you are outside you can drink sake, meet with people and work on communication, there's that too. (Tarou-kun)

Although I had always known that Japanese people are like this as a society, I was still surprised when Tarou-kun introduced this idea. I had previously not thought of hanami as part of the 'going with the flow' culture, even if it seems obvious to me now. When thinking about hanami and especially my interviews and the answers I got, it makes more and more sense to me. At first, I did not think much of the fact that most of the answers were similar, seeing as they were close to what I was expecting them to be. I did however find it a little surprising that my questions or topics were difficult for the Japanese people. Most of them even said that I was asking difficult questions and that they had never actually thought about these things beforehand. When Tarou-kun mentioned the Japanese people doing hanami, because it is what everyone is doing and wanting to stay with the flow, I thought that perhaps that might be the answer to the reason behind everyone's very similar answers.

As a culture Japan appreciates being like everyone else. Being different is seen as a bad thing and possibly a dangerous thing. People tend to avoid people who stand out so that no one would think that they are somehow associated with them and therefore possibly be seen as strange themselves.[200] Foreigners who are only superficially familiar with Japanese culture might find this surprising, because the Western world tends to see Japan as the home of the strange things in things like fashion and traditions. This kind of strong desire for standing out can be explained with the strong culture of being a part of the homogenous group. Especially young people might feel the need to stand out and appreciate their uniqueness, even though many of these youngsters (teenagers) will adapt to the commonly accepted Japanese culture as they get older and start working. The social pressure is a very real and strong thing in Japan. Those who work already, might find comfort in nightlife, which is related to the idea of drinking and becoming frank (as mentioned in chapter 6.2).[201]

Hanami can be said to be distinctively Japanese. No other country has this kind of festival or ritual, that would get the whole country to go outside to enjoy flowers. There are sakura and ume in other countries as well and lately there are some people going out on their way to see these flowers in their full bloom. The other countries hanami does not reach the levels of Japan,

[200] De Mente 2005, 19-20.
[201] De Mente 2005, 21-22.

which is exactly why it can still be considered distinctively Japanese and thus a symbol of Japanese culture.[202]

7. Forming a Theory

In the end, I see hanami as a secularised ritual. Some of my interviewees saw hanami as a Japanese ritual, but they were not sure about what kind of ritual it is. If being Japanese is the only religion that Japanese people have[203], then I think hanami is a good representation of a secularised ritual of Japaneseness. As a ritual hanami combines several distinctive Japanese characteristics into a distinctively Japanese action. Shirahata claims that even though enjoying flowers and viewing them can be found elsewhere in the world as well, hanami is distinctively Japanese. He breaks Japanese hanami down to three elements: sakura trees[204], eating and drinking and crowds.[205] I would go even further than him and argue that as a secularized ritual it combines love of nature (and its seasons), a ritual, appreciating beauty, going with the flow, food and drink as well as secularization.

Although all of my categories from the previous chapter are important parts of hanami, I would see the five I just mentioned as the most important ones in my own theory of hanami as a ritual of Japaneseness. The spiritual revival is connected to love of nature and appreciating beauty, whereas socialising and communication are not distinctively Japanese, although both are important in hanami.

I will not take a stance on whether the relationship Japanese people have with nature is truly harmonious or aiming for control. I will just go with the fact that Japanese people feel it is a special relationship. Sakura in full bloom and hanami are nature at its best to Japanese people. Sakura itself symbolises Japan to Japanese people, being their national flower and having nationalistic connections in the past, with samurai and kamikaze pilots. The ritual of hanami is all about stopping to appreciate the beauty of the coming new season, that brings many good things such as warmth and transitions to new part of one's life.

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[202] Shirahata 2015, 17-18.

[203] De Mente 2005, 19.

[204] 群桜 – gun'ou. The first symbol means a crowd or a group of something. The second one means sakura, even though it reads as 'ou' here. In this case I think Shirahata means that the element of Japanese hanami is a cluster of sakura trees.

[205] Shirahata 2015, 15.

Japanese people really love their rituals. In Japan there can be said to be a ritual for almost anything. Making a ritual of appreciating certain flowers might seem pointless to outsiders, but for Japanese people it is obvious.[206] As a ritual hanami is also used to welcome the spring and start the academic year. I think one of the most important reasons for the popularity of hanami is the timing. Ume has traditionally been important in Japanese culture, but the modern Japanese person will usually appreciate sakura a lot more. It made me think of the fact that the most popular hanami object changed from ume to sakura. Perhaps it was intentional after all? As Sunny mentioned before, Japanese people like to take in things and make them more comfortable before adopting them into Japanese culture. Ume can bloom up to a month whereas sakura blossoms will fall in a matter of days after full bloom. Sakura is therefore more symbolic and beautiful to the Japanese sense of aesthetics. It also happens to coincide with the beginning of spring and academic year. All these factors combined make sakura hanami special to Japanese people. Celebrating the beginning of spring might not be distinctively Japanese, but appreciating the beauty of short-lived flashy things is. Combining these into a single ritual is also distinctively Japanese. Perhaps hanami can be seen as a ritual celebrating new beginnings, be it spring, academic year or beauty and life.

Japanese people like to go with the flow. With hanami they see that everyone around them is doing it and so they want to join in too. This is not just because they want to experience something interesting, but also because they feel safer just doing what everyone is doing.

> If by normal you mean that a lot of people are doing it, then you could say that. But even so, it might make the person in question confused. I think Japanese people are doing it so that they would not be different from everyone else. They will feel safer when they are doing what everyone else is doing as well. (Priest-san)

So, missing out on hanami can be seen as a fear of missing out and a fear of standing out. As mentioned before and by Priest-san standing out in Japan is not a clear taboo, but definitely something frowned upon. Since hanami is a sort of a national annual celebration, actively not participating can be seen as standing out, so it can be seen as safer to just participate, even if one is not that interested in it. Other than fear standing out, Japanese people also fear missing out on hanami. Most Japanese people want to see Kyoto's hanami at least once in their life, since it is famous, but not everyone actually ever takes the trip to Kyoto during hanami season. Missing out can also mean not getting to experience spring or missing important social events in private or work life. Missing social events of the company is seen as standing out and

[206] De Mente 2005, 19.

frowned upon. Even though I use the word fear to describe this aspect of Japanese hanami, I would argue that the 'fear' is actually an inconvenience rather than an actual fear.

Even though secularization did not really come up in my interviews, I still felt like it was relevant to hanami. The long-forgotten history of hanami seems to indicate that the old traditions were more spiritual and religious in nature than the modern hanami, which has nothing to do with religion. Spirituality is still somewhat relevant in modern hanami, even if most Japanese people do not feel it clearly. That is, unless they specifically think about it, like during my interviews. Suwa-san mentioned that even though there was probably more of a connection with hanami and religion or spirituality that atmosphere has now decreased in Japan in general:

> Umm, I think there used to be a connection in the past, but I feel like current Japanese do not really feel that. I think that kind atmosphere has lessened overall in Japan. If you compare to ancient people, then probably, I think life itself has become less severe. Compared to the past, life itself has become easier. (Suwa-san)

In ancient times, commoners would go out to the mountains and pray for good harvest from the mountain kami around sakuras' full bloom, but nowadays that ritual has been merged with the ancient nobles' pastime banquets. Whether because the commoners were able to start enjoying the small luxuries of life in the past few hundred years, or because the general attitude towards religion has changed, I feel that hanami has become more practical than spiritual in modern hanami. This can be seen as a form of secularization too.

In practice this secularization and practical approach is perhaps best seen in the preference for food and drink (as in hana yori dango) and the use of hanami as a means to improve communication. As we established before, food and drink are more important to Japanese social events than conversation. Even though hana yori sake might be more accurate of the modern hanami, I feel that the idea of hana yori dango represents secularization of hanami very well. It has moved from appreciating beauty and gaining spiritual fulfillment to the practical side of enjoying eating and drinking.

> (T: So what do you think of hana yori dango?) Sunny: I think that's very Japanese too. In the end, even if you in the beginning thought that hanami and flowers are beautiful, and you keep doing it and start eating good food under the flowers you'll start thinking that the hanami is nice but eating is more enjoyable, or something like right? Even if it's like that it's not weird. I think it's fine if there are people like that too. So the spiritual connections might have disappeared. It's become a custom so gradually it has disappeared and people have forgotten I think. (Sunny)

Another example of secularization would be the consumerism connected to hanami.

> Anyway, Japanese people love sakura. It's special. I think it's the most loved. Japanese musicians will also sing sakura songs when sakura comes. There are a lot of songs that are called sakura. Clothes are sakura coloured, sweets are sakura sweets and so on. Sakura is loved. There are sakura things even in the autumn, but they start selling better when spring approaches. (Suisui)

> The material culture, I think that too is, valuable[207]. After all, I think all of these are connected under kichou, since it's something that only lasts for a while. Like this strawberry ice tea, it's only for this season, they add the scent of flowers or something and then you feel like it's spring when you see and smell these things and then just kind of want to buy and enjoy it. (T: Is that a good thing?) Hmm, it's good isn't it? There's no consumerism thinking in hanami. It's not a determined event and it's free, no religion or anything so it's free, so it's fine to do what you want. It's fine as long as there are flowers. It's bad if the flowers wilt, but as long as there are flowers, you can make or do whatever you want. (Sunny)

This might not be as clear as the two mentioned earlier, but I felt it might be relevant, since Japanese people have a habit of handling even sacred things very profanely. What I mean is that consumerism is an example of the practicality of hanami, it is a viable source of income and it strengthens the Japanese sakura or hanami mania. Suisui and Sunny were the only ones to directly comment on this aspect of hanami and both felt it was a good thing.

To summarize, I would argue that hanami is a distinctively Japanese ritual that symbolizes the Japanese spirit. By its nature the ritual is secularized which is also typical of Japanese rituals. As a ritual it is both practical and symbolic. It also combines different meanings and aspects into just one ritual. The practical aspects of food and drink and going with the flow are united with the symbolic aspects of appreciating the beauty of nature and its seasons. All of these aspects alone can symbolize Japan and Japanese culture, but combined together this feeling of being distinctively Japanese and unique to Japan grow even stronger. Even though other countries have some form of hanami too, Japan's hanami is unique in both practice and meaning. To Japanese people hanami is also a symbol of Japan. I see hanami as a ritual of Japaneseness.

8. Conclusions

My first research question was: *Can hanami be seen as a ritual of lived religion?* My second research question was: *Does hanami represent the Japanese culture as a secularised ritual?* I would argue that hanami is definitely a ritual. It is repetitive and it has clear meanings. Hanami

[207] 貴重- Kichou. Literally translated it can mean valuable or precious. Sunny used this word several times when we were talking about hanami and sakura. I translated it with different words each time, depending on the context. She used it to try and convey the sense of meaning that sakura and hanami have in Japanese culture.

is usually done every year, once or twice by most people. If it was more common, it would probably lose its meaning. Even though technically hanami can be done all throughout the year with different flowers, most people will be satisfied with just doing sakura hanami. It is after all, the most beloved flower of the Japanese people, as well as the most popular one for hanami.

The meanings given to hanami are various. The seven different categories I formed from my data represent these meanings. Socialising, communication, food and drink, appreciating beauty, ritual of the spring, spiritual revival and symbol of Japanese culture all give meaning to hanami as a ritual. My interviewees all had a little different motivations and values about doing hanami, but most at least recognised all of these meanings as being part of the experience of hanami. Some clearly preferred the practical meanings of hanami, such as the food and drink or socialising and communication. Others appreciated the symbolic meanings such as appreciating beauty and being a part of Japanese culture more.

Hanami is not part of any religion and has no religious connections in its modern form, yet it is a spiritual action for some people. This qualifies it as belonging to lived religion. I would also argue that it is a secularised ritual of lived religion. Hanami might have started off as religious in nature, but it has clearly secularised and become more practical and mundane in nature. Even so it still has some spiritual meaning, which makes it a good example of lived religion. It gives people spiritual fulfilment without being tied to any religions. Nor is it organised in any official capacity. With hanami people can express their appreciation for beauty and nature, yet the ritual holds practical value as well. Both are typical of lived religion.

As Priest-san mentioned, Japanese people might have religious or spiritual feelings, but they are not just aware of them. Most of my other interviewees felt no connection between hanami and spirituality at first, but some felt the connection after we talked about it a little and they became more aware and were better able to express themselves. For Japanese people appreciating hanami and all its aspects can definitely be a spiritual expression, even though most are oblivious to it.

Appreciating beauty is to me an obvious expression of spirituality. The beauty of sakura and hanami is not just one kind of beauty. It is the beauty of the flowers that pleases the eye, the many works of art made based on sakura and hanami and the fleeting moment when sakura are in full bloom that symbolises the uncertainty and perishability of life.

Feeling the seasons is important to Japanese people. Hanami is strongly associated with the season of spring. One way of looking at hanami is to see it as the ritual of spring. Celebrating nature and seasons and expressing the appreciation and admiration for them is also spiritual expression. It has the practical side of the temperatures becoming warmer and the academic year starting too.

Socialising, communication and eating and drinking all have practical meanings in hanami. Spiritual expression that has practical functions is important in lived religion. It is precisely the practicality that makes spiritual practices important in lived religion. I think this appreciation of practicality combined with the appreciation of the beforementioned meaningful aspects of hanami is what makes it such an important event in Japan. The true thinking of Japanese people can also be seen in hana yori dango, which is why I even used it as the title for this research.

I think the last aspect of hanami being a symbol of Japanese culture is more related to my second research question. I think as a ritual hanami represents Japanese culture in a very distinctive way. All of my aspects or categories represent the Japanese culture in some ways. More meaning is placed on food and drinks in Japanese social situations than in the Western countries. Socialising and especially communication are boosted by alcohol as it helps people relax and be more true to themselves. Appreciating the beauty in perishing things is distinctively Japanese. The love of nature and celebrating seasons might not be distinctively Japanese, but how to express it in hanami is. Experiencing spiritual feelings from looking at sakura flowers seems very Japanese to me.

My own theory was based around this thought as I explained it in the previous chapter. The secularisation aspect of this ritual shows more in the practical aspects of hanami, but I feel that the ritual itself is secularised, which is common in Japanese culture. If hanami is considered a ritual of Japaneseness as I argued in the previous chapter, then hanami definitely represents the Japanese culture as a secularised ritual. Thus, I would argue that the answer to both of my research questions is ‘yes’.

8.1 Further Research

As mentioned before, I got quite interested in the possibility of possibly doing comparative research on different types of hanami, specifically the difference between picnic and walking hanami. Since most of my interviewees held the food and sake and the socialising as the most

important aspects of hanami and saw it as more a cultural ritual rather than a spiritual one, I thought it would be interesting to compare these experiences with the experiences of just doing walking hanami, since this rarely includes drinking and eating.

Hanami as a symbol of Japanese culture. I could see hanami strongly as a symbol of Japanese culture. I even formed my own theory around this idea. Japanese people can be quite nationalistic and sakura being the national flower of Japan, Japanese people tend to treat anything related to it with special care. Which is why I think it would be interesting to continue down this path and do more focused and extensive research on it.

In general, I feel that the topic of hanami needs more research on it. I only found one whole research done on it in Japanese a few years ago, which is surprising considering the scale of hanami. Perhaps like some of my interviewees said, it is just too obvious to Japanese people. There is a lot of research on Japanese nature, religion, spirituality and other topics I covered, but even so the research on hanami is sorely lacking.

Sources

All interview recordings and transcriptions and their translations are in the possession of the author.

Interviewee 1: Sunny, two separate interviews, one over the Internet on December 10th 2016, one in Hansen Hospital Museum's park after doing hanami together, April 6th. Supplementary questions over the Internet on later dates.

Interviewee 2: Suisui. One interview in Kyoto Gosho after doing hanami together on March 27th 2017.

Interviewee 3: Priest-san. One interview in St. Agnes' Episcopal Church Kyoto, March 30th 2017.

Interviewee 4: Souryo-san. One interview in Hongyouji temple in Tokyo, April 3rd.

Interviewee 5: Kou-san. One interview in Ueno park while holding a spot, April 3rd.

Interview 6: Rouba-san and Roujin-san. One interview in Ueno park, April 3rd. The recorder ran out of power after about 6 minutes.

Interviewee 7: Tarou-kun. One interview in Ueno park while holding a spot, April 3rd.

Interviewee 8: Suwa-san. One interview in Suwa shrine, April 6th.

Interviewee 9: Hiro-kun. One interview in Ueno park while holding a spot, April 8th.

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Attachments

I have taken all of these pictures during my several stays in Japan.

1. Ueno Park



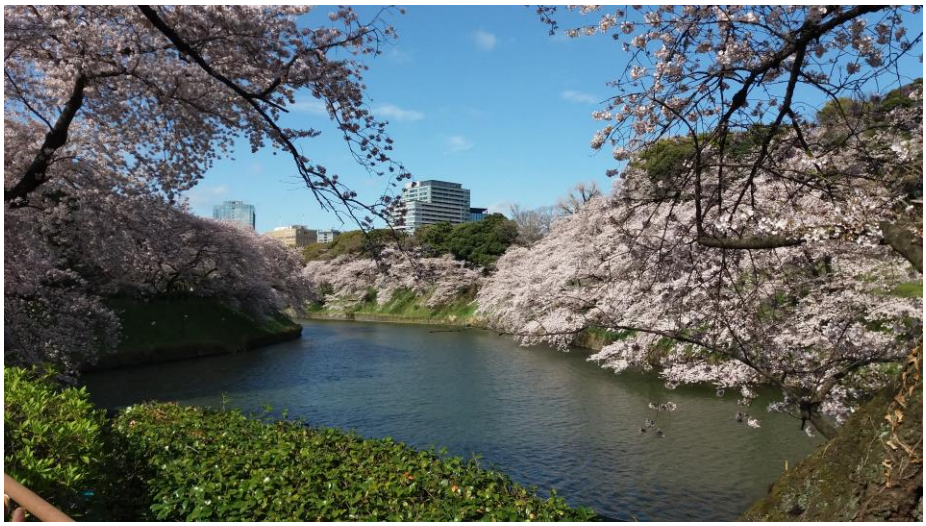
2. Shinjuku Imperial Garden



3. Yasukuni jinja



4. Chidori-ga-fuchi



5. Hansen memorial hospital museum



6. Hanami dango I bought in 2011.

