

Graduating Dead :

The memorial and therapeutical practices after 2011 Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami

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It's been 2 years since the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami. In March 2013 schools of the tsunami effected regions held the Graduation ceremony. According to the media, not only the living absolvents received the diploma, but also the children, who have died in disaster.

There is no juridical reason for issuing a diploma to those who haven't finished school due to death. Anyway, there should be any other reason why it happens in so many schools.

The author of this paper has studied the cases of issuing the diplomas to deceased absolvents in public schools of Miyagi prefecture, and is determined to present the psychological and ethnological reasons for such decision and explain the cases of memorial and therapeutical practices in the school field.

During the survey, the questionnaires were sent to 95 schools, that have 327 deceased and 35 missing absolvents enlisted, and received the 47.4 % of them answered.

The following became clear from the results:

1. The diplomas to the deceased absolvents were issued in municipal schools, district schools and village schools, but not in prefectural schools.
2. The percentage for the schools that issued the diplomas for deceased absolvents is 100 % for kindergartens, 42.9 % for elementary schools, 83.3 % for junior high schools and there is no known evidence for the issuing of such diplomas in high schools and special schools.
3. The reasons for issuing the diplomas are mainly grief care for the family and school members (teachers, students) and memorial for the deceased.

What can be seen from these facts:

There is something in common between the belief that deceased children can "promote" or "graduate" and folk customs of praying for the happy afterlife of a child, giving the deceased child clothes and shoes, as well as providing a "ghost marriage".

It can be assumed from the diploma issuing practice, that in last years there was a change from private belief to all-school semi-public memorial.