



From Festivals to the Everyday : The Circulation of Kumade at the Tori no Ichi at Hanazono Shrine

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Abstract Every year in November, the Tori no Ichi festival draws huge crowds to the grounds of Hanazono Shrine in Shinjuku, Tokyo. The festival is centered around the buying and selling of *kumade*, or good luck rakes. These bold and colorful objects function as *engimono*, or good luck charms, purchased for business prosperity or home safety. This study explores the circulation and itinerary of *kumade* at the Tori no Ichi festival by analyzing the performances surrounding them. While previous scholarship on *engimono* has focused on their roles in domestic settings or disposal rituals, this research approaches them in situ at the festival. The study shows that these objects bridge the festival and the everyday, connecting people to the event and the sacred site through a dynamic network of social, spatial, and ritual practices. The research draws on fieldwork and in-depth interviews conducted at Hanazono Shrine between 2020 and 2024.

Keywords urban festival, material religion, sacred object, performance, Tokyo

1. Introduction

In November, the grounds of Hanazono Shrine fill up with huge crowds. The people of Shinjuku are there to celebrate the annual Tori no Ichi (Rooster Market) festival, whose attraction is the buying and selling of *kumade*, or good luck rakes. At a glance, one would not recognize the bold and colorful objects as rakes, but at the back, one can see five times as remnants of their garden tool counterparts. The same festival is organized in over 40 shrines and temples around the Kantō region (杉田他 2021). Still, the most prolific ones are the festivities at Ōtori Shrine (Asakusa Tori no Ichi in Taitō Ward) and the one in Shinjuku, which this paper will focus on.

Kumade belong to the category of *engimono*, or good luck charms, which are bought to ensure the owner's business prosperity or the home's safety. Situated within the realm of this-worldly benefits (*genze riyaku*), *engimono* are objects that move from sacred sites to everyday spaces and bring good luck to their owners. Like many religious objects in Japan, they are renewed once a year to ensure their efficacy. Often

found in shrines and temples around Japan, these objects are usually linked to certain locations or events, such as the Tori no Ichi.

Kumade are ubiquitous, and during my fieldwork, I encountered them in various situations, not only at the festival. I saw how they were made in the workshops of the craftspeople, or *kumadeya*. I also noticed them placed in restaurants, bars, and cafés, as well as company offices. They appear in public spaces, such as train stations and libraries. I even came across *kumade* for sale in souvenir shops in Asakusa. In these encounters, I could see a stark contrast between the festival and the everyday: at the festival *kumade* were the main attraction, but at their eventual emplacement, the vibrant objects seemed to quietly blend into their surroundings. After a year, these objects are brought back to the festival and bought anew.

Objects, like *kumade*, and the practices surrounding them are the research subjects of material religion (Meyer et.al. 2010). While they were never absent from the study of

religion, religious objects were mostly studied as things that represent or symbolize something else, not as having agency themselves. From the 2000s onwards, the study of material religion has proliferated, and in Japan too, it has been gathering the attention of scholars in recent years (中村 2017, 宮嶋 2020). One important topic of these studies has been how religious objects circulate as commodities in different contexts (Reader & Tanabe 1998; Daniels 2003, 2012). This paper will build on this literature by exploring the circulation of *kumade* at the Tori no Ichi festival. By tracing the “itinerary” of the *kumade*, I will explore how *kumade* turn from commodities to sacred commodities through performances that connect people to the festival.

This paper is based on my fieldwork and in-depth interviews on the Tori no Ichi festivals in Tokyo (Hanazono Shrine, Shinjuku) from 2020 to 2024. During my fieldwork, I participated in the festival in various roles, both as a visitor and working at a *kumade* stall. I also interviewed the buyers, makers, and sellers of *kumade*, as well as the organizers of the festival.

This paper will start with an overview of the circulation of religious objects in Japan and the theoretical perspectives through which they have been explored. Then, I will introduce the Tori no Ichi festival, focusing on its connection to *kumade* and its surrounding area. I will continue by analyzing *kumade* in the various performances they take part in and the actors involved in them. Finally, I will discuss the itinerary of *kumade* as they move from the extraordinary to the everyday.

2. Circulation of religious objects

The research on Japanese material religion has been fragmented and spread in various fields, such as anthropology, folklore studies, and religious studies. The research interests and perspectives have depended on their respective fields but two general approaches to materiality can be identified, as Whitehead (2013) has outlined. In religious studies, objects are often considered representations or symbols that point beyond themselves, while in material culture studies, they are analyzed as commodities defined by their circulation and social function (Whitehead 2013: 24). In the context of Japanese religious objects, however, these approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as both their symbolism and

circulation are integral parts of religious practices.

The economy of good luck is evident in the variety of religious paraphernalia sold at shrines and temples all over Japan. There are different types of objects; those visitors take with them and those they leave at the site. The former group includes the topic of this paper, good luck charms (*engimono*), as well as amulets (*omamori*) and talismans (*ofuda*), and the latter, votive tablets called *ema*, on which visitors write their wishes and leave them at the sacred site. The buying and selling of these objects is a major source of income for shrines and temples (Reader & Tanabe 1998) and for visitors, they often act as a motivator for visits to sacred sites, both due to their ritual meaning and their aesthetic qualities (Reader 2014).

The aesthetic qualities of objects afford re-interpretations both by the religious institutions and their visitors. *Goshuin atsume*, or the collection of seal stamps as proof of a visit to a certain shrine or temple, has become a popular tourist activity, and the seal stamps can be seen as an attraction in themselves (Tillonen 2021). This is further enhanced by objects available for a limited time only, such as an *omamori* related to certain events or a special seasonal design of a *goshuin* seal stamp. Also, in the case of anime pilgrimage, official tie-ups with famous characters can be seen in the religious objects sold at sacred sites (Porcu 2014). On the other hand, objects also enable visitor performances, and for example *ema* tablets have become a medium through which fans can express themselves (Andrews 2014, Nuradi 2024).

This shows how the meanings of objects transform through circulation, as argued in *The Social Lives of Things* (1986), edited by Arjun Appadurai. According to Appadurai, commodities acquire their meanings “through human transactions, attributes, and motivations,” and are thus socially constructed entities (Appadurai 1986: 5). However, their meanings are “inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories” (Ibid. 5), and in this way commodities possess a kind of social life and “circulate within various regimes of value across time and space” (Ibid. 4). Within such contexts, the commodities themselves do not inherently possess value. Instead, it is through the meanings assigned to them by people that their value is determined and may change depending on the social circumstances or location.

The status of an object as a commodity is determined by whether or not it can be exchanged within a particular social context. Once an object is purchased, it is considered no longer exchangeable (at least for a while), and its status shifts from that of a commodity to someone's possession. Igor Kopytoff (1986) refers to this as singularization and calls such status changes the biography of things. The metaphor highlights the way objects go through various life stages and thus have biographies like humans. By tracing these biographies, we can uncover how an object's status changes over time, and that the status of a commodity is neither permanent nor absolute.

While the biographical approach has been the base framework for many anthropological studies of objects (see Hoskins 2006), it also has its critics, as among other things it assumes linearity—that like a human, an object has a clear birth and death, for example—and does not necessarily account for the complex entanglements an object is part of (Bauer 2019). Therefore, the term itinerary has been proposed over biography (Hahn & Weiss 2013, Joyce & Gillespie 2015). Itinerary as a term refers to the various routes the objects move through and “highlights the non-linear character of an object's mobility and the subsequent changes in its contexts and roles” (Hahn & Weiss 2013: 8). Itineraries also include possible periods of stasis, for example when an object is not being used. Also, as Bauer discusses, “an object seemingly fixed or at rest is still in motion relative to the seasons, the air, and the other things (animals, humans, objects, etc.) whose own itineraries it intersects” (2019: 343). Therefore, looking at the itinerary could provide a more holistic view on objects and their movements in networks of other actors.

The term “itinerary” fits Japanese religious objects as mobility is inherent to them. According to Daniels, *engimono*, or good luck charms, “are portable objects employed to establish a tangible relationship with a certain deity and, by extension, a particular sacred locality” (2003: 623). This can be seen in the fact that, according to Reader, amulets and lucky charms “are only considered to carry any religious significance if blessed by and acquired from a shrine and temple” (Reader 2014: 160, referring to Reader & Tanabe 1998).

This bond or link to a deity or locality can already be seen in the words *en* and *engi*, terms grounded in Buddhist thought.

En, often translated as “cause,” originates in Buddhist ideas of causality and karmic connections, whereas *engi* refers to dependent origination, or the way things arise in dependence upon other conditions. This, according to Kyburtz, “presents existence as an infinite web of chains linking all phenomena to one another, with causes and effects forming the links” and thus gives rise to “the popular concept of ‘bonds’ or ‘connections’ through which all beings are joined together” (1991: 98)¹.

On the other hand, *engimono* are also seen to have agency as standalone objects, as their meanings are based both on their materiality and symbolism. Daniels explains that the power of *engimono* is based on homophonic magic (*goroawase*) and auspicious shapes (2012: 154). *Kumade*, for example, as a garden tool, is used to gather fallen leaves. As a good luck charm, it is seen to “rake in” good luck to its owner. Also, adding a *tai*, or a decorative sea bream, on a *kumade* evokes the meaning of *omedetai*, which can be translated to “happy” or “celebratory”. These meanings, however, are not exclusive to *kumade* and can be seen throughout *engimono* of different kinds. *Engimono* are bound together as a category by a common symbolic and visual language which allows them to be recognized as good luck charms.

Objects are also bound to sacred locales through their disposal. In Japan, objects, such as amulets and talismans are “terminal commodities” (Kopytoff 1986), or commodities that once bought, will not return to the market. They have an expiration date and require renewal to ensure their efficacy.

Before their disposal, sacred objects can enter a longer period of stasis. When brought back home, they become part of the everyday environment and often go unnoticed. This reflects what Miller (1987) calls the “humility of things”, i.e. the phenomenon where society treats certain objects as background elements. However, even when objects are invisible in this way, they still have the power to shape normative behavior. According to Miller, “the less we are aware of them the more powerfully they can determine our expectations by setting the scene and ensuring normative behavior, without being open to challenge. They determine what takes place to the extent that we are unconscious of their capacity to do so” (Miller 2005: 5).

This can be seen when it is time to dispose of *engimono*.

Engimono and other religious objects become “sacred waste” (Strengs 2014) that demand orthopraxy (Gygi 2018) in the form of correct disposal practices, or services offered by religious institutions, where one subsequently can purchase another amulet to replace the old one. As Reader and Tanabe have mentioned, “gratitude for the benefits provided by old amulets and talismans is thus linked to renewal and the purchase of new ones” (1998: 196) through the performances that make up the cycle of purchase and practice.

Disposal practices are not limited to religious objects. There are dedicated rituals for the disposal of various objects, such as dolls (Gygi 2023) and needles (Kretschmer 2000, Guth 2014). By themselves, the objects are not related to certain sacred sites but become “sticky” (Gygi 2018) when trying to get rid of them. Guth (2014), for example, has discussed the practice of *hari kuyō*, or ritual needle disposal. By examining needles from their manufacturing, use, and disposal, Guth concludes that *hari kuyō* is “an assemblage made up of many practices rather than a single homogenous and immutable ritual” (2014: 184). Bringing broken needles to temples has also allowed women to participate in rituals; in other words, the needles gave women the agency to participate meaningfully in ritual life.

In this way, objects allow various people to engage in religious practices and the world of this-worldly benefits. Reader has suggested, in the context of pilgrimages, that commodities, such as souvenirs “bring the perceived or believed sacred power of a site within the ambit of ordinary people, and create avenues through which they can engage with, experience, consume, take home and make familiar that sense of power” (2014: 168). Therefore, it is not only religious specialists, such as priests, who control access to the sacred. For example, in Gould’s (2023) ethnography on *butsudan*, Buddhist home altars, the role of retailers has been emphasized as an important source of information for the purchasers.

These specialists outside of religious institutions can play a great role in the sacralization of objects. Brox (2019), in the context of Tibetan Buddhism, has explored how shopkeepers produce the aura (or, in the context of religion, sacredness) of mass-produced religious paraphernalia sold at a market. While buyers can perceive the commercial setting of the Tibetan market as posing a threat to the object, different modes of

action after the production phase lift them out of the mundane sphere. Brox divides these into packaging, ritual action, and faith labor, all of which set mass-produced objects apart as sacred commodities outside the official ritual contexts. While Japanese religious objects are not considered less sacred due to mass production, Brox’s ways of creating aura show us how the sacred is produced by marketers and consumers, not only by ritual experts.

The context of purchase is also an important aspect of religious objects, since sometimes access to certain objects can be limited to certain events or seasons, such as yearly festivals. Tsuchiya (土谷 2020) explores how social ties are formed through the buying, selling, and gifting of *chimaki*, protective talismans sold exclusively at Kyoto’s Gion festival. Tsuchiya shows that *chimaki* create diverse social relations across Kyoto. Their sacralization sets forth their circulation, and their temporary nature, being returned after a year, makes them both commodities and singular objects (Kopytoff 1986). Tsuchiya also mentions that rather than associating their sacredness with the supernatural, people often link it to the significance of the Gion festival itself.

In this brief overview, we can see how previous studies have focused on the ways religious objects acquire meanings in different contexts, such as from the place of purchase, domestic environments in which the objects are used, and the “correct” disposal practices. However, less focus has been paid to the events, such as festivals, as contexts where people come into contact with religious objects. Therefore, in this paper, I will explore the circulation of good luck charms in situ by focusing on the (human and non-human) actors and performances involved in it. By looking at object itineraries, we can see that commodities like amulets, talismans, and good luck charms flow through religious and commercial networks, and move from the sacred site to the home and back. But first, let us look at the *Tori no Ichi* festival and *kumade* in more detail.

3. *Kumade* and the *Tori no Ichi* festivals

The *Tori no Ichi* festival is held at shrines that enshrine Yamato Takeru as their deity. The Japanese folk hero was the son of Emperor Keikō, the 12th Emperor of Japan, and appears in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, the two foundational texts in Japanese mythology and history. Shrines dedicated to Yamato Takeru are

said to be located along the route he traveled during his eastern expedition (松沢 1979: 29). It is believed that Yamato Takeru prayed for victory at these shrines and, upon returning to express his gratitude and celebrate his victory, he hung the rake he used as a weapon on the pine trees before entering the shrine. This is said to be the origin of the connection between the Tori no Ichi and *kumade* (Ōtori Shrine 2023). Since this event took place on the Rooster Day (*tori no hi*) of November, Tori no Ichi has since been held on the Rooster Days of November. Based on the Chinese zodiac, Rooster Days occur every 12 days, and the number of times the festival is held varies each year. The first is called Ichi no Tori (First Rooster), the second is Ni no Tori (Second Rooster), and the third is San no Tori (Third Rooster).

Originally a harvest festival, Tori no Ichi spread from Ōtori Shrine in Hanamata village (current Hanahata in Adachi Ward, Tokyo), a farming village near Edo, to other temples and shrines across the Kantō region in the late Edo (1603-1867) and early Meiji period (1868-1912). Today, it is held at more than 40 locations across the Kantō region. While the scale and specific way of hosting the festival vary by shrine, the central feature remains the sale of *kumade* rakes.

The festival has evolved hand in hand with the transformation of the *kumade* from farm tools to good luck charms. The making of *kumade* started in the late Edo period (1603-1867) when farmers made *kumade* during their off-season to make additional income. Vendors would add paper decorations to the rakes, which gradually took on a greater meaning, although originally, they were meant to be removed before use (花田 2012). As time went by, the symbolic meaning of the rake became prevalent, and the festival also started to specialize in the buying and selling of *engimono*. This gave birth to *kumade*-making as a craft with its own market and actors, such as craftspeople (*kumadeya*) and wholesalers (*tonya*), specializing in the making and selling of *kumade* and the materials which they are made of. Making the *kumade* is a year-round business, which includes various phases from preparing ornaments and finally compiling the *kumade*.

3.1 Types of *kumade*

The base of the *kumade* is a bamboo rake on which various ornaments made of bamboo, paper, and plastic are attached. There are various types of *kumade* but generally they can



Figure 1. *Kumade* found at a train station (photographed by the author in Tokyo, 2021).

be divided into two types, *akamono kumade* and *aomono kumade*, or red and green *kumade*. The former are completely handmade, while the latter use both handmade and machine-made parts. *Aomono kumade* appeared after World War II and became commonplace before the 1960s when machine-led mass production took hold. Nowadays, most *kumade* sold at Tori no Ichi contain both handmade and machine-made parts. *Kumade* made with machine-made parts are also called *bunka kumade*. The term *bunka*, or “culture,” refers to the fact that *kumade* reflect the current culture of the year. In the 1960s, however, the word was often added to items that were made with new materials during the time of rapid economic growth and emphasized the fact that they had “evolved” from their old counterparts. In fact, around that time, many craftspeople were shifting to other areas of employment (松沢 1979), and the machine-made parts enabled the craft to continue. Later in the 1990s, wholesalers started ordering and manufacturing the parts outside of Japan, in places such as Vietnam and China, which has made *kumade*-making a global business.

Kumade are a jumble of various colorful good luck objects,

which could be described as religious kitsch. They embody what they promise to do: gold plates and other money-related decorations invite riches and luck in business. There are no strict rules on what can be attached to *kumade* and the decorations often reflect the times. For example, during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), Hinomaru flags and naval ensigns were attached to *kumade* (松沢 1979). While traditional ornaments are still popular, some choose to go with more playful objects, such as *kumade* with stuffed animals or famous anime characters attached to them. It can be said that the one-year circulation, along with the freedom and flexibility of *kumade*, has allowed *kumade* to adapt to the needs of buyers.

3.2 *Tori no Ichi* in Shinjuku

While the most famous *Tori no Ichi* is held in Asakusa, the one at Hanazono Shrine in Shinjuku is the liveliest with an estimated hundred thousand annual visitors. Situated near the entertainment areas of Kabukichō and Golden Gai, Hanazono Shrine is the chief guardian shrine of Shinjuku, and three gods are venerated on the premises. These are Ukanomitama no Mikoto (the deity of Hanazono Shrine), Yamato Takeru no Mikoto (of Ōtori Shrine), and Ukemochi no Kami (of Raiden Shrine)²¹. While the Reitaisai, or the most important annual festival of the shrine, is held in May, *Tori no Ichi*, according to the shrine priest, is considered more of a seasonal tradition (*fūbutsushi*). Therefore, while *Tori no Ichi* brings many visitors to the shrine, from a religious point of view, the Reitaisai is more significant.

The festival's origin traces back to 1879, when local residents rebuilt the shrine building that had been destroyed by a natural disaster and began hosting a *Tori no Ichi* modeled after the one at Asakusa's Ōtori Shrine (Okamoto 2017: 79). However, the *Tori no Ichi* originally associated with Shinjuku was, in fact, held at another shrine in Yotsuya, not Hanazono Shrine.

Later on, the proliferation of the *Tori no Ichi* as an urban festival coincided with the rebuilding of Shinjuku and its transformation to a bustling business and entertainment area after World War II.

The relatively recent history of the *Tori no Ichi* at Hanazono Shrine can be seen in the vendors. Whereas the sellers of *kumade* in Asakusa are mostly traditional craftspeople, who used to have their workshops near the shrine, at Hanazono



Figure 2. Crowds lining up to pray at Hanazono Shrine (photographed by the author in Tokyo, 2021).

Shrine most sellers are *tekiya*, or festival vendors. They do not produce *kumade*, only sell them. Also, the relationship between the vendors and the shrine differs by shrine. For instance, at Ōtori Shrine in Asakusa, all craftspeople belong to Fukujin-kō, or the shrine worshipper's community, whereas at Hanazono Shrine, the craftspeople and vendors do not have a relationship with the shrine outside of the festival.

Hanazono Shrine's *Tori no Ichi* also has its own attractions, such as the *misemono* side shows in which performers put on deliberately shocking acts. In the past, these shows would involve animals, such as the snake-eating woman (*hebi onna*), but have in recent years disappeared due to concerns of animal abuse. These performances used to be a staple of festivals but have largely faded, and the current performers are small theater troupes rather than full-time sideshow entertainers.

To conclude, since the late Edo (1603-1867) and early Meiji period (1868-1912), the *Tori no Ichi* has spread and connected to various locales where it takes its unique shape. This can be seen in the various actors involved in the making and selling of *kumade*, such as craftspeople, wholesalers, and vendors of *kumade*.

Next, I will examine the performances through which *kumade* move from the hands of the craftspeople and vendors to the buyers and what other objects are involved in them.

4. The buying and selling of *kumade*

Tori no Ichi hosts various objects and performances that produce the "festive landscape" (川原・岡村 2012). This landscape is made up of the 50 or so *kumade* stalls that are set up every year. A



Figure 3. *Kumade* vendor's stall (photographed by the author in Tokyo, 2020).

variety of *kumade* are on sale at each vendor's stall.

In the *kumade* market, vendors display their *kumade*, and the *kumade* hanging from above or at the sides of the stalls form a tunnel-like space. Visitor performances of walking, eating, gazing, and photographing are all part of how people produce and experience the festival space. In the daytime, these structures have a makeshift appearance but at night, when the area is lit up, the market turns into a treasure box filled with colorful *kumade* and the moving bodies of vendors and visitors.

This is where most people choose to buy their *kumade* each year. In what follows, I will focus on the performances related to *kumade*. Through these performances, *kumade* transform from a commodity to a good luck charm. This section is based on interviews with *kumade* craftspeople, vendors, and shrine officials as well as vignettes from my fieldwork at Hanazono Shrine.

4.1 Disposing *kumade*

Let us start from “the end”. *Kumade* are to be renewed every year to ensure their efficacy. But to buy a new *kumade* one must dispose of the old. The place to return old *kumade* is near the main shrine. Most visitors pray at the main shrine, even if they do not buy a *kumade*, but those who come to buy a new *kumade* first return their old one and then queue to pray. Before disposing of their old one, people also pray at Osame Daimyōjin, another shrine within the grounds, where old amulets and talismans are usually returned.

Next to the Osame Daimyōjin, there is a space dedicated to the disposal of old *kumade* where visitors throw their old *kumade*. Many throw their *kumade* with force on to a growing pile of old charms of different sizes, from a few centimeters to about two meters tall. This is when the *kumade* and its owner part ways and the *kumade* turns back into a regular object. The performance of throwing away can be thought of as part of the desacralization of the object. As the evening progresses, the pile grows so large that it is difficult to distinguish individual *kumade* from the mass. This symbolizes how the *kumade* finishes being “someone's” *kumade* as the owner cuts their ties with the object.

While amulets and talismans can be taken to shrines and temples all year round, there are few places where one can get rid of large objects. Therefore, while the Tori no Ichi is an event where one can buy *kumade*, it also affords the disposal of *kumade*. In fact, the festival produces truckloads of waste just from the old *kumade*. At Hanazono Shrine, usually 12 to 13 trucks are used to transport old *kumade*, but during the 2023 Tori no Ichi festival, as many as 20 trucks were needed due to the large volume. According to a festival organizer, this is because of the shrine's convenient location. The trucks are loaded at night and driven to a recycling center where the *kumade* are disassembled and recycled based on their materials. Therefore, while the disposal of Tori no Ichi means the “death” of *kumade* as a good luck object, some of its materials might have an afterlife in another form.



Figure 4. A pile of disposed *kumade* (photographed by the author in Tokyo, 2020).

4.2 Surrounding objects

As Tori no Ichi is a yearly event, it is synchronized with the yearly circulation of *kumade*. As mentioned before, it is customary that Japanese good luck objects are renewed to ensure their efficacy. What is characteristic to *kumade* is that each time one renews them, the price and size of the objects should also increase. This way, *kumade* connect to the growth of the business and the old items always connect to the new.

Kumade do not have price tags and the price is up for negotiation. Starting from 1,000 yen, the price of a *kumade* can go up to a few hundred thousand yen, depending on the size and the relationship with the *kumade* vendor. The traditional way of buying a *kumade* includes haggling where the discounted amount is given to the seller as a tip or a gift (*goshūgi*). For example, even if a *kumade* that costs 30,000 yen was haggled down to 20,000 yen, the buyer would still hand 30,000 yen to the vendor. Sometimes the buyer pays the asked price, but hands an extra 10,000 yen as a tip. In these transactions, money does not adhere to the exchange value of the object but has symbolic value and becomes a part of the performance. *Kumade* are almost always bought with cash, which adds a physical aspect to the exchange as money changes hands.

However, vendors do not leave the circulation up to the customer. When one buys a *kumade*, they are asked to write down their name and address. The vendors then send out postcards to their customers to inform them about the dates on which Tori no Ichi is held. The postcard also acts as a reminder of renewing the object and to encourage the customers to visit the same vendor. S-san, a *kumade* craftsperson and wholesaler at Hanazono Shrine shared details about how they manage sales:

We send postcards before the Tori no Ichi festival that include our contact information so people who have requests can contact us. Sometimes, we even call our big customers ourselves. Like, last year, someone bought an item for around 50,000 yen, and we asked, “Would you like us to prepare something about the same size again this year?” Sometimes they ask for changes like next year is the Year of the Rabbit, so instead of putting a *mikoshi* (portable shrine) in the center, they might want a rabbit.

Or they might say, “This year, I’d like a slightly bigger *mikoshi*.” When we get those kinds of requests, we try to accommodate and make things accordingly.

The postcard also features the festival schedule and stall number, along with a reminder of the vendor and shop where the buyer purchased their previous *kumade*. This is important information as most of the *kumade* sold at the festival stalls are mostly produced by two *kumadeya*. Because of this, it is impossible to distinguish between different shops based solely on the *kumade* themselves. This is a significant difference from the Tori no Ichi in Asakusa, where each *kumade* shop has its own distinct style, and the appearance of the *kumade* varies by shop. Contrastively, at Hanazono Shrine, buyers have to rely on either the stall number or shop name to find their previous vendor and the postcard functions like a map with which one locates them.

Not everyone buys expensive *kumade* and sometimes the buying can be more casual, treated as souvenirs from the festival. Because my fieldwork took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, most visitors specifically came for *kumade*, and there were few new customers. S-san described the impact of the pandemic:

There used to be more food stalls, stretching all the way to Yasukuni Street. But those are gone now. The year before last, there were none at all. Things relaxed a bit last year, and even more this year. Thanks to that, people started coming again. For example, those carrying beer would casually buy a small 1,000–2,000-yen *kumade*. But those customers have significantly decreased. Now, the people who do come are more serious buyers. We mostly sell *kumade* priced above 5,000 yen. The smaller ones hardly sell anymore.

This highlights how food stalls influence more than just the festive atmosphere—they also impact *kumade* sales. In fact, the 140 odd food stalls that appear inside and outside the shrine premises attract both buyers and non-buyers alike. During the COVID-19 restrictions, when food stalls were absent, impulse purchases noticeably declined. When I spoke with S-san again after the stalls returned, he noted that their

comeback also revived the sale of smaller *kumade*. This shows that the surrounding ecosystem of the festival plays a great role in the buying and selling of the objects.

Kumade are not the only sacred objects sold during the festival. At the shrine shop near the main shrine, one can find a variety of amulets and talismans. The shrine also sells its own small *kumade* amulet during the festival. In an interview, the shrine priest made a clear distinction between their amulets and the ones sold by the vendors:

The ones from the shrine are *omamori* (amulets). Shrine *omamori* come properly affixed with an *ofuda* (talisman). When this *ofuda* is attached to a *kumade*, it becomes an *omamori*. The *kumade* from the shrine is distributed specifically as a protective charm. This *omamori* carries the divine power of the *kami*. Each *ofuda* contains a portion of the *kami*'s spirit. That's what makes it a true *omamori*. On the other hand, *engimono* are lucky items, or things considered to bring good fortune.

This difference can also be seen spatially, i.e. where the objects are located as well as who sells them. The shrine's objects are sold by the shrine at the shrine shop and good luck charms are sold in the *kumade* market by specialized vendors, *kumadeya* and *tekiya*. Although the *kumade* that the vendors sell are not considered religious objects in the institutional sense, most visitors still see good luck objects as connected to the shrine.

In fact, sometimes the shrine's objects and *engimono* intersect. For example, some *tekiya* have gone as far as to attach official talismans from Hanazono Shrine in their most expensive *kumade*. Talismans are objects one might place in a *kamidana* (Shinto altar) or another special place – not objects to be attached to *engimono*. The talismans glued to *kumade* are bought and attached by the vendors and the practice has no affiliation to the shrine. As the shrine priest puts it, they are more like the vendor's "embellishments" but in the interview, he seemed amused by their invention.

Therefore, while *kumade* are not directly connected to the shrine as an institution, the object does acquire its meaning from its connection to the sacred site. This also shows that the various actors and objects of the festival are interconnected,

shaping both the atmosphere of the event and consumer behavior taking place there.

4.3 Choosing *kumade*

While some people buy their *kumade* from a certain vendor, there are many who choose their *kumade* based on its appearance. Customers often deliberate over small features like the zodiac animal or the color of the beckoning cat (*manekineko*). As the object will be around for a whole year, customers think carefully about their choice. This is also the moment when the meanings of the decorations are elaborated. They become part of the vendors' sales pitches in which they explain which decoration means what and the wordplay behind them.

Some people want to buy exactly the same type of *kumade* every year. During my fieldwork, I accompanied K-san, a business owner, to the Tori no Ichi festival at Hanazono Shrine. He owns a small-scale company, which delivers electrical materials to construction sites. The reasons for buying a *kumade* were to pray for business prosperity and traffic safety since driving is part of their work. K-san received his first *kumade* from a senior colleague when he founded his company and continues to buy the same shape, a treasure ship-style decorative piece. Therefore, instead of going to the previous vendor, K-san looked for a *kumade* that was the same shape as the previous ones.

There are times when a similar *kumade* brings people back to the same vendor. A father and son who owned a sushi restaurant whom I talked to at the festival told me they chose the *kumade* based on appearance, especially the *otafuku* (a round, smiling female face with chubby cheeks) in the center, believing these would bring prosperity to their restaurant. They buy a similar *kumade* every year from the same vendor and display it at the entrance of their restaurant to welcome customers.

Although it is customary to buy a larger *kumade* each year, buying a *kumade* of the same size is not uncommon. The reason for this is that many do not have space to place a large *kumade* in their office, restaurant, or house. The changes in living conditions have also given birth to new types of *kumade*, too. For example, a small or medium-sized *okimono* type of *kumade*, which is not hung on the wall but can be

placed on a flat surface. This shows how the object itself has been adjusted to fit the needs of the buyers.

4.4 Transforming *kumade*

Kumade are made by hand in workshops and are brought to the festival to be sold at the *kumade* market. Compared to shrine-produced objects, such as talismans or amulets, there are few formal rules regarding the production of *kumade*.

Once finished, the objects arrive at the festival wrapped in plastic and carried in cardboard boxes and are placed in makeshift storages or stashed behind the *kumade* stalls. It is only when they are displayed at the market, hung from the walls and ceiling of the stalls, and the bright lights hit them, that they turn into things to be looked at, photographed, or bought. As part of the general category of *engimono*, they are already seen as bringing good luck in themselves. However, in the context of the festival, they are still commodities, albeit with ritual potential. What finalizes them is the act of personalization at the festival.

After a customer chooses a *kumade*, name tags are typically placed on the right side of the object, symbolizing “upward success”. The staff also adds extra decorations on the *kumade*. The decorations are arranged to look three-dimensional, with red lucky envelopes balanced on both sides. Ears of rice are added in front, and stickers with wishes such as “Fire Safety,” “Family Safety,” or “Business Prosperity” are attached to the back or the bamboo handle.

However, what enhances the sacred nature of *kumade* is the *sanbonjime* (a rhythmic hand-clapping ceremony) performed by the vendors after finalizing the sale. This hand-clapping is an essential part of the purchase and though not a religious ceremony performed by shrine priests, this festive ritual is one reason people come to buy *kumade* at the Tori no Ichi. Also, since many stalls sell similar products, some customers choose their vendor based on the energy of the *sanbonjime*.

During *sanbonjime*, the staff forms a circle around the customers, clapping rhythmically toward them as they hold the *kumade*. The owner, holding the *kumade*, stands at the center, surrounded by the seller and other staff members. They call out the owner's name and chant wishes for success: “*Hanjō hanjō masu masu hanjō*” (“Prosperity, more prosperity, great prosperity!”) culminating in three rounds of celebratory claps:



Figure 5. *Sanbonjime* ritual (photographed by the author in Tokyo, 2021).

clap-clap-clap, clap-clap-clap, clap-clap-clap, CLAP!

Averaging in about 15 seconds, the loud clapping energizes the atmosphere and adds to the festive mood. Many visitors start instinctively clapping together with the *sanbonjime* of others. The scale of the clapping varies depending on the stall staff. Large, expensive *kumade* often involve many surrounding stall members joining in, and the ritual may be repeated several times—up to eight times, as I witnessed. This further enhances the “conspicuous consumption” which is embodied in the size and price of the *kumade*.

Many people film the *sanbonjime* with their smartphones and take commemorative photos with the vendors. The steps leading to the shrine are also a popular spot to take photographs. The shrine is decorated with lanterns with names of sponsors. The lanterns themselves are a symbol of the festival and many people gather to take pictures with them with or without *kumade*.

These rituals of personalization, together with the surrounding festival atmosphere, aestheticize consumption and help make the festival an attraction that brings people back to the event year after year. This is also how *kumade* turn from *engimono* to the *kumade* of Tori no Ichi.

4.5 Post-festival performances

For most, buying *kumade* is only one phase of collective performances through which *kumade* move from the festival to the everyday. In fact, the post-festival performances are



Figure 6. A group taking commemorative pictures together (photographed by the author in Tokyo, 2021).

almost as important as visiting the festival itself.

Tori no Ichi is held twice or three times in November and many attend with coworkers, friends, or family. The timing of the purchase varies from buyer to buyer. Some do not mind when they go, while others are particular about always buying on the same Tori no Ichi day each year. When I asked the business owner K-san why he buys *kumade* on the third one, he said that while the first Tori no Ichi offers more choices, there's a saying: "Luck is found in leftovers." Some *kumade* vendors informed me that items that stay on shrine grounds longer bring greater fortune.

However, there are also more practical reasons to choose certain days. If the festival coincides with a weekend or the eve of one of Japan's national holidays in November (Culture Day or Labor Thanksgiving Day), crowds tend to grow. Although times vary, many people buy in the evening, as the night does not end at the shrine. After buying, customers typically head to a drinking party, making the act of buying a *kumade* just one part of a festive night. In fact, one of the main reasons why Hanazono Shrine's Tori no Ichi has become such a large-scale event can be attributed to the restaurants

and other forms of entertainment in the vicinity. The character of the area is also evident in the visitors: many who work in the nightlife industry come to the festival both with colleagues and customers.

Also, K-san said he likes buying from Hanazono Shrine because of the abundance of nearby restaurants. This shows how post-purchase drinking parties are an essential part of the Tori no Ichi. It also explains why the event draws more people when it falls on a weekend or holiday.

At night, a massive influx of people and *kumade* flow from the shrine to the surrounding areas. Since *kumade* from Hanazono Shrine are not typically packed or wrapped, you often see people carrying them around Shinjuku during Tori no Ichi. Interestingly, while old *kumade* are sometimes carried in bags, sometimes upside-down, new ones are carried openly. According to an organizer, it is lucky to hold your newly purchased *kumade* high in the air when taking it to the office or home.

After the party, *kumade* are placed on display at one's business or home. The *kumade*, the star of the Tori no Ichi, becomes a part of the backdrop—watching over its owner and waiting to be returned at the next festival.

5. Kumade as an itinerant object

So far, I have examined the different performances involving *kumade* at the Tori no Ichi festival, along with the social and physical environment surrounding it. Now, let us trace the *kumade*'s itinerary, or how it moves from one space and context to another. By looking at the *kumade* as an "itinerant object" (Bauer 2019), I will discuss the connection between *kumade*, the shrine, and the festival.

Kumade are characterized by movement: from the workshops of craftspeople to the shrine festival and further to the offices, restaurants, or homes of the buyers, and back to the festival. In the case of religious objects, the material connection and proximity to sacred sites often plays an important role. This has been examined in studies on pilgrimage souvenirs. For instance, King (2010), in their discussion of pilgrimages to Croagh Patrick in Ireland, explores the relationship between sacred sites and objects from a phenomenological standpoint. According to King, sacred sites possess material charisma, and buildings like shrines or temples and the offices that

sell religious items are part of this charisma (King 2010: 81). Religious items and souvenirs can disperse sacredness, serve as media for sharing experiences with others, and act as symbols carrying collective identity (Ibid. 97). Shackley, in their study of pilgrimages to Knock, another sacred site in Ireland, also points out that the authenticity of souvenirs is closely tied not only to the object itself but also to the place. For example, plastic bottles used to collect holy water are the most purchased items at Knock (Shackley 2006: 102).

These studies show how the physical connection between objects and sacred sites is a significant part of their sacralization. And while the *kumade* are not “official” objects of Hanazono Shrine as a religious institution, as the shrine mainly functions as a location where the *kumade* vendors’ commercial activities take place, many people find meaning in buying them at a shrine rather than online. The recognition of the shrine as a sacred site influences the perception of *kumade* and transforms them from mere decorations into auspicious objects.

However, from the perspective of this research, this is not necessarily based on any existing “sacred power” of the shrine. Rather, it is based on the circulation of the object as well as the festival’s function as a node that connects various actors and performances to a certain time and locale. In fact, while *kumade* are seen as more meaningful through their connection to the shrine, *kumade* themselves act as a “marker” (MacCannell 1976/1999) that distinguishes Tori no Ichi from other shrine festivals. This shows how the festival itself becomes meaningful through its objects, as Tsuchiya (土谷 2020) has noted on *chimaki* bought at Gion festival.

In the *kumade*’s itinerary, though, the festival is only a brief stop. Usually, the phase in the owner’s home, restaurant, or company is the longest. In stark contrast to the celebrations of the festival, *kumade* blend into the environment once they are brought to these spaces. Even though they are unperformed, seemingly in stasis, they nonetheless remain active and connected to the festival in a few ways.

As good luck objects, the efficacy of *kumade* resides in their material presence in the space they are located in. Gygi (2018) theorizes objects that stay in place as body substitutes, or *migawari*, that believe in lieu of their owners. Compared to objects that are part of active ritual performances, “the body

substitute is ‘active’ as long as nothing is done with it” (Gygi 2018: 434). Therefore, even if the *kumade* displayed are not acted upon, they still have agency as good luck bringers or protectors.

On the other hand, *kumade* are also objects meant to be seen. Although they merge into the everyday environment, they remain visible through their decorations and size both of which signal to customers how well a business is doing. Therefore, once displayed, *kumade* are not only charms but also status symbols.

Kumade also afford collective performances. As the festival draws near, the patrons of bars and restaurants begin tucking money into the *kumade* as extra decorations, contributing to the purchase of a new one. Also, when the postcards from the *kumade* vendors arrive, the *kumade* start prompting their owners to return to the shrine and purchase a new one. This is how the buying of *kumade* as a collective performance becomes woven into the social calendar of their owners, making it a yearly event. This also shows how social commitment is a crucial component of the idea of luck (Daniels 2003: 158) and how various actors engage in the “labor of luck” (Ibid. 157).

Not only the renewal but also the practice of disposal is also an important factor that ties *kumade* and the buyers back to the festival. As mentioned before, Tori no Ichi offers a space for returning old *kumade* to the shrine for proper disposal, and the tradition of buying a new one further supports ongoing consumption. Therefore, even if individual *kumade* are considered terminal commodities, which from a biographical perspective “die” at disposal, the itinerary of old *kumade* always connect to a new one.

Therefore, compared to previous research which focuses on *engimono* (often stuck) in domestic spaces, looking at the itinerary of *kumade* shows that its circulation is created through an assemblage of people, other objects, and practices, all of which connect it to the Tori no Ichi both on a physical as well as symbolic level.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have followed *kumade* within the performances at the Tori no Ichi. In the previous literature, the circulation of good luck objects had not been explored enough in situ,

especially the performances of buying and selling. However, by looking at these performances, we could see that *kumade* themselves are objects in constant movement. They bridge the festival and the everyday as their temporary nature connects them to the festival and to the shrine, even though they are not directly sold by the shrine but religious “third actors” (Gould 2023) such as *kumadeya* and *tekiya*.

By examining the itinerary of the *kumade*, we could also explore the dynamic network of social, spatial, and ritual practices that revolve around the object. Through the rhythms of the festival and the act of returning them for disposal, we can also see that their value is tied not simply to the shrine as a sacred site, but to the Tori no Ichi as a temporal and spatial gathering of people and objects. Through their entanglements with other objects such as the previous *kumade*, postcards, and cash, *kumade* become a part of performances, which enhance their value as sacred objects.

These are further linked to the social calendar of the owners as well as the surrounding area of the festival. In the case of the Tori no Ichi in Hanazono Shrine, it has also been the connection with Shinjuku’s vibrant nightlife that reinforces the combination of pray and play that characterizes the circulation of *kumade*.

Notes

- 1) *Engi* also has other meanings; it can, for example, refer to the origin story of a temple or shrine. It is also used in everyday phrases such as *engi ga ii* or *engi ga warui* when something is considered to bring good or bad luck. On the Buddhist and Taoist dimensions of religious objects, see Kyburtz (1991), Reader and Tanabe (1998), Daniels (2003, 2012), and Rambelli (2007, 2017).
- 2) Apart from its religious significance, the shrine is known for its connection to the underground theater movement (*angura*) of the 1960s, when playwright Jūrō Kara established his troupe, the Situation Theater, performing in a red tent on the shrine grounds.

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